A SPECIAL WARTIME ISSUE OF MEGILLAH: EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL

Megillah

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Megillah Stands with Israel
מגילה עומדת עם מדינת ישראל

Adam Etessami

This special wartime issue of Megillah is dedicated to our brothers and sisters in Israel. We thank the People of Israel for their tremendous sacrifice and steadfast defense of our homeland, and pray that with the help of HaShem, victory and total defeat of the enemy shall soon be achieved. Amidst your hardship we share in your pain, and in your triumph we shall share in your glory.

On *Shabbat Shemini Atzeret,* Saturday October 7, 2023, our entire community in New York woke up to devastating news, Israel was under attack by Hamas terrorist forces. This was not only the typical aerial missile bombardment, but rather a well-organized attack by sea, land and air. Hamas's paramilitary forces along with Gaza residents reigned terror on Israel, via the mass murder of Israelis, the systemic and brutal raping of women, and the kidnapping of hundreds of soldiers and civilians.

An attack on Israel of this magnitude has not been seen since the Yom Kippur War of 1973. That attack 50 years ago similarly caught Israel off guard. Yet even then, that attack was a more traditional military-on-military campaign launched by Egypt and Syria's military forces, focusing mainly on strategic targets and military personnel.

Not since the holocaust, which ended 78 years ago in 1945, the final year of the Second World War in Europe, and before the establishment of the State of Israel, had their been so many Jews murdered on a single day.

On that Saturday morning, many community members arrived at our synagogues unaware of the ongoing situation in Israel. Though soon everyone became aware of the news, and a collective feeling of anxiety and despair began to set in. That evening and the following day was Simchat Torah, and thus we came to our synagogues again, all saddened on a holiday in which we are meant to rejoice and celebrate. Many thought, it would be difficult to dance with the Torah and celebrate as we usually do. That proved to be incorrect. At Shaare Shalom, Ohr Esther and Shaare Rachamim the turnout was tremendous. Israeli flags were being waved in the air, all community members of all ages joined together in chants of "*Am Yisrael Chai" (Long Live the Nation of Israel)* and in the singing of *HaTikva* (*Israel's National Anthem*) while dancing with the Torah.

During these past months, our community has acted with urgency, as the wartime emergency in Israel has become our top priority.

Our community members have donated and continue to donate significant sums of money to various organizations and individuals throughout Israel that are in need. In all our minyanim, we recite "Avinu Malkenu" and special tehillim as we pray to HaShem for the success and good health of all the soldiers and all those in Israel that are in danger. Community women, ranging from bat-mitzvah girls to grandmothers have participated in special Challah Bakes dedicated to the IDF and Israel's success.

Over a hundred community members have embarked on solidarity trips to Israel, providing emotional support to those who have lost loved ones, have family members being held hostage, and to Soldiers who have been wounded or have seen their comrades fall in battle. Community members have also served as volunteer laborers, working in the fields of farms and kibbutzim across the country, filling in for the absent Israeli men and women who have been called for emergency army service.

Let our actions over these last months and in the months ahead serve as an enduring message. A message to the future generations of the Mashadi Community, a message to the people of Israel and soldiers fighting for Israel, and as a message to the enemy:

Our resolve is strong. We stand and will always stand with Israel. We will do all that we can to help our people, and our homeland achieve absolute victory, whatever the cost may be.

The Editorial Staff of Megillah, would like to extend our sympathies and condolences to all those in Israel who have lost loved ones, suffered and have made sacrifices since the October 7 attacks and subsequent war. We all hope and pray for your health, success and for you to fight on to absolute victory.

Peace In Our Time

EDITORIAL

Adam Etessami

On October 7 2023, the people of Israel were subjected to the most heinous atrocities and despicable acts of terror the Jewish People have experienced in over a generation. In this Simchat Torah Massacre, 1,139 Israelis were murdered, a majority of which were civilians, as even children and babies were not spared. These terrorist invaders perpetrated a variety of unspeakable crimes, including torture, mutilation, mass rape against Israeli women and girls and taking nearly 250 hostages, most being civilians.

These vile attacks were committed by a band of terrorist scum, led by Hamas, joined by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, some other minor league radical Islamic groups, and apparently some ordinary dirtbag individuals who had no technical 'terror-group affiliation' but wanted to join in on the action.

What allowed these groups to launch such an effective masacre? Well, they are based in the Gaza Strip, a coastal enclave that shares a 37 mile border with Israel, which since 2007 has been administered solely by Hamas, a terror group founded with the stated goal of destroying the Jewish State. Thus, making the Gaza Strip the perfect location for terror groups to use as a staging ground for such attacks.

Three natural follow up questions are:

1. Why were the Israeli Border Police and Israeli Defense Forces so unprepared for this contingency?
2. How and why did the Gaza Strip become a terrorist-haven?
3. What is the best course of action to prevent such terrorist attacks from occurring again?

I am unprepared to answer the first question, yet the findings of a thorough inquiry Israel will commission after the war shall hopefully provide insight into the failures and deficiencies of the Border Police, IDF, Security Services (Shin Bet), Intelligence Services (Mossad) and/or Israeli Government Ministers.

In this Editorial, I will seek to provide answers to the second and third questions via examining recent history. We shall review the British and French treatment of Nazi Germany, the Oslo Accords and the Gaza Disengagement. This will allow us to understand the mistakes Israeli leadership made in the leadup to the October 7 Massacre in a historical context, clarifying the lessons we must learn to deter our enemies.

"Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."
- Winston Churchill.

The British and French Appeasement of Hitler's Nazi Germany

In 1933, roughly 15 years following the German defeat by the French, British and Americans in the First World War, and the national humiliation that was the Treaty of Versailles, Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party came to power in Germany. They immediately began to rearm and violate, at first discreetly, the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. In the same year, Hitler authorized the creation of an air force (the Luftwaffe) and a 100,000 man strong army (the Reichswehr). The British and French, weary of war and focused on the economic impact of the Great Depression, were in no mood for any form of confrontation. They each sought to maintain close diplomatic ties with Germany, and British and French government criticism of German rearmament was essentially nonexistent. Only Winston Churchill, then a member of parliament in the opposition, wrote an article for the "Evening Standard" in February 1933, in which he cautioned that, "Germany is arming".

In 1935, Hitler publicly proclaimed that Germany was rearming, via implementing conscription and the formation of a 500,000 strong army, openly and brazenly violating the Treaty of Versailles. Now, you'd think the British and French governments must have seen the looming threat this posed and decide to act and put a stop to this madness, right? Wrong. The British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, decided that staying friendly with Germany was the best course of action, and essentially approved of German rearmament and authorized the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, allowing Germany to develop a powerful navy. Did the British at least adopt a policy of rearmament themselves to rival German military strength? No. Baldwin gave a speech in which he said ""I give you my word that there will be no great armaments". Churchill continued his efforts to alert the public and call for immediate British rearmament. In March 1935, Churchill expressed in the House of Commons, "Germany is arming, she is arming at a speed, and on a scale which is infinitely greater than our efforts to make good the shortfalls in our defences."

On March 7, 1936, the German army (Wehrmacht) marched into the Rhineland, a narrow strip of German territory bordering France, Belgium and the Netherlands, committing its most egrigous violation of the Treaty of Versailles yet. Ironically, German forces were instructed to retreat should the French pose armed resistance. Yet unsurprisingly, the British and French were both unwilling to intervene and risk war, and decided to simply appease Hitler by making no effort to enforce the treaty and halt the remilitarization of the Rhineland. At this point, it was clear to all that neither France nor Britain had the resolve to protest Nazi policies and territorial ambitions, leaving Hitler confident that he'd be able to ramp up the aggression without consequence.

In 1938 Nazi Germany was on the move again, first via the annexation of Austria and absorption of the Austrian Army (known as the "Anschluss") followed by Hitler's threats against Czechoslovakia, and demands that Germany be handed possession of the country's Sudetenland region. This quickly morphed into a crisis, as Czechoslovakia refused to cede territory to the German Reich, prompting Hitler to mobilize troops and threaten an imminent invasion of the Sudetenland. France, having a mutual defense pact with Czechoslovakia, and unprepared for war against Germany, was desperate for a diplomatic solution. Britain was in the same situation due to their mutual defense pact with France. Determined to avoid war at all costs, an emergency meeting was organized to resolve the crisis, the Munich Conference of September 1938.

Those gathered in Munich included British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini, and the German Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler. Not breaking with their policy of appeasement, Chamberlain and Daladier agreed to hand the Sudetenland over to Hitler in exchange for guarantees that Germany will end its expansionist ways and seek no further conflict. The outcome of the Munich Conference further emboldened Hitler's territorial ambitions, meanwhile Chamberlain was convinced that he prevented a war, waving around an agreement he signed with Hitler saying:

"My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor. I believe it is peace in our time".

Winston Churchill, while addressing the House of Commons disagreed, saying to Chamberlain "*You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor, and you will have war*".

Less than a year after the signing of the Munich Agreement, Germany invaded Poland, marking the beginning of the Second World War. Over the next six years, war raged across the globe, tens of millions of lives were lost, many of which were innocent civilians, including six million European Jews that were systematically exterminated by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

Again and again, the leaders of Britain and France had the opportunity to confront Germany, yet they did not as they wished to avoid war. Ironically, their wish to avoid war at all costs via accommodating Hitler, is what made war inevitable. Their shared policy of appeasement, and their failure to stand up to Nazi Germany's violations of the Treaty of Versailles and expansionist provocations, led to the most devastating war in the history of the world.

The Israeli Appeasement of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Arab Palestinian Terrorism

Israeli national security has been a glaring concern and priority ever since the establishment of the State in May 1948. The threat of force existed in two dimensions, one being via the traditional military forces of its Arab neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq), and the other being the emergence of Palestinian Arab terror groups established with the aim of destroying the Jewish State and founding a new Arab Palestinian state.

The first three decades of Israel's existence mainly featured its fight against its Arab neighbors, which it fought against and beat in the 1948 War of Independence, the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1967 Six Day War and 1973 Yom Kippur War. In the aftermath of these conflicts, Israeli military might was firmly established and it became clear to Israel's Arab neighbors that traditional military conquest of Israeli territory was impossible, a waste of manpower, a waste of resources, and overall a cause that could endanger the internal standing of their regimes.

The new proxy for the fight against Israel became the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was founded in 1964 with the stated aim of eliminating the State of Israel and establishing an Arab state in its place. The PLO, along with some copycat groups, coordinated numerous terrorist attacks, murdering Jews and Israelis and trying to bring attention to their vile cause.

Examples of their terrorist activity include:
The Lod Airport Massacre, a terrorist shooting spree at Lod Airport which killed 26 and injured over 89 (1972). The Munich Olympics hostage crisis, in which eleven Israeli athletes were taken hostage and later murdered (1972). The Ma'alot Massacre, an attack on a school in Ma'alot, saw 25 killed of which 22 were children (1974). The Hijacking of Air France Flight 139 and ensuing hostage situation in Entebbe, Israeli Commandos led a daring rescue though four were killed (1976). The Night of the Gliders incident in which fighters infiltrated Israel from Lebanon and killed 6 soldiers (1987).

Until the early 1990s, the Israel Government followed a principled position of not negotiating with terrorists, under any circumstances.

Throughout the 1950s, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion implemented a policy of reprisal operations to deter future terrorist activity. Following most terrorist attacks, the IDF would be deployed and conduct cross border raids into the Egyptian occupied Gaza Strip or Jordanian controlled West Bank and target terrorist strongholds and even Egyptian/Jordanian military bases, with the aim of inflicting casualties on the enemy and weakening their capabilities. In the 1960s, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol continued to follow this policy and authorized the Samu Raid (Operation Shredder), one of the largest Israeli incursions into Jordanian territory.

Following the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre, Prime Minister Golda Meir initiated Operation Wrath of God, which directed the Mossad to hunt down and assassinate all terrorists affiliated with the murder of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic games.

In 1982, Prime Minister Menachem Begin responded to the ever-growing PLO attacks on Israeli civilians coming from the Lebanese border region, by launching a full scale invasion of Lebanon (the Lebanon War). The PLO and their leader Yasser Arafat were then expelled from Lebanon.

In 1987, Hamas, another terrorist group committed to the destruction of Israel, with an even more radical Islamist ideology was established. Hamas along with the Palestinian Liberation Organization provoked the First Intifada, a violent uprising of Palestinian Arabs against Israel lasting roughly between 1987-1993.

As the First Intifada escalated, the Palestinian Arabs deployed all sorts of terror tactics, seeking to hurt Israel and its people by all means necessary. Palestinian Arabs carried out bombings, shootings, stabbings, stone throwing, riot inciting, kidnapping, and property destruction. Israel suffered over a hundred fifty losses during this period, with many more wounded and significant damage done to their economy.

Israel's initial response to the unrest was to maintain its "Iron-Fist" policy against terrorism, refusing to negotiate with Hamas and the PLO, and responding with armed force regularly, refusing to give the Palestinian Arab terrorists legitimacy.

A paradigm shift began when the Labor Party was victorious in Israel's 1992 Knesset Elections, making Yitzchak Rabin the Prime Minister and Shimon Peres the Foreign Minister. Labor's campaign was largely focused on taking a softer approach against the Palestinians Arabs and trying to negotiate peace. Once in office, Shimon Peres led secret negotiations with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization (yes, the same terrorist organization PLO committed to Israel's destruction, responsible for murdering hundreds of Israelis). Secret negotiations took place in Oslo, Norway and an agreement was ultimately reached between the two sides, known as the Oslo I Accord. Yitchak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shook hands at a ceremony at the White House in September 1993. The agreement enabled the creation of a Palestinian interim self-government, called the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The Palestinian Authority would be granted administration of certain territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Accords also called for the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

What message did signing an agreement with the PLO send to Israel's enemies across the world? I think it's something like this: "Hey guys! You can violate our sovereignty and threaten our population, and if you do a good enough job we'll reward you by giving you control over some territory". Isn't that a bit similar to the message the British and French sent Germany by failing to act when they repeatedly violated the Treaty of Versailles by rearming and reentering the Rhineland? It is eerily similar, as Israel accommodated rather than confronted the enemy in response to their hostile actions. Benjamin Netanyahu, then a rising star within the opposition Likud Party wrote a prophetic opinion article for the New York Times, titled "Peace In Our Time?" published a week before the Oslo Accords signing. He said *"The Rabin Government is now betting the security of Israel on Yasir Arafat's promises. But his promises are worthless. He has violated every political commitment he has ever made. Since his "breakthrough" promise in 1988 to stop P.L.O. terror, his own Fatah faction has launched more terrorist attacks against Israel than any other Palestinian group….Instead of giving peace a chance, it is a guarantee of increased tension, future terrorism and, ultimately, war"*. Just as Churchill adamantly warned against the dangers of appeasing Nazi Germany, Netanyahu, a student of history, did the same here.

Now that Rabin and Peres handed over some authority to Arafat's Palestinian Authority, would Palestinian Arab Terrorism and continued civil unrest end? Of course not! Attacks continued after the signing of the Oslo Accords, including the 1994 suicide bombing of the Hadera Bus Station killing 5, the 1994 suicide bombing of a bus on Dizengoff Street killing 22, the Beit Lid bombings which killed 20 soldiers and one civilian, and tragically several other similar attacks. Wouldn't you expect that around now the Israeli government, witnessing the Palestinian Arabs continuing their hostility and terrorism after the Oslo Accords, would slam the brakes on any further concessions and "peace" negotiations. Wrong again! In September 1995 Rabin & Peres along with Arafat signed the Oslo II Accord, granting the Palestinian Authority further powers and territory. Just like the British and French, Rabin and Peres held a strong desire to achieve peace and avoid conflict, and evidently both were willing to make concessions to appease their respective enemies. The British and French appeasement policy served to embolden Hitler's Nazi Germany, and it appears the Oslo Accords "Peace" process emboldened all the Palestinian terror factions.

In 2003, amidst the Second Intifada, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon proposed his Gaza Disengagement Plan, a proposed unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, and evacuation of all Israeli settlers living within the Strip. Sharon explained that "*The idea of disengagement is to reduce terror as much as possible, and grant Israeli citizens the maximum level of security*". Yet that wasn't what happened when Chamberlain handed Hitler the Sudetenland. Did that reduce terror and improve security? Of course not. This withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would only serve to accommodate the terror groups seeking to destroy Israel, allowing them to operate freely in a Gaza Strip no longer policed by Israel. Additionally, this would further encourage terrorists, seeing that their attacks during the Second Intifada are what in-part lead to the Gaza Disengagement. This realistic assessment was advocated by then Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who at the time said *"The withdrawal from Gaza does not enhance peace, it undermines it. It rewards terrorism and sets back the cause of peace by creating a power vacuum that the terrorists will fill"*.

Sharon did not have a majority for the Disengagement Plan between his own Likud Party and his right-wing coalition, so he went out and formed a coalition government with Shimon Peres's Labor Party. Upon official adoption of the plan, Netanyahu resigned his post as Finance Minister, declaring "*I cannot be part of a government that abandons an area to terrorists"*. The Sudetenland handover and the Gaza withdrawal both made one outcome inevitable, war.

As Netanyahu predicted, terrorists would soon control the Gaza Strip. In 2007, a Hamas coup deposed the Fatah (Palestinian Authority) government, establishing total Hamas supremacy in the Strip, as a withdrawn Israel could only observe. Hostilities gradually escalated, as Hamas nurtured ties with Iran and other enemies of Israel, and acquired funds and weapons to enable future assaults on Israel. Over the next decade, there were several times hostilities between terrorists in the Gaza Strip and Israel broke out into full blown armed conflicts. Terrorists fired hundreds of rockets from Gaza into Israel, (many of which were shot down by the IDF's Iron Dome Missile defense systems), continued orchestrating kidnappings, stabbings and shootings on Israeli civilians, and provoking riots and confrontations with IDF soldiers. During this period, Israel launched several campaigns to try and eliminate the terrorist threat from Gaza: Operation Cast Lead (2008), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014).

These operations did have some minor successes, yet ultimately failed to eliminate the threat to Israel as Hamas retained control of the Gaza Strip, and continued to stockpile weapons and train terrorist fighters. After a couple years of relative silence, Hamas launched an invasion of Israel, massacring soldiers and civilians on October 7, 2023. Israel found itself fighting its biggest war in half a century.

None of this would have been possible if it wasn't for the cowardly appeasement of terrorism that was the Oslo Accords perpetrated by Yitchak Rabin and Shimon Peres and their coalition of left leaning parties, and the subsequent idiotic withdrawal from Gaza during the Second Intifada led by Ariel Sharon and a left leaning "pro-peace" coalition he and Peres cobbled together. Just like Chamberlain - Rabin, Peres, Sharon and their ilk so desperately sought to avoid war, that in their desperation the steps they took to establish "peace in our time" fueled the enemy's ambition and resolve, prompting horrible war and atrocities to occur in the future.

Given the tragic repercussions of the Oslo Accords and the Gaza Disengagement, Israel must learn its lesson and return to its "Iron-Fist" policy of never negotiating with terrorists. No withdrawing from territory, no more negotiating hostage releases or prisoner-swaps, and absolutely no future discussions on allowing the establishment of an Arab Palestinian State, ever. Israel must make clear that it shall respond to any acts of terror with the most severe consequences. Israel must have the resolve to never again grant concessions to all Palestinian Arab Terrorists, and the Israeli public must be prepared to endure the future pain and loss this policy may at first cause. This "Iron-Fist" policy will be difficult to endure, and positive results may not be seen for many years, though all these bands of terrorist scum will eventually get the message that their terror tactics will not produce any Israeli concessions. Only then will Israel be in a position of strength, and have the ability and ruthless resolve that will be needed to put an end to this conflict once and for all.

We the Jewish People, along with our brothers and sisters in Israel must all realize that Israel's aim must not be peace, it must be victory. On May 13, 1940, amidst Britain's darkest hour, Winston Churchill speaking at the House of Commons for the first time as Prime Minister, gave the following rallying cry, which I believe our people must embrace:

"You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: victory. Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

With the help of HaShem, may Israel achieve total victory in this war against terrorism, and have future leaders that learn the lessons of history and never again appease the enemy.

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MEN'S SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL

Tony Aziz

Ze'ev Jabotinsky once said, "*War is a bad and contemptible thing, but people at war are sometimes better than in everyday life.*"

Strolling into Kanissa on Shabbat morning, Shemini Atzeret, October 7th, I had no idea that our world was about to get flipped upside down. When I first heard of the attacks, my stomach twisted and my heart dropped. Everyone in Kanissa was visually pained, and nobody could stop thinking of our Israeli brothers, who were still in an ongoing active attack. The pain turned into fear, fear into sadness, and then sadness into anger. The only thing that stopped me from hopping on the next flight to Israel was my wife, Stephanie, stealing my passport. I'm usually very optimistic, but I thought there was more bad news than good still to come. But over the next few months, I realized I was wrong.

After Simchat Torah ended the following night, the reality of the devastation started to set in. The shocking videos, the rapidly rising number of victims, and, worst of all, the hostages. But, incredibly, our Jewish nation didn't miss a single moment to start the response. Over in Israel, about 360,000 reservists (30% more than the amount called up) jumped back into the army. Those who didn't qualify to fight enlisted their services in other ways. Medical professionals and Zaka volunteers rushed into a still-active war zone to help find wounded or corpses. Women grouped together to make hot meals for soldiers. Activists made posters and held demonstrations to demand the return of hostages. Celebrities went to army bases to give strength to our boys waiting to walk into terror tunnels in Gaza. The list goes on.

Across the globe, the Jewish diaspora also joined the fight. In our own community, we immediately started our plans for support in this war. In the first weeks of the war, my office became a sort of command center to field dozens of daily calls from community members with ideas and projects. We created a multifaceted response using tefillah, volunteerism, donations, and solidarity trips. Our level of tefillah went up across the entire community, no matter how religious, and masses turned out for highly attended community-wide tehillim readings. Next, members of our community were energized more than ever to volunteer, whether packing supplies, writing letters, baking sales, online activism, or attending rallies in Great Neck, New York City, or Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, the generosity of the community shined through our Israel Emergency Fundraiser, which to date has raised close to $1 million, distributing funds to a full list of places you'll see published elsewhere in this magazine. And of course, our multiple Solidarity Missions to Israel, which any of the participants will tell you about, were a life-changing experience.

Our community's first Solidarity Mission was from January 8th to the 12th, when 24 men set out on a mission to help. The efforts started back in Great Neck, with community members donating, writing letters, and purchasing close to 1,600 items to be delivered to our dear IDF soldiers during the trip. Of course, the flights to Israel were full of people traveling to support the country. Once we arrived, we could feel the emotion in the air. It was a broken yet strong and spirited country. Most of the country was still operating as normal, with restaurants and stores open. And anyone we spoke with showed appreciation for us being there.

On our first day, we traveled to several sites to gain perspective, like the Har Herzl military cemetery, where every day there were families burying or visiting their dead. We also visited the Knesset, the Mashadi Beit Avot, an old home in Herzliya, and volunteered at a food packing center. But, by far the highlight of the day was our dinner in Jerusalem. We invited three Mashadi reservists, Koby, Ariel, and Rony, who just returned from Gaza the night before. We heard their stories and their perspectives, which echoed those of every other soldier we spoke to. The message was clear: Yes, we're away from home for months at a time, and we've witnessed friends getting killed, but morale is high and we want to finish the job!

Day Two took us through one of the most intense emotional rollercoasters imaginable. We traveled down south to the Gaza Envelope area, which was at the heart of the war. We started the day in the city of Ofakim, which is one of the furthest locations that the terrorists reached. As we walked with police hero Itamar Alus, hearing his story, we encountered many residents who had recently moved back home just days ago.

Speaking to these people and seeing the look in their eyes helped us connect and showed them that they're not alone. Next, we passed through Sderot and saw the demolished police station that was overrun by terrorists, where one Mashadi police officer was killed. Later, we went to Kfar Aza, where words cannot describe the devastation. Signs of war that do not belong in a residential town. Homes were sprayed with bullet holes, and I don't even want to imagine what was inside those homes that were burned to a crisp. We weren't there as tourists; we came to bear witness for the future and to tell people undeniably what we saw with our own eyes. We carried that emotion over to the site of the Nova Music Festival, which now displays pictures of the approximately 364 young people massacred there. But we soon flipped the mood. We joined in circles of song and unity with other visitors at the site and spoke words of support to some of the victims' families who were there. Continuing to an upbeat stop, we went to a nearby pop-up rest area at Gilat Junction, which was created in the days after the war by a few civilian friends that just wanted to volunteer to help in the war. My words cannot describe the feeling of being there, inspired to see the dozens of volunteers stationed there to support soldiers passing in and out of Gaza, just to give them an emotional boost so they know they're not fighting alone. Lastly, we wrapped up with our BBQ on a secret base, hearing the soldiers' stories of Gaza, and talking, laughing, singing, and enjoying a nighttime Jeep ride with them. We came in as guests, and we left as brothers.

On Day Three, we visited the Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer. This is the main rehab center for wounded soldiers. The harrowing stories of their injuries and traumas were mitigated by their resilient attitude and high spirits. We pray for them all to have a speedy recovery and return to some kind of normal life. Next, we traveled to Shomron and saw up close the dangers facing those settlements that are surrounded by Arab towns. There, we also met the Fish family, who lost their son in battle a few weeks earlier, yet they still had

the utmost strength and passion for the success of the war. We moved on to another bereaved family, the family of a Mashadi soldier, Yaakov Elian. He had just been killed three weeks earlier, so it was a stop we had to make to pay our respects. Our president, Doron Hakimian, said it best: "If we came all this way and made this our only stop, it would be worth it." We closed the day with a stop at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, where we saw the artistic displays of protest for the release of the remaining hostages. May they all return home soon. B"H.

The final day, we had the honor of traveling back down south with Eli Landau of Zaka. Eli took us to many of the sites he went to on October 7th as a Zaka volunteer as he tried to find wounded or recover dead bodies. He took us to Kibbutz Be'eri, which was one of the hardest hits. A local resident named Golan gave us a detailed description of what they went through on that day and told us stories of the friends he lost. All this was going on while we heard the loud booms of theIsraeli tank shells happening so close to us that the ground would shake, reminding us that we're still in an active war zone fighting to eliminate the animals that perpetrated this. Then yet again, we went from the lowest point back up to the highest of the Shuva Brothers. Similar to the Gilat Junction, the Shuva Junction was a pop-up rest area but much closer to the action in Gaza. Soldiers in Gaza would drive out, grab a box of hot food for their unit, and drive right back into the battle. We even participated in serving food and washing their dishes, which again gave us that warm feeling of pride to be a member of this united Jewish nation that is all there for one another. Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, some of our group went to visit the amazing Shaare Zedek hospital, which has been treating many of the critically wounded in this war. Of course, we concluded our trip with a quick stop at the Mahane Yehuda Shuk, where we bought souvenir "Bring Them Home" dog tags, which adorn the necks of most Israelis, in support of the missing hostages.

This brief recap of the trip does not capture the deep emotions of each stop. Throughout our trip, we felt two constant themes. The first is the strong appreciation every person had for our presence there. The amount that we actually contributed far exceeded my expectations. We all left feeling like we did something very impactful. Each person we encountered told us how important it was for us to be there, coming from halfway across the world into an active war. For them and for us, this was not an Israeli war; this was a war for the entire Jewish people, and our presence showed them that we're here fighting with them. The second glaring theme was the total strength and unity of the country. I was in Israel this past summer and saw a country torn in two parts, but that division is now completely gone. Every person in the country, whether leftist, rightist, religious, or secular, speaks ביחד ננצח "united, we're victorious." Every person in the country is participating in the war effort toward the common goal of victory. Every family that has lost someone and every soldier we spoke with had the same message: "Our losses are for the good of the nation, and we won't stop until we have complete victory." These people are making the ultimate sacrifice, and we were lucky enough to be there with them.

What a special nation we are! We are now back in Great Neck, but our hearts were left in Israel. With the growing antisemitism and hate around the world, especially among young Americans on campuses, this country is feeling less comfortable. And even after a devastating attack in Israel, seeing how that country comes together makes you wonder, which is actually the safer place in the long run? For me, the answer is clear.

AM ISRAEL CHAI.

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Generous members of the Mashadi Community raised funds to donate an Ambucycle to United Hatzalah of Israel in honor of the following distinguished individuals:

Mr. Oren (Nissan) Bezalely &
Mr. Kamran (Jesse) Hakimian

Thank you to all those who contributed in this Mitzvah to help the medics of the State of Israel.

This is an advertisement paid for by Mr. Albert Bassal, if interested, please contact him for more information.

606
SIVAN ELKABETS
NAOR HASIDIM
was brutally murdered
in this house

NEVER
GIVE
UP

WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL

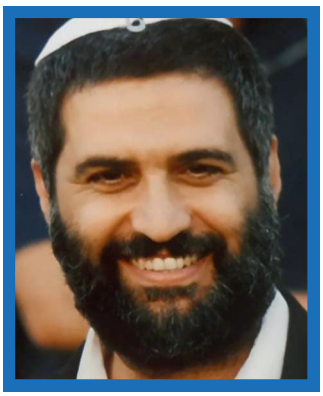
Sharleen Ijadi

What happens when forty women ages sixteen to seventy embark on a four day journey to support our brothers and sisters in Israel, just as the country tries to recover from the atrocities of October 7th? It's hard to put into words but I can tell you this - our experience was life changing. We are forever changed by the incredible stories and courageous people we have been fortunate enough to meet along the way. People often ask "How were you able to handle it? Wasn't it too emotional? It certainly was, and at times it was almost too painful and tragic to bear, but surprisingly often we were filled with courage, strength and inspiration too. Here are a few of the incredible people who touched our hearts and reinforced our belief that we are so fortunate to be a part of this exceptional nation.

1) Irene Nurith Cohn, Zaka Volunteer

Nurith is a therapist and scuba diving instructor who has three daughters, one of whom is currently serving in the IDF as a combat soldier. Since October 7th, Nurith and her fellow Zaka volunteers have been collecting human remains from the area of the Nova Music Festival.

They do this painstaking work in order for families of the victims to be able to have jewish burials for their loved ones and get some degree of closure. She is a woman among a sea of male volunteers. She showed us the Nova Car Cemetery and the monuments to the young lives lost or taken hostage that fateful day. Her words gave us many insights into the incredibly brave work Zaka does. She told us she feels privileged to be doing this holy work. Her strength of character is truly aspirational. Nurith can be reached at Nurithcohn@gmail.com



2) Rav Ami Cohen, Tel Hashomer Hospital

Ami, as he so humbly prefers to be called, runs an organization called "Together for Them". He works with wounded soldiers, helping them fine tune their stories, and empowering them by taking them all over Israel and all over the world to inspire others. Instead of remaining despondent and dependent on aid from the government forever, he gives the wounded soldiers the tools and the opportunities to become active givers to society. Ami helps them "recycle their pain" and help others with their own challenges. To date he has brought over 50 wounded soldiers to speak and promote the love of Israel worldwide. Many of the soldiers he has worked with go on to become doctors, lawyers and business owners in the technology sector. His work is nothing short of miraculous. It is Tikun Olam (making the world a better place) in its purest form. Ami plans to visit New York in May. To learn more about Ami you can visit Together-for-Them.com/en

3) Amana Tzukerman, Army Base Southern Israel

Amana lives in the Golan with her children and her husband who is a General in the Nachal Brigade. They are the ultimate power couple, as he has 1500 soldiers under his command, and she keeps in touch and does programming for all of their families. She is a lifeline for women who have been widowed and for children who have become orphans. She has a team of volunteers that assist these families 24/7. She is relentless in her pursuit of providing some comfort for these families, both financially and emotionally. Stunningly gorgeous both inside and out, Amana inspired us deeply. For more information or to follow Amana's whattsapp group please contact Gila Livi at (901)550-7098

4) Moshe Sasson, Har Hertzel

Moshe is a reservist who works in the search and rescue division of the army called Palchatz. He is Syrian by descent and his family made aliyah to Israel when he was six years old.

We were lucky enough to have Moshe tell us the incredible stories of our nation's fallen heroes at Har Hertzel. He eloquently described the heroism of these exceptional people willing to give their lives for Israel's safety and continuity. The most difficult part was seeing the ages of the soldiers, many of whom were only 19, 20, or 21 when they sacrificed their lives for our nation.. We all wept silently as Moshe showed us an entire section of the cemetery which was empty until the tragic events of october 7th. Moshe is exceptionally knowledgeable and has done many tours for our community. He can be reached at Sassontours@gmail.com

5) Gal Roitsztein, Tel Hashomer

Gal teaches Dog Assistance Therapy at Tel Hashomer's nursing school. Gal has served the country in the first and second Lebanon wars as a Tank driver. He has suffered multiple injuries, has undergone numerous surgeries and has been hospitalized at times for durations lasting up to a year. He traveled to the Netherlands to undergo Horse and Dog Therapy for his severe PTSD and ended up staying and studying their methods. In true Israeli fashion, he brought the program back to Israel and started the first accredited program of its kind in 2016 in Tel Hashomer.

Since October 7th he has done knee replacement surgery (his third), and has worked in the hospital protecting wounded soldiers and staff for eighty days consecutively. Remarkably, he has recently returned to service in the IDF back on the border of Lebanon, back where it all began. Gal is a staunch advocate of veterans and says "we are willing to give from what we suffered so that others don't have to". You can follow Gal's journey by visiting his Facebook page or at ilufklavim.co.il

6) Chana Cohen Alloro, Comedian from Shokeda

Chana is a 39 year old mother of six who teaches torah by day and performs comedy by night!
We met Chana just shortly after her family was finally able to return to Shokeda after months of being displaced (the town is only a few kilometers away from the border of Gaza). You would never know it by meeting her. Her colorful headcover, infectious laugh and adorable personality had us all cracking up from the moment we met her. She told us that making people laugh is her passion, that it is therapeutic for her audiences and herself. Comedy is her way of helping people heal and is her way of serving Hashem. You can follow her on Facebook or on instagram at chana_cohen_alloro

7) David Ziet, Tour Guide

We had the good fortune of having David with us when we traveled to the towns closest to Gaza. His deep understanding of the land, grasp of Israel's current policies, along with his impressive Torah knowledge make him a rockstar of a tour guide.. David made aliyah with his wife and children back in 2008. Today his two older sons both serve in elite commando units. One of the most remarkable things he said was "our sons going into the army was not an unfortunate consequence of us making aliyah, but rather was one of our main goals." He told us that "doing something to give back to the country that's given us so much is a privilege".

David lives in Efrat with his wife and children. He can be reached via Whatsapp at +972 52 750 5940. You can follow his journey on instagram at David_Zeit_Tours

8) The Organizers and Volunteers at Shuva brothers & Gilat Junction

These two junctions service the soldiers coming in and going out of Gaza, sometimes after several weeks or months of service. The organizers are private citizens who dropped everything they were doing as of Oct 7th to help our soldiers in every way they can. Incredible meals, coffee, juice bars, showers, haircuts, massages (by the most amazing Chassidic women!), washing machines, and "stores" (where everything is donated and free for the taking) are just a few of the amenities available. Our soldiers get a chance to eat, listen to music and just decompress before heading into Gaza or going back to their families. Both junctions left us filled with awe and appreciation. You can follow them on instagram at shuva_ahim and ateam_israel

9) Sivan Rahav Meir, Israeli Journalist & Speaker

Sivan was kind enough to speak for us at our hotel in Jerusalem. She told us of her many experiences talking to people all around the country. She also gave us many actionable tips on how to help Israel from the diaspora. This included adding a mitzvah in the name of a hostage or wounded soldier, making an impact on our families and even the outside world by being "an ambassador to Israel" to American Jews and non-Jews alike. She spoke about the importance of being on the "right side of history" and standing up for what is right. We left feeling empowered and filled with a sense of purpose. You can follow Sivan's journey on Instagram or contact Coty Bitton at (516) 382-4398 to join Sivan's very popular WhatsApp chat in English.

10) The Ladies of the UMJCA Solidary Trip

Some of the most fascinating people I got to know during this 4 days adventure were the incredible women from our own community. What started as a mutual love of the land of Israel became a deep appreciation and admiration of their intelligence, compassion, skills & talents, beautiful hearts & souls. I won't name all their names and contributions here, but suffice it to say I found 39 new role models on this incredible trip.

This list barely scratches the surface. As a group we were continually inspired by the bravery of our soldiers, their sense of purpose, and their willingness to put everything on the line to fight for the Jewish people. We found courage everywhere we looked, and even seemingly ordinary people we struck up conversations with turned out to be extraordinary in their own right. The whole trip left us feeling extremely privileged to be a part of the Jewish Community and as if that weren't enough, to be a part of the unparalleled acts of kindness of the Mashadi Community. May Hashem answer our prayers and may we be inspired further by the return of our hostages, the safety and success of our soldiers and by the continued unity amongst the people of Israel Amen!

HALAKHA of the Day

Three minutes of Torah, Jewish History or Halakha every weekday.

By Rabbi Yosef Bitton

SCAN TO SIGN UP TO RECEIVE HALAKHA OF THE DAY EMAILS!

Dear Soldier
I hope you get well soon. Thank you
for protecting the
land of Israel and
all of the Jews around
the world.

SIVAN ELKABETS
NAOR HASIDIM
was brutally murd
in this house
7.10 יזכור

כפר עזה
נוסד בשנת 1951
ברוכים הבאים

256

חיינו
Chai Lifeline
Thank You!
UMJCA
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TACTICAL STORAGE CABINETS
DEDICATED BY WOMEN OF UMJCA
IN TRIBUTE TO OUR BRAVE AND SELFLESS SOLDIERS
AND SECURITY FORCES WHO FIGHT DAILY TO
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YOUNG MEN'S SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL

Aaron Aziz

Trip Participants:

Rabbi Adam Sabzevari, Aaron Aziz, Daniel Dilamani, David Levian, David Lolai, Eliyahu Ebrani, Gavriel Zerovabeli, Itai Hakimian, Jeremy Kamali, Jon Kamali, Justin Kamali, Warren Kalaty, & Yonatan Hematian.

Attempting to explain our solidarity trip in words would not nearly do justice to the profound experience that we all underwent during our week in Israel. The primary goal of this trip was to support absolutely anyone affected during the October 7th attacks, which included meeting hostages, comforting hostage families, giving gifts to both wounded and active soldiers, supporting displaced families, and helping in any way possible. The emotions experienced throughout this trip can't be described, as they covered every possible emotion one can feel. We felt sadness, happiness, gratitude, fear, love, and everything in between. None of us were prepared for a trip like this, but we were honored to have the opportunity to represent our friends and family in this once-in-a lifetime experience. All of us have grown up with a strong connection to Israel, and since this war has begun, we have all felt an even stronger connection as we needed to stay strong and support our brothers and sisters in Israel. None of us truly realized the impact this trip would have on our lives or how much deeper our connection to Israel would really become. Our goal is to share our experience from beginning to end in the hopes that we can pass along some of the feelings and deeper love we gained for our homeland throughout the week.

DAY ONE

TEL HASHOMER HOSPITAL

We arrived Monday morning, ready to start our trip, but ultimately had no idea what was truly to come in the next few days. We started off with a spontaneous stop to visit Rav Yitchak Yosef, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, in his home apartment. There we received the most honorable blessing from the Rav himself and got to start our trip on a very holy note. Upon settling down quickly in Jerusalem, we immediately hopped on our bus towards Tel Hashomer Hospital, which is the rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers and victims. They have expanded heavily since October 7th, and we were given a grand tour of the entire facility. As we were walking through the area towards the hospital, it felt very peaceful, and you could feel that the wounded were in a safe place. We met several young soldiers with missing limbs and fingers, and the most amazing part was that each soldier greeted us with a huge smile that did not go away. Every single one of these soldiers would constantly thank us and make us feel that our support really made a difference for them.

As we continued through the facility, we came across a man by the name of Avida Bachar who was missing a leg and was in a wheelchair. He did not seem eager to share his story at first, but after a bit of time, he sat us down and explained that he was a survivor from Kibbutz Be'eri and began to share his story. None of us were ready for the story that followed, and we began to understand how truly impactful this trip was going to be. The Bachar family included Avida (the father), Dana (the mother), Carmel (15-year-old boy), and Hadar (13-year-old girl). He explained that his family of four lived in one of the homes that were attacked directly and burned down by Hamas on October 7th. He continued to explain that, upon hiding in the safe room of their house, they were trapped there and were constantly being shot at by terrorists. Even as the shooting calmed down, their house was set on fire, and they had no choice but to pray and wait for their rescue. He lost his wife and 15-year-old son that day and was blessed to be able to save his 13-year-old daughter. Words can't express the sadness and pain that came from this man's mouth, and we felt it deep inside us. It is one thing to hear a story on the news or to read it online, but to hear it firsthand from a survivor was something indescribable. He kept expressing the fact that he was grateful to have been able to spend those years with his wife and 15 years with his son, and he knows that other people don't always have that much time with family. He left us with an important message, saying, "Embrace every moment with your family members, because you truly never know when it will be your last." We were definitely not prepared for such a heavy story so early on, but we understood a bit better what type of trip this was going to be.

BRING THEM HOME NOW HQ

Our next stop was the "Bring Them Home Now" headquarters, where they would produce all the posters, necklaces, and marketing needed to spread the message. They would also host many hostage family members in their building, and we had the honor of meeting some of them. While we were helping to make necklaces, we were introduced to two girls who both had family members who were current hostages. One of them had a brother, and another had a father, who were both being held captive by Hamas. None of us have met anyone with such a close relationship

to a hostage, so many of us were caught off guard. One of the girls even went and pointed to a poster on the wall and said, "This is my father...", and upon hearing this, our hearts nearly fell to the floor. It was a tough feeling to see these family members experience such pain in front of our eyes, yet they smiled most of the time and kept on thanking us for coming to support them. We met another man who told us that both of his brothers were hostages and that one of them was pronounced dead only a week before. This man led us in prayers and also had a positive attitude despite the nightmare he was going through. The people we were meeting were truly the strongest and most good-willed people we have ever come across in our lives. These interactions were all eye-opening, to say the least, and truly gave us insight as to what many of these families are going through on a daily basis.

DAY TWO

OFAKIM

Coming from an intense first day, we were prepared for another experience on day two, as we had a full day ahead of us. Our plan for the day was to visit Ofakim, Kibbutz Be'eri, run the Chai Lifeline Carnival, and help at the Gilat Junction. Ofakim was the deepest part of Israel reached by Hamas when it was attacked on October 7th. Sadly, we lost 43 people from that town, but we were fortunate enough to meet one of the heroes, Itamar Alus, who saved countless lives that day. Itamar was greeted right off the bus with a huge smile and was explaining that his fight with the terrorists that day began right where we were standing. He went on to explain in specific detail his entire experience that day, and it was as if we were watching a live-action movie. He would re-enact every step he took that day while showing us bullet holes and places where innocent people were murdered. He explained that he had to often choose between going after the terrorists or saving someone's life, and he always chose to save the life, even if it meant risking his own.

At one point, he explained that he had covered a rabbi with his body while getting shot at multiple times, all while praying Shema Yisrael the whole time. His story was detailed beyond our imagination, and he really made us feel as if we were there on that day. He took us around the whole town, showed us the memorials of each murdered victim, and truly connected us to those who were lost that day. Towards the end, he had pulled some of us aside in tears, explaining that he did not feel like a hero and that he wishes he could have saved more people. He even continued to thank us and said that our support is noticed by everyone in his town, and it makes a huge difference for them in helping them stay strong and move forward. This man was an angel sent from Hashem and a true example of a living hero. We are honored to have met such an incredible man who truly opened our eyes to some of the horrors experienced on that day.

KIBBUTZ BE'ERI

Following this, we went directly to Kibbutz Be'eri, which was one of the hardest hit spots targeted by terrorists on October 7th, and we lost at least 130 Jewish people that day. We had the honor of receiving a grand tour of the Kibbutz by Mr. Eli Landau, who was the son of the head of ZAKA, which is Israel's rescue and recovery organization that steps in following any terror attacks. They are all incredible people who devote their time to doing a very tough and heartbreaking job. Eli went through his entire experience on October 7th and explained that even the worst horror movie imaginable couldn't explain what he saw that day. Upon walking through Be'eri, words really could not explain the devastation seen around this Kibbutz, and it truly hurt us to see it the way it was. It looked as if a fire tornado had run through and destroyed everything, and we could not believe our eyes. This was a beautiful and peaceful Kibbutz that was left in ruins and destroyed inside and out. Hearing someone recount the scene of the Be'eri post-attack was very hard to take in, and even seeing the ruin wasn't enough to fully understand the severity of what happened that day. These peaceful people of Be'eri were attacked for absolutely no reason, and their entire home had been destroyed. While we were there, we would hear these super loud bangs as if an explosion were happening nearby, and we would all shudder from that sound. Eli explained that the sound was from an Israeli tank shooting targeted missiles into Gaza to protect our soldiers, and that he would pray that it would hit its target every time. He did not even flinch from the sound, as he was used to it, and it showed us how much he has truly been through over the past few months. Words really can't explain the scene in Be'eri, as it was just absolute devastation with endless burned-down houses, melted metal, broken glass, and bullet holes everywhere.

CHAI LIFELINE CARNIVAL

Even though our spirits were a bit down following our visit to Be'eri, we were fortunate enough to have sponsored a carnival for displaced families, which completely changed our moods and energy. We entered this carnival to see hundreds of children and parents smiling and laughing. We did not know what to expect upon entering this carnival, but the happiness we felt in the air was incredible. We immediately got involved and began helping run the different stations, such as the cotton candy, popcorn, and crepe stations. Not only did the children enjoy it, but we did as well, and it was an emotional experience to say the least. One of the more notable moments at this carnival was when one of the mothers came over to us and explained that today was the first time she had seen her children smile since October 7th. Hearing something like that really made us understand that even the smallest acts of kindness can make the biggest impact on all of those affected on October 7th.

GILAT JUNCTION

Immediately after the carnival, we made our way over to the Gilat Junction, which is a spot where soldiers going into and out of Gaza were able to just relax, eat, and gather themselves. There were so many people who were giving their time here, and they had set up countless stations of food and service just for these soldiers. They had a schnitzel-challah station, popcorn, pancakes, shakshuka, and burgers, and all of these things were at no cost to the soldiers. There was even an area in the corner in which soldiers could get full-body massages and just rest. We were very excited to give the clothing that was donated and packaged in New York, and we were finally able to distribute everything. We brought two full duffle bags of clothing, and the soldiers were overjoyed by the things we brought for them. They kept thanking us and hugging us, and you truly felt how much it meant to each one of them. The smiles on their faces said it all, and many of them were literally in Gaza only hours before. Later in the night, we began dancing and singing with the soldiers, and there was a general joy you could just feel in the air throughout the night, despite the intense circumstances. After visiting this junction, we really felt a sense that we made a difference in many of these soldiers' lives, and they made sure that we understood it as well. The constant thanks and gratitude shown by these soldiers was very evident; meanwhile, they were the true heroes who needed to be thanked endlessly.

DAY THREE

ORANGE FARM

We began day three with an overwhelming amount of different emotions flowing through our bodies. We did not understand what this trip would do for us or how it would make us feel, and it had only been two days. We started the third day with a bit of a lighter activity, which involved us visiting an orange farm and helping pick oranges for the local Israeli farmers. They lost most of their workers on October 7th, who fled out of fear without any warning. Our job was to pick as many oranges as possible because they would go bad if we didn't, as there was no one around to harvest them. We had an incredible time, and the oranges were absolutely incredible. Imagine the best orange a person can find straight from the tree in the holiest land there is. We even had the honor of learning about different farming halachot from our very own Rabbi Adam Sabzevari. Towards the end, the main farmer showed us several brachot needed to ensure the oranges could be taken out of the farm and eaten in a kosher manner. We were treated so nicely by the people on this farm, and they gave us fresh falafel sandwiches by the end to show thanks. This was a very wholesome experience and a bit lighter than what we were used to so far on this trip.

SHUVA JUNCTION

We headed straight over to another junction known as the Shuva Junction, which was started by three brothers on October 7th. This junction started as just a small tent with some food, and now it is a massive space with a ton of food, clothing, and just a relaxing place for all of the soldiers coming in and out of war. We brought more duffle bags with donated clothing to give to the soldiers, and they were overjoyed when we began distributing everything. A simple pair of socks brought the biggest smile to a soldier's face, which was truly heartwarming to see. We never got tired of giving out clothing, but we had wished we collected more so we would never run out, as there was a nonstop need from the soldiers. While giving out the clothing, we had the huge honor of meeting Rabbi Amar (the former Sephardic Rabbi of Israel), who, by chance, stopped by to bless all the soldiers at this junction. Everyone was singing prayers and dancing, and it was an absolutely amazing experience the whole time there. The people running the junction were so amazing and thankful that they gave us custom sweaters to bring home with us. Everyone we visited would constantly show their appreciation and thanks to us, even though they were doing the most incredible things. They really would make sure that we understood what a difference we made for them and how much our support meant to all of them.

NOVA FESTIVAL SITE

After that amazing experience at the junction, we made our way to the Nova Festival Site, which was one of the tougher places we visited throughout our trip. It is near impossible to describe the sheer horror experienced by the people at this festival, and it was not a truly difficult place to visit. Nearly 350 innocent people were murdered that day on a day that they were supposed to be celebrating peace. They went to this festival to have a happy and joyous experience, and it turned out to be the darkest nightmare imaginable for everyone. We arrived and walked around the site, which consisted of endless memorials for these young, beautiful souls. It was hard for any of us to speak while we were there, and we just made our way around in silence, showing our respects to anyone we could. We even saw a survivor from that day being interviewed, and she was one of the girls who hid in a nearby forest while she watched many of her friends get slaughtered by hamas. It is truly hard to describe the scene at this site, as there were so many memorials spreading so far that it was almost impossible to believe that so many people were murdered in that exact spot. One of the nicer things we saw was the area in which a tree was planted for each victim of that tragic day, and it was a beautiful thing to see.

INTELLIGENCE ARMY BASE

The last place we visited for the day was an intelligence army base, where we had the pleasure of BBQing for all the soldiers. We had arrived and immediately saw one of the iron domes, which was an incredible site. Afterwards, we prepared the BBQ and got to grill, chat, and laugh with all of the soldiers. We were cooking for a few hours, and soldiers were constantly thanking us throughout the night. After the BBQ, we were given a tour of the base, which was amazing because it was a makeshift base that ultimately ran 24/7. All of the soldiers had to be ready to go and be alert at any moment, as they would be required to run intense, intelligent operations at any given moment. This army base was responsible for many of the behind-the-scenes operations that people don't always notice. They are ultimately the eyes and ears of the soldiers and are constantly doing surveillance of our enemies to protect our soldiers as they go into war. These soldiers were truly amazing, and we were so lucky to see some of the behind-the-scenes equipment and tasks they handled on a daily basis. These are true Jewish heroes and are not always recognized for it since they are not directly in combat. We are grateful to have met every single one.

DAY FOUR

SECRET BASE

We were truly exhausted by Day 4, but we very much looked forward to this day, as our entire day was coordinated by Rabbi Zabihi and his family. We started the day by going to a super private army base that required all of us to submit our passports for review and background checks. This army base is best compared to the show "Fauda," in which Israelis go undercover as Arabs and perform very covert and dangerous missions. Every member of this base looked Arab, and it was quite an experience. We were able to see some of their training facilities as well as their armored vehicles. Our main intention of this visit was to sponsor and serve the food to the soldiers, which consisted of burgers, schnitzel, and so much more. The soldiers were happily eating and sharing experiences that they were allowed to share with us, and we heard some incredible things. There was a famous video of a group of Israelis who went undercover in a hospital disguised as Arabs, and we learned (without official confirmation) that we met one of the members of the secret mission. It was truly an experience, and we are thankful to the Zabihi family for getting us a full tour of this facility.

GIFTS FOR KIDS

Upon leaving the army base, we ultimately had an open schedule and needed to decide what to do at that moment. It was pouring rain, so our options were limited, but we decided to do something involving the displaced families from the north who were staying at a nearby hotel. These families had been forced out of their homes for their own safety and have been having a hard time with their children. A lot of the parents were out of work and were forced to care for their children while receiving no income for months. We decided to go to a nearby toy store and buy as many gifts as possible for the children at the hotel. Upon arrival, we were greeted with smiles and laughter from every child, and it made our days. These kids were all going through a very tough and confusing time, and this seemed to really lift their spirits. The parents of these children had privately pulled us aside and explained how much of a difference it makes for them when they feel our support and that it is noticed and acknowledged. This was one of the happier experiences we had on the trip, and we were lucky that we found the time to make it happen.

AIR FORCE BASE

Getting to this final army base was quite an experience for us. We initially had plans to

go to a specific army base to BBQ for the soldiers, but they were canceled because they were sent into Gaza. We had found another army base right afterwards, only to have that plan canceled again because that unit was sent into Gaza as well. We understood that something serious was happening, and we knew that our plans would not really be up to us. At the last moment, we found one final army base, which was an air force base fairly close to Gaza. They told us to come and grill for the soldiers, and upon arrival, we began cooking and preparing food for the soldiers. This was one of the most incredible experiences of the trip, as we were able to truly hang out with the soldiers the whole time. Some guys were playing ping pong with soldiers, some were playing backgammon, some were just chatting and laughing, and some were cooking the food, but everyone was involved and having an amazing time. Throughout the experience, we were brought around the base to see some of the helicopters and equipment used by these soldiers daily. We were given a walk-through of the helicopters used in combat, and these soldiers basically explained that they would always have to be ready to go and could be in Gaza within 30 minutes of waking up. These soldiers were truly superhuman and were risking their lives every day for our homeland. We even had the honor of praying in a helicopter that was in Gaza only 24 hours before. We were singing and dancing in this helicopter, and it was one of the most incredible experiences any of us could have ever imagined. We said a ton of prayers throughout for the soldiers, and before we left, we received a standing ovation from them, and they made sure to tell us multiple times how much of a difference our support makes for them and that it keeps them stronger. It was hard for us to understand why these soldiers were thanking us so much, but we came to learn that even the smallest bit of support makes a world of difference to each and every one of them.

FINAL DAYS

MASHADI SOUP KITCHEN

We were nearing the end of our trip and had a few more things left to do. One of the nicer things we got to do was help package food at the Mashadi Synagogue in Mea Shearim, which fed over 300 families. We had an amazing time there, and it was a super quick and efficient process. Mehrnoush Rafinia had been the organizer of the soup kitchen and made sure everything was taken care of that day, and we could not thank him enough. We were given a grand tour of the Mashadi Synagogue afterwards as well, and it was absolutely beautiful. They were even doing a large renovation next door to expand, which was incredible to see. We entered Shabbat ready to rest, but with a true sense of fulfillment and filled with heavy emotions. We knew the trip was nearing its end, but we had one more important task on our agenda left to do.

SHAARE ZEDEK HOSPITAL

Sunday arrived, and we were leaving later that day. We scheduled our visit to Shaare Zedek Hospital, which is a hospital for wounded soldiers that has been super active since October 7th. We had prepared three large duffle bags with clothing that was generously donated by our family and friends. These bags included specifically more comfortable clothing such as pajamas, slippers, and t-shirts, which were requested by many of the soldiers. These soldiers were entering the hospital without any additional clothing to change into and simply wanted to be in clean and comfortable clothing following any procedures or surgeries they went through. We were given a grand tour of the facility and were introduced to several injured soldiers as well. These soldiers always greeted us with smiles, despite their injuries and everything they had been through. It was an honor for all of us to meet these heroes, especially in such a difficult time for them. Shaare Zedek is truly an incredible facility, and they have even begun building an underground emergency unit that is currently being renovated and will be a huge addition to the hospital. They truly made us feel that our support made a difference to them, and they even gave us an honorary plaque thanking us for our support. These organizations are keeping our Jewish brothers and sisters alive and strong, and we couldn't thank them enough.

FINAL WORDS

This piece of writing truly cannot express any part of the experience and emotions felt throughout this solidarity trip. It would be impossible to truly express the way we felt at so many different points of this trip with just words. From the joy of hugging a soldier to the pain of walking through Be'eri, we truly experienced every possible emotion that one could feel during these tough times. We truly learned that even the slightest bit of support from our end makes a world of difference to everyone in Israel. It is our job to constantly show support in any way possible, whether it's by donating, by visiting, or just by spreading awareness. We will always have a constant responsibility to support our Israel family, but in these times specifically, we must make a conscious effort to provide extra support as needed. We were blessed with this opportunity to experience many different people and places affected by October 7th, and we could have done anything without the incredible support of the people around us. Our friends and family made this trip possible, and we could not thank them enough for their consistent support and heavy donations provided. We constantly pray that, BzH, we will bring home our hostages as soon as possible and completely destroy those who seek to destroy us.

JAVOON

*ALL COMMUNITY YOUTH, BOTH LADIES & GENTLEMEN, ARE ENCOURAGED TO JOIN THE **JAVOON MINYAN** ON WEEKDAY MORNINGS!*

***LOCATION:** MAIN KANISSA @ SHAARE RACHAMIM SYNAGOGUE*

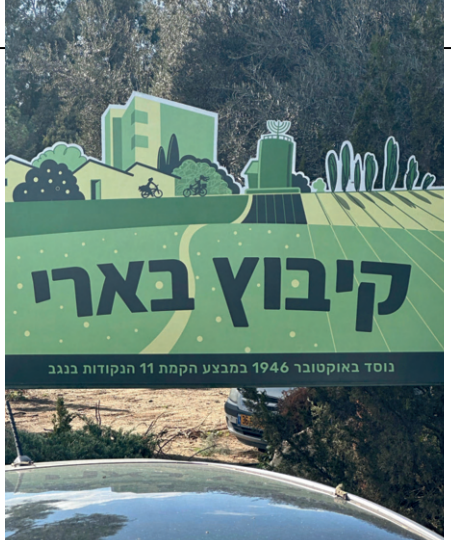
***SCHEDULE:** MONDAY - FRIDAY, **7:45 AM** SHACHARIT, **8:35 AM** LAVISH BREAKFAST BUFFET*

An express morning Minyan, ran by and catered towards the Youth!

BRING HIM HOME NOW!
BRING HER HOME NOW!

עכשיו

זק"א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مقهى النور

WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL 2.0

Debbie Aziz

With help from the ladies of the UMJCA Women's Solidarity Trip 2.0

On March 4, 2023, we were privileged to join a second Women's Solidarity Trip to Israel as representatives of our Mashadi community here in Great Neck. We were a group of 20 women who set out on this journey. We wanted to show support and give back to our homeland, as this war takes its toll on the State of Israel and the nation of Israel at large. What we didn't realize before was how little we actually understood—that there is a lot going on in the country that the news doesn't necessarily talk about at all. There's so much to mourn, but also so much to be proud of. This war has many layers to it, and on every stop of our trip, we learned something new:

The Return of Our Hostages: This is the "hot topic" of the war, and we were privileged to meet a few different hostage families over the 4 days of our trip. Some saw graphic videos of their loved ones being brutally dragged away; others have no proof of their loved ones being taken—they're presumed kidnapped, with no sign of life or death. Both are circumstances that no family should ever know. Some are furious with the government, some are strong and beg us to keep praying, and some show themselves to be completely broken. We visited Hostage Square and sat and listened to family members, loved ones, and neighbors who came as representatives of our hostages. Some were there in shifts, and some hadn't missed a single day of being there and spreading awareness. We also later met with Yaakov and his wife Or, who got married about a month before October 7th, when Yaakov's brother, Elkana, was taken hostage by Hamas from the site of the Nova music festival. They spent their honeymoon supporting Yaakov's parents, Elkana's wife, and his three-year-old son, in addition to doing everything possible to get Elkana back home. They are showing strength where no one else in their family is able to. There are families and friends of 134 hostages who are waiting every day for it to be THE day when they're finally reunited with their loved one. *They are heroes in their own right*.

Our Soldiers: Our soldiers are incredible. We met soldiers across army bases and even our own security guard, who fought heroically for us in Gaza. We visited the army base at *Sde Teman*, where we barbecued for the soldiers and provided them with a delicious meal. More importantly, we learned about what they do there. They invited us into the war room and taught us about the complexities of Gaza's terror tunnel system and its implications for the missions to retrieve hostages. We also had the privilege of meeting soldiers who were wounded in battle at Tel Hashomer hospital and rehabilitation center. We visited both the amputee section of the hospital and the general rehabilitation section. Many were kind enough to tell us their stories and inspire us with their positive energy. We heard from Omri, who was grateful to have his eyesight even though he was missing a leg. We heard from Mendel, who showed us where bullets entered and left his arm, but he managed to be so full of light and joy. These soldiers were airlifted out of Gaza and managed to sit here with smiles on their faces, thanking us for our visit. On the back end of the trip, we also visited Har Herzl, the military cemetery in Jerusalem. We heard accounts of the heroic soldiers who didn't make it back to base, couldn't be helped in a hospital, and fell both on October 7th and in the war in Gaza. They lost their lives proudly protecting our homeland and its citizens. Together, we mourned the loss of these souls, many of them husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, and friends, all of them gone at far too young an age. We honor these soldiers: those who are actively serving, those who are recovering from service, and those who gave up their lives to serve. *They are heroes in their own right.*

The Hidden IDF: When most people think of the IDF, they think of combat soldiers. They are not thinking about the soldiers we met at Shura Base. Shura is the base whose primary job is to identify bodies of soldiers, a chevra kadisha, but specific to the IDF. The Rabbis on base (and yes, we mean Rabbis, plural) painted for us a picture of what the base looked like on October 7th and the weeks following it. To say the least, it was horrifying. This unit is full of tzadikim who are doing a job no one else would want to do and are doing it in the most humble and respectful way possible. We met Rebbetzin Noa, one of only twelve women in this unit. She, together with the Rabbis, expressed that although it's mentally challenging, they are honored to do Hashem's work and give the fallen soldiers the respect they deserve. They asked us to pray for their mental health in addition to their physical strength to do what needs to be done. *They are heroes in their own right.*

Civilian Volunteers: When October 7th happened, our country bounded together in ways no one could imagine. People from across the country dropped everything to support soldiers in a war no one anticipated or was ready for. First, we met Sami, who left behind his business and moved into a trailer close to the border of Gaza. He started making sandwiches for soldiers, taking personalized orders, and using the freshest, most delicious ingredients. We helped make some sandwiches, only to learn that at the height of the war, Sami was making 3,000 sandwiches a day! We also visited two junctions that were similarly founded by ordinary civilians who just wanted to help. They set up camp on the side of the road and began to provide fresh food for soldiers, as well as new equipment and even a place to do laundry, rest, and recharge. They all admitted that it took time before donations started coming in. The founders of these junctions started out by paying out of pocket for everything because they couldn't sit back and do nothing. We also met some incredible volunteers at Tel Hashomer Hospital. We saw yeshiva students come midday to bring pizza and to sing to brighten up the day of soldiers they

don't know. Another volunteer expressed that he comes twice a day, every day, before and after work, just to visit and lift spirits. Women from both the southern city of Shokeda and the northern city of Kiryat Shmona also told us that when they were evacuated, they voluntarily gave their house keys to the army to use their showers, eat their food, and have a place to feel at home near the battlefield. Our nation is showing up for each other in ways that Hamas never could have anticipated. *They are heroes in their own right.*

Families of Victims of Terror: We all hear about terror attacks on the news. This one attacked; that one attacked. This one leaves behind a wife and kids; this one leaves behind parents and siblings. Names and faces are just names and faces until you meet them in person. Beyond the news articles are families who are torn apart months and sometimes years later, even though they seem to be continuing on. We partnered up with the organization One Family—Mishpacha Achat—to throw a Bat-Mitzvah party for 22 girls who lost first-degree relatives in terror attacks before, on, and after October 7th. We danced and celebrated, and although we had fun, we held back many, many tears. Some moms even told us their stories and thanked us for giving them a night off from their grief and putting a smile on their daughter's face when they don't have it in them to make anyone else happy. Even some girls shared that it was their first smile in months. Some of the smiles that night were genuine; others were forced. In any case, these families showed us the resilience of our people. We also heard from Rabbi Doron Perez, who recounted for us the difficult decision he and his family made to marry off one son just ten days after 10/7, while another son was (and still is) a hostage in Gaza. It's a decision no family should ever be faced with. These families showed us that, although we as a nation get knocked down, we'll find a way to celebrate again. And we're much stronger together than apart. *They are heroes in their own right.*

Establishing a Jewish Presence: On the second day of our trip, we met Haggai Nissim, son of Avishai and Ruthie, a Mashadi-Israeli who lives in the West Bank. He explained to us that he and his wife moved there six and a half years ago to unclaimed land situated between Arab and Jewish areas. He did this to further establish a Jewish presence in Israel. Living there is not easy, and Haggai abided by all settlement laws. For example, Haggai and his family lived in a temporary dwelling space for the first five years because the law mandated it for that time period. Despite the hardships, he uses his mountaintop vantage point to collaborate with the IDF, keeping watch on nearby Arab villages and reporting any suspicious activity. As a Mashadi-Israeli, Haggai is an inspiration for us all. We helped Hai to plant trees on his farm to do our part in developing the land of Israel. Haggai and others like him make significant sacrifices for Israel. They leave behind the comfort and security of established Israeli territory to live in these unsettled areas while fully abiding by the complex settlement laws of the area. Their sacrifices contribute to the establishment of our Jewish presence in the land of Israel and help maintain the safety and security of our Jewish brethren who live nearby. *They are heroes in their own right.*

Displaced Families: A huge number of Israelis have been displaced from their homes since October, both from the North and South. Cities that border Gaza, like Beeri, Kfar Aza, Sderot, Shokeda, and others, were evacuated for obvious reasons. With Hashem's help and in a show of true patriotism, many of them are beginning to rebuild their settlements and move back home. We visited the city of Sderot, which is less than a mile away from Gaza, and with the help of the organization, Chayenu put on a carnival for their children. We learned that they had just returned to their homes in the last two weeks, and school had only just started again for them two days prior to our visit! It was an honor to help put a smile on their faces, and it was equally an honor to talk to them about their experiences as evacuees. It had been a hard five months for many of them, and despite being a mile away from a warzone, they were grateful to be home. We were also privileged to share a hotel with displaced families from the northern city of Kiryat Shmona, which is less than 2 miles away from the border of Lebanon. They too have not been home since October, and told us that there is no option of returning for them for at least another 6 months. You'd think living in a nice hotel is all fun and games, but not when you came with nothing but the clothes on your back. Not when your child, who was doing so well in school, couldn't get his hands on a laptop to do schoolwork. Not when it took a month for them to get washing machines in the hotel and had to wash whatever clothes they had in their hotel bathtub. Not when you watch videos of barrages of rockets being thrown over your hometown at all hours of the day. Some of the young girls in the hotel saw that we had an Israeli flag and asked if they could also have one to hang up. We found one to give them and saw that same night that it was hung up in the lobby and signed by many of the people: "We will return!, "Kiryat Shmona is in our hearts," and "Am Yisrael Chai!" We are blown away by all the displaced families who, despite the physical danger, hold this land of Israel close to their hearts and won't give it up that easily. *They are heroes in their own right.*

First Response on the Day of 10/7: The October 7th attacks were unprovoked and unanticipated, and we heard many tragic accounts of that day in different places across Israel. We visited the site of the infamous Nova Festival in Reim and were met there by two survivors of the festival, Eden and Shira. You could feel the heaviness in the air as they told us their tragic and horrifying account of that day, how they made it out against all odds, and how some of their best friends weren't so lucky. We saw the faces of too many young, beautiful souls who came to celebrate life and didn't make it home, as they were either murdered or kidnapped. We also learned about heroes of that day who could've run and saved themselves but went back and forth trying to save people, only to be taken out in the end. We learned of a similar theme when we took a tour of the city of Ofakim with police officer Itamar Alus. Itamar gave us a play-by-play of his morning, running out of his house with just a pistol—not even a helmet on his head! We cried as we learned his wife begged him not to go, not to be a hero, but he couldn't stand by when the people of his city were in danger. We saw the bullet holes and the places where grenades landed, as well as the exact spots in which he survived 6 direct barrages of gunfire. We saw the homes of the people he protected and saved, and we paid tribute to those who didn't survive the hours of fighting like he did. These people were his neighbors and friends—another set of Jews who did nothing to deserve the atrocities committed against them. We visited the Nachal Oz Army Base, which was infiltrated by over 40 terrorists. We went into the remains of their command center, which was burned down. Brave soldiers fought them off for as long as possible, and when they couldn't get in, the terrorists decided to set it on fire. 12 female soldiers burned alive inside that command center; only six managed to get out. At the end of our trip, we were also taken aback when we learned that both of Rabbi Doron Perez's sons were at this base on 10/7. His younger son was stationed on the base and taken hostage, and his older son ran there voluntarily from his home to help his brother; he was shot in the leg while trying to fight. Time after time, we hear about people who could've stayed put but made instant decisions to put their lives at risk to help others. They are heroes in their own right.

None of this happened in a bubble. There are many more stories like these that we didn't get to hear—heroes upon heroes who showed up for Am Yisrael on and after October 7th. We came out to support Israel, but it's Israel that gave so much to us. We learned that we're a nation of resilient people, talented people, and inspiring people. One of the soldiers at Tel Hashomer reminded us that their service is not only for the Jews in Israel but for the Jews around the world. Their sacrifices shouldn't be in vain; we need to all be working collectively to

make the world a better place. We need to be better spouses, parents, children, and friends. We need to do more chessed and brighten up the world however we can. We pray to Hashem to see better days, and we thank Hashem that we are part of this undefeatable nation. We learned that our nation, the nation of Israel, is a nation of heroes.

Thank you to Ayelet Nissim, who joined as our "tour guide" on the trip and helped plan every detail to perfection. We also thank all the solidarity trips before us who shared details of their own trips and helped to make our trip possible. And, of course, an endless thank you to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for every moment of every day.

Am Yisrael Chai!

MARCH FOR ISRAEL IN WASHINGTON D.C.

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

Ella Hakimian

This past November, I had the opportunity to gather among 300,000 Jews from across the world at the March for Israel rally in Washington, D.C. Together, we commemorated the tragedies of October 7th, urged Congress to support Israel, and celebrated our faith to uplift broken spirits. At 6 o'clock in the morning, we began our exciting journey from Great Neck to March.

At our rest stop, we came across a group of Ashkenazi Jews from the 5 Towns whose bus had unfortunately broken down on the way to the rally. Met with despair, the men didn't know how they were going to make it to Washington, D.C. When they saw our bus arrive at the rest stop, they asked us if we had extra room to take a few people with us. We brought the Ashkenazi Jews on board, served them Persian "noon taftoon" cake, and taught them common Persian words and phrases. This experience set the tone for the day. Rather than using our different backgrounds to divide us, we put our Jewish identity before any other and spread our cultures to bring us closer together. As we neared the capital city, the entire highway was filled with buses of Jews dancing and davening. On our bus ride, teenagers and grandmothers alike sang and danced to Jewish music as we awaited our arrival.

65 degrees and sunny, we navigated our way through the jam-packed National Mall on that beautiful fall day. As I stood between the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol Building, I felt the energy of the Jewish people. With passion, 300,000 brothers and sisters cried loudly for the return of Israeli hostages. The love for our homeland and appreciation for our soldiers radiated off of each person. We heard from Alana Zeitchik, the cousin of six hostages being held in Gaza, and Chuck Shumer, the Majority Leader of the United States Senate. Hillel student leaders Sabrina from George Washington University, Emma from the University of Winnipeg, and Noa from Columbia University shared their struggles on campus and inspired the students in the audience, myself included, to stand up for what they believe in. Girls walked around with notepads and pens for people to write letters to soldiers, and we befriended women who had flown in from Texas to participate in the rally. You could not see beyond the mass of people waving their Israeli and American flags in the sky.

A definite highlight of the day was watching Ishay Ribo and Omer Adam perform their songs "HaLev Sheli" and "Modeh Ani" on the March for Israel stage. Their music lightened the intense feelings of the day and lit a spiritual spark in all who gathered.

Growing up, I was taught that wherever I was, I reflected my community. That day on the National Mall, while I stood with a few friends, I was honored to serve as a representative for our entire Mashadi Jewish Community, whose love and support for Israel are everlasting. Every aspect of our day was filled with overwhelming feelings of joy, unity, and pride.

As we continue to yearn for our innocent hostages, pray for our soldiers, and battle antisemitism, let us not forget the millions of proud Jews who stand with us, providing hope and comfort to all.

Baruch College

A verified Mashadi student at Baruch College.
Granted anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the article.

As a Mashadi senior at Baruch College in New York City, my collegiate journey has been deeply intertwined with the nuanced dynamics of antisemitism and antizionism. These experiences, set against a campus as diverse and vibrant as the city itself, have offered a profound insight into the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as perceived from thousands of miles away.

The Impact of Misinformation and Media Influence

Outlets like Al Jazeera, funded by Qatar, often present a skewed version of events, shaping public opinion and fostering a growing antipathy towards Israel among college students. On a trip to Israel, I was introduced to Honest Reporting, an organization dedicated to debunking false narratives and promoting accurate journalism. Their Instagram account, @honestreporting, is a critical resource in the fight against misinformation, offering a counter-narrative to the biased reporting that influences many students at Baruch and beyond.

Pro-Israel Programming and Campus Safety

In the aftermath of the October 7th attack, the response from Jewish student organizations like Hillel was a vivid illustration of the community's resilience. Hillel at Baruch held a vigil for the victims of the attack. My participation, however, was from the outskirts, where, due to my Middle Eastern appearance, I found myself among Arab students. At our sad memorial, I was able to overhear them say they were waiting for the Jewish students to start chanting "Death to Arabs!". It was a jarring reminder of the deep-seated stereotypes and misconceptions that permeate our campus and society at large. As the president of Baruch College spoke at the vigil, it was followed by the distribution of stickers accusing CUNY of complicity in a so-called Gaza genocide. Incidents of insensitivity, such as two female students filming themselves "flipping off" a billboard of kidnapped children and laughing, highlight the extent of misinformation and bias that exists. Such actions not only reflect a lack of empathy but also underscore the misinformation epidemic fueling campus discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of the present media and how these students were raised, they are convinced and willing to put their reputations on the line for the belief that Israel has put the Palestinians through 75 years of oppression. Despite these challenges, my sense of safety on campus remains unshaken, rooted in a faith that transcends the immediate environment.

Campus Demonstrations

Baruch College's politically active student body frequently engages in demonstrations and protests, reflecting a broad spectrum of opinions and beliefs. One of the most striking instances of this was when the Muslim student club displayed a giant Palestinian flag over their door, and in the Baruch lobby, a bold statement of solidarity and a catalyst for campus-wide conversations. Additionally, the courtyard has served as a venue for various protests, providing a platform for voicing support for Palestine and critiquing Israel. These demonstrations, while a testament to the democratic spirit of the college, often tread a delicate line between advocating for Palestinian rights and veering into the realms of antisemitism and antizionism, creating an environment that can sometimes feel unsafe for Jewish students like myself. The Middle Eastern & North African Society, or MENA, is a student organization that claims to keep Arab culture alive. MENA has frequent demonstrations, such as motivating students to wear their "Keffiyahs" on campus, a traditional Arab headdress worn by men from parts of the Middle East. They also post flyers for Pro-Palestine rallies such as "Flood Manhattan For Rafah" and "Emergency Rally For Gaza." While they believe their intentions are pure, they repeatedly fail to realize how their calling for a "Free Palestine" means the destruction of the State of Israel, along with all of its citizens. The president of MENA was kind enough to come into the Hillel and speak with us, before revealing to us that she believes the only way for there to be peace is for the Jews to leave Israel.

Academic Perspectives

The academic environment at Baruch is generally conducive to open dialogue and learning, with most professors maintaining neutrality on contentious issues. However, there have been notable exceptions where some faculty members have introduced "anti-genocide" readings that falsely portray Israel as a monster. Such curriculum choices not only challenge the notion of academic neutrality but also pressure students to conform to a singular narrative that frames Israel in a contentious and often misleading context.

Conclusion

As I reflect on my time at Baruch College, the journey through the physical landscapes of Israel and the ideological battlegrounds of campus discourse has been enlightening. The experiences and insights gained from the challenges faced on campus highlight the crucial role of accurate information and open dialogue in navigating the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a world increasingly divided by polarized narratives, the path forward must be paved with empathy, understanding, and a commitment to peace. The role of initiatives like Honest Reporting in combating misinformation is invaluable, serving as a beacon of truth in a landscape often clouded by bias and misunderstanding.

Boston University

Mickey Rahmani, Nathan Rahmani, Joseph Rahmani

Life as a Jewish college student at Boston University, millions of miles from Great Neck, has been pretty difficult in the past several months. We all remember waking up that Saturday morning and hearing the news that hundreds of our brothers and sisters in Israel were murdered on one of the happiest days on the Jewish calendar. We all expected to be embraced by university administration, professors, and friends, but many of us were left abandoned.

Members of Students for Justice in Palestine held a protest on October 7th, before any offensive military action by Israel was undertaken, to commend the "resistance" and honor the "martyrs" of October 7th. They denied the atrocities of October 7th, including the beheading of babies, claiming they were exaggerated. We were left feeling inhuman. How can masked students at BU deny our humanity when it has so obviously been violated?

Later, the President of Boston University (like the Central Board President) sent an email entitled "Conflict in the Middle East," in which he stated he was "appalled by and condemns" the attack by Hamas on the State of Israel and urged all students to express their ideas without violence.

However, the vocal minority continued their "advocacy" by dropping banners from several campus buildings and demanding that Boston University stop funding the "genocide" unfolding in Gaza and selling Israeli products in campus stores. They also demanded that Palestine be liberated from the river to the sea. The feeling of walking by a protest of fellow BU students, some of whom were your friends, who desire to deny the Jewish people their ancestral homeland is indescribable.

Most recently, on February 26th, there were protests claiming that "Zionism = Terrorism" and explicitly calling for pre-1948 borders for the Palestinian people. Meaning, the protesters aim to achieve a single Palestinian state in current Israeli territory.

Despite the "vocal minority," the Jewish community at Boston University has never been more united. We held a vigil at Marsh Plaza with several hundred Jewish and non-Jewish attendees, where we mourned the hundreds of Israeli lives lost on October 7th and prayed for the safe return of the hostages. Furthermore, the greater Boston community held a rally with thousands of attendees at the Boston Commons, with various political and religious figures in attendance.

In response to SJP's denial of the atrocities of October 7th, we brought Shye Klein, a photographer and an attendee of the Nova Music Festival, to give a presentation on his experience on October 7th. He presented many pictures from the festival and the unfolding attack and left us with messages of encouragement. One particularly chilling moment was when he showed us a picture of him and his friends speeding past terrorists attempting to stop their car to kill them. Although Shy's story was heart-wrenching, it was profoundly meaningful.

Furthermore, we convened almost all BU Deans, almost as qualified as the Kanissa presidents, at the Hillel for a session outlining our campus struggle. We shared the story of our ancestors' ordeal in Iran during the Allah Dahdi incident and how it resonates with the experiences of many individuals concealing their Jewish identity on college campuses, which we found appalling. Many deans expressed solidarity with us and a desire to improve the Jewish student experience at BU.

Lastly, we held several hour-long meetings with the President, Vice President, Dean of Students, and Academic Provost of Boston University (a lot less FOB than our Mashadi Boards), urging them to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism and to form a task force analyzing Jewish life on Boston University's campus. After pushing them heavily, the BU administration finally formed a Working Group on Jewish Life and Addressing Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Harassment (a lot of words, we know), which is tasked with helping the community understand the unique challenges Jewish students, staff, and faculty at Boston University face and making several recommendations by the start of the next academic year.

Living alongside the masked minority of students who deny our humanity can be challenging. Celebrating an atrocity like October 7th and denying us our homeland is incomprehensible to us. However, we find empowerment in educating others about the beauty of Israel and the Jewish people and advocating on behalf of Jewish students across campus.

Most importantly, we reject appeasement in favor of pride. We walk proudly as Jews, part of a resilient people who, despite millennia of persecution, thrive today with our Jewish state. We're grateful to be a part of a united community that, even while away from home, is a community to rely on for support during these times.

The situation at BU isn't unique; college campuses have emerged as figurative front lines in the war against sympathizers of terrorism in the US. While all of our front lines are safer, it remains crucial to understand their significance.

Am Yisrael Chai!

Cornell University

Nabi Nabavian

I traveled back to a very different Cornell University after an unorthodox Simchat Torah holiday.

At first, I surprisingly felt very safe. I walked into my Business Organization lecture on the Monday following the October 7th attacks to a rowdy room. My professor stood in front of the 200-person class and condemned all aspects of the terrorism that occurred that day. He also took a moment to say that if we experienced any level of discomfort due to the event, he and the teacher assistants would be there to help assist us during the stressful period. Also, after my Calculus teacher dismissed our class later that week, he asked if I'd stay back for a minute. He knew I was Jewish and asked me if I had any family living in Israel, making sure they were alive and safe. Both of these non-Jewish professors knew the repercussions of backlash at the time of taking a position on the conflict due to its political complexities, yet still made sure to provide support to Jewish students. I admired their proactivity, and it made me and other students feel supported.

That Tuesday, the Cornell Jewish Community held a vigil to honor the lives of the October 7th victims. The event gathered the support of hundreds of students and staff, demonstrating the Jewish unity at Cornell.

Despite the broad support from the administration and student organizations, the Jewish president of Cornell, Martha Pollack, failed to address the issue. Her email to students described the Hamas terrorists as 'militants', and described the human loss at the time as due to "human actions such as terrorism, war or mass shootings, or by natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires or floods". Rather than hold Hamas accountable for murdering over 1,200 innocent Israelis, she gave a broad response to current events.

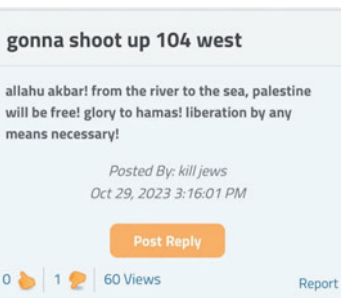
About a week later, Cornell Professor Russel Rickford spoke at a pro-Palestinian rally, arguing the Hamas attack on Israel was 'exhilarating and energizing'. While he later stepped down from his position due to external pressures, his ideas only fueled a growing flame. Weeks went on, and students backed his position and started to hold more pro-Palestine events. Soon, marches with hundreds of students across campus shouting "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free" became the norm.

By the end of October, the Cornell campus was vandalized with pro-terror graffiti. Sidewalks read "F*** Israel" and "ZIONISM = Genocide". The famed Cornell Store displayed an "ISRAEL IS FASCIST" across the entrance floor, while swastikas were seen across campus. While the University did a great job at clearing the spray paint swiftly, Jewish students couldn't feel safe anymore.

Shabbat dinners at Chabad now hosted multiple policemen. Jewish fraternities and sororities now had overnight guards. Walking outside with a kippah on your head was now a risk. My first-semester friends now looked at me like an enemy. While many started to experience blatant antisemitism, it didn't hit me yet.

One day, I saw a message in a group chat. Anonymous users on an online Cornell forum threatened to "shoot up 104 West," the kosher dining hall located right next to the Cornell Jewish Center. Another post had a user threaten to "stab" and "slit the throat" of Jewish males on campus, to rape and throw off a cliff any Jewish females, and to behead any Jewish babies. In that same post, the user threatened to "bring an assault rifle to campus and shoot" all Jewish students. The next day, the FBI was seen all over campus, the kosher dining hall had temporarily shut down, and news channels covered the event. While I received texts and calls from friends, family, and even distant connections, I still didn't feel unsafe. I knew these comments were empty threats coming from someone sitting behind a screen. This was confirmed to be by Patrick Dai, a 'depressed' Asian-American student living down the block from a Jewish fraternity annex house.

The day I knew I wasn't safe anymore was about a week later. On November 1st, Cornell Police announced the search for a male wearing all-black clothing who displayed a pistol by 600 University Ave– right across the street from Chabad. It hasn't been the same since. Weeks went by slowly as none of us felt secure anymore. Our winter break eventually came in time and allowed us to go back to our families in much safer communities. But as things died down, it seemed as if everyone else forgot what we had gone through.



When we came back from break in mid-January, Student for Justice in Palestine (SJP) continued to host rallies across campus. On multiple occasions, SJP had large groups of students engage in 'die-ins', where people dressed in keffiyehs and pretended to die on the floors of large halls and libraries. SJP furthered their anti-Israel agenda by proposing a resolution to the Cornell Student Assembly which would force the University to publicly divest from companies with Israeli ties such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin. While this agenda had been rejected by a vote of 16-4, SJP continues to search for ways to turn students and faculty against Jewish Students.

Present Day

It's a sad reality that the longer time goes on, the more normalized everything becomes. I was walking to Chabad for lunch last week, and on the way a pro-Palestine demonstration took up the whole sidewalk. I crossed the street and saw 30 people chanting and holding up signs. Multiple cars passed by and honked for them, while I walked on the other side of the street in shabbat clothes, with my kippah in my pocket.

With vandalism still occurring on campus, and demonstrations more violent by the day, nobody feels safe anymore. With Cornell having one of the largest Jewish student populations across US college campuses, I can't imagine how much worse the conflict is at other schools. With little media attention anymore, it is our job to spread awareness on the violence and antisemitism going on today. Without your support, nobody knows what their next move can be. The best way to keep your friends and family safe is to help fix these issues one step at a time.

University of Michigan

Bradley Benilevi

Hundreds of University of Michigan students staged a walkout and gathered to call on the university to divest from companies profiting from Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Organized by Students Allied for Freedom and Equality and the TAHRIR Coalition, the goal of the protest was to "increase student awareness about how the University's investments fund Israeli military violence." National walkouts have been common across the country since October 7th. This protest, however, was unique to other school protests across the country and unique to the triannual Palestinian marches on the UMich campus; this protest stormed the Stephen M. Ross School of Business (RSB).

The Ross Business School was founded by Stephen M. Ross, an UMich alumnus who grew up in a Jewish household. The RSB, made up of the highest concentration of Jewish students on campus, is known to be the office of Jewish Resource Center head Rabbi Fully Eisenberger. Rabbi Full teaches Torah to dozens of students at the RSB every weekday in the center of the school's winter garden. That day, the RSB was an obvious target for such a passionate protest.

Moments after the protest, I walked back to the RSB, curious what the aftermath would look like. I was relieved to see students still huddled over their laptops, business clubs standing proudly behind their booths, and, of course, Rabbi Fully conversing lively with Jewish students. It felt as though the protest was an immediately forgotten fever dream, as if every person in the building patiently waited for the dream to end.

By the end of the day, there was already a viral photo of Rabbi Fully blocking the marching protest. As much as this photo instills fear in Jewish students, most people fail to recognize the sign being held by the leading protester. Zoomed in on the photo, the sign reads, "UMICH JEWS FOR OPERATION OF PALESTINE." The student holding the sign is an anti-Zionist Jewish student.

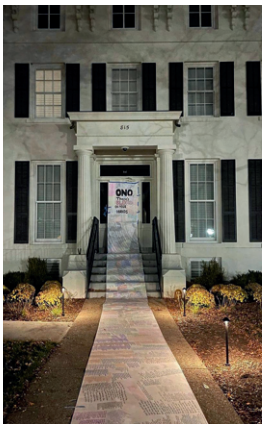
More exotic demonstrations are common as well. A 'Die In' demonstration saw over 100 pro-Palestine students lay on the ground of the school yard for over three hours, simulating corpses. This was an attempt to draw attention to the Palestinians that were allegedly killed by Israeli military forces and, again, to call on the university to divest from companies that fund Israel. The SAFE president opened the event by reading 4,000 names of Palestinians that were allegedly killed by the Israeli attacks on Gaza after October 7th.

It was no surprise to see photos of my friend's house vandalized with swastikas during an off-school day. The following day called for an FBI investigation. Unfortunately, the swastikas were not enough evidence to find the vandal, meaning whoever that may be continues to roam the UMich campus freely.

One UMich professor released a statement blaming Hamas's genocide on October 7th on the Jewish State and its "structural apartheid." I did not think too much of the statement initially, although I was disappointed to see over 600 signatures of other UMich professors at the end of it. Anytime I get discouraged by this census, I simply remind myself that the statement's top signatures include those of numerous unqualified professors, such as associate gender studies professor Charlotte Karem Albrecht, associate gender studies professor Victor Mendoza, and theater professor Ashley Lucas.

On a more honorable note, the UMich JRC, Chabad, and Hillel are significantly contributing to showing, spreading, and providing support for Israel. Solidarity Birthright trips, Israel fundraising events, history of Israel lectures, a presentation of an October 7th survivor of Kibbutz Be'eri, and more kinds of programming have been offered to students to encourage the support of Israel. Facts of the Ground at Michigan, a coalition of students looking to "clear the fog" of disinformation spreading on the UMich campus, presented 'Perspectives on the Israel-Hamas War' with keynote speakers Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of the former leader of Hamas and popular advocate for the elimination of Hamas, and former Representative Ted Deutch,' to speak at the UMich campus. There has also been additional security for Shabbat dinners to promote a sense of safety for students to keep Shabbat on campus. Pro-Israel gatherings of Jewish students, parents, and community members at the UMich campus made the Jewish presence on campus clear.

The most prominent gathering saw the JRC president, Daniella Ludmir, urge students to vote against the Central Student Government resolution AR 13-025, titled "University Accountability in the Face of Genocide." This resolution acted as a request of the Central Student Government to take a "non-discriminatory stance on violence and systems of apartheid, especially given recent developments in Israel and Palestine," after UMich President Santa Ono released a statement supporting Israel's right to defend themselves. Thankfully, the resolution was predominantly voted against, which ultimately saw a cheating scandal by numerous pro-Palestine students. A group of pro-Palestinian students took this matter as far as vandalizing President Ono's home with a long scroll taped to his front door. The scroll read, "Ono, There's Blood On Your Hands" with the names of hundreds of alleged Gazan martyrs, suggesting the school's investments directly led to the death of Gazans.



In the midst of this bizarre time to be a college student, I feel rather safe on campus. A sense of cohesion within the Jewish community has reached new levels on the UMich campus. Shabbat dinners see students struggling to find an open seat. Students who grew up unobservant or never identified as Jewish are now contributing to Jewish programming and learning with campus Rabbis. As protests now occur weekly, I feel as though they have become a normality. They do not discourage many Jewish students, and particularly, the protestors do not present themselves very well. With that, Jewish students have successfully displayed righteousness as their pro-Palestinian classmates aggressively march through the UMich streets.

New York University

Sofia Ijadi

Antisemitism has been a growing institutional problem on NYU's campus and other United States university campuses for decades, increasing by over 40% in 2022 alone, and worsening even further since the October 7, 2023, Hamas massacre in Israel. NYU is among the worst campuses for Jewish students, and NYU has long been aware of the festering Jewish hatred permeating the school. The surge in anti-Semitic incidents on campus since that date has been remarkable, deeply affecting students, faculty, parents, and alumni emotionally. Despite the prevalent Jewish population at New York University, the school's administration has been more than hesitant to address dangerous rhetoric and acts against Jewish students.

Shortly after October 7th, the campus was filled with posters representing civilians kidnapped by Hamas. However, NYU students tore down these pictures, leaving behind evidence that pointed to their objectionable intentions. Despite these individuals being identified, NYU did not take disciplinary action against them, thereby allowing them to continue participating in anti-Semitic activities on campus. This incident played a pivotal role in galvanizing the Jewish community at NYU. With Jews making up approximately 13% of the student population, the events of October 7th and the subsequent reactions not only underscored the challenges faced by Jewish students, but also highlighted the solidarity and resilience within the community. This period marked a significant moment of cohesion among Jewish students and faculty, fostering a renewed sense of identity and purpose.

The staging of pro-Palestine demonstrations in Bobst Library, a location at the center of NYU recognized for its crucial role in education, research, and collaboration, dramatically changed the atmosphere onsite. The library, typically a quiet sanctuary dedicated to study, was transformed into a scene of active protest. Demonstrators, including students and professors who supported the cause, made their presence felt across all ten floors. They lined the aisles, bringing the issue to every corner of the building. To ensure their message was unmistakable, supporters cramped the library's walls with "Free Palestine" flags, making a strong visual statement right from the entrance. The use of a speaker system to chant slogans added an auditory dimension to the protest, further amplifying their message.

This protest had a significant impact on the library's usual tranquility and the Jewish students' sense of safety. The activities not only diverted the focus from study and research—particularly disruptive during a critical time like midterms—but also created an atmosphere of tension. Jewish students, among others attempting to study, found the environment unsettling, casting a shadow over their sense of security and concentration in what is usually a safe academic haven.

While Washington Square Park is not officially an NYU campus, it plays a significant role in the university's day-to-day life, blending seamlessly with the academic and social activities of its students and faculty. On October 18th, this vibrant public space, typically a symbol of diversity and creativity, became the backdrop for an infuriating demonstration. A group of students poured red dye into the iconic fountain and chalked "Free Palestine" around its perimeter. As someone who cherishes the daily walk through Washington Square Park, enjoying its culture and ambiance as a cherished part of my routine, encountering this scene on the way to my early morning class was jarring. The shock was palpable—not just the boldness of the act but the fear evoked by the action and the embarrassment I felt for the NYU community.

NYU has announced the establishment of the Center for the Study of Antisemitism, slated to open in fall 2024. This initiative aims to unite scholars and students in exploring both the historical and contemporary aspects of antisemitism. The center's creation is a clear sign of NYU's commitment to deepening the understanding of antisemitism within its community. By fostering a scholarly examination of antisemitism's roots and manifestations, the center aspires to educate and contribute to a more peaceful and inclusive campus atmosphere. Hopefully, this center will enable students to fully grasp the complexities of the conflict and promote a more harmonious community, encouraging dialogues that bridge divides and foster mutual understanding.

In the wake of these events, the Jewish community at NYU has worked to promote an improved understanding of antisemitism and its effects while reaffirming its presence and voice on campus. The NYU Jewish community has taken steps to ensure that Jewish students feel supported and that their concerns are taken seriously, including educating the larger student body, holding productive dialogues, and participating in university governance. The ignorance I am witnessing in a place that is supposed to foster the next brilliant minds of our generation sickens me. Yet, amidst these challenges, the sense of unity and resilience within the Jewish community stands out as a beacon of hope and strength.

Syracuse University

Kayla Kavakeb

I am sure many can imagine how hard it is to be away from a home like ours for an extensive period of time. I did not appreciate it then, but we are beyond lucky to live in such a tight-knit community. A community where everyone bends backwards for each other, shares similar values, and is filled with immense happiness and love. I am beyond grateful for the way I was raised, and especially now, I have learned to cherish every aspect of my Jewish identity.

When I got to college, while I did quickly find an immense support system and amazing friends who I will have relationships with for the rest of my life, there was no community like home. Afraid to disappoint and anxious to fit in, I immersed myself in the American college experience and way of life. Although I have truly enjoyed my experience at Syracuse thus far, there have always been pieces missing. Nobody understands what it means to keep kosher. Nobody has weekly Shabbat dinners at home. My friends still believe me to be the most religious person in this world.

Since October 7th, my entire world on campus has changed. As someone who has always felt a strong connection to Israel, it has become increasingly hard to fathom the atrocities that occurred on that morning and every day since. There are already enough people who are unaware of Jewish culture and practices, and now I am surrounded by antisemitism and anti-Zionism. My friends have been beyond supportive since then, and I feel honored to be able to answer questions they have and share my knowledge about the reality of the war.

It warmed my heart to see my Instagram flooded with news stories and posts in support of Israel. It was amazing to see how my cousins came together in their initial efforts to fundraise for Israel for relief and how those efforts have continued and are still ongoing. It is remarkable to see how such horrible events have brought together an entire population. While there have been many Syracuse students, Jewish and not, who have become a system of support on campus, the majority of these efforts did not come from them.

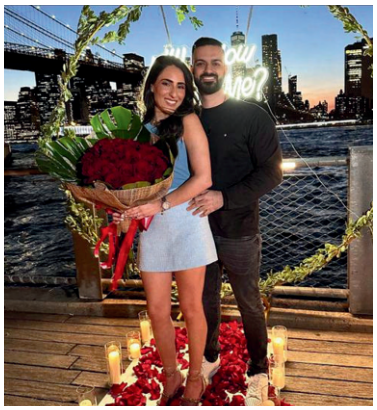
Although I have never felt personally unsafe on campus, it has definitely been hard to see the lack of support and representation for Jewish students at Syracuse University. The Syracuse administration is one of the roots of the problem, as they have never sent any emails expressing their support for Jewish students or taken initiative to stop on-campus protests that have been disturbing. I have witnessed pro-Palestinian protests shut down major walkways, the student center, and even the quad—the center of campus. These protests are nothing close to peaceful, as they are filled with loud chants and posters. One chant I vividly remember was "IDF What do you say? How many kids did you kill today?" Similarly, one of these protests explicitly called out Jewish organizations on campus for being "complicit in genocide." Even though we were told that the student who said that would be penalized, the school has taken no efforts to shut down such protests as they take place.

There has been little to no pro-Israel representation on campus. Right after October 7th, Syracuse's Chabad and Hillel worked together to host a vigil and large Shabbat dinner. There was also a demonstration on the quad of an empty Shabbat table to represent, at that time, the 241 hostages in Gaza. Hillel brought in a Nova Festival survivor, Millet Ben Haim, to share her experiences on that day. It was eye-opening to hear her story and share in her pain. While these events have all been lovely, there is never enough attendance to create an impact, as not enough students are truly passionate about these issues.

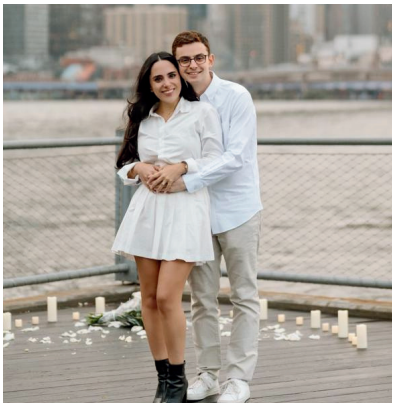
My problem on Syracuse's campus isn't necessarily with what has happened in support of the Palestinian movement; it's with what hasn't happened in support of Jewish students. It's the lack of announcements condemning terrorism and antisemitism from teachers and administration. There's a lack of kosher food options on campus in dining halls. It's the lack of resources for Jewish students that makes it nearly impossible to be remotely orthodox at Syracuse.

Each day on campus has been a battle. It is a battle over whether or not I will walk through a pro-Palestine protest. It was a battle over what antisemitic post or announcement I would open my phone to. It is a battle to keep my Jewish identity strong. The thing that keeps me going is the light coming from our friends in Israel. Nothing will ever break the Jewish spirit.

RECENT ENGAGEMENTS



Jonathan Cohen &
Shiran Cohen



Ori Goldring &
Britney Hakimian

Benjamin Nabavian &
Shani Soleimanian

Yosef Kendil &
Yael Dilamani

Josh Eleyahouzadeh &
Noa Gorjian

Daniel Cohen &
Avigail Aziz

Matan Zucker &
Kayla Kamali

Daniel Livian &
Eden Kashimallak

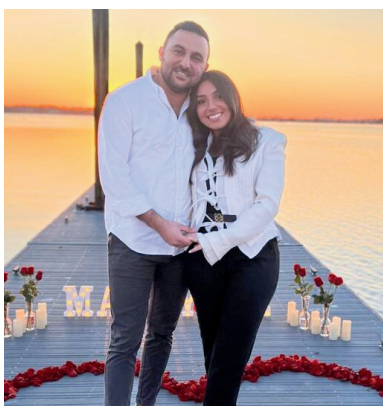
Adin Levian &
Yasmin Soufian

Yossi Khojahiny &
Odelya Niknam

Mayer Stone &
Ariella Aghalarian

Yosef Hekmati &
Tamar Cohen

Yossi Namdar &
Orly Banilivy



Itai Hakimian &
Sarah Levian

COMMUNITY HONORS

Submitted by Barham Kamali on behalf of the UMJCA Honorary Committee

INTRODUCTION

We're here today to honor three very special people for their lifelong dedication and service to those in need, both within the Mashadi community and the Jewish community at large. These three individuals all have certain characteristics in common:

- They are all selfless in their pursuit to help others in the name of Hashem.
- They go out of their way to ensure the privacy of those they help and to make sure they are treated with dignity and respect.
- They all do their tremendous Chesed work quietly and under the radar, never seeking recognition for their efforts.
- In fact, they are all so humble that none of them wanted to accept our invitation to be honored here today.
- These three individuals are the best kinds of role models for our children, and hopefully they will inspire future generations to continue in their footsteps.

HONOREE #1 – MRS. JANET HAKIMIAN

- Janet has been helping those in need for several decades now, whether it be with food, clothing, or other items.
- Not only does she help families in the NY area, but also in Israel. For many years now, she has collected money for the Tiferet Shlomo orphanage in Israel. She had tzedakah boxes made for them, which she distributed to friends and family as well as local stores.
- She also has arrangements with several caterers that give her their leftover food from events, which she distributes to those in need.
- Anyone who has been to her home has seen her three-car garage filled with refrigerators and freezers.
- She also distributes clothing to people of all ages.
- Of her many wonderful qualities, the one that has always stood out is the way she treats each individual with dignity and compassion, regardless of their circumstance. Her humility is unparalleled, having turned down many organizations that have tried to honor her.

HONOREE #2 – MRS. LIDA EDALATI

- Lida started her charity work several decades ago after coming to America, when she became neighbors with Mrs. Rahel Kamali and admired her charitable work.
- Many people from our own community, as well as other Jewish communities, give money to Lida to distribute to families in need.
- Besides collecting money, she also collects and distributes a wide range of other items, including food, clothing, furniture, and other household items.
- For many years, Lida would leave her garage door open all day for those in need to come pick up clothing. A little-known story about her is that she arranged on short notice to donate a wedding dress to a girl who had just come from Iran to New York to get married.
- A few years ago, she was honored by the Town of North Hempstead for her tremendous charity work and was added to their prestigious Women's Roll of Honor.
- She does her charity work very quietly.

HONOREE #3 – MR. GIDEON KARMELY

- Gideon was born in Israel and served in the IDF before moving to the United States.
- Growing up, his parents taught him that all Jews are responsible for one another and that saving one life is the equivalent of saving the world.
- This life lesson is what guided him towards the path of doing Chesed work.
- Most people know Gideon for his tremendous work with Tomchei Shabbat for the past 30 years, which delivers Shabbat meals to over 1600 people every single week, a service that he says would be impossible without the tremendous help of our community's youth.
- His philosophy is simple: It is unacceptable and morally wrong for any Jew to go hungry.
- He was honored a few years ago by the Queens Borough President for his work with Tomchei Shabbat.
- What many people don't know is that he is also very active in making medical referrals to help people find the right doctors. Gideon has been directly involved in arranging 15 kidney transplants for those in urgent need.

Bat Mitzvah Jaamati

Nov 5, 2023 - 4 Chesvan 5785

MAZAL TOV TO OUR BAT MITZVAH GIRLS!

Tehila Abdolazadeh, Shifra Bassali, Emilie Dallacorte, Kate Dilmanian, Giselle Enayatian, Monique Enayatian, Lia Etessami, Revital Ezrahian, Talia Ezrahian, Taylor Hajibay, Claire Hakimi, Mia Hakimian, Orielle Hakimian, Raquel Hakimian, Riley Hakimian, Jolie Hazghiyan, Juliette Hezghia, Nadine Kamali, Avia Kashanian, Brielle Kashanian, Kayla Levy, Ava Livian, Raphaella Shlomit, Shiley Loloi, Joelle Loloi, Emma Mordechai, Adina Nassimi, Natalie Nassimi, Micol Nitzani, Priel Rahmanan, Hadar Sianes, Lily Siouni, Naomi Siouni, Shirel Wonboy, Zohara Zaboulani, Brette Zar, Jasmine Zar

FAKE LETTERS TO THE FAKE EDITOR

If you'd like to ask the Fake Editor a question, please reach out via email:

FakeEditor@mashadiyouth.org

Letter to the Fake Editor:

Dear Fake Editor,

I'm a Mashadi mother with a 19 year old daughter and 24 year old son. My husband and I decided to go to Miami this Passover so our children can be in the ***scene*** and get married. Do you have any advice for us on how to make this trip a success?

Reply from the Fake Editor:

Dear Reader,

Yes, *Miami Passover* is upon us. It remains one of the most important traditions practiced by our community, so I've drafted a ***Miami Passover Survival Guide*** to help our young Ladies and Gentlemen along with parents like yourselves prepare for this crucial trip.

Miami Passover Survival Guide for the Ladies:

1. Prior to the trip, purchase an entirely new wardrobe. The rule of thumb is you want to spend roughly 10% of your father's net worth on clothing for Miami Passover. However if you are over the age of 21 you can up it to 20%. Remember, the ***most important*** piece of apparel will be your *coverups,* which you'll wear for 20 minutes when on the way to/from the beach, so definitely focus on these.
2. Prior to the trip, your diet should consist of one carrot per day, nothing more. You should make fun of and shame your crazy friends that eat more than one carrot per day. What matters isn't that you feel more confident in yourself, but making sure your friends feel as insecure about themselves as you do.
3. While on the beach, make sure you flirt with and lead on guys that you have zero interest in just so you get attention.
4. Don't pursue guys or take matters into your own hands, what you need to do is wait for Prince Charming to come and rescue you from your despair, because the real world is like a fairy-tale.
5. When a group of guys isn't giving you attention because you aren't fun to be around, dont try to be more fun to hangout with, but instead go up to said guys and accuse them of dropping you and then launch a boycott of these guys. That will really show them!
6. Prioritize your tan. If you are a brunette you want your skin color to resemble a piece of charcoal, if you are a ginger aim for your skin color to resemble the color of a a stop sign.

Miami Passover Survival Guide for the Gentlemen:

1. Every morning during the 30 days prior to Miami Passover, look in the mirror and tell yourself *"I'm great, I'm so great that I can have literally any girl I want, in fact I'm so handsome and stunning and brilliant that these girls don't even deserve being in my presence. Since I'm a 10, lowest I'll settle for is a 9.5"*
2. Ignore all these old people that try to recommend girls to you. They are judging you in a way thats way too realistic and rational which isn't fair. What you need to do is pursue the most attractive girl at all costs or die trying.
3. Try to be speaking with girls 24 hours a day. Don't allocate anytime for hanging out with the boys. Throw your friends in the trash can for the chance to SIMP on a girl.

Miami Passover Survival Guide for the Parents:

1. Similar to the President of the United States, parents have a special power they must be ready to use at all times - the **VETO.** If there is a guy or girl that your child tells you they are interested in, you need to veto it immediately unless said guy/girl is 100% exactly what you want.
2. Always remember that your child is better than everyone else's, so unless your child is going for the very best - **VETO**.
3. Place zero trust in your child's decision making abilities. Why should your kids make their own life decisions? If you like the guy/girl they are going for but it wasn't your idea - **VETO**.
4. You like the girl/guy your kid chose but you're in a bad mood that day because its awful beach weather? - **VETO**.

America's young people may be 'educated' but TikTok has made them incredibly ignorant.

Roughly 1/3 of 18-29-year-olds are getting news from alternative sources.

Jonathan Harounoff

Academic pedigree is no longer a reliable indicator of intelligence. Millennials today are the most educated generation in America, with around 40% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Yet they are among the most ignorant and misinformed. And the Israel-Hamas war and the global antisemitism surge that followed have been a disturbing case in point.

One reason behind this phenomenon is the generational disparity when it comes to news consumption. While older generations still rely heavily on traditional news sources for current events, 32% of 18- to 29-year-olds are getting their news from alternative news sources on platforms like TikTok, oftentimes from influencers or self-proclaimed citizen journalists on the ground who are not bound by fact-checking or ethical reporting standards observed in newsrooms. It's no coincidence that today one in five young Americans believes the Holocaust is a myth, with an additional 30% of respondents polled aged 18–29 unsure if the Holocaust took place.

I had never used TikTok before, in large part because of its reputation for perfecting a hypnotic algorithm that continuously feeds users content they want to imbibe, sapping hours of their lives before they realize how much time they've spent on the platform. But recently I downloaded the app for the first time to see how long it would take—and with as few prompts as possible—before the app would start sending me down an antisemitic rabbit hole.

The same toxic rabbit hole that compelled Jewish social media influencers to issue a scathing open letter about how TikTok "lacks critical safety features to protect Jewish content creators and the broader Jewish community, leaving us in digital and physical danger." The same toxic rabbit hole forced Barak Herscowitz, TikTok's top government relations official in Israel, to step down from his role in January. And the very same Jew-hating abyss that forced TikTok executives to fly to Israel in February to meet with the country's president amid mounting concerns that the platform and its 40,000 moderators are unable to control the virulent spread of antisemitic content online.

My initial findings on TikTok were staggering. After scrolling briefly through make-up tutorials, synchronized dances, and adorable dog videos, I stumbled across a video of a pro-Palestinian roaming kosher supermarkets in the U.S. and stopping visibly Jewish employees and customers to force them to say "Free Palestine." After stopping on that video, the platform's algorithm started feeding similar videos, and the floodgates opened. Videos that appeared to be moderate or even pro-Israel were also flooded with hateful and antisemitic comments. Alongside some videos, there were also suggested searches based on what other users had been browsing, including "Jews worship the devil" and "Government is controlled by Jews."

There is and should always be a clear demarcation between free speech and hateful or violent speech. The same applies to social media platforms. TikTok officials told officials in Israel that it had already expunged 160 million fake TikTok accounts spreading disinformation online since the Israel-Hamas war broke out last October. But more needs to be done, including providing more robust antisemitism training to moderators who can help stem the spread of hateful content online. That's because digital hate doesn't stay online. It has real-life consequences, which is why so many young people march in the streets spouting hateful slogans that overtly or covertly call for the destruction of the Jewish people.

The concerning development here is that when pushed just a little bit on their motivations for spreading hateful content, whether intentional or not, many young people don't know what they're chanting about—or much about the Middle East. An insoluble conflict that has caused so much devastation and deadlock for decades cannot be distilled fully into a 15-second TikTok, and it shouldn't have to be. If younger generations want to engage in these very complex and tough topics, they need to be willing to take the time to read up on the subject, entertain multiple perspectives, and not stay confined in their snug echo chambers perpetuated by TikTok's hypnotic algorithm.

An illuminating study written about in the Wall Street Journal late last year found that the vast majority of college-age students who were taking part in anti-Israel protests didn't even know which river and which sea they were referring to when chanting, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

Dov Forman runs a massively popular TikTok account with his 100-year-old great-grandmother, Lily Elbert, who survived the Holocaust. Forman uses the account to share lessons from the Holocaust while issuing warnings of rising antisemitism to their 2.1 million followers. But the account has been subjected to vile antisemitic abuse, receiving around 1,000 antisemitic messages every day since the Hamas terror attacks of October 7. "The intensity and frequency of antisemitic content, ranging from Holocaust denial and distortion to overt expressions of racism and extremist sympathies, have alarmingly increased in recent months," Forman told me. "These digital arenas have become breeding grounds for radicalization, often influenced by external bodies, including investment from Iran and China, aiming to exploit the impressionable minds of young children."

Platforms like TikTok, Foreman added, should prioritize user safety over profit,and in order to keep Jewish creators safe, more can be done to implement robust platform policies, robust educational initiatives, and a collective societal commitment to uphold the dignity and respect of all individuals. Suffice it to say that after writing this piece, I deleted TikTok from my phone.

(A version of this article was originally published on Fox News.)

Question and Answer with Rebecca Ijadi Hakimi:

Rebecca Hakimi is a teacher at Talmud Torah and MESA. In 2023, Rebecca received certification from the Jai Institute of Parenting in Parent Coaching. She provides a safe and judgment-free space for moms to express any struggles that they are going through and supports them in finding solutions.

Q: Welcome! What is the most common concern you hear as a parenting coach?

A: I mostly hear about the strong-willed child, who often throws tantrums, hits, grabs, and speaks disrespectfully.

Q: What advice do you give to those moms?

A: I advise them to avoid all forms of punishment and to opt for connection instead. Children misbehave when they are hurting. They may have been yelled at by a teacher, fought with a friend, felt jealous of a sibling, etc.

It's important to look beneath the behavior and figure out what's causing this child's pain.

Also, children don't even begin to develop impulse control until ages five to seven. Very often, an angry child can't stop himself from hitting or grabbing. It's simply a lack of brain development. It's important for us moms to remind ourselves that this behavior is normal and age-appropriate. A child can be reminded that hitting is not allowed, but this feedback should be given in a loving way when the child is not in an emotional state.

Q: What is something that you think all of us parents can work on?

A: It's hard to choose just one, but I'd say we can work on validating our children's feelings. We can say things like

- I get it.
- I understand.
- You really wanted that.
- I remember feeling that way as a kid too.
- It's hard to hear the word no.

This makes children of all ages feel seen and understood. This gives the message that mom gets me. Think about how you feel when you complain to a friend and she says, "You are right, I get it." Doesn't that feel great? That's how we want our children to feel.

Q: Any advice for a mom who doesn't have the time or patience to play games with her children?

A: Be silly. We can't always make the time to play (life is busy!), but we can always be playful. We can randomly use a funny accent, make funny faces, or do a funny dance. We can give piggyback rides and have a dance party. We can play "What Would You Rather?" and pick silly things. Aim for lots of giggles. Playfulness is the universal love language for children.

Q: Let's say I'm at the park and I must leave, and my child won't listen. I gave him multiple warnings that we had to go. What should I do?

A: Most of the parents I've seen at the park resort are saying something like, "Okay, bye! I'm leaving without you!" What we're doing at that moment is threatening our child with their biggest fear—abandonment. Here are some things we can say instead:

- What song would you like to listen to in the car?
- What game would you like to play when we get home?
- Let's race to see who can get to the car first!
- Staying calm and bringing play into the picture is the key to gaining cooperation.

Q: The other day, my daughter cried because I drained the bath. She cries about losing games. She cries about every little thing. How do I teach her not to cry over silly things?

A: This is probably not the answer that you want to hear, but as parents, we need to take our children's tears seriously. To us, something may be insignificant, but to them, it's a big deal. This is where compassion and validation come in handy. We can remind ourselves: she's not giving me a hard time; she's having a hard time.

Many parents are triggered by crying because they were told not to cry as a child. The truth is that crying is healthy! It's healing. We don't want our children to stuff the hurt inside, we want them to release it. We can tell our child:

- You're feeling so upset. It's okay to cry. Let it out.
- Crying is not just for babies. Big kids cry too. Adults cry too.

Q: What would you say to a parent who wants their child to be more helpful with chores?

A: Chores are great for children! They thrive when they feel like they're part of the team. The next time you want your child to unload the dishwasher, try saying something like "let's unload the dishwasher together" or "I'm about to unload the dishwasher; would you like to help me?" Laugh together while you do it, or put some music on! Making chores a bonding experience is the key to having a child who loves to help.

Q: How can I teach my children to be less entitled and more grateful? Should I force a "thank you" when they get a gift or when someone has done something nice for them?

A: Unfortunately, demanding that a child say thank you doesn't teach gratitude. We can teach gratitude by:

- Modeling gratitude (for example, sincerely thanking the person who gave our children gifts).
- Practicing gratitude regularly. We can tell our children what we're grateful for and ask them what they're grateful for. We can make it part of our routine: either morning routine, night routine, during the drive to school, during the walk home from Grandma's on Friday nights, etc.

Q: My child is constantly demanding things like "Get me an apple!" "I want a fork!" I always remind her to say please, but she doesn't. What should I do?

A: In one of Sarah Chana Radcliffe's books, she talks about the "Ask, Don't Tell" rule. She says that children need to learn to make requests on an asking form. A parent can teach their child to change "I want a fork" to "May I have a fork, please?" The please here is nice, but not the most important element. The important part is to teach children to ask for things instead of demanding them. Here's what I suggest: Sit with your children tonight and tell them about this new rule you learned about. Tell them that from now on, whenever they make a demand, you'll remind them of the new rule. It will take weeks of reminders, but eventually it will stick.

Want to hear more from Rebecca? You can follow her Instagram page, @ParentingCoachRebecca.

Teaching Judaism At Home: What I Learned From Three Incredible Moms

Jennifer (Kohanim) Pittleman

Parenting a toddler is a funny thing. You can be doing the most mundane activity with your kid, and then you accidentally stumble upon a huge teaching moment. One day, my four-year-old daughter Kayla and I were reading an Elephant & Piggie book (a children's book series about two animals who are best friends) when my daughter asked me, "Why is an elephant gray?" I could have told her "because they are" and moved onto the next page, but I decided in that moment to say the following: "Because that's the way G-d made them." And of course her response was "What's G-d??" to which I said "G-d makes animals and people," and with that, she was quiet, and we continued reading.

These moments remind me of the huge responsibility this thing called parenting truly is. Our children are these empty vessels thirsting for knowledge, and the way we explain the world to them plays a huge role in how they understand it. And in particular, the way we explain and live Judaism ultimately plays a big role in how they feel and think about being Jewish.

I spent a lot of time thinking about this topic of Jewish parenting during my second maternity leave following my son Aaron's birth. The stillness and monotonous fashion of taking care of a newborn left a lot of quiet time for reflection, and I kept coming back to these questions: How do I create a rich, meaningful Jewish environment at home? How do I present the Jewish holidays in a compelling way each year and even bigger concepts like G-d, mitzvot, and tzedaka in the most relevant way?

Amidst the quietness of maternity leave, I even posed this very question on a Jewish Facebook group to see if anyone out there had created some kind of "teaching Judaism at home" guide, and I was met with a similar response across the board: "Aren't you sending your kid to a Jewish school? That would essentially answer your question right there."

I was puzzled by people's answers. Yes, I was in a period of life where my kids were in daycare and not yet in Jewish school, but obviously there's so much that needs to be done outside of the classroom to effectively translate Judaism. Obviously, sending your kid to Jewish school is not a magic bullet.

Following this unsatisfying Facebook group interaction—and probably as a way to keep my brain busy during maternity leave—I

decided I would interview moms in our community to see what they had to say about approaching Jewish education at home. I interviewed three incredible moms and gained unique insight from each of them. I'll attempt to summarize my takeaways from each conversation and hope you gain from it as much as I did.

FOCUS ON THE JOY OF BEING JEWISH

My first conversation struck me because this mom was so clear on what she felt was the most important thing to focus on in Jewish parenting, and that was joy. She explained how Judaism was portrayed to her as a young girl as this amazing gift and something deeply joyful. She described how the mere act of feeling joy as a Jewish family, feeling loved by Jewish parents and Jewish grandparents, is transformative in a way that you can't feel in a classroom.

It made me think of the Friday night gatherings at my grandparents' house with uncles, aunts, and cousins that shaped my youth. Shabbat kicked off with this epic party. Those Friday nights were the most festive part of the week, with our long table filled with glamorous dishes and a house filled with so much laughter and fun. As I think back on it, though, I am not exactly sure if I linked this incredible family time with being Jewish; it more so felt like it was a part of being Mashadi, which was in a different category in my mind.

I was in awe of what this mom was describing as the fabric of her Jewish upbringing and the Jewish environment her parents built. It made me think about what more I could do to embed this Jewish joy in our home, which led me to the next mom I interviewed.

DON'T SHY AWAY FROM TALKING ABOUT G-D

The next mom I talked with told me how important it was to her that her children knew that Hashem loved them no matter what. She talked about the kinds of things she did in her day-to-day to convey that message to her children. It consisted of two things mainly: 1) talking about G-d often, particularly thanking Hashem when good things happened, and 2) singing a lot of Jewish songs because she felt that Jewish songs naturally engender a love for G-d.

This conversation made me realize how little I was talking about G-d in our house. Yes, I lightly introduced the idea to my daughter while we were reading a book, but otherwise the G-d mentions were pretty minimal, and it made me reflect on why I was so hesitant. I knew that belief in God and love of G-d were huge components of Jewish practice, but I was more nervous than I realized about how to present them without messing up. It felt like the stakes were so high, and what I would say could shape my daughter's early associations with G-d.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that I need to shift my mindset from getting things "right" to simply being authentic. In other words, I don't need to philosophically explain G-d, but what I can do is share stories with my daughter of how I talk to G-d as part of my tefila and how it makes me feel (after all, she already watches me pray every morning) or how I loved tefila in school when I was a little girl.

After talking to this mom, I also became acutely aware of the fact that we don't really listen to much Jewish music at home. This is mostly because I love so many different types of secular music and usually play the music I want to hear at home. While I know that this aspect of a love for Jewish music will naturally develop once my daughter goes to kindergarten this upcoming fall at a Jewish day school, I started to think about small ways to adjust the soundtrack of my home. I pushed myself to more regularly sing Shabbat songs, even in the hectic rhythm of the post-school Friday night schedule and post-shul Saturday afternoon schedule. And I ended up picking a handful of Israeli artists who sang children's songs that I could tolerate (I am so picky with children's music) and included those artists in our Alexa's favorite songs list. So far, my daughter hasn't complained about the new music (or asked Alexa to play the Frozen soundtrack instead!), so I hope I can continue the trend.

CONSIDER WHAT YOU BRING INTO YOUR HOME

The very last mom chat I had was filled with insight. I listened as my friend talked about how she thoughtfully considered the things she didn't want to introduce to her kids as much and even more so than what she did introduce. This included the decision to not have iPads and screens in the house and to carefully select the types of books that came into her house. I know screen time is a thorny issue, so this is not a matter of whether this mom's stance on screens is right or wrong, but I think it's more about this concept of filtering.

Of course, the topic of filtering gets more complicated once kids are older and exposed to so much (and I am certainly not the expert there since my kids are so much younger), but the topic is definitely worth considering with toddlers. It includes asking ourselves simple questions such as: Can I skim through books before my child picks them from the library (I can't tell you how many times my daughter has picked books about Christmas or Easter based on the colorful book covers)?

And similarly, can I pay closer attention to a song's lyrics before playing it? On the music front, my husband and I have made this mistake multiple times. One time he played Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" and my daughter subsequently sang "and I'm a monster on the hill" as well as this awfully non-age appropriate lyric: "I have this dream my daughter in-law kills me for the money."

And then there was this period where I was randomly playing Nelly's "Country Grammar," and my daughter subsequently sang, "Shimmy, shimmy cocoa, what? Listen to it, pound. Light it up and take a puff. Pass it to me now." I am sadly not kidding and probably shouldn't even be admitting to these parenting blunders, but those are examples of being too flippant in regards to one's media consumption and not considering the fact that one's adult lens is extremely different than a child's lens.

Kids listen closely to everything in their surroundings, and it goes way beyond music. They especially listen to every little word that comes out of their parents' mouths. That's why I loved hearing my friend share the kinds of things she was consciously voicing in her house to engender a positive view of Judaism. One thing that stood out to me was that she proactively shared her thoughts on the parsha with her husband and made a point to do so in front of the kids instead of waiting to share the thoughts once the kids were in bed. She wanted her kids to see that talking about Torah was something enjoyable and genuinely interesting. The entire conversation made me reflect more closely on all the various inputs I could "control" for my kids, as well as consciously think about whether the current inputs were aligned with my values or not.

It was such an amazing journey to take time out of my day-to-day routine to talk to so many fantastic mothers and learn about their approach to teaching Judaism at home. A big thanks to Ester Rahmanim, Mijal Bitton, and Rebecca Hakimi for sharing their experiences with me. May we all continue to have the clarity and strength needed to continue on this tricky tightrope called the parenting journey.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CENSUS AND DATA COMMITTEE

Submitted by Michael Kamali

Dear Community Members,

We are thrilled to announce that we are on the cusp of celebrating a significant milestone in our community's history: the 50th anniversary of the Mashadi Directory. This monumental occasion not only commemorates our rich heritage but also underscores the strength of our community bonds that have endured through generations.

As we prepare to mark this momentous event, we are delighted to inform you that the new UMJCA Mashadi Directory is in its final stages of preparation for publication. In the coming weeks, you will receive a letter via mail, which will provide you with the opportunity to review and update your profile. This will also enable you to activate your online account, ensuring that your information is current and accurately represented in our directory.

The Mashadi Directory has long been an invaluable resource for our community, serving as a comprehensive guide to connecting and engaging with fellow members.

Your participation in this process is crucial, as it allows us to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the directory, ensuring that it continues to serve its purpose for many more years to come. We encourage you to take the time to review your profile carefully and provide any necessary updates to ensure that your information is up-to-date.

Thank you for your continued support and participation.

Pesach at MESA

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

MAGEN EPHRAIM
SEPHARDIC ACADEMY

One of the most important mitzvot of Pesach is the celebration of the Seder during the first two nights of the holiday. At these very special festive dinners, we celebrate our departure from Egypt, marking the end of our slavery, and we thank God for rescuing us. During the Seder, we read the story of our freedom from Egypt and perform certain rituals to recreate and reenact the experiences of slavery and freedom.

The Pesach Seder, for this reason, requires a stage decor designed to dramatize slavery and freedom, thus "entertaining" our children—that is, educating them without boring them in the process! This is why during the Seder we serve maror—bitter herbs, to feel the flavor of slavery—and charoset, a brown paste made with dried fruits, which resembles the mud used to make bricks during our captivity. On the other hand, we drink four cups of wine during the Seder to celebrate our freedom. Another theatrical gesture that represents freedom (cherut) is known in Hebrew as hasiba, which involves reclining on our left side like the nobles used to do in antiquity.

But this year, we at MESA thought about taking this to an additional level and show our kindergarten students Yetziat Mitzrayim more realistically than ever.

To do that, we are taking our children "back to Egypt." And to do that we are visiting this coming Monday April 8th the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This extraordinary museum has a very special Egyptian section with hundreds of art pieces, sculptures, and paintings. By seeing and understanding these pieces of Egyptian art, our students will have the opportunity to understand in a very visual (and entertaining) way where our ancestors lived for more than two centuries—during times of slavery and beforehand, in times of prosperity.

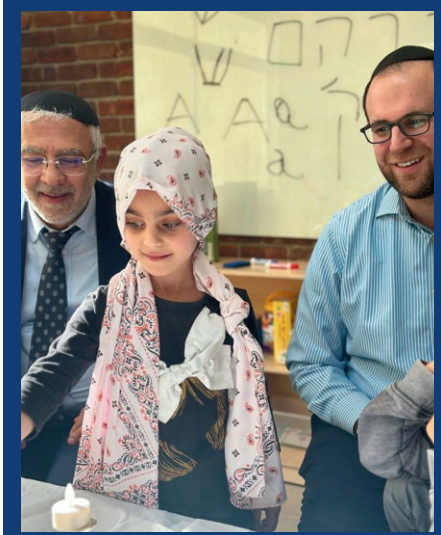
We will have a specialist in this matter, Elana Kaplan, a Museum Educator and Lecturer for the MET who specializes in showing and teaching the Jewish angles of Egyptian art. Elana will be our guide tour!

We will have the opportunity to see and appreciate how our forefathers were living in Goshen in the times of Yosef. We'll explore the lives of the slaves in ancient Egypt: what works they were doing, what clothes they were wearing, what foods they were eating, etc.

We will pay special attention to the making of mud bricks—made with mud and straw—that our Tora explicitly describes, and the rabbis prescribe us to reenact in the charoset. Our MESA students will be able to connect between the Pesukim (biblical verses) that they learned in school, and that we will recite in the Haggadah, and the images that will come to life in their imaginative minds.

All this will enable them to fulfill our Rabbis' mission statement for the Pesach Seder. "In every generation we have to see ourselves as if we were coming directly from Egypt."

Hachnasat Torah Celebration at Magen Ephraim!



MAGEN EPHRAIM
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A Jewish Day School for boys and girls rooted in the traditional precepts of Sephardic Halacha, Minhagim and shared community values.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE!

The next 26 new students to register for the 2024-25 Academic Year will receive a $3,000 tuition discount on an annual basis for the next six years (Kindergarten through Fifth Grade).

The Mashadi Takana as Compared to the Syrian Takana

Besalel Ben Haim

In May of 2008, in response to what our community leaders identified as a "plague" affecting Jewish communities outside of Israel, our community adopted the Reaffirmation of Our Traditions, a series of restrictions imposed on accepting certain converts into community affairs. The Takana, as it is colloquially known, was adopted after a year and a half of studying the issues presented and intense negotiations among various community arms and leaders. Ultimately, it was unanimously adopted. The original Takana was signed and attested to by the following:

As noted above, all of our community Rabbis at the time agreed to the final language of the Takana. But getting there was not an easy task and required a significant change to the Takana from the Syrian community's version of the Takana upon which the Mashadi Takana is based.

The Syrian Takana

In 1935, Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin, the Chief Rabbi of the Syrian Jewish community, in conjunction with the Rabbinical Council of the Syrian Community, issued an edict against marriage to converts. Such marriages were not to be recognized, children of such marriages were not permitted in the community schools, and all synagogue honors, such as bar mitzvahs, weddings, and burials in the community cemetery, were to be denied to such individuals. The Syrian Takana was based on a ruling by Rabbi Shaul David Setton, called Dibbur Shaul, who left Aleppo in 1912 to become Chief Rabbi of the Syrian Jewish community in Argentina. After observing a community in Buenos Aries that was bereft of Torah and Mitzvot and therefore easy prey for intermarriage, Rabbi Setton established the first Takana in 1927. Eight years later, the Syrian Jewish community adopted its version in New York.

While a healthy debate surrounds which types of converts were targeted in the original 1935 Syrian Takana, the Takana was subsequently reaffirmed by the Syrian community in 1946, 1972, 1984, and 2006, and over time, it has become clear that the Takana applies to all converts. The Takana is such an integral part of the Syrian Jewish community that if you were to walk to any Syrian synagogue in Brooklyn, Manhattan, or Deal, the Takana is proudly displayed for all to see. The Syrian community points to the Takana as one of the tools used to successfully thwart the mass intermarriage rates of other Jewish communities in the diaspora, but the Takana has faced criticism.

According to a story told in the October 14, 2007 New York Times Magazine, one of the detractors of the Takana was Harav Ovadia Yosef. The New York Times reporter recalls a conversation he had with a Rabbi in the Syrian community:

According to the rabbi, the community's refusal to recognize the woman's conversion drew the ire of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, at the time the chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel. Rabbi Yosef, a man of volcanic temperament, came all the way from Jerusalem to Brooklyn and informed the local rabbis that he, himself, vouched for the girl's Jewish authenticity. "There he was, in person, in Shaare Zion"—the largest [Syrian] synagogue—"dressed in his robes and vestments," the rabbi, who was there, told me. "He gave an oath that he had personally affixed his name to the girl's conversion document. She was as Jewish as he was, and he wanted her recognized as a member of our community."

"And the answer was?" I asked the rabbi.

"No."

"No? You turned down the chief rabbi of Israel?"

"We felt it was necessary," the rabbi explained. "If we let our kids marry gentiles, they'll try to slip their kids back into the community via conversion. And then the Edict will lack teeth."

The Mashadi Takana

When the Mashadi community sought to introduce a Takana, one proposal that was being seriously considered was a broad Takana that applies to all converts, identical to the Syrian Takana. Our Chief Rabbinical Authority, Harav Eliyahu Ben-Haim, opposed such a Takana and would not allow it to be adopted. Harav Ben-Haim argued that such a Takana would violate at least four separate mitzvot of the Torah. Harambam writes in Hilchot Deot, Chapter Six, Section 4, that every Jew is obligated under two separate positive commandments to love the convert. One is what the Torah says in Devarim 10:19: "You must love the convert." Second, in Vayikra 19:18, we are commanded to love every Jew, and Haramabam argues that a convert is no less than any other Jew. Harav Ben-Chaim also points to an additional negative commandment that a blanket ban on converts would

violate. The Torah tells us in Shemot 22:20, "And a convert you shall not distress." There is an additional violation that may apply to a broad ban against all converts, as it states in Vayikra 19:17 that we are prohibited from hating any Jew, and as converts are Jews, that negative commandment may also apply to an outright ban on converts. For those reasons, and without passing judgment on the Syrian Takana, Harav Ben-Haim rejected an outright ban and would not endorse such a ban in our community. As a result, language was included in the Mashadi Takana to make it clear that the ban only applies to insincere converts, including primarily those individuals who convert for the purpose of marrying a member of our community. The Mashadi Takana opens with the following statement:

No male or female member of our community may intermarry with non-Jews. Converts for marriage are not allowed according to Sepharadic Halacha, and therefore, once determined as such by the Religious Council, are forbidden.

The operative words in the opening paragraph tell us that the ban is limited to "converts for marriage." The Takana goes on to state that "no present or future Rabbi of our community will convert male or female non-Jews who seek to marry into our community." Again, reiterating the point that the Takana is aimed at those who convert for the purpose of marriage, Finally, the Takana states, "OUR COMMUNITY does not accept any converts for marriage, male or female." The natural implication is that a sincere convert —one who is not a convert for marriage, male or female—is accepted.

Only after these adjustments were made did the Takana receive the endorsement of the Mashadi Chief Halachic Authority.

There are some who question the need for such a Takana. After all, if a person has strayed so far from the values of our community that such a person is prepared to marry an insincere convert or non-Jew, how would the threat of banishment from a community the person has already rejected be of any deterrence? Proponents of the Takana argue that the Takana ensures that the community itself remains pure under its leadership and membership from undue foreign influences. We have unfortunately seen many American Jewish organizations dilute their values so that such organizations no longer truly represent Jewish values. This tends to happen after the leadership and membership of the organization are no longer comprised of people who cherish Jewish values. The Mashadi Takana ensures that the community leaders and members esteem Jewish values and thus safeguards that the community remains pure in principles and beliefs.

Thankfully and with the help of Hashem, our community has now launched the greatest tool against assimilation and intermarriage: the Magen Efraim Sefaradic Academy. In our own school, our boys and girls will be imbued with the Jewish and Mashadi values that have carried our community over the centuries. In the framework of a Mashadi Jewish community that has its own school, Kannisas, and social organizations, the Mashadi Takana has an important role to play in guaranteeing that our community's values will look the same in 100 years as they do today.

Should We Help Others?

Yossi Namdar

Helping people in need can have various positive effects. It not only alleviates their immediate challenges but also fosters a sense of community, strengthens social bonds, and often creates a ripple effect of kindness. Additionally, it can contribute to personal fulfillment and a greater sense of purpose for those providing assistance.

Helping others can lead to increased empathy, improved mental well-being, and a deeper understanding of different perspectives. It promotes a more compassionate and supportive society where people feel valued and interconnected. Moreover, acts of kindness can inspire others to engage in similar behaviors, creating a positive and uplifting environment.

Certainly! Helping others can have profound effects on the person providing assistance. It often brings a sense of accomplishment, boosts self-esteem, and enhances overall well-being. Engaging in acts of kindness triggers the release of feel-good hormones like oxytocin and can reduce stress levels. It also fosters a positive outlook on life and can contribute to a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The benefits of helping others extend to both the giver and the recipient, but the perceived magnitude may vary. While the person receiving help directly benefits from the support, the giver also gains emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical advantages. The sense of fulfillment and happiness derived from helping others can be significant, contributing to the well-being of the person offering assistance. It's a mutually beneficial exchange that contributes to the overall positive dynamics within communities.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of helping others and practicing kindness. It contains numerous commandments and teachings that promote acts of charity, compassion, and justice. For example, the concept of "tzedakah" encourages giving to those in need, and various verses underscore the value of treating others with fairness and generosity.

The Torah also highlights the significance of hospitality and welcoming strangers. In addition to charitable acts, ethical principles such as honesty, integrity, and empathy are woven into its teachings. The Torah encourages a sense of community responsibility, urging individuals to look out for the welfare of their neighbors and to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole.

Yes, my friends, the answer is yes; it is beneficial to help others, and it is our obligation.

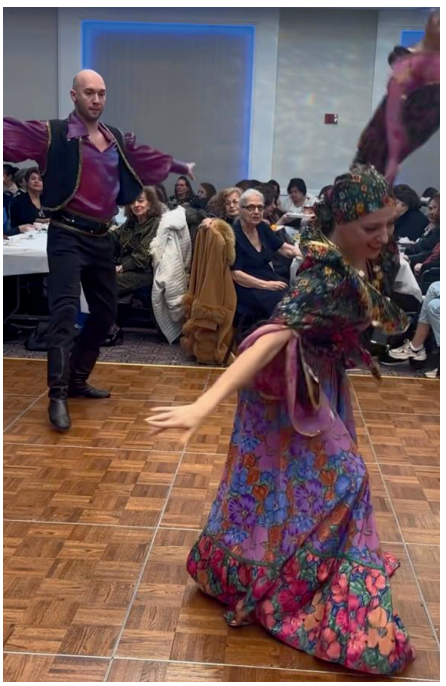
There are various ways to help others, and it often depends on individual circumstances and needs. Common ways to assist include offering emotional support, providing financial aid when possible, volunteering time or skills, sharing knowledge, and showing kindness through gestures like listening, comforting, or offering practical assistance.

Baruch HaShem, we live in a community where charity and volunteer work form the fabric of our collective identity. We have learned from our forefathers and our great community leaders, who are so numerous to mention, the value of charity work and helping others. This tradition that is deeply rooted in our history is more than just an act of kindness; it's a testament to the resilience, unity, and passion that define us. The Mashadi community, with its unique cultural heritage and shared experiences, has always understood the significance of supporting one another, ensuring the spirit of generosity thrives within us.

I am proud to be a member of this community and consider myself extremely lucky to have the opportunity to do my minimum share of service to our community by providing Shemura Matzas' and Sukkahs' for our holidays. I am also proud of all our community board members for their volunteer work, and I hope that our young generations continue to carry the torch of our forefathers with pride and embrace the opportunity to make a lasting impact.

BRING YOUR BIBI/BABA TO BINGO!

SENIOR CLUB CHANUKAH PARTY



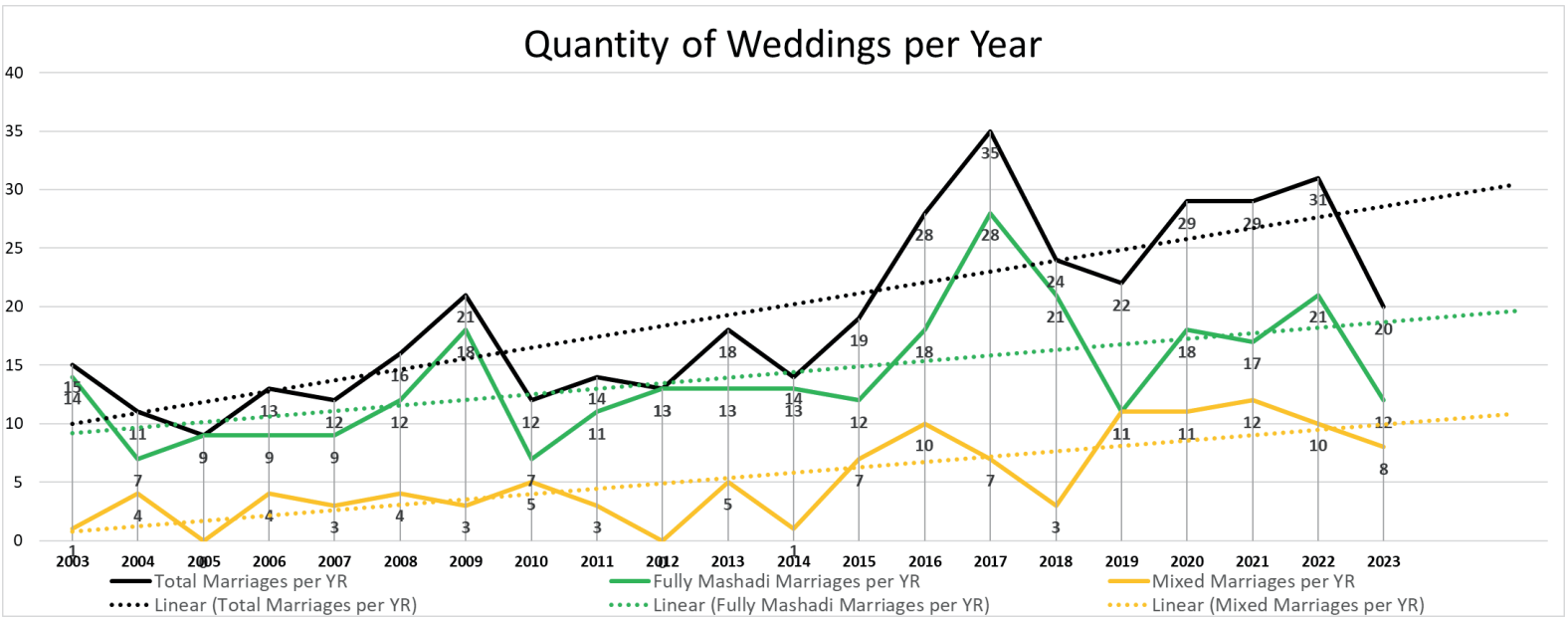
THE MARRIAGE CRISIS

Community members of all ages have likely heard about an ongoing "marriage crisis" or "dating crisis" within the Mashadi Community. This typically references the presumed understanding that there are too few Mashadis getting married per year, relative to the quantity of Mashadis entering marriage age.

This section of *Megillah* is dedicated to exploring this topic and providing valuable data and statistics to evaluate this "crisis". The data in use was collected by the MYC for *The Mashadi Wedding Album Volume II,* which will soon be published.

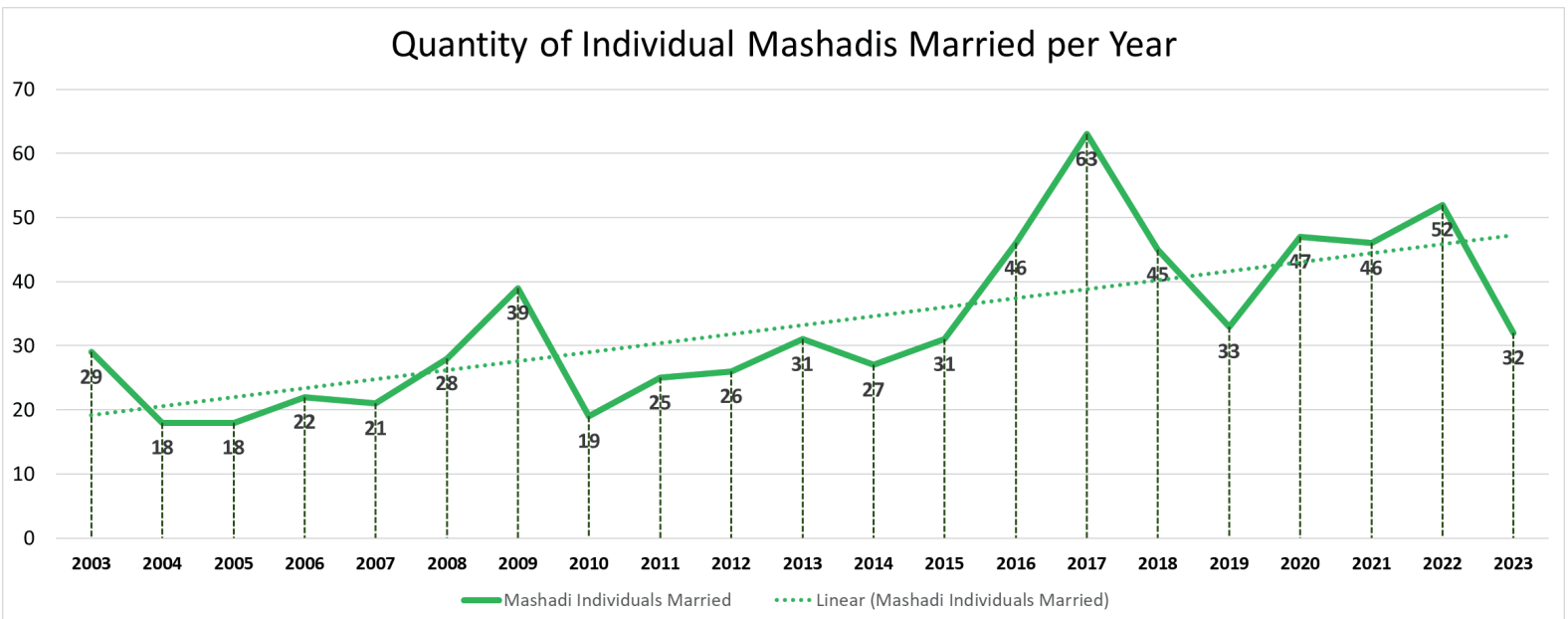
Data presented is **nearly precise.*

The below chart illustrates the quantity of weddings per year from 2003 - 2023, categorized by fully Mashadi Marriages, Mixed Marriages (in which one member of the couple is non-Mashadi, and the total sum).



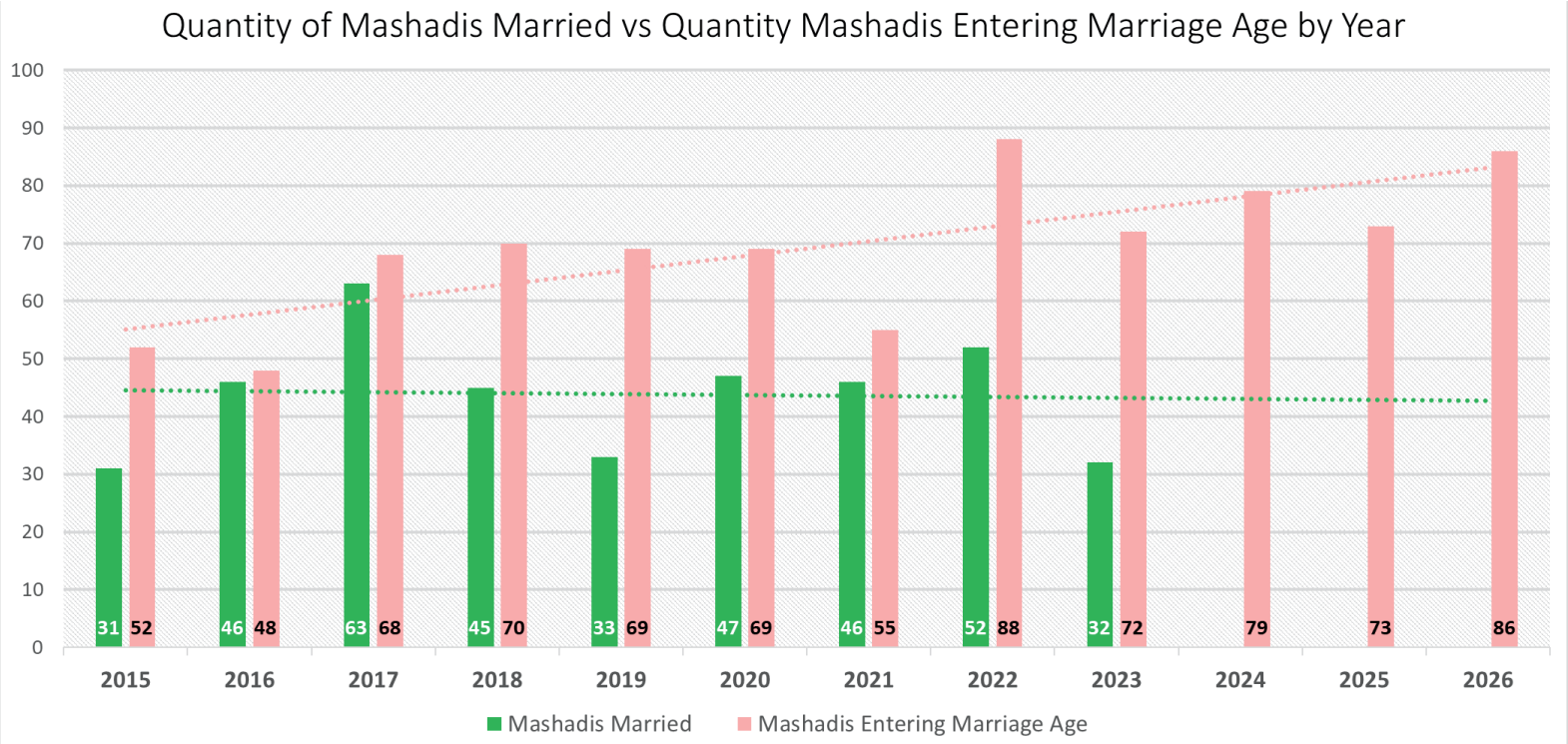
While the quantity of weddings has gradually increased over the past 20 years, a major contributing factor has been that the quantity of mixed marriages has increased to nearly 50% of total marriages.

The below chart illustrates the quantity of individual Mashadis married per year from 2003 - 2023 (including Mashadis who married non-Mashadis but not including their spouses who married into the community)



While the quantity of Mashadis married per year is trending upward, the increase is not significant. Additionally, the boom of 2017 was followed by a decline and 2023 was a record low year.

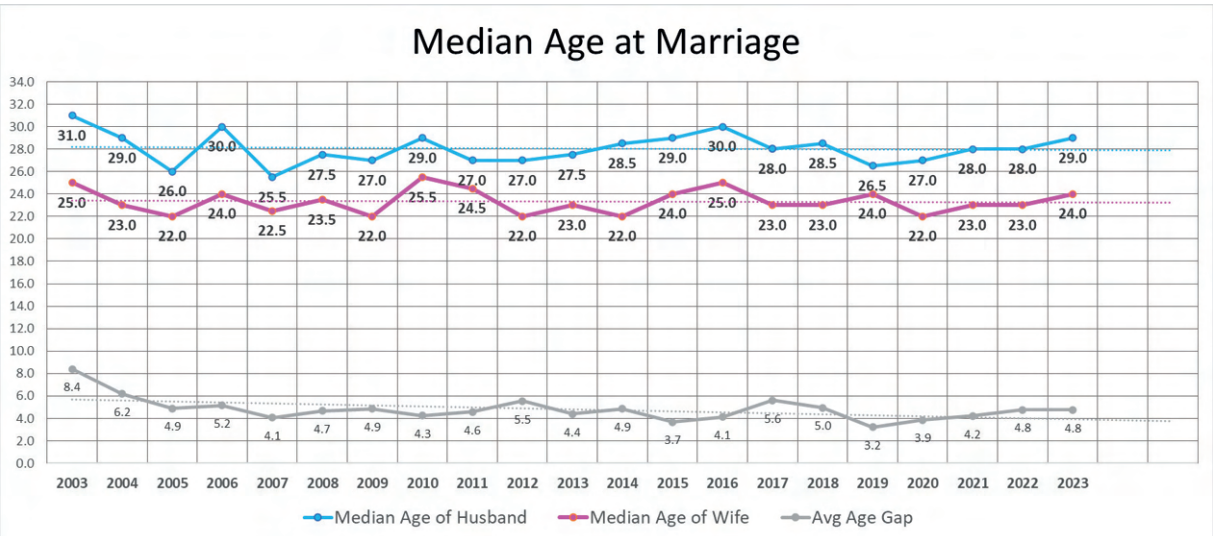
The below chart illustrates the quantity of individual Mashadis married per year from 2015 - 2023, along with the quantity of individual Mashadis entering marriage age.



This is the most concerning chart yet, as the quantity of Mashadis Married per year remains relatively flat as per the green dashed trendline, yet there seems to be substantial growth in the quantity of Mashadis entering marriage age each year (pink dashed trendline). This means that each year more singles enter marriage age, than those who get married. Hence, the annual number of marriages is not nearly high enough to cover the growing pool of singles. This validates the existence of a Marriage Crisis that could continue to worsen unless the quantity of Mashadis getting married increases to match or at least come close to the quantity of Mashadis entering marriage age.

Age	% of Men Married at this Age
20	0.29%
21	1.74%
22	2.03%
23	4.06%
24	6.96%
25	9.86%
26	12.46%
27	9.86%
28	8.99%
29	10.14%
30	6.38%
31	5.80%
32	2.61%
33	4.06%
34	2.61%
35	0.87%
36	1.45%
37	1.45%
38	2.03%
39	0.58%
40 +	5.80%

The below chart illustrates the median ages of Mashadi men and women married between 2003 - 2023, along with the average age gap during said period.



Median Age at marriage appears to be steady at around 28 for men, and around 23 for women. Interestingly, the average age gap seems to be slowly shrinking and is trending to a 4 year gap.

Contrary to what many may believe, teen marriages among young ladies are EXTREMELY RARE, with only about 3.50% of girls getting married while aged 18 or 19.

The most common age range for marriage varies by gender, as over 65% of women are married between the ages of 20 to 25, while over 55% of men are married between the ages of 25 to 30.

Age	% of Women Married at this Age
18	1.10%
19	2.47%
20	11.81%
21	13.19%
22	12.91%
23	13.74%
24	9.07%
25	8.24%
26	6.32%
27	3.57%
28	3.02%
29	5.22%
30	1.92%
31	0.82%
32	1.37%
33	1.10%
34	0.82%
35 +	3.30%

The Three Dating Tendencies Quiz by Logan Ury

Submitted by Karen Koren

Read each statement & decide how much it describes you. Circle the number that corresponds to your answer:

1 = VERY UNLIKE ME
2 = SOMEWHAT LIKE ME
3= THAT'S SO ME

1	**1 2 3**	I don't want to go on a 2nd date with someone if I don't feel the spark when we meet.
2	**1 2 3**	When I'm on a date I might ask myself, is this person up to my standards?
3	**1 2 3**	I'll be ready to date when I improve myself (i.e: Lose weight or get the job that I want).
4	**1 2 3**	I'd prefer if my wife/husband and I had a romantic "how we met" story.
5	**1 2 3**	I usually read reviews before I make a significant purchase.
6	**1 2 3**	I don't have time to date right now…
7	**1 2 3**	I believe there's someone out there who's perfect for me, I just haven't met him/her yet.
8	**1 2 3**	When making a decision I tend to go back-and-forth weighing all the possible options.
9	**1 2 3**	My friends tell me I need to put myself out there more.
10	**1 2 3**	I find dating apps or going through matchmakers unromantic because I want to meet my person in a more NATURAL way.
11	**1 2 3**	I pride myself on never settling.
12	**1 2 3**	I rarely go on dates.
13	**1 2 3**	I don't believe the spark can grow over time. Either you feel it in the beginning or you don't.
14	**1 2 3**	I'll know I've met the right person because I'll feel completely sure about them.
15	**1 2 3**	If I want to attract the best possible person, first I need to become the best possible person.
16	**1 2 3**	Love is a gut feeling. You know it when you feel it.
17	**1 2 3**	My family/friends think I'm too picky.
18	**1 2 3**	I'm focusing on my career path now and I'll think about dating later.

Scoring Key:

The Romanticizer: Add up your scores for every third question, starting with question 1 (sum of answers to questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16). _____

The Maximizer: Add your scores for every third question, starting with question 2 (sum of answers to questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17). _____

The Hesitater: Add up your scores for every third question, starting with question 3 (sum of answers to questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18). _____

On which did you score the highest? That's your dating tendency. _____

Am I Being Too "Picky"? Well, It's Not What You Think

Karen Koren

If you're familiar with my straightforward approach, you know I'm not one to sugarcoat reality. Today, I want to delve into a topic that might strike a chord with many of us: the subtle art of being "too picky." Brace yourself, as we shall explore three common dating tendencies that often serve as blind spots. What they all have in common is the notion of having unrealistic expectations (some would argue that each of the following categories applies to the business world as well). What you're about to read is heavily influenced and inspired by the perspectives of behavioral scientist Logan Ury and psychotherapist Lori Gottlieb — both distinguished Jewish authors.

1) The Romanticizer: Unrealistic Expectations of LOVE

For those of us who cherish the idea of a soul mate, the fairy tale ending, and the intoxicating allure of love, we fall into the category of the romanticizer. To us, love is not a choice; it's a cosmic event waiting to happen! You believe you're single because the right person hasn't waltzed into your life yet. You also imagine that the perfect love story will unfold effortlessly when the stars align.

The pitfall here lies in the soul-mate mindset—a belief that relationship satisfaction hinges on finding "the one." Romanticizers often find themselves waiting for love rather than **actively working to create it.** The romanticizer's quest for an idealized partner often results in a narrow vision, missing out on potentially great matches. Romanticizers also heavily depend on instant sparks and chemistry. They tend to say phrases like "When you know, you know" or "I need to feel it right away.".

So, what's the cure for the romanticizer's ailment?

Firstly, it's about being mindful of what influences our perceptions of love. Life isn't a Disney fairy tale, and we need to filter out unrealistic portrayals of relationships from sources like romance novels, Netflix, rom-coms, and even social media.

Secondly, adopting a "work it out" mindset is crucial. It's time to shatter the illusion of perfection. If we're not perfect, why should our partners be? The focus should shift from finding someone flawless to understanding that the real challenge lies in the **daily effort needed to grow and sustain a great relationship.**

And a reality check—love is not passive. Waiting around at the next MYC event or house party for the perfect match won't cut it. It's time to put in the effort (I love that word) to find someone, even if it's not as romantic as the idealized notions we often see in popular culture.

2) The Maximizer: Unrealistic Expectations of OTHERS

Now, let's turn our attention to the meticulous researchers, the Maximizers, who explore every option painstakingly before making a choice. Their motto is a simple yet loaded question: "Why settle? Or who else is out there?". I find this tendency to be very common among the people I work with.

Maximizers grapple with a specific kind of perfectionism. They believe that with enough exploration, they can find the perfect person and be absolutely confident in their decision. However, the pursuit of perfection becomes a burden, leading to decision delays, anxiety, and an unrelenting fear of making the wrong choice.

The cure for maximizers involves a shift in perspective.

How? Firstly, by embracing the concept of being a "satisfier," as coined by Logan Ury. It's about having standards but not getting overly fixated on the idea that there might be someone better out there (because there will always be someone better out there). Identifying criteria, hunting until finding a **"good enough"** option, and being content with that decision is the key!

Secondly, once committed, it's essential to understand the power of rationalization. Our brains have a remarkable ability to convince us that the choices we make are the right ones. Applying this to dating means that once you commit to someone, your brain will work to convince you that it was a good decision.

Being a "satisfier" doesn't mean settling! It's about being happy with a decision once it meets your "good enough" standards without constantly wondering what else might be out there.

3) The Hesitator: Unrealistic Expectations of OURSELVES

Lastly, let's address the hesitators—those who hold back, waiting for the perfect moment when everything aligns seamlessly. If you resonate with the idea of being 100% ready before diving into the dating pool, you're in this category. I find this category to be very common amongst the singles I speak with as well.
The pitfalls for hesitators are multifaceted:
Firstly, by waiting to date, you're missing out on an opportunity to develop essential dating skills and figure out the type of person you genuinely want to be with!

Secondly, if you wait until you've lost 20 pounds or until you've landed your dream job, this may raise concerns about conditional love. Will your partner leave if you face setbacks like losing your job or gaining a few pounds?
Thirdly, hesitators often overlook the opportunity cost of not starting. The price paid when choosing one option over another can be significant in your dating journey.

Moreover, waiting means missing the chance to learn and improve. Dating is an incremental process of figuring out preferences and making changes as you learn over time. It's a journey of trial and error, a process hesitators bypass in their pursuit of elusive perfection.

So, what's the cure for hesitators?

Firstly, the realization that nobody ever feels 100% ready for anything. At a certain point, you need to take the plunge and start. To overcome hesitation, bridging the intention-action gap is crucial!

Setting deadlines for yourself, especially short ones, is one of the most efficient ways to motivate action. Preparing for your new dating life can involve practical steps like contacting friends, networking, finding places to go, assembling a couple of outfits, checking out local events, and even practicing essential skills like listening and being curious about others.

Consider seeking the guidance of a therapist, coach, or mentor to explore and address any unspoken fears or past issues that might be holding you back. Committing to both therapy work and dating concurrently can be a powerful way to move forward.

Reinforcing your identity as a "dater" is crucial. Start with small goals, like committing to one date a week or month. Once you go on one date, don't hesitate to go on the next, as too much lag time between dates kills momentum!

And lastly, a piece of advice for everyone—stop talking to your ex! Keeping past relationships in the picture only complicates the process of moving on.

In conclusion, the journey of love is complex, filled with pitfalls and blind spots. By unraveling these dating tendencies and embracing the cures, we can pave the way for a healthy and fulfilling relationship. It's time to bid farewell to unrealistic expectations and embark on a journey of self-discovery and genuine connections.

B'hatzlacha!

Love & Dating: Identifying Your Values for a Healthy Marriage

Rabbi Adam Sabzevari

"For a relationship to transition from infatuation to true love, it must be rooted in shared values."

"When people are attracted, they are blinded."

This past Hanukkah, our community was honored to welcome Chana Levitan, a distinguished expert in dating and marriage. Levitan, author of the best-selling "I Only Want to Get Married Once," addressed critical questions for singles to consider before and during the dating process. Her insights emphasize the crucial role of shared values in forming a lasting marriage. In the following, I aim to delve deeper into this important dating-related topic that I am passionate about, exploring how to discover and align these values.

A common misconception, perpetuated by Hollywood, is the idea of "love at first sight," which is usually mistaken for true love. This sensation, more accurately described as infatuation, is caused by a chemical release in the brain that includes phenethylamine, norepinephrine, and dopamine. Although it feels great, this feeling is not true love, as research shows that infatuation typically lasts at most two to three years, sometimes even less.

For a relationship to transition from infatuation to true love, it must be rooted in shared values. Of course, it is helpful to have shared interests, such as hobbies, favorite foods, and vacation preferences. However, shared interests aren't strong enough to sustain a healthy marriage. As the initial excitement fades, the importance of shared core values becomes increasingly more obvious. Without shared values, the likelihood of a healthy marriage decreases substantially.

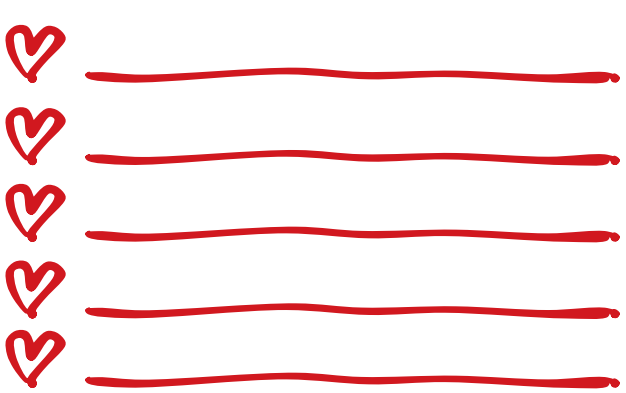
What exactly is a value? Values are our core beliefs about what is right or wrong, good or bad, important or desirable. Values express our highest priorities and are our deepest driving forces. People will often fight for their values, and some will even die for them.

Endless studies have proven that value conflict is one of the most destructive elements in a relationship. The obvious question is, why aren't people more careful? Why don't we just check out our value compatibility since this is such an explosive issue? The answer goes back to infatuation. When people are attracted, they are blinded. The challenge, then, is not to be blinded by infatuation but to seek a partner with shared values.

Before determining if you share values with someone, it's crucial to engage in self-reflection to identify your own values. When counseling and guiding singles, I recommend a three-step exercise to aid in answering the question: What are my values?

1. List Your Values: Write down everything that matters deeply to you on a piece of paper or an Excel spreadsheet. There is no right or wrong here. Be honest with yourself.
2. Rank the List: Arrange your values in order of importance, from highest to lowest.
3. Distinguish Non-Negotiables: Mark a line somewhere high on this list to separate your "non-negotiables" from your "nice-to-haves." Values above this line are your "core values" and essential for your partner to share, while those below the line can be compromised on if everything else lines up.

Remember, having an extensive list of deal-breakers can limit your options, and some might consider you "too picky." Aim to keep your "non-negotiables" to no more than five values.



Based on my counseling experience and conversations with singles in the dating scene, I've compiled a list of values to consider and help you in this exercise. To be clear, these are only examples, and I am not suggesting what constitutes a correct or incorrect value. This exercise is more about identifying your values to ensure the person you're dating shares those values with you.

- **Religion**: What level of kashrut do you observe inside and outside the home? Do you want to be Shomer Shabbat? Are you flexible and respectful of religious differences?
- **Family Values**: How close do you want to live to your family? How often do you wish to see your immediate and extended families?
- **Location**: How important is living in Great Neck (or any other geographic preference) to you? Are you comfortable living outside of Great Neck? Do you aspire to make Aliyah to Israel?
- **Education**: What level of education do you aim to achieve? How much do you value education?
- **Working**: Do you aspire to be a stay-at-home parent or active in the workplace? What are your preferences regarding your spouse's work status or occupation?
- **Travel for Work**: Are you comfortable with your spouse frequently traveling for work?
- **Children**: If it were fully up to you (though it's in the hands of Hashem), how many children would you like to have? One and done? Cheaper by the dozen? Somewhere in between?
- **Community Service**: Is volunteering and/or community service important to you? Do you prefer to focus more on home life?

As a bonus fourth step in this exercise, it is important to revisit this list throughout your dating journey to remind yourself of what you truly hold as important. Furthermore, the dating stage is a learning experience. It is very common to redefine your list or change your rankings as you learn more about yourself and what you really need in a partner. This process of reflection and reviewing your list ensures that your understanding of your values evolves alongside your experiences, allowing for a deeper insight into what makes a relationship truly fulfilling for you.

Identifying and sharing core values with your partner is foundational for a healthy and enduring relationship. This exercise, though time-consuming, is well worth the effort.

May Hashem bless you with clarity of mind and heart as you navigate your journey of dating and finding a partner who shares your core values!

Amen!

Navigating the Changing Tides: Marriage Challenges in the Mashadi Jewish Community of New York

Eddie Levian

In the dynamic landscape of the Mashadi Jewish Community of New York, a significant shift has unfolded in the past five years. Engagements that once thrived within the community have seen a dramatic change, with over 80% now forming with other Jewish communities. This shift poses unique challenges, including the impact of societal expectations on marriage.

The prevailing notion that girls must marry at 18, coupled with the perception of those over 22 as old maids, creates a divisive atmosphere. This contributes to a disconnect between younger and older members, hindering communal unity.

The graduation system, guiding young adults toward the singles minyan of Ohr Esther, is proving to be a divisive force. A potential solution lies in establishing separate age-specific minyans and fostering a sense of community among peers.

The diversity in educational and religious paths, ranging from public schools to various Jewish schools, has fragmented the community. Establishing a dedicated school that reinforces shared values and opens its doors to other Jewish communities could foster unity and facilitate easier alignment for marriages.

The erosion of traditional values, manifested through issues like teen sex, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, and social media addiction, poses significant hurdles to successful marriages. Strengthening the community's school to focus on rebuilding these shared traditional values offers a potential solution.

Gentrification has brought about a shift in priorities, emphasizing superficial attributes like looks and wealth. The community's traditional emphasis on character, known as "nejabat," is losing ground to these superficial expectations. Encouraging a return to value-based mate selection can counteract this trend.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges faced by the Mashadi Jewish Community of New York requires a multifaceted approach. From restructuring age-specific minyans to establishing a dedicated school and reinforcing traditional values, the community can navigate these changes and preserve the essence of meaningful and lasting marriages.

"Elahah Naz", a love story about assimilation and redemption

Ebrahim Shaer, translated into English by Michel Dilamani

Elahah and Houshang met at the university. Eventually, they fell in love, and since they were both Jewish, they decided to get married. Elahah told her family, but her parents objected to their marriage because Houshang was not wealthy and he was still studying in school.

About a year passed, and Elahah was not able to convince her parents to allow her to marry this man. Houshang finished college and moved to a different city for four years. They were in touch for a while but eventually stopped. Elahah, too, after finishing school, got a job as a secretary in a dentist office. One day, the telephone rang at the doctor's office, and a patient asked for an appointment. The patient introduced himself as Houshang. As Elahah heard this, she got excited. She could not talk or breathe for a moment, but she pretended she did not know him. An appointment was booked for three days later.

Elahah first decided not to go to work that day, but she was so excited by old memories coming back that she didn't know what to do. Three days later, Houshang showed up at the doctor's office and introduced himself at the front desk. Elahah did not come up to the front desk to ensure that she could control her emotions. Although she had been desperately waiting for this moment for four years, she controlled herself. The front desk secretary asked the patient to have a seat.

Elahah was watching the entire episode from behind a window. They asked Houshang to go to room #2 to get ready for the examination. After several minutes, the doctor and his nurse entered the room and started the examination. The doctor introduced the nurse to prepare the patient. After a few minutes, the doctor walked in with a different nurse, who was none other than Elahah herself, to start the procedure. Houshang was sitting in the dentist chair and was unable to look behind him to see her. While Elahah was assisting with their tools, Elahah now knew this was Houshang himself. She was so excited that she dropped a few of the tools.

After the doctor finished his work, he asked Elahah to clean up the patient. At this point, the two lovers were in the room. Houshang was in pain and had closed his eyes. Elahah was cleaning the patient, trembling. All of a sudden, Houshang realized that he was familiar with the smell and softness of these hands. Houshang opened his eyes and saw Elahah. At first, he thought that he was hallucinating due to the sedation, but soon he realized that this was real. His beautiful Elahah was in front of him after four years.

Very calmly, he said, "Hello, Elahah." Elahah calmly answered back, " Hello." When Elahah finished cleaning up his face, she asked him to come to the front desk to make another appointment. They both walked nervously to the front, remembering all of the beautiful memories they had together. Elahah was wearing a nurse's white robe, looking like an angel. She could not raise her head to look at Houshang. She asked him what date and time were good for him. Houshang wanted to come back as soon as possible to see her again. He asked if tomorrow was good. Elahah raised her head with a smile and said, "No, you need at least a week to ten days for the stitches in your mouth to heal." Houshang could not easily answer and asked, "Why don't you see what a good time is?" Elahah responded, "In that case, I will see you in 10 days at 4pm," then wrote the appointment time on a business card and gave it to him.

Houshang wanted to speak to her some more, but the doctor called her inside. Elahah told him she would see him in 10 days. Houshang followed her with his eyes as she left the office. He thought maybe he should wait for her outside until she gets off from work, but he was not sure if Elahah would have time to speak with him.

The next day, he decided to call the doctor's office to see if he could speak with her. At first, it was difficult for him, but like anyone in love, he gathered the courage and picked up the phone to call her. They told him that she was not there, as she only works on Mondays and Fridays. They asked him to call back on Friday. It was difficult for him to wait that long. He tried to call her old house, but the line was disconnected. He had no choice but to wait until Friday. On Friday, he called the doctor's office and asked to speak with her, but again, she was not available, as she was in a procedure and couldn't come to the line. The receptionist asked him to leave his callback number. He was desperately waiting for the call, and for every call, he would jump from his seat to answer the line. Houshang waited until 8pm, but no call came. He then had to wait until Monday.

On Monday at 9am, he called the doctor's office. This time, Elahah herself picked up the phone, and Houshang introduced himself and said, "It's me." Elahah responded, "Your appointment is still in a few days; why are you calling now?" Houshang said, "I only called to speak to you. Last Friday, I also left a message: Why didn't you call me back?" Houshang wanted to continue the conversation, but Elahah said she was very busy and could not speak. She said, "I have your number, and I will call you as soon as I can. I must tell you that no one gave me your message."

Houshang, having several business appointments and meetings, had canceled them all and waited for her phone call. He even thought that perhaps the lines weren't working. The call finally came in at 1:30pm, and they talked for a few minutes. Houshang asked to meet her at a restaurant for lunch. Elahah did not have time, but she decided to meet him at 5pm for coffee.

In the restaurant, Houshang asked her to tell him about the last four years of her life and asked why he didn't see happiness in her face anymore. She said, "When my parents objected to our marriage and you left, other men also asked for my hand in marriage, but my parents rejected them also. They wanted a rich son-in-law, a doctor, or an engineer. For them, it didn't matter what I wanted for my future. Fame and money were what were important."

She continued: "I was tired of this attitude, so I found myself an apartment and moved out. I was only visiting them for Shabbat. This loneliness and living alone were devastating for me. During this time, I got to meet Alfred, a young man who was working in a ladies shoe store. After a few dates, we fell in love, but the problem was that he was not Jewish. I did not know what to do and explained this to my parents, who had prevented me from marrying even a Jewish man due to their stringencies." Elahah started crying while explaining all of this, and Houshang tried to calm her down.

Elahah said, “I finally decided to marry Alfred, and I only told my mother, who became angry and out of control while cursing me. She said, ‘Why did you do this? We did not even agree with the best Jewish boys. How can we be proud of a non-Jewish son-in-law?’ My mother said that she didn’t even have the strength to tell my father. He might have a heart attack. I told my mother that if dad had a proper understanding, we would not be in such a situation. It was my dad who did not allow me to get married to Houshang or the others who tried. All of this caused me to fall for a non-Jew. Regardless, Alfred and I have made up our minds to get married in a month. At this time, my father entered the room and asked what was going on. I did not have the strength to say anything, but I told him that I had met a young man and that we were getting married next month.

As usual, my father exploded and asked, ‘How dare you do this on your own? We must know who he is, which family he is from, and if he is wealthy.’ I told my father, ‘Enough is enough; you can no longer decide who I will marry or who I may not marry. He is a lady shoe store salesman, and he is not Jewish. Hearing this, my father’s eyes became bloodshot, and he wanted to beat me, but my mother stopped him. My father shouted, ‘Leave this house immediately! You are not my daughter anymore, and you will not be in my will.’ I ran from my father, went back to my apartment, and cried all night. I loved Alfed, but I did not want to leave my parents either.”

“The next day, my mother called and tried to talk me out of this marriage. She was trying to convince me that if I married this man, I would be permanently out of the family. A few other family members also tried, but I could not go back anymore. After 15 days, Alfred and I, in the presence of a few friends, got married in a church. From that day on, the entire family broke up with me. My mother still used to call me to see how I was doing, but I was afraid to go to their house. My father would only allow me to go back if I divorced Alfred. At this point, he would allow me to marry any Jew. My parents were regretting their past behavior. They wanted me to marry for wealth and status, and they realized it was too late now.”

At this time, Elahah was late for work and had to run to her doctor's office. Houshang was upset that such a girl could fall into the hands of a non-Jew and that her parents didn’t cooperate more with her. Why had they put up stumbling blocks to prevent their marriage? Why were they so obsessed with money and status? What is wrong with a pure and simple life? Why does it have to be all about luxury? Why do they have to live in a mansion by the water? Why can’t they live in a simple apartment and be happy? How long should this drama continue? Why not let a man and woman decide and choose for their own future?

Houshang called the doctor's office, asked to speak with Elahah, and asked to meet again for lunch. She accepted. They met for lunch, and she apologized for upsetting him with a sad story. She said, “For a long time, I have been looking for someone to be able to express my feelings to.” She continued telling Houshang that after her marriage, her father does not give her money anymore. “That’s why I was forced to move to Alfred’s apartment downtown. Alfred was not able to support both of us. I had to work for two days in the doctor's office and sometimes babysit neighbors' kids and live a very simple life.”

Houshang asked, “Why don’t you have kids yet?” Elahah answered, “First, we cannot afford it, and we are both waiting to find full-time jobs. Secondly, because I have married a non-Jew, I totally regret losing Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and Jewish traditions. I also regret not listening to my parents. I am also wondering: If we do have a child, should he be raised as a Jew or a non-Jew? Also, when Alfred and I have an argument, he tries to put me down by labeling me as a Jew, and this really bothers me.”

Elahah asked Houshang, “Now tell me about how you are doing. Are you married?” Houshang answered, “About a year after I broke up with you, I met a Jewish girl and decided to get married. Everything was okay, but unfortunately, after testing, we found out that we cannot have children together because of our blood types. We decided not to continue. She eventually married someone else, and she now has two beautiful children. Now I live with my parents, and I have a job that I’m happy with.”
At this point, they said goodbye to each other and left. Elahah and Houshang spoke a few more times, but of course, Houshang was not comfortable communicating with a married woman. However, he still wanted to help Elahah financially and emotionally. He felt that he was still attracted to her, but he did not have the courage to ask her to get a divorce from her husband. It didn’t feel right. Houshang still kept asking her if he could be of any help.

One day, Elahah called Houshang and asked him for his help. They met an hour later in the same restaurant as usual. Elahah showed up, pale in the face. She said, “Last night, I had a big argument with Alfred. He wanted me to get pregnant, and he said that if I refused, then he would divorce me. Recently, he has been addicted to drugs, too. I am not sure what will happen if I get divorced. I am not even sure if my father would take me back into his house.”

Houshang said, “I thought you said that if you get divorced from Alfred, you can go back and marry any Jewish man that you want to. Don’t worry; I will help you. Go back to your husband and tell him that you will accept his offer, and don’t be afraid of a divorce. You are still beautiful, and many young Jewish boys are willing to marry you and have children with you.”

Elahah calmed down and decided to talk to her husband and go back to her parents house. Houshang truly wanted to marry her if she got divorced. Two days later, Elahah informed him that she had spoken to her husband, and they decided to go their separate ways. She said that her parents were also very happy, and her father accepted her back and is willing to cover the lawyer's expenses (from the divorce).

Two months later, the divorce was finalized, and Elahah went back to her parents house. The night that she went back, her entire family gathered, and her father threw a big party. Many flowers were sent to her, but the biggest flowers were from Houshang. That night, Houshang also came with his parents. After dinner, Elahah confessed, while holding a glass of wine, that she was truly sorry for her irresponsible act. She apologized for disrespecting her parents and friends, and she thanked Houshang for his help. Houshang also raised a glass, complimented Elahah, and asked her to marry him. He promised to be a good husband and asked her parents permission to marry their daughter. Everyone there became extremely emotional. Elahah’s father stepped forward and confessed that he should not have been after money and fame. He said that it was only important that a man and a woman love each other and that parents should not interfere so much. He took Elahah’s hand and placed it in Houshang’s and said, “I wish you all the best in life” and kissed them both.

A month later, a big wedding was arranged for them. Among the flowers, there was a basket of flowers from Alfred, wishing the bride and groom health, happiness, and a long life. Along with the flowers, Alfred sent a poem:

“My Dear Elaheh Naz, /

I speak to you with my heart No one can love you like I do

You make me bloom /

You gave me light to grow /

You sent me to places that no one can reach /

You were kind to me /

You taught me how to love /

And I was a good student /

With love and kindness, you saved me like a dry plant and brought me to life /

And today, I am like a strong tree that stretches to the heavens /

I know if this light goes away, I will turn into a dry plant again, lifeless /

And no light other than yours can revive me again /

And I shall burn like dry wood in fire /

My days were starting with you, and I would go to sleep with your dream /

You used to pamper me and take care of me /

You helped me grow like a flower to become just like you /

Your scent, your color, and your aroma changed my life /

Your scent will always be on my leaves, and like blood, it will be running in my veins /

You were the goddess of love and kindness /

You opened my heart with love and brought me to life /

You made my wishes come true /

You attracted me with your eyes /

You were always fighting with yourself, but you always seemed happy and smiling /

I was a strong tree that no storm could break, but you separated me from my root with your beautiful eyes and kindness /

And I was flying in heaven like an autumn leaf /

You are dear, popular, and lovable /

You have pride, but you helped me like a stranger /

You helped me to come alive and stay alive /

You were a kind nurse to me /

You were an experienced doctor /

You were a medicine /

You were G-d sent /

You were passionate, and you cured me /

You needed nothing, but I was in need /

You were great, and I was nothing /

You were like a bird flying free, but I was broken /

You were the morning dawn /

But your dawn was too short-lived, and soon it was sunset /

Like the sun, you were warm during the day, and your warmth kept me alive /

I found you in heaven, but then I lost you soon /

Now I constantly fight with myself every moment of every day /

My leaves were drying up because you shine your light on others /

But I am happy that your light is shining on others, and I hope that makes it a strong tree like mine /
heads towards the heavens and gives fruits forever /

I yield to your will /

And happy with what you want /

Only you can see everything /

If I am not that happy please ignore me /

Your happiness has always been my wish, and it makes me happy /

Your freedom makes me free /

Being away from you pains me, but for your sake and your family's sake, I accept to stay away from you, /

But thinking of you all the time /

Now you have returned to your nest /

And I hope your nest is always bright /

And your house will always be full and plenty /

May your heart be happy and your life be full /

I still love you more than yesterday and less than tomorrow”

At the time of writing the original article, Houshang and Elahah have been married for four years and have three beautiful children. These children are growing up in a Jewish home with traditional Jewish values.

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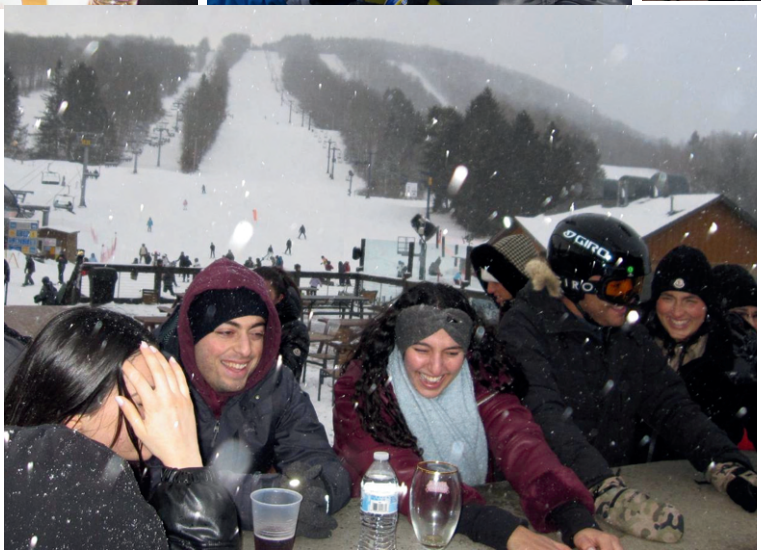

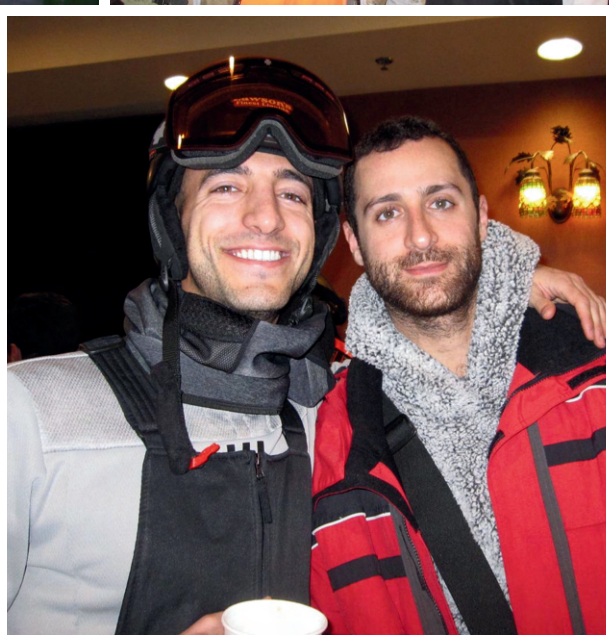

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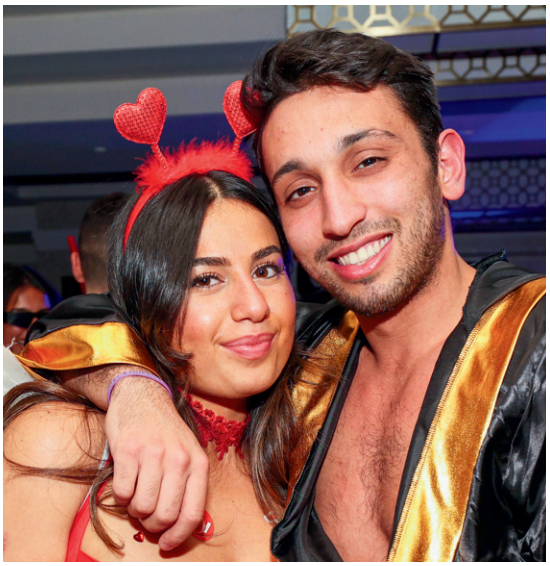

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Did you know? New Law Requires Reporting of Corporate Ownership

Robert Bichoupan

There is a new law that became effective on January 1, 2024. Anyone who owns an entity anywhere in the United States now has the obligation to report ownership under the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN). With limited exceptions, the Department of Treasury Bureau now requires any company, opened either in the past or in the future, to report. For companies formed prior to 2024, the filing deadline is January 1, 2025. For companies formed in 2024, the deadline is 90 days from filing. For companies filed on or after January 1, 2025, the filing deadline is 30 days from filing.

Any party who has a 25% beneficial ownership interest in any entity or has substantial control of any entity (including officers, managing members, and those with sufficient voting rights) must report their names, addresses, dates of birth, and unique identification number, which is obtained by supplying additional information to the government.

The purpose of this law is to help the government control illicit activity, money laundering, financing of terrorism, tax fraud, human and drug trafficking, counterfeiting, piracy and securities fraud, financial fraud, malicious acts of foreign corruption, harming the security interest in the United States, etc. For now, the information may only be made available by FinCEN to federal, state, local and tribal government agencies, federal law enforcement agencies, judges, prosecutors and central authorities, financial institutions using information for customer due diligence requirements, federal regulators, regulatory agencies, and the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Given the amount of hacking and leakage going on and the possibility that the laws may change again, I am not sure whether I believe it will be limited to these agencies, but time will tell. However, the failure to provide the information within the timelines provided may result in serious financial penalties and fines. Further, any subsequent change in beneficial ownership or control of a company must also be reported to FinCEN. Anybody creating an entity also has liability for reporting under the new act, so many accountants and lawyers who formerly opened new companies may now decline to do so.

NEW REAL ESTATE LAW ABOLISHES $500 CREDIT AND MANDATES PCDS:

New York has historically been a buyer-beware state. Buyers are well advised to do their own inspection of a house prior to purchasing it, usually with the assistance of an engineer. As many of you may recall, in 2002, the law was changed to require that upon the sale of a house, the seller provides either a Property Condition Disclosure Statement (PCDS) or a $500.00 credit at closing. The statement was in 48 parts and described in detail the seller's knowledge as to the condition of the house. Most of my fellow attorneys in the Long Island and New York City areas routinely recommended their sellers give the $500.00 credit rather than the PCDS to avoid post-closing liability.

The law has now changed again. Effective March 20, 2024, the $500.00 credit is no longer an option. Sellers must provide the PCDS related to the condition of the property. The new form is required to be delivered prior to the signing of the contract of sale. Further, the form has been modified to include information regarding flooding and flood zones. Do you know what flood zone you are in? Are you aware that flood zone categories have changed and your information may be inaccurate? You now face potential liability if you give the wrong information.

Now, rather than relying on just the engineer's inspection report, a buyer will have remedies against a seller should the answers provided by the seller turn out to be inaccurate. This also includes the seller stating "unknown" when the seller knew or should have known of a condition. It is not clear whether this form can be waived by a buyer or what damages a seller may face in the event that the answers are inaccurate. It is clear, however, that this new law will, if nothing else, likely create more litigation.

Seller's Brokers: Did you know you have an affirmative obligation to advise your seller of the requirement to deliver the PCDS? Buyer's Brokers: You too have an obligation to inform your buyer of the right to receive the PCDS. If you fail to do so, there are repercussions for you and your customer.

Nothing contained in this article is intended to provide legal, tax, or any other advice; it is merely intended to raise awareness of issues. You should discuss these matters further with your personal legal and tax advisors. If you wish to further discuss these developments, you may also contact Robert Bichoupan at (516) 482-1186, or by email at Robert@Bichoupan.com.

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How To Make The Perfect Steak

Aaron Aziz (@kosherfatty on Instagram)

Reverse searing is the method of cooking a steak in the oven until it reaches a specific internal temperature, then searing it afterwards on a super-hot surface. This ensures an even cook throughout the steak and the perfect outer layer crust.

SUPPLIES

- Steak (any type)
- Salt/Pepper
- Food Thermometer/Temperature Probe
- A sharp knife
- Tinfoil
- Resting/Cooling Rack
- Cast Iron Pan, Gas Grill, or Charcoal Grill
- Cutting Board

SEASONING

1. Preheat the oven to 275 degrees.
2. If the steak is wet, pat it dry with a towel.
3. Season the meat with salt and pepper, and make sure to season the sides as well.
4. Place the seasoned steak on a cooling rack (you can use any sort of pan that elevates the steak and allows heat to hit the bottom of it).

OVEN COOKING

If you have a temperature probe, follow this step; if not, see the next step.

- Place the temperature probe deep into the steak and set the desired alert time to five degrees less than your desired cooking level. (See the end for different levels of steak cooking and their corresponding temperatures.) For example, if you would like your steak to be rare, then your goal should be to cook it to around 130 degrees internal, so taking the steak out at 125 degrees is ideal here, as the steak continues to cook after leaving the oven for a bit.
- If you have a food thermometer, you can just check the internal temperature of the steak periodically as it cooks. Do the same as explained with the probe. (Expect cooking times to vary between 20 minutes and over 1 hour, depending on the thickness and cut of the steak).
- Once you remove the steak from the oven, you will be letting the steak rest for 10–20 minutes, depending on how thick the steak is. Put the steak on a cutting board or plate and place a piece of tinfoil in a tent shape on top of the steak, which will keep it warm while resting. (Patience here is most important, as you can mess up the steak by cooking it too quickly after removing it from the oven).

SEARING

After your steak has rested for the proper time, it can be seared in multiple ways. Different methods include using a cast iron pan, a gas grill, or a charcoal grill (a charcoal grill often brings the most flavor but involves the most work).

The most important thing to note here is that your focus should be to create the hottest surface possible to sear the steak, no matter what method you choose to go with. If your grill is not hot enough, it will not sear properly and will cook your steak more than your desired cooking level.

When you are searing, you should be cooking for about a minute on each side and keep flipping every minute until you get a golden-brown crust. Your goal is to get the crust to be crispy and brown but not burnt.

Place the finished steak on a cutting board, grab your sharpest steak knife, and slice up the steak to your liking (sprinkle some sea salt on top to make each bite even better).

ENJOY YOUR PERFECT STEAK!

Steak Cooking Levels

Rare:
* Internal temperature: 120-130°F
* Center color: Red

Medium Rare:
* Internal temperature: 130-135°F
* Center color: Pink

Medium:
* Internal temperature: 135-145°F
* Center color: Slightly pink

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