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Be'chol Lashon, a program of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, seeks to grow and strengthen the Jewish people through racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusiveness.

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## BE'CHOL LASHON UPDATES

### One People Many Faces:

#### Opening our Eyes and our Attitudes to the Expanding Racial & Ethnic Variety of Jewish Life

**By Rahel Musleah, Winter 2007, Jewish Women International**



The face of the American Jewish community is changing. According to the Institute for Jewish and Community Research (IJCR), at least 20 percent of American Jews are racially and ethnically diverse, including those of Sephardic/Mizrahi (Middle Eastern), Asian, Latino, African-American or mixed-race heritage. Many racially and ethnically diverse Jews are born Jewish, and many more enter through the portals of conversion and adoption.

Gary Tobin, IJCR president, and his wife, Diane, IJCR's associate director, believe so strongly that the Jewish community's strength lies in its diversity that they created "Be'chol Lashon: In Every Tongue," an initiative to create a more racially, ethnically and culturally inclusive Jewish community. Diane Tobin, Be'chol Lashon's director, works with Jewish community leaders around the world as well as with organizations nationally to do more effective outreach.

To read the complete article as printed in JWI, click [here](#).

### Persecuted Jews meet Bush

**By Beth Young, December 11, 2007, JTA**



President Bush used his annual Chanukah meeting with Jewish leaders to invite figures who had experienced persecution throughout the world.

Among the 15 individuals who joined the president at the White House on Monday, International Human Rights Day, were Elliott Benjamin, the vice president of the Iranian American Jewish Federation; Rabbi Gershom Sizomu of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda; Holocaust survivors Gerald and Joan Schwab; and Judea and Ruth Pearl, parents of the Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, who was murdered by al-Qaida operatives shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Several of the attendees at the meeting are members of Be'chol Lashon, a group of multiracial and multiethnic rabbis and Jewish leaders that is an arm of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research.

Read the full article [here](#).

### Bush Burns Hanukkah Candle at Both Ends

By Nathan Guttman, December 12, 2007, The Forward.com

Read the full article [here](#).

## ABAYUDAYA UPDATE



We are delighted to update you on the progress of the Abayudaya Community Health and Development Plan that provides essential life-saving services to adults and children throughout the region. This project promotes peace and cooperation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Uganda. [Click here for the newest update.](#)

The Abayudaya Executive Committee, the democratically elected community council, requested that Be'chol Lashon serve as the clearinghouse for long range planning and fundraising efforts on behalf of the Jewish community of Uganda. All funds raised for the Abayudaya Community Health and Development Plan have been matched dollar-for-dollar by a challenge grant, as will all additional donations. This inspirational project is becoming a reality through your generosity. To donate, [click here.](#)

## EVENTS & COMMUNITY UPDATES

**Be'chol Lashon Purim Festival: Save the Date - March 16, 2008**



**African American Art & Culture Complex**  
**762 Fulton @ Webster, San Francisco -- Parking Available**  
**Free Holiday Event**

On March 16 from 1-4pm, at the African American Art & Culture Complex in San Francisco, Be'chol Lashon will host a family Purim Festival celebrating the diversity of the Bay Area with costumes, food, games, and holiday traditions from around the world including West African Drumming and Dancing, Chinese Lion Dancing, Capoeira/ Brazilian martial arts and the Pact Multicultural Book Fair. Although a Jewish holiday, the Purim themes of courage and triumph are

universal.

**Book Release:**

**Rabbi Kohn's, Emerging Jewish:**

**Surviving the Conversion Process with Your Ideals and Relationships Intact**

**Thursday, January 10th from 8:00 to 9:00 pm**  
**Congregation B'nai Emunah, San Francisco**

**& Sunday, January 13th, from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm, noon**  
**San Geronimo Valley Community Center**  
**sponsored by Congregation Gan HaLev**



Have you ever thought about converting to Judaism? Are you in the process, newly Jewish (Mazal Tov!), or an old hand? Make sure you remain joyous in your choice with the help of Rabbi Daniel Kohn, whose new book provides crucial information about the emotional and social impediments and even opposition that converts to Judaism may encounter on their spiritual path.

Join him for a seminar, discussion and book signing to learn about ways to keep your enthusiasm, excitement, and commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people undiminished. For more information, [click here.](#)

## The Habitot Parent-to-Parents Cafe for Multiracial Families

**January 19th, 10am - Noon**  
**Habitot Children's Museum, Berkeley**  
**2065 Kittredge Street**



Join us for this *Playgroup Cafe* for mixed heritage and transracially adopted families with children 0-6yrs old. It is an opportunity to come together, share ideas, stories and offer mutual support.

Parents and caregivers gather to chate and visit with each other while a staffed, hands-on art activity engages the children.

For more infomation, contact Susana Telles, Parenting Education Programs Manage at 510-647-1111 x 16 or [parented@habitot.org](mailto:parented@habitot.org)

### We welcome your participation in the Be'chol Lashon Newsletter!

The Be'chol Lashon Newsletter is reaching more and more people every month. Please send us information about events in your community or articles of interest that relate to Jewish diversity.

Please e-mail newsletter submissions to Esther Fishman, [Esther@JewishResearch.org](mailto:Esther@JewishResearch.org). Submissions are subject to editing for content, clarity and style.

**Special thanks to all the contributors who make the newsletter interesting and informative**

## CURRENT NEWS

### 63% Say they would Welcome Ethiopians into thier Family

**By Kobi Nahshoni, December 13, 2007, YNetnews.com**



A week after the disconcerting reports about the discrimination running rampant at several Israeli schools, it seems that perhaps there is still hope that most of the public does not suffer from such worrying racism.

According to a new Ynet-Gesher poll, the majority of Israelis would not object to see their child marry an Ethiopian and would not hesitate to send their children to a school that has a large Ethiopian student body. And yet, 52% of the population admits that they do not have any personal friends of Ethiopian descent.

The Ynet-Gesher poll was conducted by the Mutagim center and was based upon a representative sample of 500 adult, Hebrew-speaking Jewish Israelis. When asked "would you let your child marry an Ethiopian?" 63% answered they would gladly welcome the marriage while 19% said "absolutely not." Another 6% said they would be saddened but would not object. Religious segmentation points at a different attitude: 61% of ultra-Orthodox respondents said they would vehemently object such a marriage. Only 25% would welcome an Ethiopian in-law.

The second question examined the degree of familiarity respondents have with community members: 32% admitted they do not have any Ethiopian friends and that they do not know any Ethiopians with whom they could build friendships. 20% do know Ethiopians but have no Ethiopian friends and 34% said they or their children have such a friend.

Once again a religious segmentation points at a different trend in the ultra-Orthodox community: 72% don't have Ethiopian friends.

Age analysis reveals that 77% of the 65-and-over and 58% of 55-64 year olds said neither they nor their children have Ethiopian friends. Only younger Israelis, aged 18 through 44, have at least one Ethiopian friend.

Does the segregation in some of Petah Tikva schools reflect parents' wishes? 63% claim they have no problem sending their children to schools where 40% of the students are Ethiopians. On the other hand, 14% said they "would never" send their children to such institutions. 50% of ultra-Orthodox respondents

said they would not send their children to such a school.

Gesher director-general Shoshi Becker said that the findings are worrying and require immediate action: "It is difficult to understand how people who practice Judaism as a way of life choose to steer clear of Ethiopian immigrants." Becker added that a Jewish-democratic society should view acceptance of the other as a challenge and a mission and convey a clear message to future generations: "This is our job as a society, a community and as individuals."

### Jews Relieved by Chavez Defeat

By Larry Luxner, December 3, 2007, JTA



A few hours before the polls opened in Venezuela on Sunday morning, federal police raided the main Jewish social club here, La Hebraica, ostensibly looking for weapons and explosives. Though they left empty-handed and no major damage was done, the incident stoked Jewish fears in Venezuela's capital about the government of President Hugo Chavez.

So when hundreds of voters lined up a few hours later around the corner from a kosher bakery in the affluent Caracas neighborhood of San Bernardino to cast their vote under the watchful eye of soldiers toting machine guns, many said it was the most important political decision of their lives.

When the results of the referendum on Chavez's package of constitutional reforms finally came in, many Jews here breathed a sigh of relief. Venezuela's 26 million people awoke Monday to learn that Chavez's proposals to make Venezuela a socialist country and allow him to run for re-election indefinitely had been defeated by the slimmest of margins. "Baruch Hashem," said Alicia Truzman, the Moroccan-born owner of the kosher bakery in San Bernardino. "All of us are happy. We can breathe easier now." Truzman voted 'no.'

"Originally we were not going to vote because we're always getting tricked anyway," said Truzman, 60, who lived in the Israeli city of Kiryat Malachi for eight years before immigrating to the Caribbean island of Curacao and finally Venezuela in 1974. "But at the last minute we decided to vote because there have been many demonstrations by students, so we began to have some hope."

Chavez's power grab has been a source of major concern for Venezuelan Jewry. More than half the country's Jews have fled South America's leading oil-exporting nation since Chavez came to power, and the regime's close ties to Iran and occasional antagonism toward Jews has prompted many others to make provisional plans to leave. While the defeat of Chavez's broad-ranging referendum Sunday eased Jewish fears in Venezuela, dealing the president's plans for authoritarian control of the country a major blow, many remain fearful about their future in Venezuela and are making plans to leave.

Roberto Kulka Kohn, the owner of a Caracas textile plant that manufactures woven labels, said his provisional plan to dismantle his factory and relocate it to some other country is now on standby. "The problem with us in Venezuela is that you could never live like this anywhere else," Kohn said as he showed a visitor around the lavish Altamira Tennis Club, where he is a member. "Nobody here really wants to go to Israel. You would need to have 10 times as much money to live this way."

Kulka said he's happy the referendum came out the way it did. "This is a turning point for Venezuela," he said. "Now I'm not thinking of going anywhere under these circumstances."

The situation, however, remains tenuous. The police raid at La Hebraica was but the latest in a series of incidents intimidating to the country's Jews. "I think this was just to scare the daylights out of the Jewish community, to convince us not to vote and to keep a low profile," said Rabbi Pynchas Brenner, spiritual leader of the Union Israelita de Caracas synagogue and chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Venezuela. "But since the Holocaust, we don't scare easily." Only a week earlier, the words "Zionist Assassins" were scrawled at the entrance to Tiferet Israel, a Sephardic synagogue in the Caracas suburb of Mariperez. The perpetrators, two women, were caught on surveillance video.

Last year, Chavez himself indirectly accused the Jews of killing Jesus Christ. Although he didn't explicitly mention the word "Jew," his remarks left little doubt among Venezuela's Jews that their president is an unabashed anti-Semite. "If you ask me, I think Chavez is anti-Semitic, but not officially and not publicly," said Rodolfo Osers, a civil engineer and representative of ORT in Venezuela. "As a person he hasn't done anything yet. But he supports local organizations and people who are anti-Semitic."

Since a failed coup attempt against Chavez in 2002, the Jewish community has maintained an extremely low profile. Nobody will discuss publicly how dramatically enrollment has dropped at the

Colegio Moral y Luces Herzl Bialik, the main Jewish school of Caracas. Some 30,000 Jews once lived in Venezuela, but with more than half having left since Chavez came to power, estimates of the community's size range from 14,000 to as few as 9,000.

The official vote tally, announced in the wee hours Monday morning, set off a barrage of fireworks in eastern Caracas, where Chavez is particularly disliked, and energized the country's remaining Jews, who almost universally had opposed the 69 proposed constitutional changes. The 'no' victory was "the greatest thing that could have happened" for Venezuelan Jews, Brener said.

"There was a doomsday scenario here, but now people feel there's a new chance that wasn't here before," said the rabbi, a frequent target of anti-Semitic radio and TV commentators employed by the Chavez government. Chavez's referendum, which was defeated by a margin of less than 2 percent of the vote, marked the 53-year-old leftist president's first major domestic defeat since taking office in 1999.

The past eight years here have been particularly unnerving for Venezuela's Jews, and Chavez still has six years left in office. Chavez has built close ties to Iran and its Holocaust-denying president, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, whom Chavez has publicly embraced as his "brother" in the struggle against the United States, imperialism and Zionism. He also has allowed anti-Semitic expressions on state-controlled media and police raids on Jewish schools and institutions.

For some time now, most Jewish families in Venezuela have had a Plan B. "If I have to, I will go to Israel," said Marcko Glijenschi, a retired psychotherapist and former director of the Confederación de Asociaciones Israelitas de Venezuela, or CAIV, an umbrella group of local Jewish organizations. He currently is the second vice president of the Zionist Federation of Venezuela.

"For me it's very easy. I also have an apartment in Miami, and also one in New York," said Glijenschi, who like many Venezuelan Jews lives in a large home behind a high protective wall in Altamira. "The problem is for young people. Our parents always said to us, 'don't get involved in politics.'" With Chavez losing Sunday, some put their plans to leave on hold; others did not. "The decision has already been made," Truzman, the kosher bakery owner, said in between serving cheese blintzes and chocolate eclairs. "We are moving to Miami."

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### Indian Jews Look to Invite Attention on Hanukkah

By Marissa Brostoff, December 5, 2007, Forward.com



Next week, at New York's Indian consulate, a group of Indian Jews will attempt to bridge the gap between their culture and that of most American Jews — by throwing a Hanukkah party. The decision may seem obvious, but Hanukkah is actually a relatively new addition to the Indian Jewish tradition, which developed separately from those of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. Although lore claims that Jews have lived in India since the time of Antiochus, the villain of the Hanukkah story, Indian Jews started celebrating the holiday only about 200 years ago.

Every immigrant community in this city of immigrants must negotiate competing desires to remain unique and to assimilate. But while Russian, Bukharian and Middle Eastern Jewish communities are substantial enough to be visible within the larger Jewish landscape, New York's tiny Indian Jewish community has gone largely unnoticed.

"People have been here 30, 40 years, but the community is virtually unknown," said Romiel Daniel, president of an organization called the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA. "The Russians got tremendous support [from the American Jewish establishment]; as far as our community was concerned, no."

Since 1995, the Indian Jewish Congregation has been renting out the Village Temple in Manhattan's Greenwich Village on major holidays. The congregation's High Holy Day services, which are free and open to the public, have drawn people from outside the community, including Ethiopian, Russian and Bukharian Jews. "We want to be part of the larger community," Daniel said. "We don't want to assimilate, we want to integrate."

Part of the upcoming Hanukkah party's significance is that it reaffirms the growing partnership between India and Israel, both of whose New York consuls general will be in attendance. Today, India is the second-largest importer of Israeli goods. That situation is not far off from the one that brought Jews to India in the first place, according to one version of the story. "Three ships left from Palestine. They were trading with India," said Moses Samson, a friend of Daniel's who, like Daniel, made his way to Queens

from Bombay. "There was a typhoon, and one ship went down in the sea, one was swept to Cochin and one landed on the coast of Maharashtra" near Bombay. The legend ends with the birth of two communities: a larger one in and around Bombay, known as Bene Israel, and a smaller one in the city of Cochin.

Shipwreck or no shipwreck, the Bene Israel and Cochin communities date back more than 2,000 years. Much later, in the 19th century, a wave of Jewish traders and refugees from the Middle East settled in eastern India. This group became known as the Baghdadis. The combined Jewish population of India numbered about 37,000 at its peak.

Today, the Jewish population that remains in India has shrunk to about 5,000. Many Bene Israel and Cochin Jews have immigrated to Israel, and the Baghdadis have relocated to British Commonwealth countries. And then there is the community of mostly Bene Israel Jews in the United States, which is concentrated in the New York area and numbers about 350. "My husband and myself are second cousins. My son and his wife also were second cousins," said Noreen Daniel, who is married to Romiel. "Our community is small."

The Daniels left Bombay in the early 1990s and spent three years in Madagascar and Mauritius before settling in New York. Their living room contains a mix of Indian and Jewish decorations — a clock set to Bombay time, a replica of Chagall's stained-glass windows and an Indian menorah with holders for small cups of oil instead of candles.

Indian Jewish émigrés, who left the old country primarily for economic reasons, were not greeted warmly, either in Israel or in the United States, Daniel said. In 1962, Israel's chief rabbi questioned their "purity" as Jews and demanded that they be converted under Ashkenazic supervision. (Legend has it that he failed after David Ben-Gurion himself intervened.)

In the United States, they seem to have simply slipped beneath the radar. "Part of the reason we wanted to [hold the Hanukkah party] in the consulate is that we wanted to increase awareness... of the fact that there are Jewish populations of different ethnicities who are here in this country," Daniel said. The evening may be an opportunity for integration, but Daniel promised that the Hanukkah rituals — reciting Psalm 30, an unusual benediction for the holiday, in a unique kind of chant, and eating fried Indian snacks — will "make you feel like you're back home in Bombay."

"If we changed the services, we'd get killed," he said with a laugh.

## IDENTITY

### My Story: Conversations with My Father

By Farideh Goldin, December 6, 2007, Jerusalem Post



During most of my adult life in Iran, I dreamed of leaving, finding a place where the words "Jew" and "woman" were not derogatory terms. My father, however, loved Iran. He never imagined a day that he would have to abandon the country of his ancestors. We had heated debates in Iran and later in his new home, Israel. Last year, he passed away on the last day of Hanukka, still dreaming of Iran, his views shared by many other Iranian Jews both in Israel and in the United States. Here are my conversations with my father.

Once upon a time, my daughter, after a brief journey, you and I yearned to return to Shiraz. Through the arched gateway adorned with blue tiles, passing underneath the holy book of Koran, we entered our forefathers' homeland for over 2,500 years. There was a time, my daughter, that your eyes, like mine, sparked with joy to see our city of roses and

nightingales, the city of poets and writers.

Once upon a time, my father, winter came, the ground froze, the trees died; ice caps dropped on your city's mountain tops. I felt the familiar invisible yellow patch on my chest for being the daughter of my mothers' religion. The holy book nested on top of the gate to Shiraz did not give us, the Jews, security.

My daughter, scant were those who scorned our beliefs. People of Iran were decent and God-fearing. There is always the good and the bad wherever you go. I saw kindness, respect; I was somebody in the land of my fathers.

Don't forget that an Iranian king, Cyrus the Great, freed us from our bondage in Babylon. Our forefathers remained in Persia because we felt safe under the king's benevolent rule. Cyrus was a second Moses; Persia, our new Promised Land. We entered its borders as free men and not slaves.

Baba, didn't you tell me of dark nights of pogroms in the Jewish ghetto of your youth? Returning from his synagogue one rainy Shabbat morning, your white-bearded father, the community rabbi, was beaten bloody for daring to walk outside the walls of the ghetto.

Those were the old days of ignorance and fanaticism, of melee and mayhem - and even in the dark days, the kindness seeped through. A Muslim mullah brought us warm blankets, hot tea, bread and grapes after a long night of bedlam in the ghetto. My daughter, don't look at the ugliness. We were better off than the European Jewry, where the so called civilized Germany murdered six million of us.

Baba, we were not allowed to become six millions. We suffered in silence. Our history not recorded and publicized, our murdered ancestors die repeatedly in the elimination of their names, their stories and their faces. The Jews of Tabriz, men, women and children, were decimated in the eighth century. The Jews of Mashhad were forced to convert in the 17th century. Baba, don't help erase the past because you still yearn for your farms and orchards in Shiraz, because after such a long period of emotional and financial despair, you became a prosperous landowner under the shah's rule.

My orchard was paradise on earth. I created it from dust and boulders, from a land untamed and dry. I invested all my money, my time, my sweat, my love. Such amazing endeavor! Don't tell me about your adopted country America being the land of opportunity. I had it all in Iran.

Baba, and then the tornado of the Iranian revolution shattered your life, your farm, your house and your respected status. Fleeing in a hurry, you left them behind. You forgot that as Jews you must not invest in property that you cannot secure in your pocket, in the hem of your daughters' dresses. How can you long for your life in Iran?

Yes, I suffered during those years of revolution and chaos. I suffered under a regime that tortured me and took my livelihood away, a government that reduced me to the broken man you see today, but I didn't suffer alone. The Muslims, the Baha'is, the Christians, the Zoroastrians suffered as much if not more. I am not the only displaced and wandering Iranian.

Don't criticize me for having felt comfortable in my own country. Have you not bought a piece of your America? Have you not trusted your money to its banks? America has its own history of bigotry and anti-Semitism. Aren't you afraid of an uprising against the Jews? As you have allowed yourself to grow roots in your new country for just a few decades, I gave myself permission to invest in the land of my fathers for millennia.

They have been other perilous times for Iranian Jews, but we survived them. Do you remember the story of Purim? Mordecai and his niece, Esther, saved us with their wisdom and their words. Iran bestowed upon us its protection for centuries.

Baba, a story of 2500 years ago doesn't testify to today's Iranian Jewish history. From 100,000 Jews, there are only 25,000 left in Iran today - a token kept under the thumb of another Haman, another powerful Iranian, a Holocaust denier with an impending atomic bomb to destroy Israel - the country that sheltered you.

Baba, you talk of Queen Esther's story as our story, of the story of Iranian Jews. You are right, it exemplifies our position in Iranian history, as a people who had to tread gingerly around our rulers as Iranian Jews do today. The king bestowed upon Haman the power to annihilate a powerless people. Esther, even though a queen, approached the king trembling in fear. Baba a part of me prefers the story of Hanukka over Purim. I can't imagine Iranian Jews being brave enough, like the Maccabees, to rise up against those who try to annihilate us, to assimilate us, to kill our traditions.

My daughter, Hanukka is not our story as much as Purim is. We conquered and survived through words and not swords. In your adopted country, Hanukka competes with Christmas, a commercial holiday. Don't forget that you are Persian.

Baba, I remember you lighting the Hanukka candles in the corner, where no one could see from the outside. You mumbled the prayers so that no one could hear you beyond your family.

I light my hanukkia by an unobstructed window. Let the candles light, growing more intense every night for eight nights, brightening my house, and the faces of those walking by the window. Let the neighbors and passersby know who I am - a Jew, no longer afraid.

And, for you, my father, I do add an additional prayer when I light my hanukkia. I pray that once again the Iranian Jews, Muslims, Christians, Baha'is and Zoroastrians will have the opportunity to share your vision of a free Iran - a light unto other nations.

## Born Chinese and Raised Jewish

By Lambeth Hochwald, November, 2007, Jewish Living



*How three young women, adopted from China, are approaching their Jewish coming-of-age.*

Zoe Kress is a typical Jewish girl raised on a diet of matzo ball soup and knaidelech, along with that other standard "Jewish" fare, wonton soup and pot stickers. She's excited about heading to Israel this year with her eighth-grade day school class, and she had the time of her life at her bat mitzvah last spring, where she read from the family Torah. The party following the ceremony was especially meaningful for Zoe, because the theme-China-holds particular significance for her. Zoe is one of the many Chinese children who were adopted by Jewish families in the late '90s and are now embracing their Jewish faith as they prepare for and celebrate their bat mitzvahs. However Chinese and Jewish traditions are being woven together-whether it's a Mandarin reading during the service or a party menu that includes both brisket and Peking duck-these kids have a better sense of their dual identity than adopted children ever did before.

"Things have definitely changed," says adoption-medicine specialist Jane Aronson, M.D., who is director of international pediatric health services in New York City, CEO and founder of the Worldwide Orphans Foundation ([www.orphandoctor.com](http://www.orphandoctor.com)). and clinical assistant professor of pediatrics at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University. Aronson has evaluated over 6,000 children adopted from abroad and has traveled to orphanages in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, China, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Latin America.

"When the children came here in 1975withtheVietnamese airlift, their culture wasn't yet as well integrated into our culture," she says. "We learned a lot from them. Today's adopted children who are coming of age know where they've come from." Children adopted by Jewish parents also know that being from a far-off land and a different culture doesn't mean they can't embrace their Jewish identities wholeheartedly.

Aronson's family is a case in point: She's the mother of two children, one adopted from Ethiopia and the other from Vietnam. "My sons go to Hebrew school and they see themselves as Jewish," she says. "They don't say, 'I'm Jewish but...'"

"It's so important for these children to understand their roots as an Asian, Jewish, and American person,' Aronson observes. "It's incumbent on the family to recognize these differences and embrace them in their own way.'

Here are the stories of three girls-two who have already had their bat mitzvahs and one who will celebrate hers in the spring. Each of their families had its own approach to integrating its adopted daughter's cultural heritage into her life, and each story speaks volumes about the joys and challenges of doing so.

### Emma's All-American Bat Mitzvah

Emma's bat mitzvah was the culmination of a huge dream for her parents, Andrea and Robert Colton of Boca Raton, Fla. The mother and father of five wanted it to be the best day of Emma's life. Held on May 19, 2007, the ceremony turned out to be the perfect blend of all that Emma loves - horses and family - but no Chinese rituals.

"Emma didn't want her bat mitzvah to have anything to do with her Chinese background," says Andrea, a dermatologist. "She wanted it to be like everyone else's-and that was fine with us." Recently, Emma told Andrea that she thinks of herself more as a Jewish Boca girl than a Chinese girl. "That makes sense, since she did exactly what my other (biological) daughters did-they all went to Jewish preschool, then Hebrew school," Andrea says. "Growing up in Boca as a Chinese girl, I felt like any girl growing up in Boca,' Emma says. "It felt normal. In Hebrew school, no one ever asked about my background."

Emma loved learning her haftorah and Torah portion in preparation for her bat mitzvah, and says that one of the hardest parts was learning how to chant. "Even harder was getting up on the bimah in front of all of my family and friends and singing everything I learned," she says. "But in the end, it turned out to

be really fun and I didn't mess up once. I had the greatest time of my life."

Her dad, Robert, an internist, did discuss Emma's roots in his speech. "I talked about the profound ways Emma has affected everyone's life," he says now.

From the start, the Coltons did whatever they could to integrate Emma's Chinese culture into her life, from attending Chinese playgroups, language classes, and festivals, to taking her on a "heritage" trip to China three years ago. "Emma got to meet the foster mother who took care of her for six months. It was such a beautiful, positive experience," Andrea says. "Most important to us was that she saw that she came from so much love.' Two of Emma's older sisters lived and studied in China before the family adopted Emma, and they speak Mandarin fluently. Last June, two weeks after Emma's bat mitzvah, the whole family returned to China, this time to adopt 4 1/2 year old Connor, their newest addition. "Emma tried to learn as much Mandarin from her sisters as possible so she could communicate with her little brother," Andrea says. "This year, she's studying Mandarin instead of Spanish in school."

### **Hannah's Bumpy Path to Bat Mitzvah**

When Susan Sachs, an executive search consultant in Mount Kisco, N.Y., started thinking about her daughter Hannah's bat mitzvah, she had just had her own. "I had a bat mitzvah to complete something that never really had a chance to happen - namely, my formal 'statement' that I was a committed Jew," she says. "I also hoped that in doing so, Hannah would see this as a continuation of a family tradition and would take her place on the bimah when it was her time."

Susan's husband, Shelly, a vice president of business development for a business support company, has a strong affiliation with the culture of Judaism but not with the religious aspects.

"Hannah went to Hebrew school for about two years and hated it," Susan says. It started to look like a bat mitzvah might not be in the cards. "For the most part, she was bored, so she was resistant on those grounds. But a year or so into her religious education, it became clear to us that part of her resistance had to do with the fact that she was the only non-Caucasian in the school and she was having trouble understanding how she fit in.'

Hannah acknowledges that the toughest part about going to Hebrew school was that she was the only Asian person there. "I stood out," she says. "Also, kids asked questions about whether it's 'legal' to be Chinese and Jewish at the same time. That was hard.'

Ultimately, Susan and Shelly decided to take Hannah out of the synagogue school and hire a tutor who was also a dear friend. When the tutor fell seriously ill, Hannah became discouraged and decided that she was no longer interested in studying for her bat mitzvah. This was wrenching for Susan. "To me, given Hannah's early beginnings, I wanted her to feel that she had roots in a world community to which she would always belong," she says. Still, Susan respected Hannah's wishes.

"I felt like I was letting go of one of those dreams we all have for our children," Susan said. "But if we had any hope of drawing her to Judaism, I realized, we had to let it happen naturally:'

This past year, Hannah started attending her friends' bar and bat mitzvahs. And one day, she announced that she would like to have one after all. Susan and Shelly found her another tutor. "This one has engaged Hannah at her pace," Susan says. "They sit on the floor together in our family room, talking, laughing, studying, and Hannah is making remarkably quick progress learning her prayers, her haftorah and her Torah portions. She studies her Hebrew every night before she goes to bed, and a few weeks ago on a family vacation, she was singing the prayers in the car.'

On May 24, 2008, Hannah will have her bat mitzvah in the synagogue where Susan and Shelly got married, Hannah had her baby naming, Susan's parents renewed their vows for their 50th wedding anniversary, and where, five years ago, Susan's mother, then 78, celebrated her bat mitzvah.

"Hannah is going to experience her bat mitzvah in one of the most meaningful places that exists for my family," Susan says. "I will take the tallit that both my mom and I wore out of the needlepoint case that we both made, and put it around the shoulders of my beloved Jewish daughter who was born in China:'

There may just be some Chinese traditions woven into the day. "We are looking for ways to make Hannah's Chinese heritage an important part of this event," Susan says. "We always hoped that she would embrace Judaism and her Chinese heritage."

Susan says there was never one way to ensure that Hannah would feel "Jewish:' "We've had to live our lives the way that's right for us-to a large degree that is defined by Jewish values. Sure, we've had to change direction several times with her bat mitzvah and that has required a great deal of creativity and

flexibility.'

It has also given the family an understanding that there's more than one path. "The traditional route to Judaism doesn't always work," Susan says. "But that's okay."

### The Yin-Yang Story Of Zoe

For Marlyn Kress, a single mom from Mount Laurel, N.J., planning her daughter Zoe's bat mitzvah was the culmination of every hope she had for the baby she adopted at 8 weeks. "I knew that whatever child I had, biological or adopted, was going to be raised as a Jew," says Marlyn, a sales executive who adopted Zoe from China after years of trying to have a baby. "I wanted her to be proud of where she came from and who she is, but I also wanted her to make a life as a Jew-not just to practice as a child, but as she grew up and had a family of her own."

Zoe, who was converted in an Orthodox ceremony at a mikvah when she was a year old, attended a Jewish nursery school and then a Solomon Schechter day school. Her bat mitzvah on April 21, 2007, paid tribute to the yin-yang story of her life.

The service was entirely traditional in custom and ritual, right down to Zoe's decision to twin her bat mitzvah with a girl who perished in the Holocaust. (Tibor Rubin, the brother of the girl Zoe honored, is a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. He's become like a grandfather to Zoe, and he attended her bat mitzvah.)

"Both Zoe and I learned so much about tikkun alam. And we learned that you may not know why you do things, but that what you receive back is a thousand fold," Marlyn says. Add to that a discovery that a family Torah, appropriated years earlier, was found in the Torah vault at Marlyn's synagogue, and that Zoe read her parsha from it, and you have an event steeped in ancient ritual, spirituality, and personal revelation.

"Being Jewish is a big part of my life and I'm proud of it," Zoe says. '~ a young kid, I always looked forward to my bat mitzvah. When you become a bat mitzvah, you become a woman in the Jewish world. You take on the responsibilities of an adult and people treat you as one. It is hard to imagine my life without its Jewishness. It's hard to explain how I feel. All I can really say about it is that being Jewish is a part of my heart.'

While the ceremony was all Jewish, the party was a tribute to Zoe's Chinese background. The handmade invitation was written in Hebrew and English and adorned with Zoe's Chinese chop, a stamp with her name in Chinese. Zoe wore a pink floral dress made of Chinese silk and the tables were named for Chinese cities. Fortune-cookie-shaped place-card holders were made of Chinese fabric, and the tables were adorned with Chinese lanterns and vases of orchids.

Zoe says she loved sharing pieces of her Chinese background with her family and friends. "My favorite part about my bat mitzvah was definitely my party," Zoe says. '~ much as I enjoyed the service, the party was so much fun:'

"I wanted her to know who she is and how she got here," her mother says. "I wanted her to be proud of both sides of herself. She's an American-raised Chinese-Jewish girl.'

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### Gay El Nuevo Herald Columnist Stirring up Latino Mainstream

By JW Arnold, November 11, 2007, Express Gay News



Gay Miami journalist Daniel Shoer Roth, author of a newly published collection of columns, will be one of the influential authors featured at the Miami Book Fair International this weekend at Miami Dade College. Roth has collected a series of his most thought-provoking columns from Miami's el Nuevo Herald in a bilingual volume titled "Stories of Truth and Hope," which was published in collaboration with the Dade Human Services Coalition. In the spirit of Roth's column "En Foco," which takes a raw look at the social and economic issues facing his community, the book hopes to inspire a sense of hope and fuel civic activism.

The author is the first to admit his own unique background colors his perspective. "I'm a gay Latino Jew," he says, "Throughout the book, you see a special sensitivity to minorities. I grew up Jewish in a very Catholic society and gay in a very machista country. This book is definitely the result of feeling discriminated against, but it takes a positive route and, hopefully, will foster tolerance for any issue, including gay issues."

A native of Venezuela, Roth came to the U.S. in 1997 to study journalism and Latin American and Caribbean studies at New York University's graduate school. An internship with el Nuevo Herald landed him a full-time position as a reporter in 1999. Eight years later, he is a full-time columnist exploring the contentious issues in Miami's conservative Hispanic culture.

One of the difficult topics Roth tackled early was the struggle of young gay children. "Gay children were being kicked out of their homes, and the public welfare system didn't have a structure for these children," Roth says. "They were facing substance abuse, prostitution and suicide."

Roth also used a column as a vehicle to publicly come out to his readers in a first-person piece titled "The Closet Where Pain is Stored." He was surprised to find his readers extremely supportive. But Roth found his readers less enthusiastic about a column that advocated the rights of homosexuals to marry, published just two weeks after Spain legalized gay marriage.

The only gay-themed column in the book is titled "A Man's Pain in a World of Children," which discusses the pain Roth felt as a young child who realized he was "different" in a society that demanded strict conformity. "In a Latino newspaper, these are very tough subjects," Roth says. His work has gained national attention, earning him a 2005 award from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and recognition by the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association.

One of his columns told the love story of two older men, one of whom was dying of cancer. "It wasn't really about the fact these men were gay," Roth explains. "One of them was dying, and it was about the relationship. I received over 100 e-mails from readers, and some of them were even giving advice to them."

Roth acknowledges that his column and now the book make him a spokesperson for the community. "There are a lot of outreach opportunities with this book," he says. "It is platform to reach out to temples, churches and activist communities. I can do this because I'm comfortable with my sexuality. When you're really happy with yourself, you have nothing to hide. I'm happy my readers know it and they respect it. They might not agree with all of my views, but they support the way I voice them."

While Roth insists he tries to "live for the moment," the success of his book has given him a larger agenda. "The gay issue in the Latin community is definitely important to me," he says. "Whatever my next project, it will definitely have the gay component because that's part of my identity. It permeates everything, just like my Hispanic culture. I write for a mainstream culture, but there is always a deeper context."

## COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

### Kosher Hotel Takes Root in Marrakech

By Romina Ruiz-Goiriena, December 2, 2007, Haaretz.com



When Moroccan-born Israeli chef Mordechai Perez decided to visit Marrakech in search of his roots, he had no idea he would also be making a career move. In short order, he found himself chief chef of Marrakech's first-ever kosher hotel and restaurant, Primavera, set to open next Monday. "After my mother died, I left Israel," relates the 44-year-old Perez. "A month ago, I came to Marrakech searching for my roots," he told Haaretz in October. "I came and I stumbled onto this kosher hotel project. When I got the job as head chef, I decided to stay."

He came to Marrakech in part to learn about his father's legacy. "My father was the head of a village 75 kilometers from here. He would come here every day because he was dedicated to the promulgation of Marrakech Jewish life." Seated in the synagogue seat where he said his late father prayed 60 years ago, Perez shares stories about the Jews who inhabited the Mellah, the city's Jewish quarter, in the beginning of the 20th century. He is especially moved to be serving the same community that his father, Yaacov, served as rabbi.

To the casual observer, the quarter, which is a short distance from the hotel, reflects the Muslim character of Morocco. Its narrow alleys were flooded with children playing and elders fasting for Islam's holy month of Ramadan. But on closer inspection, the true nature of the Mellah - in essence, the Moroccan version of the ghettos of European cities - becomes clear. Many of the homes are still decorated with mezuzot and a wealth of other sacred Jewish symbols. "The sign of a Jewish home,"

Perez sighs with nostalgia, referring to a mezuzah in a Muslim-owned house.

Today, Marrakech is home to 300 of Morocco's several thousand Jews. Marrakech's Mellah, once a vibrant shelter for those expelled from Spain in 1492, recalls an era when both Jews and Muslims were involved in salt and spice commerce, and both lived and prayed within the old city's thick paprika-red walls.

A veteran of hotel kitchens in Israel and Belgium, Perez will be responsible for implementing all of the kashrut dietary regulations in the new facility. "I am one of the only ones in Marrakech trained to approve kashrut and be a proper shomer," or kashrut supervisor, he says.

### **Jews in Marrakech**

For co-owner Prosper Kadoch, 43, the new hotel and restaurant, located 15 minutes from the Mellah, is about creating a place for the Moroccan Jewish community as well as "providing a home in Marrakech for Jews worldwide." In recent years, adds his partner Simon Acoca, 45, "Marrakech has undergone an incredible transition, and it is definitely a tourist hot spot. We are just trying to open the market for Jews as well."

As one of the most important cities in Africa, there is without doubt a need for real kosher cuisine there, Kadoch says. Mindful of observant guests, the hotel and restaurant will maintain strict kashrut standards. The hotel will also have an in-house synagogue, and will try to meet the needs of those keeping Shabbat.

Although their primary target is Jewish community, the hotel will be open to visitors of all kinds. "What is important is that they understand that they will be complying with a kosher environment," Acoca says. In addition, the hotel plans to organize sightseeing tours to historical Jewish landmarks and areas in Marrakech. The owners aim to "contribute to a Jewish experience in the middle of Marrakech while still indulging in everything the Maghreb has to offer."

### **The question of terror**

For some potential visitors to Morocco, the specter of terrorism has been a reason to delay a trip. Limor Azulay, 36, of Jerusalem, concedes that she has been held back from touring Morocco by fear. "My mother is Moroccan, and although I've always been interested, I've always been too afraid to go," she says.

The fear was underscored by multiple suicide bombings in Casablanca in 2003, whose targets included a Jewish-owned restaurant. The following year, Moroccans were involved in the Madrid train bombings. Mindful of the damage to tourism, the government has since made security - and providing tourists with a sense of safety - a high priority. "When it comes to tourism, there is a certain air of tranquillity in Morocco, and no one is willing to sacrifice that," Acoca says.

Perez agrees. "Word on the street is that there are little spurts of terrorism, but we know that the king takes care of them silently," he says. "I have only been here for a month, I go outside of the Mellah and everyone tells me 'shalom, shalom,'" Perez says. "I speak back to them in my mother tongue, Moroccan Arabic, and they know that I am a Moroccan Jew. I know that there is nothing to be worried about."

Primavera, 78 Route de Casablanca, Marrakech, Morocco. For more information: [www.primavera-marrakech.com](http://www.primavera-marrakech.com).

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## **Argentina's Jewish "Desaparecidos"**

**By Marcela Valente, November 27, 2007, Inter Press Service News Agency**



The "Report on the situation of the Jewish detainees-disappeared during the genocide perpetrated in Argentina" was for the first time published in print in Argentina to make it widely available to the public, by the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations' (DAIA) Social Studies Centre (CES), with the backing of the government Human Rights Secretariat.

"The book forms part of DAIA's commitment to the families of the victims," CES director Marisa Braylan told IPS. She was alluding to complaints by families of victims, who have accused DAIA of keeping a low profile during the de facto regime despite the disappearance of members of the community.

"The families were asking for help, and the current leadership assumed the responsibility of reviewing

past actions and acknowledging that several errors had been made," said Aldo Donzis, president of DAIA.

The report does not specifically refer to these "errors," but reflects the commitment "to recognise omissions and mistakes," said Braylán.

Human Rights Secretary Eduardo Luis Duhalde remarked at the presentation of the book Wednesday that "confronting the dictatorship at that time required a heroic stance, and that is not something that can be asked of all citizens alike."

Two aspects stand out in the report. One is that Jewish people formed a disproportionately large part of the dictatorship's victims of forced disappearance. The other is that although "they did not suffer specifically anti-Semitic persecution, Jewish victims suffered especially brutal treatment, and Nazi symbols were used" by the torturers, said Duhalde.

The introduction to the book explains that DAIA emerged in 1935 to confront the threat of the Nazi regime in Germany and the activities of its agents and supporters in Argentina.

It then goes on to describe the challenges and anti-Semitic harassment and attacks suffered by members of the Jewish community in Argentina prior to the March 1976 coup d'etat that ushered in the dictatorship.

The two most serious attacks suffered by the Jewish community in Argentina actually occurred after the return to democracy: a 1992 bomb blast that killed 29 people in and around the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, and the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community centre in the capital, in which 86 people were killed. But the report does not dwell on either incident.

DAIA notes that the military regime's persecution of leftists, trade unionists and others deemed "subversive" included abductions, torture, forced disappearance and the theft of the babies and young children of political prisoners, while it remarks that the Jewish victims received treatment that was even more cruel and brutal than other prisoners.

The report is based on the testimonies of a number of people, some of which were collected by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), created in 1984 by then president Raúl Alfonsín. Other statements were taken from court records, in Argentina and abroad, or from the personal accounts of survivors gathered by local or international human rights groups.

Many survivors said there were Nazi symbols, like the swastika or pictures of Adolf Hitler, on the walls in the clandestine detention centres where they were held, and that they were subjected to anti-Semitic insults during the torture sessions. In addition, Hitler's speeches were often played over loudspeakers, during torture sessions or at night.

The book includes a provisional list of Jewish victims of forced disappearance, which was first presented in court in Spain in the late 1990s. It also provides a list of names drawn up by the Barcelona-based Commission of Solidarity with the Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Argentina.

The book says that in the 1970s there were between 230,000 and 290,000 Jewish people in Argentina, representing between 0.8 and 1.2 percent of the population at the time, while they made up an estimated five to 12 percent of the "disappeared".

CONADEP's 1984 report "Nunca Mas" (Never Again) documented 8,956 cases of forced disappearance, including 1,117 members of the Jewish community — a proportion of 12.4 percent. And if the outright killings documented by CONADEP are taken into account as well, the proportion climbs to more than 15 percent.

The book published by DAIA lists 1,300 Jewish victims of forced disappearance, but the Association said it would leave the registry open because it presumes there were more. (Human rights groups put the total number of "disappeared" at around 30,000.)

DAIA points out that, just as in the Nazi concentration camps, political prisoners in Argentina were assigned numbers, stripped of their names and humiliated, and that after they were killed, their bodies were hidden. Jewish political prisoners were also subjected to "added suffering," it says.

In his testimony to CONADEP, survivor Daniel Fernández said Jews were subjected to an especially cruel and sadistic form of torture: "the 'rectoscope', which consisted of inserting a tube into the victim's

anus, or into a woman's vagina, then letting a rat into the tube. The rodent would try to get out by gnawing at the victim's internal organs."

A man who testified anonymously before CONADEP said the torturers laughed at Jewish prisoners and painted swastikas on their bodies. Cristina Navarro, another survivor, said one guard took special pleasure in beating detainees with Jewish last names.

DAIA also quotes journalist and writer Jacobo Timerman, who died in 1999. In his book "Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number", the former newspaper publisher said Jewish detainees were forced to get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

"It is clear, then, that this was not a particular 'excess' committed by some repressors, but rather an institutionalised conception and practice within the security forces in power during those years," says the report.

Other witnesses said torturers questioned detainees in detail about Jewish organisations and drew up maps of synagogues and sports clubs, as well as lists of names. Some of them even knew words in Hebrew or Yiddish, and were "truly obsessed" with Zionism and Israel, said Timerman.

Writer Nora Strejilevich said one of her interrogators "assured me that the 'problem of subversion' was the one with which they were most concerned, but that the 'Jewish problem' followed it in order of importance and that they were filing information."

Braylán said the documents and testimonies that served as the basis for the DAIA report will form part of the archives in the "Museum of Memory" that is being created in the Navy School of Mechanics, which was the dictatorship's most notorious torture centre and has been handed over to human rights groups.

December 1983 — a confrontation remembered among old-timers as the New Year's Eve massacre. The massacre was a real bean-spiller, and it was followed by the testimony of Eddie's first cousin (and partner and C.F.O.) Sam E. Antar on how the illegal schemes had been carried out. This gave the United States Attorney prosecuting the case, Michael Chertoff (now the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security), more than enough to work with. Eddie went away for six years.

Unlike the late Toussie, however, Eddie Antar was not expelled.

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### Their Tiny Slice of India is Jewish

By Prithi Yelaja, September 13, 2007, TheStar.com



Though his last name might be a hint, Opher Moses still gets puzzled looks when he asks for time off during the Jewish high holidays. Because of his skin colour and accent most people assume he is Hindu or Muslim. "I never get Jewish. Even in Israel they think I'm Palestinian," he says.

A 1999 immigrant from India, Moses is part of a tight-knit community of about 400 Indian Jews in the GTA — a fascinating minority that is misunderstood, at least initially, as often by their Jewish cousins as by the wider world, yet devoted to preserving their faith and heritage. They will gather to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, today.

Their Hebrew service includes elements familiar to all Jews such as the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn), but instead of honey cakes, halva (an Indian sweet made of semolina) will be served as part of the exuberant festivities. "We wear Indian dress, distribute sweets and sing Indian melodies. Everything is the same way we had it back in India. Sometimes we even incorporate a Bollywood tune to make it more proactive with the audience," says Moses, 24, a mortgage consultant.

Adds Victor Abraham, 72, a lay cantor who officiates during the service: "It's our way of melding our Indian culture with our Jewish faith. Jewish people have always taken on the shades and culture from the part of the world they live in."

Though the broader Jewish community has come to embrace Indian Jews warmly, scepticism is a common reaction from others, says Moses. "In India, being Jewish was no big deal because we have such a long history there. But when I came here, I found a big gap in understanding. People would look at me strange when I told them I was an Indian Jew. I had to go into great detail to explain who I was."

Lacking their own synagogue in Toronto, Indian Jews come together as a group only for the High Holidays, gathering at the Jewish Women's Council Hall on Bathurst St. After Rosh Hashanah services this morning, Shirley Kehimkar has invited family and friends home to enjoy an Indian feast she planned to get up at 3 a.m. to start preparing, including rice pilaf, chicken curry and grouper fish. "A Jew is a Jew. We're the same everywhere, but I do like spicing up my food," Kehimkar, 65, a retired civil servant who came to Canada in 1969, says with a chuckle. "We're such a small community we're like one big family."

She organized "A Night in Bombay" complete with bhangra dancing earlier this year to celebrate the community's deep roots in India, where they are known as the Bene Israel Diaspora.

The Indian Jewish community began with just seven couples, oil pressers by trade from Yemen who survived a shipwreck off the coast of India in the 2nd century B.C. – or so legend has it. At their height, there were about 20,000 Jews in India, though only 4,000 remain today, mostly in the cities of Mumbai and Pune. Many Jews rose to prominence there, including Albert Sassoon, after whom the Mumbai dock is named.

Despite a relatively idyllic existence in India, many did the same as Jews all over the world and emigrated to Israel after the nation's birth in 1948. "In India there was no such thing as anti-Semitism. I only heard that word after I left," says Abraham, a retired Hamilton city planner who came here in 1968 for a better economic opportunity.

With larger numbers in India, it was easier for Jews to preserve their faith and culture. In Canada, doing so is more challenging because "we are a minority within a minority," Moses says. Parents in the small community typically send their children to Jewish schools or Hebrew night classes. They attend established synagogues. Bar and bat mitzvahs are celebrated. Small groups of families take turns hosting the Sabbath dinner at home on Fridays. Marrying within the faith is strongly encouraged.

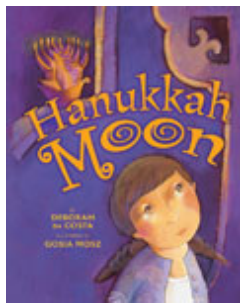
Their strong identification with Indian culture means they also observe festivals such as Diwali and Holi. "It's an interesting balance," says Moses.

"I also have allegiance to three countries because they've shaped who I am. If someone talks negatively about Israel I'm right in there defending the country. Same with India and now also Canada."

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Children's Book Review: *Hanukkah Moon*

By Deborah Da Costa, Kar-Ben Publishing, \$17.95 hardcover, \$7.95 paperback.  
Order your copy [here](#).



When Isobel is invited to Aunt Luisa's for Hanukkah, she's not sure what to expect. Aunt Luisa has recently arrived from Mexico. "At Aunt Luisa's you'll get to celebrate the Hanukkah Moon," Isobel's father promises. Isobel's days at Aunt Luisa's are filled with fun and surprises – a new camera, a dreidel piñata filled with sweets, and a mysterious late night visit to welcome the luna nueva, the new moon that appears on Hanukkah.

An unusual Hanukkah story with a multi-cultural focus, this title celebrates a little-known custom of the Latin-Jewish community.

"...this book will give young readers another perspective on ways that Jews from other countries and traditions celebrate familiar holidays....A rare and worthy choice that will enhance most collections." – School Library Journal

"Mosz's whimsical Chagall-style illustrations...in combinations of purple and gold hues add a Latino flavor to this gentle and warmhearted story offering a new perspective on an age-old Jewish holiday." – Kirkus Reviews

"[The] pick of the season, *Hanukkah Moon* shines with warmth and will draw in anyone who loves children or has ever been one." –World Jewish Digest

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**Book Review of *Shalom India Housing Society*: On Gibeon, or in Ajalon**

**By Mltali Saran, November 18, 2007, Business-Standard.com**



***Shalom India Housing Society*  
By Esther David, Kali/Women Unlimited, \$17.95  
Order your copy [here](#)**

Esther David portrays a Jewish community in Gujarat after the 2002 riots, caught between integration and isolation and wondering where home is.

Towards the end of *Shalom India Housing Society*, Judith, one of the building's flat owners who has emigrated to Israel, writes to the Society's president to ask him to stop looking for a buyer for her flat, since she and her husband are returning to live in Ahmedabad.

"We live very near the Valley of Ajalon and Mount Gibeon. On some evenings we see the sun and the moon suspended on the horizons of the east and the west. Often I catch myself thinking, are we on Mount Gibeon or in the Valley of Ajalon?... [India and Israel] are like the sun and moon for us... As a Jew, sometimes I wonder, are we coming or going? Where are we going? Where is home? Is our home within us or somewhere else?"

In these 19 chapters, each focusing on one Bene Israel (Children of Israel) character, Esther David assembles a restless portrait of a tiny, little-known, unique community of Jews from western India. The self-named Bene Israels are apocryphally descended from 14 survivors of a Jewish shipwreck off the Konkan coast over 2,000 years ago. They lived in isolation from other Jewish communities until the 18th century, developing their own blend of Maharashtrian and Jewish traditions, and in the 1950s emigrated in large numbers to Israel. The few thousand Bene Israels left in western India today continue to occupy a sometimes uneasy space between generations of integration with the rest of India, and a unique Jewish heritage.

David's novel focuses on a handful of Bene Israels who live in Ahmedabad. In the fear-riven aftermath of the 2002 riots, they've been driven from their houses, once dotted around the Magan Abraham Synagogue in Bukhara Moholla in peaceful integration with other communities, into a Jewish ghetto centred on the *Shalom India Housing Society*, which also reserves one building for other minorities such as Parsis and Christians.

The novel hangs what is essentially a collection of personal histories, most of them women's, on three pegs: the characters live in the building at one time or another; their homes are visited on the night of Passover by the Prophet Elijah, or Eliyahu Hannabi, who decides whether or not to grant their wishes; and they are involved in the fancy dress competition at the synagogue which caps the Simhat Torah festival.

Through the interconnections between the flat owners, and through their relationship to their heritage, we get an insight into the trials of, say, a young girl like Yael, whose widowed mother won't let her wear a sexy garba dress; or the patriarch Samuel, whose parents came from Israel to India to find him a bride; or Leon who, to the horror of his parents, likes to cross-dress; or Hadasah, the friendly but distant novelist who never talks about her traumatic past. There are as many stories of contentment as there are of pain, as much talk of leaving for Israel as of returning to India, as much anguish about finding a Bene Israel spouse as about intermarrying with Hindus and Muslims.

Possibly the most unsuccessful character in the novel is the prophet Eliyahu Hannabi himself, imagined as a fun-loving but prickly fellow whose decisions about people's fates seem disproportionately influenced by the quality of the wine poured into the goblet reserved for him at the Seder table. The prelude to the novel names him as the protagonist, but happily he quickly fades into the poster of the Prophet invariably hung up in the flats of the other characters.

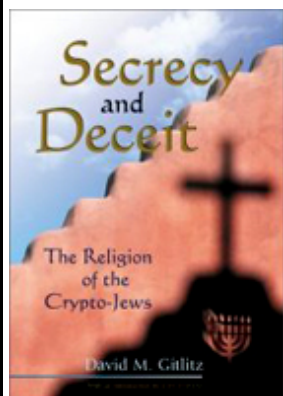
David is an utterly uninspired writer, so it's a bit of a coup that she is able to not just keep one's interest but also nurture it. It has everything to do with an interesting subject, and nothing at all to do with novel-writing; but somehow it all comes together. If you've never heard the words "Bene Israel" or "malida", don't know the story of the Prophet's footprints at Khandala, or think that Indian Jews only eat kosher

meat, read *Shalom India Housing Society*. It's not a great work of art, but it is a nice piece of social anthropology, with a good deal of heart thrown in.

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**Book Review: *Secrecy and Deceit* - A History of the Crypto-Jews**

**By Ruchira Paul, November 26, 2007, the Accidental Blogger**



***Secrecy and Deceit***

**By David Gitlitz, University of New Mexico Press, \$32.95**

**Order your copy [here](#)**

*Secrecy and Deceit* is a detailed chronicle of Crypto Judaism in Spain, Portugal and their colonies in Latin America . David Gitlitz's voluminous book - 600+ footnoted pages, is a meticulous account (much of it gleaned from Inquisition records)that traces the history of Iberian Jews between 1238 to 1992.

A funny story I remember my childhood family physician telling us, went as follows:

"In a tribal area of India (where most Christian missionaries preached the gospel and still do), an entire village had converted to Christianity after persistent prodding and promises of cash and clothing. The villagers showed up every Sunday at the church in another nearby village and ostensibly did what they were expected to do as newly minted Christians. Some months later, the missionary came to check on the new converts in their own village and found to his horror that the villagers in their homes were going about their old ways, blithely performing Hindu rituals of offering food, flowers and lighting lamps at the shrine of the domestic deity. He asked with some indignation, "Why are you still indulging in heathenish ways? Didn't you all become Christians?" The villagers replied, with some puzzlement, "So what if we became Christians? Does that mean we've lost our faith?"

Amin Maalouf would have extracted a whole chapter out of this exchange! The attitude of the Crypto Jews of Spain and Portugal was a bit like the villagers above except that their defiance was fraught with the risk of persecution and death. The pressure on the Jewish citizens to convert to Christianity, while common in most of Europe, was particularly acute in devout Catholic kingdoms like Spain and Portugal. A vital part of the urban commercial sector and advisers to kings and noblemen, Iberian Jews were held in high regard for their capabilities and education. But their prosperity and Jewish faith made them objects of suspicion, envy and contempt at the same time. Unable to withstand the pressures of being the perennial "other" of society, many Jews did in fact "voluntarily" convert for reasons that ranged from expediency, fear, the wish to belong and even out of a genuine conviction that Christ indeed was the Messiah of the Jews and hence Christianity was the logical culmination of what Judaism had taught and promised them. Voluntary conversion however soon gave way to coercion and intimidation that included curtailed civil rights and freedoms, extortion of cash and property, general humiliation in public places, ghettoizing, relentless proselytizing, imprisonment and even death. The only place where Spanish Jews were relatively free of religious persecution was in the mostly southern Andalusian regions under Islamic rule.

Soon after Ferdinand and Isabella re-conquered all of Spain, the notorious Spanish Inquisition was established. Under the rules of the Inquisition, all non-Christians were banished from Spain. Many chose to leave. Those who remained or were unable to leave had no choice but to convert to Christianity. The Inquisition had jurisdiction over all Christians but its focus was mostly directed toward ensuring the orthodoxy of the new converts (Jews and Muslims) who were known as Conversos or by the derogatory term Marranos. The zealots of the Inquisition installed spies to keep an eye on the new converts' way of life in the privacy of their own homes - whether they reverted to their heretic ways when no one was watching. The spies were among anyone the converts came in contact with - neighbors, merchants, co-workers, domestic servants and even their own Converso relatives. Since many had

converted under duress and not out of conviction, there indeed were lapses. They continued to practice the old faith in secret, sometimes subverting the tenets of the new religion to fit their old beliefs, thus making them crypto practitioners of their ancestral faith while leading a Christian life in public. (The history of Portuguese Crypto Jews is similar but followed a slightly different time line)

For the Jewish Conversos, some of the tell tale signs of Crypto Judaism that the spies looked for were:

- \* Cleaning, bathing, wearing nice clothes on Saturdays
- \* Lighting a candle on Friday nights in a secret place (basement, inside a clay pot or closet) not visible from outside
- \* Fasting on Jewish high holidays, avoiding leavened bread at Passover
- \* Sweeping toward the center of a room rather than toward the door
- \* Separating utensils for milk and meat
- \* Circumcision of male children in secret
- \* Avoiding pork and not eating fish on Fridays
- \* Praying while facing a wall

The guilt and sadness of having to hide what they really believed took their toll on some new converts. The private rejection of the public lie sometimes expressed itself in the form of regret, apology, frustration and anger. For example, before entering the church many Crypto Jews would mutter a prayer which essentially said, "Lord, forgive me for what I am about to do inside. I do not worship sticks or stones nor do I see divinity in bread or wine. I believe only in the laws of Moses." At other times, the reluctant Converso would just try to avoid Christian worship by faking illness on Sundays and other holy days. But equally often the practice took the form of outright denunciation of and derision for the central tenets of the new faith in private surroundings, among other Crypto Judaizers. The derision occasionally went beyond mere words and translated into actual desecration or mockery of Christian holy symbols - among them, the cross and Catholic statuary and icons. All this was quite naturally to be expected from a reluctant group of converts on whom Christianity had been forced under the threat of death, expulsion and extreme privation. What I found surprising however, was the fact that the Virgin Mary was the target of more vicious abuse than Jesus himself. The mockery of Mary, quite naturally always centered around the Christian belief in her virginity and the divine nature of her conception. One form of showing disrespect towards Mary consisted of throwing figs or making the sign of the fig at her statue or painting.

*Secrecy and Deceit* is a register of the persecution of Crypto Jews under the draconian reach of the Inquisition. In a gargantuan enterprise, names, dates, nature of infractions and punishments are meticulously researched and recorded by the author. Within those details lie the history of the Iberian Jews and Christians and their uneasy co-existence. In his introduction to Gitlitz's book, Ilan Stavans sums up the essence of Crypto-Judaism as follows:

David Gitlitz's encyclopedic volume is a tour through the palace thus described by Diderot in Jacques Le Fataliste et son Maitre: a magisterial citadel—from the French locution citadelle: "a city within a city"—made of tortuous alleyways, where no passerby ever finds his way across.

The palace, of course, is a metaphor for the identity of crypto-Jews. Gitlitz offers a detailed catalogue of their manners: their hygiene, their birth customs, their liturgical rituals, their sexual interaction, their dietary laws and superstitions. These manners have been passed along from one generation to the next, with a sole purpose in mind: the concealment of truth. Their dishonesty isn't reprehensible; instead, it is a strategy of survival. For these crypto-Jews, the reader is made to understand, are consummate actors; on the surface they appear to be average citizens, but really they are part of a clandestine club that enables them to exist in a parallel universe. The degree of furtiveness varies from generation to generation. It isn't improbable, for instance, that for some of its members the club might be so secret an entity they might not be aware of their membership in it. In any case, for them Hamlet's question, "To be or not to be?," is turned, unapologetically, into an affirmation: "To be and not to be."

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