

Be'chol Lashon Update 7/11/05

Featured Articles:

International Israelite Board of Rabbis

Argentinean Jewish Heritage

Donations from Argentine Jews to Local Jewish Charities on the Rise

Faith in the Wilderness

Dry And Earthy

South African Cookbook to Tell Story of Country's Jews

In Bolivia, Unrest Expected to Increase Jewish Emigration

Nicaragua, Long a Beef Exporter, Examines Lucrative Kosher Market

Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes, Son of Righteous Gentile Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Passes Away in Portugal

New Jewish Agency Chief Bielski will Reach Out to Non-Orthodox in Diaspora

Jewish Groups Launch Campaign for Rights of Refugees from Arab World

Conservatives, Rainbow Coalition

Legal Riff Ends; Web Site Hails Jewish Rockers

North American Muslim Learns About Tolerance in Israel

[Link to PDF](#)

[Back to Newsletter Archives Page](#)

International Israelite Board of Rabbis

Israelite Academy

Ordination and Graduation

June 25, 2005/18 Sivan, 5765

By Rabbi Capers C. Funnye

Saturday afternoon June 25, 2005 was a historic day for Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation. Two of our members Tyrone Burks (Avraham Ben Israel) and Joshua V. Salter (Yahoshua Ben Yosef), were ordained as rabbis by the International Israelite Board of Rabbis, after four years of study in the Israelite Academy. The Sabbath afternoon was warm, and the Knesset was filled with excitement as Rabbi Sholomo Ben Levy, president of the Israelite Board of Rabbis, Rabbi Barauch Yehudah, acting dean, Rabbi Hailu Paris, chairman of the education committee, Rabbi Benyamin Ben Levy, bursar, Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Yehudah, NY president, Rabbi Yeshurun Ben Israel, spiritual leader of Beth Shalom, Brooklyn, Rabbi Capers C. Funnye, spiritual leader of Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken E.H.C., and vice president of the Israelite Board of Rabbis and representatives from Israelite communities around the country participated in this wonderful event.

The graduation ceremony took place on Saturday night. Avraham and Joshua were awarded their degrees from the academy before an audience of about 150 people. Rabbi Hailu Paris gave the commencement address. After the graduation ceremony, a dinner was held in honor of the two graduates. The evening was filled with fun and words of encouragement from family members and friends for the graduates. It was a proud moment for Rabbi Capers C. Funnye, who served as Rosh Yeshiva for the Israelite Academy, Chicago.

Avraham (Tyrone Burks) was born in Chicago, Illinois. Avraham attended DeVry Institute and received his degree in Electronics in 1989. After completing his education, Avraham went to work for Motorola Corporation as a Communications Technician. Avraham began his studies in Judaism in 1997 and found his spiritual home at Beth Shalom in 1999. Avraham entered the Israelite Academy in the fall of 2001 and proved to be a worthy student and most diligent in his studies. He excelled in Hebrew language and Talmudic studies. Avraham is married to Louveria (Leah) and they have two beautiful daughters, Monique and Dominique.

Joshua Salter, was born into an Israelite family, he is the second of ten children born to Daniel and Elishaba (Faustina) Yosef. Joshua is married to Renee Jackson-Salter and they have two lovely daughters Pashence and Ariel. Josh is currently employed by Morgan Stanley Brokerage firm. Joshua enrolled in the Israelite Academy in 2001. Joshua has decided that his work as a rabbi can be in any area of the country or the world where his services might be needed. In Josh's own words "I hope to be a faithful servant to Hashem

and the House of Israel and awaken those asleep in the dust; to bring T'kun Olam into world and to help chart new courses for the Israelite community.

Avraham and Joshua are the first rabbis from the Chicago Israelite community ordained in their native city.

Featured Articles List

Argentinean Jewish Heritage

JTA Email Edition

June 27, 2005

Some 280,000 to 300,000 people of Jewish heritage live in Argentina, according to a survey. The survey was done in 2004 by an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee study group, in association with a local sociological studies organization. The definition was wide, as the group considered all those born to a Jewish mother or father, or those with a Jewish grandparent.

Donations from Argentine Jews to Local Jewish Charities on the Rise

By Florencia Arbiser

JTA Email Edition

June 12, 2005

After years of depending on the kindness of others, donations from Argentine Jews to their own Jewish charities are increasing. Despite the fact that Argentina's Jewish community lacks a comprehensive fund-raising strategy and tax deductions for charitable giving never surpass 5 percent, more and more Jews are contributing to local projects and institutions. The Buenos Aires-based Tzedakah Foundation, created in 1991 with the help of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to assist impoverished Argentine Jews, saw a 25 percent increase in donations last year. The largest expansion was in the group of donors who give less than \$400 annually, which rose from 62 people in 2000 to 3,273 in 2004.

The total number of Argentine Jewish donors to Tzedakah last year was 3,595. Of the more than \$1.4 million collected, which doesn't include subsidies from JDC and the Claims Conference 80 percent came from local donors and 8.4 percent from international donors. The rest were contributions of medicine. "Donations are growing among Argentine Jews," Jorge Schulman, the foundation's executive director, told JTA. Tzedakah was conceived of as a central collection agency, inspired by the American Jewish federation system. Unlike the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina, the community's 111-year old central body, which is funded largely by burial contributions to the community's four cemeteries, Tzedakah relies only on solicitations to fill its coffers.

Sponsoring an event is the best way to raise funds, Schulman said. This year, Tzedakah organized a summer golf tournament on the Uruguayan coast, two Israeli orchestra concerts and a gala dinner for donors. One of its strongest draws is a young donors dinner that targets recent college graduates. Tzedakah also plans fund-raising campaigns that tie in with Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Considering the obstacles to attracting substantial charitable donations in Argentina, Schulman cites the small number of Jewish families with large fortunes and stresses that there simply is no established culture of giving in the community.

But Schulman says the country's recent financial crisis motivated Argentine Jews across the religious spectrum to help each other. A JDC survey conducted in 2004 and the first three months of 2005 shows that 53 percent of Jews in the Greater Buenos Aires area made a charitable donation to the Jewish community in the past year, including 38 percent who donated money. Others gave food, clothing, mattresses and other materials or performed volunteer work. According to the poll, donor numbers from among the lower, middle and upper classes were almost equal. Some 40,000 of Argentina's 250,000 or so Jews currently live below the poverty level, which is defined as a monthly income of less than \$300 for a family of four.

Seventy percent of Jewish parents who want to enroll their families in Jewish schools or community centers can't afford to do so without outside assistance, a sign that there are few potential large donors in the community. "Contributions from local donors are certainly increasing. But in comparison with the need, local funds do not allow us to complete our mission," Chabad-Lubavitch's Argentine director, Tzvi Grunblatt, told JTA. According to Grunblatt, Chabad projects received \$600,000 from local Jews in 2004, but the organization's annual budget was \$4 million. "We're educating people, and slowly the culture of charitable giving is widening," he said. "We're going through a mentality change." The drive to support the community with more locally donated funds can be seen in a new, large-scale construction project that got under way last year: A total of \$3.4 million was raised from 50 large donors to create a new Jewish home for the elderly.

After learning that Jews make up 60 percent of the inhabitants of private, non-Jewish homes for the elderly in Buenos Aires, the

Argentine Jewish businessman Jorge Fainzaig started devoting four hours daily to raising money for another Jewish facility. Two of Buenos Aires' three existing Jewish elderly homes are located on the city's outskirts. One is filled to capacity and another, which needs extensive renovation, is located in an outlying area with a rising crime rate. Envisioned as a self-sustaining entity with the capacity to house 295 elderly Jews and host 150 more for daily activities, the new senior living and community center will be located close to Buenos Aires neighborhoods with large Jewish populations and will be easily accessible by public transportation.

Convinced that the project is truly needed and transparently planned, Fainzaig, 59, started knocking on doors to raise the \$10 million needed to open the home and cover operating costs for its first year. "I'm surprised and moved. The magnitude of the project and the local funds donated make this a historic milestone," he said. According to Fainzaig, the average donor to the project is about 60 years old and may hope eventually to live in the new elderly home. Seated in his office a few feet from Buenos Aires' main downtown square, Fainzaig is proud of how well the campaign has gone. "Rabbis with the strongest local connections to fund-raising opened their address books to offer their donors phone numbers to be part of the project," he said.

To Fainzaig, the effort's success isn't due just to the slight improvement in Argentina's economy in recent months, noting that fund-raising and giving to charity are key components of Jewish identity. Fainzaig's family moved his father, Isaac, a Polish-born tailor, into a non-Jewish home for the elderly in 1990. Sensing that it wasn't the right environment for the family patriarch, after a few days they moved him back to his son's house, where he lived out his days. "Thanks to Jewish support, Jews now will have a better chance," Fainzaig said.

[Featured Articles List](#)

Faith in the Wilderness

By Angela Denning-Barnes
Jerusalem Post
June 23, 2005

In a town where there is no rabbi, no synagogue, no Torah, and no roads out, it's hard to imagine how a Jewish community could flourish. But in the far reaches of Bethel, Alaska, a few families have learned to pull their faith even closer, and make do with what's available. Bethel was named by missionary settlers about 100 years ago, and grew quickly to its current status of around 6,000 residents and 16 churches. The small Jewish congregation is a mish-mash of about 20 members, who all have one thing in common: they call Bethel home. The town sits on the banks of Alaska's second largest river, the Kuskokwim, about 50 miles inland from the frigid Bering Sea. Although it's 400 miles away from the nearest road system, Bethel is still the metropolis of the river's Delta, providing services to 50 remote villages, ranging in size from a few households to over a thousand residents each. Most of the people in the region are Yup'ik Eskimo, with the large majority speaking their native language.

The tree-less, tundra-covered landscape can be harsh, reaching -40 Fahrenheit in the winter – a season that lasts most of the year. When Solomon Krevans had his bar mitzva on April 30th, the Kuskokwim River was still frozen solid with ice, and local residents were traveling by snowmobile. Krevan's bar mitzva was the first ever in Bethel. "It's what's going to give me my connection in other places to the Jewish religion," Solomon said. "I mean, you can be Jewish and do the same things that Jewish people do, but you aren't exactly considered as Jewish and you're not exactly given as many responsibilities in Jewish communities if you haven't had your bar mitzva." His father, who goes by J.R., said he is proud of his son.

"I'm glad that he's chosen to go on with that path. It's worked for me," J.R. Krevans said. "I'm also glad he doesn't see it as the only path, that he has learned to really respect, not tolerate, others' beliefs." Solomon Krevans and his younger sister and brother have grown up learning first-hand the intricacies of the region's native culture. Each one has attended Bethel's Yup'ik Immersion elementary school, where the language of instruction is Yup'ik, phasing into English only in the older grades. J.R. Krevans said being Jewish in a public school hasn't been a problem for them. "The background assumption of Christianity here is perhaps greater in some ways [than other places]," J.R. Krevans said. "The level of religion in the school is very high here, far beyond what is legal. It's annoying at times, but it's not a big deal, partly because our kids are pretty strong and pretty clear in their faith." To prepare for his bar mitzva, Solomon Krevans studied every week for about a year with David Horesh. Horesh is not a rabbi, although some people in the small congregation affectionately call him one. "It slightly drives him crazy when we say it," J.R. Krevans said.

Because of his strong faith and the fact that he grew up in Israel, Horesh was asked to guide Krevans in his studies. That and because the congregation's new Torah is kept at the Horesh household. Horesh had been thinking about getting a Torah for a while. He had found an Iraqi Torah on the Internet two years ago, but decided to pass up the opportunity. "It was getting close to Shabbat," Horesh explained, "and I told myself I can't do it, it's too late, I can't bid on it. I'll just go back and check on it Sunday morning. And it was 11 o'clock before I realized it, and being on the edge of the world, I missed the bidding. And so I missed out on the opportunity to get an Iraqi Torah, which broke my heart." HORESH, WHOSE father is from Baghdad, spent most of his youth in Israel before moving to the US when he was 11. Although buying a Torah from his father's country didn't work out, things eventually fell into place. One night, a year and a half ago, Bethel's Jews were gathered at the Horesh household. The men were in the kitchen, the women in the

nearby family room, all discussing the bar mitzva. Eleven-year-old Krevans suggested they look for a Torah, and Horesh proceeded to pull out his laptop computer. He found three on e-Bay; one was from Israel.

"All the guys said, 'I'm in for a thousand... I'm in for a thousand,'" Horesh said. "And that's what all the women in the other room heard. And they yelled, 'you're in for a thousand for what?'" They found out the next morning they had won the bid – \$3,000, plus \$100 for shipping from Israel. Horesh said the funny thing was, it came wrapped in Christmas paper, which even made his children giggle. Horesh has four children, ages seven, six, five and four. The Horesh children are home-schooled, because David and his wife Dana think it would be too hard for them as Jews in public school. At home, Horesh teaches them Western studies along with Hebrew and a heavy dose of Judaism. Although the local culture involves the subsistence hunting and fishing of arctic animals, including moose, caribou, seal and birds, the Horeshes keep a kosher home. They fish a lot, and they air freight hundreds of pounds of kosher meat and dairy products from Seattle, Washington every year. Dozens of pounds of chicken and cheese can be found in the family's freezer on any given day, and boxes of matza ball mix are stacked high in their pantry.

Horesh said having the Torah in his home has enriched his family's identity. He said that they initially thought they would only take it out of the Ark during the High Holy Days, but he said it demanded more. "Because it's here in my house, I can't ignore it, out of a measure of respect," Horesh said. "Because I can't ignore it, I'm going to do what I'm supposed to do, and then because I'm doing that, it's a natural progression that I'm going to invite others to join me. And so really out of nowhere about a year ago, we started having Saturday morning services here every week." J.R. Krevans agreed that having the Torah so accessible is a good thing. Krevans grew up in New England attending a temple and weekend religious school. He moved to Bethel in 1984 to work as a doctor at Bethel's regional hospital. "Most places, the Torah is owned and kept by a big congregation and you see it up at the front of the synagogue and maybe you handle it every now and then," J.R. Krevans said. "What's interesting is that handling one and being around one more frequently has not made it less special, it's made it, in fact, more special."

Bethel's Jewish congregation held a community-wide Seder this year. About 100 people from different faiths gathered together in the hall Saturday evening to hear the Haggada read, and to eat matza ball soup. Although this was not the first time they had held a Seder for the general public, J.R. Krevans said this year was special because his son, Solomon, had asked to lead the ceremony. Under Horesh's guidance, Solomon had prepared the Haggada from start to finish. J.R. Krevans said people in Bethel notice how hard they work to maintain their religion, adding that most people in the town are not only tolerant of Judaism, but supportive of it. "When you have to work at something, it becomes more important, and people recognize that," Krevans said. "Actually, compared to where I grew up, and certainly compared to a lot of the places I've visited in my life, Bethel is a wonderful community religiously. While there's not a big Jewish community to be supportive of, you know, our path, we have to work harder, which maybe is good."

[Featured Articles List](#)

Dry And Earthy

By Gamliel Kronemer

The Jewish Week

June 10, 2005

www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=10975

A friend recently asked me to suggest a good inexpensive kosher sparkling wine for a party to celebrate the completion of her Ph.D. She was rather surprised when the wine I suggested was not from Israel or California, but from Spain. Spanish wines used to be one of the wine world's best-kept secrets ~ but no longer. After two decades of intense modernization and development, the Spanish wine industry today produces some of the world's best wines. Wine guru Robert Parker recently predicted that in 15 years Spain will be the star of the wine world, and that's a prediction that's hard to argue against.

Although it was once only known for the wines of Jerez (Sherry), Spain, in fact, has a very diverse wine industry that cultivates nearly 1,600 different varieties of wine grapes. With such a large number of varietals, it is hard to come up with too many generalities about Spanish wines, but here are a few: Spanish whites tend to be dry and fruity, Spanish reds tend to be meaty, Spanish wines tend to have a lovely earthy element and tend to be very reasonably priced. Luckily, for the kosher consumer, the last few years has seen several good, and even excellent, kosher Spanish wines released on the U.S. market. Today's kosher consumer can buy everything from world-class Spanish reds, to traditional Sherry, to delightful Champagne-like sparklers.

The wine I suggested to my friend was the Tierra Salvaje Cava Brut Reserva. This Spanish sparkling wine, or Cava, is made in Spain by Moët & Chandon, the French Champagne producer known best for their flagship Dom Perignon Champagne. The Brut Reserva is a lively Champagne-style wine, with a bright straw color, a citrus nose and large long lasting bubbles. It has a crisp pineapple flavor, floral hints and a dry, slightly lemony, finish. One of the best parts of this wine is its low \$13 price tag. Perhaps the most interesting kosher wine to come out of Spain thus far is Capçanes's Peraj Ha'abib. The small winery that makes this wine is located in a hilly region about 100 miles south of Barcelona, a region that is rapidly becoming the home to some of Spain's best wines.

The name, Peraj Ha'abib, is the Spanish transliteration of a Hebrew phrase meaning flower of spring. The wine is well named,

because like the pedals of a flower there are so many wonderful layers of flavor that can be peeled away before getting to the wine's core. When drinking this wine, look for flavors of cranberries, currants, blackberries, Bing cherries, anise, oak, tobacco, vanilla, mocha, and citrus fruits. Unfortunately, Spanish kosher wines tend to be poorly distributed in the U.S. So even though you might not find Capçanes or Tierra Salvaje in every wine store with a kosher section, odds are you will find a few kosher wines from Spain. Try one. Although not every Spanish wine is great, I can honestly say I've never tried a bad one.

[Featured Articles List](#)

South African Cookbook to Tell Story of Country's Jews

By Moira Schneider
JTA email Edition
June 23, 2005

Mock crayfish and a history lesson. You'll get a little of both in a forthcoming South African Jewish cookbook, being billed not only as a great recipe source, but also as a social history of South African Jewry. The cookbook, a fund raiser for the Cape Jewish Seniors Association, is due out late next year. The publishers of the book hope to draw in funds and shed light on a cuisine unique to this part of the world. Included will be traditional recipes as well as updates and short-cuts that incorporate health trends and local flavor ~ accompanied by relevant anecdotes. The book's editor is Oded Schwartz, a former Israeli and a renowned chef who spent 36 years in the London food industry. During the course of interviews he is conducting for the book with professional cooks, as well as with others, he has discovered that domestic workers often have unwittingly become repositories for information on Jewish life here.

"Because they have an outside eye and were responsible for the mechanism of the home, they have very vivid and insightful recollections of what happened in the Jewish community, for example, in the '50s," Schwartz says. One such worker, who has worked for the same family for 50 years, remembers buying chickens on a Friday, along with the other domestic workers, and taking them to the Gardens Synagogue to be slaughtered. "Although she couldn't supply me with quantities, her description of how she makes her gefilte fish is absolutely fantastic," Schwartz says. It is tidbits such as these that the book's planners hope will elevate it into a collector's item.

"We really need food memories and we would like the cooperation of the Jewish community throughout the country as well as former South Africans living overseas," he says. The Jewish community here has strongly Lithuanian roots. Schwartz says he has identified a special Jewish cookery style in South Africa that is not present anywhere else. The Jews come from a rather narrow ethnic background. The fact that the community lives in the Southern Hemisphere also contributes to the unique food culture. "So the traditional Rosh Hashanah fruit is served on Pesach because that is when they are in season. The wine for Pesach is made from fresh grapes instead of the traditional raisins used in the rest of the Diaspora. The classic mock crayfish is a South African invention, as is the word "kitke" for challah. "Also, the way that you serve meals ~ this luscious South African table with a choice of seven starters and desserts and about 15 main courses is because of the particular circumstances of having servants in the home, allowing the housewife to be as extravagant as that."

Also being unearthed for inclusion are menus of women's Zionist balls of days gone by ~ events that were the highlight of the social calendar in the small country towns, Schwartz says. "The Afrikaners went there not for the music and dancing, but to be fed well," he laughs. Irene Friedland, a project researcher, says a huge number of local recipe books from the 1950s onwards were produced, particularly from these rural communities. "What for us is like gold, is what women who arrived here in the 1880s brought with them," she says. "Many of them were illiterate and what they brought with them was in their heads it wasn't written down."

[Featured Articles List](#)

In Bolivia, Unrest Expected to Increase Jewish Emigration

By Joe Goldman
JTA email Edition
July 10, 2005

The political, social and ethnic crisis in Bolivia is taking a toll on the country's small Jewish community. The landlocked Andean nation practically ground to a halt last month in the face of nationwide protests that cut off food and gas supplies from the major cities. There have been two presidential resignations in the past 18 months, and the country is awaiting actions from the Supreme Court president who recently took over as national president to guide the country to new elections before the end of 2005, though his support in the country's Parliament seems to be faltering. The indigenous people, who make up the bulk of Bolivia's population of 8 million, are

demanding more say in the government and calling for nationalization of natural gas fields. The gas-rich city of Santa Cruz has answered those demands by saying it could secede from the nation and form its own autonomous territory.

"The first major effect of this long situation is the fact that one has to live in a world of great uncertainty," said Gabriel Hercman, institutional director of Circulo Israelita, the main Bolivian Jewish organization. "Our children cannot go to school because it isn't safe to travel. There is no production in the country, no investments, and that is certain to bring major consequences down the line. The lack of being able to plan out anything with any certainty is a terrible situation." Hercman says there are only about 600 Jews left in Bolivia, half of them in La Paz, down from a high of around 2,000 in the 1950s. The recent protests included a bit of anti-Semitism, but it wasn't a major focus, he said.

"There were demonstrations that, more than anti-Semitic, were against all foreigners. The most vehement and vociferous of these groups against any foreigners was the indigenous groups in El Alto, a huge suburb of La Paz," he said. There is a group in La Paz called Unzaguista Falange, they are an extreme right-wing organization and they have put on their Web site nationalistic and xenophobic diatribes. The protests could accelerate Jewish emigration, Hercman predicted. "Many Jews have left the country. Some have gone to Israel but most have immigrated to the United States," he said. Because of the unrest, Israel evacuated its citizens from Bolivia early last month. Two dozen Israeli trekkers were airlifted to Peru, and approximately 150 Israelis marooned at a hotel in La Paz, the capital, were evacuated.

[Featured Articles List](#)

Nicaragua, Long a Beef Exporter, Examines Lucrative Kosher Market

By Brian Harris
JTA Email Edition
June 30, 2005

Kosher beef consumers in the United States may soon find themselves dining on meat from this decidedly non-Jewish country. CARNIC, one of Nicaragua's largest and most storied meat packing firms, has taken the first steps toward kosher slaughter with an eye on the potentially lucrative export market. In late April, three head of cattle were killed in kosher fashion by a rabbi flown in from New York in a trial run of what CARNIC general manager Manuel Centeno says could become a steady supply of kosher beef, if tests prove fruitful.

"We do not have the installations to produce a large amount of kosher cattle right now," Centeno said in an interview at his office. "The future of kosher slaughter for the company depends on the success our sample has in the United States. It is a very special process; we do not have people specialized in kosher production." CARNIC's move has piqued the interest of the tiny local Jewish community. Misled by exaggerated stories in the local media, the community thought CARNIC had conducted kosher slaughter prior to Passover and wanted to see if some fresh beef could be reserved for locals. Centeno said that if CARNIC begins kosher production, some meat could be set aside for domestic consumption.

Rabbis in Costa Rica and Panama regularly conduct shechitah to feed their congregations, and Costa Rica occasionally exports kosher beef. However, CARNIC holds the potential to be the Central America's first mass kosher exporter. Beef and leather long have been traditional Nicaraguan exports, with CARNIC relying on the export market for 80 percent of its business. In 2004, beef exports to the United States from the country's three authorized slaughterhouses, including CARNIC, grew by 74.5 percent to \$40.3 million, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported. However, it has been at least 25 years since Nicaragua last exported kosher beef, and renewing the trade is a risky proposition.

To produce kosher beef economically, CARNIC likely would have to devote an entire day solely to kosher production. The slaughterhouse currently processes an average of 455 head of cattle a day, which would drop on days of shechitah because of the rigors of kosher production. As a result, the plant would be depending on the premium price of kosher beef to make up for lost revenue from lower production. If the company has to build new facilities in order to have a reliable supply of kosher beef, it won't go through with the plan, Centeno said. CARNIC also is interested in the organic market, a lucrative niche. The conversion of some of the company's output to organic, which is already under way, makes the kosher option tempting, since both the organic and kosher markets offer premium prices.

CARNIC's primary focus is the U.S. market, but Centeno said the company has received inquiries from Israel as well about kosher Nicaraguan beef. The inclusion of organic and kosher production is the latest twist in CARNIC's history. The company originally was founded and owned by the Samoza family, a dynasty that ran the country as a dictatorship for nearly 50 years before being overthrown in the 1979 Sandinista Revolution. The leftist Sandinistas nationalized all of Samoza's vast holdings, including CARNIC, which remained a symbolic prize of the revolution's triumph. After the Sandinistas were voted out of office, the company was sold off to local cattlemen as part of the pro-U.S. Government's attempts to dismantle the Sandinista apparatus. Though he has been at the firm for only six months, Centeno is no stranger to the company's history: He served as President Anastasio Samoza's chief of staff during the dynasty's final three years and fled the country when Samoza was overthrown. He returned in the early 1990s.

Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes, Son of Righteous Gentile Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Passes Away in Portugal

By Anne Treseder

Archivist, International Committee to Commemorate Aristides de Sousa Mendes

July 6, 2005

Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes, who helped his father, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, save the lives of 30,000 refugees fleeing the Nazis at the start of World War II, passed away in Portugal on June 30, 2005, after a long illness. He was 85. His father, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, was the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France, in 1940, when Paris fell to the advancing German army, and Jewish and other refugees fled southwestward to escape into neutral Spain. But the Spanish authorities would not allow refugees to enter Spain without a Portuguese visa. Against the orders of Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar, who had directed that no Jews or other "undesirables" be allowed visas, Sousa Mendes, with the support and assistance of his wife Angelina, and his sons Pedro Nuno and Jose Antonio, issued Portuguese visas "around the clock" in June 1940 to as many refugees as possible, without regard to nationality or religion.

Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes, who had been the oldest surviving child of Aristides and Angelina de Sousa Mendes, was born in Coimbra, Portugal, on April 29, 1920. He was a graduate of the law school in Toulouse, France. In 1939, when Nazi bombs began falling in France, Aristides and Angelina transported their younger children to the safety of neutral Portugal, and returned to their posting in Bordeaux. Sons Pedro Nuno and Jose Antonio remained in Bordeaux with their parents. In May 1940, the Low Countries fell to the Nazis, and the Nazi army advanced on France as well. Frantic refugees converged on Bordeaux. Pedro Nuno left the consulate regularly to transmit his father's telegrams to Lisbon, seeking permission to issue visas to these refugees. Week after week, there was no reply.

In a 1987 interview, Pedro Nuno recalled that by June 1940, "Everything was at a standstill [in Bordeaux]: the heat, the impatience of the refugees, the thunderstorms," the German planes overhead. Aristides fell sick with exhaustion and despair. When Aristides emerged later from his sickroom, Pedro Nuno recalled in a 1986 letter, "He [Aristides] took over the reins and decided to give passage to Portugal to all the refugees without regard for race, religion, or social standing, and to no longer wait for Salazar's answer to his telegrams. He was now acting according to his conscience." Aristides, Pedro Nuno, other family members, and several refugees set up an "assembly line" in the consulate to issue as many visas as possible.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes' acts of moral courage and "disobedience" resulted in his dismissal from the Portuguese diplomatic corps, his public disgrace, and his own impoverishment. Even as the family's economic situation deteriorated, Pedro Nuno recalled, his father "reaffirmed that he had never regretted his action saving thousands of refugees, and that he would do it all over again, should it be necessary." Aristides de Sousa Mendes died a pauper in 1954; his wife Angelina had predeceased him. Most of Aristides' children could not find employment in Portugal, and were forced to emigrate to other countries. Pedro Nuno worked as a lawyer in the Belgian foreign service. After a long career, he retired with his family to Sintra, Portugal.

In 1967, through the efforts of Pedro Nuno's sister Joana, Aristides de Sousa Mendes was recognized as a Righteous Gentile at Yad Vashem in Israel. The long dictatorship in Portugal finally fell in 1974, after a nearly bloodless revolution. Throughout his life, Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes struggled, as did his siblings, to obtain "rehabilitation" for his father. He met with journalists and biographers who were interested in his father's case; he once appeared on KPIX-TV (Channel 5) in San Francisco. On March 18, 1988, in the presence of Sousa Mendes family members, Aristides de Sousa Mendes was finally rehabilitated and posthumously honored by Portugal's Assembleia da Republica. On December 5, 1988, in ceremonies at the Presidential Palace in Belem, Portugal, U.S. Ambassador Edward Rowell presented Portuguese President Mario Soares and Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes with copies of a resolution passed by the United States Senate honoring the compassionate and courageous acts of Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

This writer, who has worked with others to honor the life of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, visited Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes and his family in Sintra several times. Pedro Nuno knew much tragedy in his life: the death of two siblings when he was a child, the suffering and death of his parents, the dispersal of his family, and the deaths of three of his children. Nonetheless, he exhibited enormous grace and dignity. He and his wife Maria Adelaide made their guests feel welcomed and appreciated. They both cared lovingly for their ailing son, Goncalo, now deceased. Although fluent in Portuguese and French, Pedro Nuno spoke almost no English; with a kind smile on his face, he listened patiently as this writer expressed herself in halting Portuguese. In all aspects of his life, he was a gentle man.

Robert Jacobvitz, who organized the International Committee to Commemorate Aristides de Sousa Mendes and spearheaded efforts to "rehabilitate" Aristides de Sousa Mendes in Portugal, also visited Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes. On learning of Dr. Sousa Mendes' death, Jacobvitz remembered fondly that "Pedro Nuno was the patriarch of the family. What struck me the most was the way he carried himself. He was a tall, elegant man. He had the most striking deep brown eyes I have ever seen. They communicated to

me the many events that they had recorded in Pedro Nuno's life. [When he first met me], he approached me with great vigor and said: 'Ah, Jacobvit, it is so good to see you!' I almost cried."

Joel Neuberger, former executive director of the Holocaust Center of Northern California, was also profoundly moved by the courage of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and of his son, Pedro Nuno: "I was very sorry to hear of the death of Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes. When I visited him in Portugal in the summer of 1991, his father had been dead more than 36 years, but [Pedro Nuno] was focused on gaining recognition for his father's courageous acts and the restoration of his good name in the history of Europe. He deprecated his own role, although certainly the rescue could not have been accomplished without his willing assistance. It was an honour to speak with him (in French). He seemed not at all concerned that his frantic work those days in mid-June 1940 had cost him a position, career, and status [in Portugal]. "Just meeting Pedro Nuno was one of the high points of my life."

Dr. Pedro Nuno de Sousa Mendes is survived by his wife, Maria Adelaide de Sousa Mendes, his son, Nuno de Sousa Mendes, four siblings (Sebastian, Teresinha, John Paul, and Marie Rose), and many nieces and nephews. He is also remembered with love by the many other people whose lives he touched.

[Featured Articles List](#)

New Jewish Agency Chief Bielski will Reach Out to Non-Orthodox in Diaspora

By Charlotte Halle

Ha'aretz.com

July 1, 2005

www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/594602.html

As newly appointed chairman of the Jewish Agency, Zeev Bielski says he will endeavour to bring the non-Orthodox majority of Jews in North America closer to Israel, where an Orthodox monopoly exists on marriage, conversion and other areas of personal life. "It is my duty to try and bridge the gap between the situation in Israel today and the desire of these people to be recognized and to be able to fulfil their Jewishness the way they want it," he told Haaretz in an interview this week. "I'm going to be raising it. By talking, persuading and searching for a proper Jewish solution for the non-Orthodox communities, I will try to be involved and make an effort to find better solutions to the situation we have today."

Bielski, who has been mayor of Ra'anana for close to 17 years, was ratified Tuesday as chairman at the Jewish Agency's Assembly. He was unanimously elected to the post after former minister Natan Sharansky's candidacy was vetoed in a controversial move by the agency's most senior panel. One source in the World Zionist Organization said that the decision of the agency's Advise and Consent committee not to allow Sharansky to run would "weaken Bielski" in his new post. Indeed, Bielski himself was disappointed not to have won in an election against the former Diaspora affairs minister. "I personally would have preferred to have the vote [with two candidates]," he told Haaretz. "I worked toward this, I was 100 percent ready for this and I had the support of most of the voters. I am sorry it happened like this."

But Bielski insists the move would not weaken him: "I'll just have to work hard to prove to everyone that the choice was correct." Though aware that some Sharansky supporters have already vowed to remove him from office in a year when he will have to compete again for the chairmanship at the 35th Zionist Congress, Bielski says: "I don't think people are waiting for me to fail. People who know me from Ra'anana know that I favor very wide coalitions and I'm going to call on all parties [in the WZO] to join my coalition. I hope they will respond to my outstretched hand." Bielski, though "absolutely delighted" with his new appointment, admits he has been through "a long month of ups and downs." Since being named as the prime minister's choice for the Jewish Agency chairman and disregarded as the candidate of World Likud, Bielski was eventually nominated for the post by the Reform Movement and given a Herut seat on the WZO Executive - a necessary step before being elected chairman of the Agency.

The maneuvers to get him elected were said to be masterminded by the Prime Minister's Office via MK Omri Sharon and Likud Deputy Director General Rafi Bar-Chen, a member of the Zionist General Council, in an effort to block the candidacy of Sharansky, who resigned from the government in protest against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan. Bielski, who will not leave Ra'anana for Jerusalem, where his new job is based, says he thinks the Gaza withdrawal plan will not affect Diaspora Jewry. "I hope that within a few weeks, after the disengagement is complete, we will quickly reunite in Israel - and in the Diaspora. It is our responsibility. We must not forget that Am Yisrael [People of Israel] is one people. We have a very painful situation, with people being torn from the inside, but we have to look beyond our different movements and keep united. We're too vulnerable. We have too many enemies on the outside. We can not allow ourselves to be ripped apart. It is our duty to try and reunite Am Yisrael as quickly as possible."

Era of aliya is not over

Bielski says he will work to implement major reforms at the Agency, as outlined in the strategic plan devised under the leadership of his predecessor, Sallai Meridor. "The Agency will concentrate on aliya [immigration to Israel] by choice; we believe that the era of aliya is not over. Israel is the best place for Jews who would like to live Jewish lives - and ensure Jewish lives for their children - and I

believe we will witness hundreds of thousands of immigrants coming to Israel in our lifetime, and the Agency will be here for them." He says that the Agency would concentrate on the MASA program, which aims to bring tens of thousands of young Diaspora Jews to Israel for up to a year on volunteering and educational programs. "Some will become immigrants, but most will go back to their countries where they will become Jewish leaders in their communities." Bielski adds that in line with its strategic plan, the Agency would also work to close the social and economic gaps between children in Israel.

[Featured Articles List](#)

Jewish Groups Launch Campaign for Rights of Refugees from Arab World

By Brett Kline
JTA Email Edition
June 7, 2005

As the Palestinians continue to demand a "right of return" for refugees who fled or were expelled during Israel's 1948 War of Independence, Jewish leaders from around the world are intensifying a campaign to advocate for the rights of Jewish refugees from the Arab world. The campaign to document the mass violations of Jews' human rights in the Arab world, as well as the loss of their private and communal assets, will be launched in March 2006 by an American Jewish group, Justice for Jews From Arab Countries, and the World Organization of Jews From Arab Countries. Once compiled, the documentation will be catalogued and preserved by a special unit in Israel's Justice Ministry.

"No one disputes the fact that the Palestinian refugee issue is on the table," said Stanley Urman, Justice for Jews' director. "We want to be on the table with them. There is a sense of urgency to this. Many people who were forced out of their homes are dying or have died already. We are talking about two populations of refugees from the same political situation." Representatives from the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and Israel met Monday in Paris to launch the campaign. Representatives from Mexico and Australia participated by phone. "The Palestinian narrative has held sway over international opinion," said Bernie Farber, CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress. "It's very compelling, but this narrative must also be told."

Some 860,000 Jews lived in 10 Arab countries, not including Iran, in 1948. Fewer than 8,000 remained by 2001, most in Morocco. Many Jews were forced to flee their homes in the Arab world under duress, especially at the time of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. They were granted refugee status by the United Nations, but the matter was never pursued. While Israel absorbed most of the Jewish refugees — their descendants today make up about half the population of Israel — Arab countries kept the Palestinians in camps and refused to give them citizenship, using their plight as a weapon in the political struggle against the Jewish state. Today, the number of Palestinian refugees and their descendants tops four million, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which provides them with services.

According to Justice for Jews, the legal and political basis for the rights of Jewish refugees is U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, adopted in 1967, which declares that there should be a "a just settlement of the refugee problem." The resolution does not make a distinction between Arab refugees and Jewish refugees. Delegates at the Paris meeting stressed that advocacy for Jewish refugees' rights should not be about money or initiating legal proceedings. "Over the years it has been difficult to raise the profile of Sephardic Jews throughout the world," said Gina Waldman, who was born in Libya. "This is about telling the stories that have never been told. It is not about money. And some of the stories are very sad." Waldman recalled fleeing with her family from Tripoli in 1967 as a mob was setting fire to her apartment building.

"A Muslim neighbor saved us," she said. "He convinced the mob to leave. He saved our lives." She and six family members managed to get to Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, where they lived in one room. Her great-grandfather had founded a land development company in Tripoli, which employed more than 300 people when the family fled in 1967. Her father, she said, "never got over the loss" of the family business. Waldman eventually moved to the United States, while her parents stayed in Italy and a brother went to Israel. She has worked as a human rights activist for many years. "After Sept. 11, I decided it was time to speak up," she said.

She founded Jimena, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, and has made a film, "The Forgotten Refugees." Urman said Israeli officials have collected the case histories of some 3,000 families. "We would like to have 100,000 cases," he said, "but honestly that figure may be too high. People should be telling their stories, but there is a process involved here to record everything." Jewish organizations have been willing to get involved in the campaign. Justice for Jews will finance projects on the international level, while groups in participating countries would pay to compile the case histories. "This is a historical mobilization of the international Jewish community," Urman said. "The same thing happened for Soviet Jews. Now these stories from Jews from Arab countries must be told." The group's next meeting is scheduled for September in Paris.

[Featured Articles List](#)

Conservatives, Rainbow Coalition

The Jewish Week

Debra Nussbaum Cohen

July 8, 2005

www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=11101

In the week since gay-friendly Conservative rabbis organized themselves, for the first time, into a public group ~ called Keshet Rabbis ~ their numbers have nearly doubled. Last week, 75 members of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly signed up to offer counseling and consultation to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Conservative Jews. This week the number stands at 137, just under 10 percent of the RA's 1,500 members. The emergence of Keshet Rabbis comes at a critical moment for the Conservative movement, with the recent announcement of the retirement of Ismar Schorsch, the longtime chancellor of Jewish Theological Seminary, and the Law Committee's reconsideration of its current ban on ordaining gay rabbis. Keshet (Hebrew for rainbow) Rabbis plans to advocate on behalf of the GLBT population and try and make the movement a more welcoming place for them, said one of its founders, Rabbi E. Noach Shapiro of Congregation Shomrei Emunah, in Montclair N.J.

In 1992 the Law Committee voted against ordination of openly gay rabbis but encouraged the movement to welcome gay and lesbian congregants. The RA also forbids members from officiating at same-sex commitment ceremonies, but has not censored rabbis for doing so. "We want to activate the parts of the [ruling] and statements by the Conservative movement to be welcoming. We want to make those statements less empty," said Rabbi Shapiro.

Another of Keshet Rabbis' creators, Rabbi Menachem Creditor of Temple Israel in Sharon, Mass., said "the time for this has come. Too many rabbis have seen too many people in needless pain," he said. "We're really at the threshold of a new Conservative movement and at the threshold of a new definition of family," added Rabbi Creditor. "People are opening their eyes to the fact that you can have a healthy family with a new definition of who is part of it," he said.

Ad-hoc groups of Conservative rabbis spring up every time the gay issue is at the top of the Law Committee or RA's agenda, though they haven't reached out to the public before. The conflict over women's ordination more than two decades ago was the last time there was a publicly visible, organized group of RA members, according to Rabbi Joel Meyers, the RA's executive vice president. "On every major halachic issue the movement is diverse in its approaches," Rabbi Meyers said. "I understand and appreciate that Rabbi Creditor and others want to push harder. There are people on the other end of the spectrum who want to push the other way. That's the nature of the Conservative movement."

Featured Articles List

Legal Riff Ends; Web Site Hails Jewish Rockers

By Nara Schoenberg

Tribune staff reporter

SouthFlorida.com

July 8 2005

www.southflorida.com/news/chi-0507070357jul08,0,6036947.story

This has been a heady year for the Jews of rock 'n' roll. After three fans announced their intention to launch a Web site called the Jewish Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the already well-established Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland sued for trademark infringement. Suddenly, a bevy of world-class lawyers was fighting over . . . the right to tell the stories of Gene Simmons, Michael Bolton and four-fifths of the J. Geils Band. Then, a few weeks ago, the legal clouds lifted sufficiently to allow the three fans -- New Yorker writer Jeffrey Goldberg, Washington Post reporter David Segal and radio executive Allen Goldberg (no relation to Jeffrey) -- to launch their diplomatically renamed site, Jewsrock.org.

So now, the world has a place to go if it wants to find out whether Paula Abdul is Jewish, how Alan "Moondog" Freed helped set rock 'n' roll in motion, who Nudie Cohn was and why David Lee Roth is a hero to his people. In honor of the occasion, we asked Jeffrey Goldberg about the Web site, the Jewish contribution to rock 'n' roll, and his own experience at the hands of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The following is an edited transcript:

Q. Our people gave the world Albert Einstein and Anne Frank, what . . .

A. Anne Frank?

Q. Anne Frank.

A. All right. Fine, fine. How 'bout Moses? Don't forget Moses. He's big. And the founder of Christianity, as well. And both Neiman and Marcus. Sorry. All right, go on.

Q. Our people gave the world Albert Einstein and Anne Frank; what, if anything, do we have to gain by exploring our connection to Gene Simmons, Barry Manilow and Kenny G?

A. What do we have to gain? What do we have to gain by disseminating knowledge? It's knowledge about an interesting and unexplored intersection in American life, the intersection between Jews and popular culture.

Q. So you're conceding the point? I mean, it's fair to see you're looking beyond the A-list to find most of your Jewish rockers?

A. What do you mean?

Q. Gene Simmons, Barry Manilow, Kenny G . . .

A. But we're not just talking about just Gene Simmons, Kenny G, we're talking about Lou Reed and Joey Ramone and Bob Dylan. We're talking about Leiber and Stoller. We're talking about a whole range of people. We recognize Kenny G for what he is; we put him in the category called "Bad for the Jews." But if you look at our list, there are some pretty amazing people. Malcolm McLaren, who basically invented punk rock. I don't mean to sound defensive about the Jewish contribution to rock, but Bob Dylan is the single most influential popular music writer of the last half century. And he's a person who's deeply, if fitfully, involved in his Jewishness. And don't knock Neil Diamond, OK? I know you were thinking about it, but don't do it. Just don't do it -- 'cause I think he's a musical genius.

Q. Who

A. OK.

A. I love Neil Diamond.

Q. Anything in particular?

A. Uh, the entire canon. Put down, "the entire canon." Not "The Jazz Singer" that much, to tell you the truth. Not my favorite.

Q. You mentioned Bob Dylan -- Bob Dylan is, I think, religiously best known for renouncing his Judaism.

A. Yeah, but then he came back.

Q. So it still counts?

A. It totally counts. I mean, we're not judging people and their commitment to Judaism, we're simply saying these are people who are Americans and Jews and have done something interesting in music. But the fact is, he came back. And that's what counts. And, in all seriousness, I'm surprised at the depth of the American Jewish contribution to rock 'n' roll, not only in terms of performers, but in terms of the people who define the canon in some way. I mean, Leiber and Stoller, two Jewish boys from Los Angeles, wrote Elvis Presley's biggest songs. That's kind of interesting and it's not well-known.

Q. Paula Abdul is listed on your Web site. Are both her parents Jewish?

A. To the best of my knowledge. We are not applying strict rabbinical standards to the judgment of who's Jewish. I mean, if somebody wants to be Jewish, if some rock 'n' roll star says, "Hey, I feel Jewish," we'll put 'em in there under the category of "Feels Jewish."

Q. Who's your favorite Jewish rock 'n' roller?

A. If I say Dylan, is that just too obvious? It has to be Dylan, [Lou] Reed, Joey Ramone and David Lee Roth, only because he went into rock 'n' roll to disprove Jewish stereotypes. I think he's said -- semicoherently -- on many occasions that that's why he wanted to become a rock star. I didn't even know that he was Jewish until relatively recently, I'm embarrassed to tell you.

Q. It never would have occurred to me.

A. Well, here, take out the Lee: David Roth. Then you say, "Jewish." [Say] David Lee Roth, [and] you think, Lynyrd Skynyrd. By the way, not a Jewish rock band. Definitely not. Randy Newman's a great songwriter, by the way. Let's not knock Randy Newman. You're only touching a part of it when you're talking about performers. You're talking about some incredible people who've influenced rock music. Phil Spector and Alan Freed and Leiber and Stoller. I mean, the list goes on. And these are people whose influence has been far deeper than the J. Geils band, even though the J. Geils band is four-fifths Jewish.

Q. Four-fifths?

A. Everybody in the J. Geils Band, except J. Geils: Jewish.

Q. Aside from David Lee Roth, was there stuff that really surprised you in your research?

A. Beck. Beck was one of my favorites. One of Beck's great regrets is that he never had a bar mitzvah.

Q. Tell me about your legal problems.

A. We originally wanted to call [the Web site] the Jewish Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame objected to that and they sued us. We got a whole mess of lawyers who told us we could probably win and keep the name, except that the Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was utterly humorless and would fight us all the way to the Supreme Court. So we decided rather than fight forever for a marginally interesting name, we would change the name and launch. We couldn't launch and fight at the same time. We suggested as part of a compromise that we call ourselves the Jewish Rock & Roll Challah Fame, like the bread. And their lawyers objected, saying people would still confuse us with the Hall of Fame in Cleveland. And I was like, wait: a Web site named after a braided Jewish egg bread is going to be confused with a massive, well-funded museum in Cleveland? But lawyers: not a funny group of people, generally speaking.

Q. Is there a lesson there?

A. We learned a lot of trademark law and we met a lot of nice lawyers in Cleveland. And they did us a tremendous service. One, they got us a tremendous amount of attention, for free. And in their lawsuit they listed Jewish rock 'n' rollers in the Hall of Fame. One in particular -- the Flamingoes, a doo-wop group in the 50s -- they were all Jewish, they were black Jews and they were among the first inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. So we put the Flamingoes on our Web site, and we never would have known, otherwise.

Q. Sounds good.

A. You should only be so lucky, to be sued by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

[Featured Articles List](#)

North American Muslim Learns About Tolerance in Israel

By Leora Eren Frucht

July 10, 2005

Israel 21c

www.israel21c.org/bin/en.jsp?enZone=Democracy&enDisplay=view&enPage=BlankPage&enDispWhat=object&enDispWho=Articles^11038

Javeed Sukhera loves what he calls "the vibrancy of Israel." When Javeed Sukhera told friends in Toronto that he'd be spending the next three years of his life in Israel, some of them were aghast. "Israel? Of all the countries in the world, you had to choose Israel!" cried several members of the moderate Muslim organization he helped found. Sukhera admits that he, too, had a few apprehensions. "I wasn't sure I'd be all that welcome: here I was, a North American Muslim of Pakistani background coming to live in Israel," recalls Sukhera, a self-described maverick with jet black hair and dark piercing eyes. But Sukhera was in for a surprise.

"Israel accepted and welcomed me with open arms. Israelis really appreciated the fact that I came here, and the overwhelming response has been one of tremendous curiosity," says the 24-year-old, sitting in a café in the Negev desert, casually ordering a drink in Hebrew - a language he has picked up with ease. Sukhera, a recent university graduate, decided to come to Israel because it was the only place in the world that offered the kind of medical training he was looking for: a hands-on, multicultural, community-oriented program. He found it in the desert city of Beersheba at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, which offers an English-language M.D. program in international health and medicine in collaboration with Columbia University. The four-year program draws students from all over the world and sends them out to do internships in Africa, India, South America and other developing countries.

Sukhera, who just completed his second year of studies, raves about the program. But for him, the mere experience of being a practicing Muslim living in the Jewish state has been equally eye-opening. With his dark skin, the son of Pakistani immigrants expected to literally stand out in Israel. "My first surprise was discovering that unlike the Jews I know from Toronto, not everyone in Israel is Askenazi," he told ISRAEL21c. "I had no idea that the majority of students, especially here in Beersheba, are Sephardi Jews from Morocco, Iraq, Yemen and even India. In fact, I blend in more easily than many of my fair-skinned, blond classmates from the American Midwest." Another irony for Sukhera was experiencing one of his most memorable Ramadan holidays in the Jewish state.

"In Canada, I used to feel very isolated during Ramadan [a Muslim holiday]. All my fellow students would be eating in the cafeteria, while I lingered outside, alone, fasting. Here there is a large Beduin population, so everyone is familiar with the customs of the holiday. At lunchtime you have tons of people sitting on the lawn, with their prayer beads, fasting. I'd never been in an atmosphere with such a large Muslim population during Ramadan, and I felt very much at home." On a deeper level, Sukhera found that it was precisely his own experience as a Muslim in North America that has enabled him to identify with the psyche of the Jewish people - and need for a Jewish state. "Most of the non-Jewish world doesn't understand why Jews are such strong supporters of Israel, but to me it's perfectly understandable.

"Jews feel so disliked by the rest of the world, and having lived in a country in which I am part of a minority, I can completely relate to that." It was 9/11 that sharpened Sukhera's sense of himself as a member of a minority. "That was a watershed moment for me," he recalls. "Until then, growing up in Canada, a pillar of multiculturalism, I felt I could do anything and be anything - including prime minister if I wanted to be. "But after 9/11, I felt as though Canadians didn't want me. I found that I had to constantly distance myself from this act, which I myself viewed as a complete perversion of the Muslim faith." As a North American Muslim who has become sympathetic to Israel, Sukhera finds himself in a unique situation. "When I'm with Muslims I give them every pro-Israel argument there is to get them to understand the need for a Jewish state, but when I'm with Israelis I am more critical and try to show them the way the world understands Israeli policy. "In the end, I know I am building some bridges, but may be burning others, alienating myself from some Muslims and Jews."

When Sukhera arrived in Israel two years ago, the intifada was raging. But living in the periphery of the country - the Negev desert - the bombings in the central cities of Israel seemed far away. Until one hot August day when Sukhera was hanging up his laundry, and heard a startling boom - followed by a second one. From the window of his apartment, he looked down to see a scene of carnage at the busy intersection below. Two suicide bombers had blown themselves up, killing 16 people, including a three-year-old boy, and wounding over 100.

"It was one of the most unforgettable days of my life. Until then, I had always argued that in resolving conflicts you have to be unemotional. But after witnessing a terror attack, I understood how difficult it is not to react emotionally. When you see people murdered in front of your eyes, you can't not be emotional about it. It is part of being human." The attack, which initially shattered Sukhera's sense of personal security, also taught him another lesson. "I can't forget the looks on people's faces the next day as they waited for the bus at that spot: the combination of fear, shock and determination. But they went on - nothing changed, nothing

stopped. That example of determination in the face of terror shows me why there is reason for optimism." The incident also underscored the bizarre situation in which Sukhera finds himself: "Here I am in a place where not only do I fear being attacked by terrorists, but I fear that other people are looking at me as though I might be a terrorist. "It's really difficult and something I feel very alone in."

Although when Sukhera described this feeling to one of his Israeli lecturers, the professor responded that he experiences something similar whenever he attends conferences in Europe. "Other lecturers look at him as though he personally is a mass violator of human rights by virtue of the fact that he is Israeli - much like I am automatically cast as a potential terrorist because I am Muslim." Sukhera came to Israel primarily to study - and he says the program at BGU has exceeded his expectations. "For me to get an education in a place where only one tenth of my patients speak English makes a profound contribution to my medical education because I'm learning cross-cultural medicine in the truest sense. I'm living it," says the med student, who has gained much of his experience at BGU's adjacent teaching hospital, Soroka Medical Center.

"At the end of the day, I have no doubt this program will make me a much better physician," says Sukhera who would like to do his internship in Africa, and hopes to some day work with NGOs to help improve health in the developing world - in addition to having a clinical practice in Canada or the US. In parallel with his studies, Sukhera is also doing volunteer work with an organization which promotes peace-building through collaboration in health. This year, they worked on community health projects with Israeli Beduin high school students, who drew up plans to prevent suicide and violence. Next year, he and another student plan to expand the program to include Palestinian and Jewish Israeli schools. Eventually, he hopes to create a network of university students in the Middle East focused on health promotion, especially among youth.

"My experience has helped me see that science, specifically medicine, transcends borders and disciplines. Even in the midst of the most dire conflict, medicine has the unique ability to bring people together and make a positive difference," he says. In his spare time, Sukhera has crisscrossed the country from Eilat to the Galilee and learned to love what he calls "the vibrancy of Israel." "It's amazing how a place can soak itself into you, becoming the air you breathe and the blood that flows through the rivers and canyons of your body. And even though Canada will always be Number One, every day in Israel makes it more and more a part of me," writes Sukhera in the most recent entry of his on-line journal, which he hopes will help break down stereotypes among readers of all backgrounds. "I want to help people learn from my example - and show both sides how much we have in common."

[Featured Articles List](#)

[Home](#) | [Projects](#) | [Publications](#) | [Social Change](#) | [Media](#) | [About IJCR](#)