

# KOL MEVASSER

## The Jewish Journal 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Mensch List

The Jewish Journal invited the community to nominate “extraordinary volunteers” for their annual recognition of “people who give so much to make the world a better place.” Two members of Kahal Joseph Congregation were honored and featured on the Jewish Journal’s Mensch List. We are extremely proud of these members of our community, and of course, quite familiar with their generous spirits and accomplishments. In the words of the Journal editors, “We are inspired by all of these stories and highlight this list of mensches each year to motivate us all to live up to their example.” We invite you to read their stories. We reprint the articles from the Jewish Journal below.

### Love of Jewish Education Began in Childhood

by Claudia Boyd-Barrett

For most people, working full-time plus overtime hours as vice president of finance at a property management firm would be enough to stay busy.



But for Nira Sayegh, 52, of Beverly Hills, helping run NPS Realty & Management Corp. with her husband, Pinny, is a fraction of her responsibilities.

For the past four years, Sayegh has served as a volunteer on the executive board of the Sephardic Educational Center, an international educational and cultural organization with offices in Los Angeles and a historic campus in the Old City of Jerusalem. In L.A., she puts in 10 to 15 hours or more each week managing the center’s office inside The Jewish Federation building on Wilshire Boulevard, overseeing staff, organizing events, manag-

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### Exposing Crimes Against Iraqi Jews

by Karmel Melamed

His voice cracking with emotion, his eyes welling with tears, Joseph Samuels, 84 and a retired Jewish real estate developer, recalled the pogrom’s angry Muslim mobs in Baghdad that his Iraqi family and the Jewish community there faced during the Holocaust. Known as the “Farhud,” this violent pogrom was carried out against the Jews in early June 1941 and has rarely been spoken about publicly by those who survived the massacre.

Samuels is one of a small remaining group of survivors of the Farhud, and during the past decade he has begun to write about and speak publicly about this dark chapter to various groups in Southern California.

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## KJ Schedule Vayechi

### Erev Shabbat

Friday, January 2nd

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am  
**Shabbat Candle Lighting .. 4:37 pm**  
Minha / Arbith ..... 4:37 pm

### Shabbat

#### Parashat Vayechi

Saturday, January 3rd

Shaharit/Morning Prayer .... 8:30 am  
Minha, Seudah, Arvit..... 4:00 pm  
Motzei Shabbat / Havdala ... 5:41 pm

### Weekdays

Sunday, January 4th

Shaharit ..... 7:30 am  
Mon to Fri, January 5th to 9th  
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am

### Erev Shabbat

Friday, January 9th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am  
**Shabbat Candle Lighting .. 4:43 pm**  
Minha / Arbith ..... 4:43 pm

### Torah & Haftara Readings

Genesis/Beresheet:

Parashat Vayechi 180 to 191

Haftara 191 to 192

### We want you to be a member!

Did you join us this fall over the High Holy Days? Whatever you spent for tickets will be applied towards annual membership in Kahal Joseph. Call Sarah at 310.474.0559

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"I was 11 years old when the Farhud broke out in Baghdad against the Jews," said Samuels, who now lives in Santa Monica. "It was a horrible massacre of Jews for two days straight, with mobs of Muslims slaughtering the Jewish men, raping the Jewish women and throwing the little kids in the Tigris River."

Samuels said Jewish homes and businesses in Baghdad also were looted during the Farhud, which was incited by the pro-Nazi regime in control of Iraq and by daily anti-Semitic radio broadcasts made by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. "My two uncles had their homes looted but escaped the mobs by jumping from the different roofs of homes in Baghdad's Jewish quarter," he said. "I was so frightened as a child — we brought furniture to reinforce the door in our home, which was located just outside the Jewish quarter. I saw Muslims looting outside, and I still remember them saying, 'We'll come back for you!' since they knew which homes were Jewish because of mezuzahs."

Although official records of the massacre claim nearly 180 Jews were killed and a few hundred injured, Samuels said the Iraqi Jewish community long has believed the number of Jews killed is closer to 1,000. He said he and his family survived the Farhud because British forces invaded Baghdad and stopped the violent mobs. Still, the memories of that pogrom haunted Samuels for nearly six decades, along with the

painful memories of his escape with his brother from their homeland in 1949 due to the constant persecution of Jews. For many years, he said, he never even spoke to his children or anyone about his difficult life in Iraq, but he finally decided to open up after taking a memoir-writing class.

Samuels since has dedicated most of his free time to raising awareness of the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab lands during the last century. He has written articles about his own experiences during the Farhud and in fleeing persecution in Iraq that have drawn positive feedback from thousands of readers worldwide.

Samuels also has joined forces with the nonprofit group JIMENA (Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa) to speak to Jewish students at local venues, including UCLA's Hillel, Congregation Kahal Joseph in West Los Angeles and Yeshiva University High Schools of Los Angeles (YULA). He said he is also slated to speak at a gathering of Christians United for Israel in San Bernardino in May.

"For me, it is important to bring out the story to the public for all to understand what happened to the Jewish community in the Arab lands," Samuels said. "We were a 2,700-year-old community that was tortured, imprisoned, killed; [we] indirectly or directly had our properties confiscated and either had to escape from our homes or were forced out by the Arab regimes just because we were Jews."

## Refuah Shlemah

Moselle Amron • Maurice Ovadia  
Abe Abraham • Michael Herzbrun  
Saul Sassoon • Sassoon Ezra • Tilda Levy

## Condolences

We send our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Joseph Ozair Sharraf, z"l, brother of Yvonne Moalim and Amy Shemesh. May Hashem comfort them together with all the mourners of Tzion

## In Memoriam

We remember these yahrzeit anniversaries for January 3 to 10, 2015. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, & attend services the preceding Shabbat.

### 13 Tevet / Sunday, January 4th

Moise Maurice Abitboul *Moshe ben Yonah*  
Ester Avrahami *Ester bat Gazala*  
Fortuna Sinder *Fortuna bat Suzan*

### 14 Tevet / Monday, January 5th

Joseph Isaac Joseph *Yoseph ben Yitzhak*

### 16 Tevet / Wednesday, January 7th

*Khasnah bat Rahel*

### 17 Tevet / Thursday, January 8th

Ezekiel Menashe Akerib *Yehezkel ben Moshe*  
Victoria Reuben *Victoria bat Chahla*  
Farha Shamash *Farha bat Masooda*

### 18 Tevet / Friday, January 9th

David Davoudian *David ben Yehezkel*  
Esperance Mathalon Shaaya *Esperance bat Simcha*

### 19 Tevet / Shabbat, January 10th

Yeheskel Goury *Yeheskel ben Shaul*  
Solomon Raymond *Shlomo ben Rahamim*

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ing the budget, raising money and remotely overseeing operations at the Jerusalem campus.

Recently, Sayegh helped organize the Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival for the center. She also single-handedly puts together a yearly Sephardic High Holy Days service at the Intercontinental Los Angeles hotel for families without a synagogue affiliation. And she volunteers to help with Jewish community events whenever needed, such as with High Holy Days celebrations this year at the Kahal Joseph Congregation in West Los Angeles, where she is a member.

“I’m the kind of person that I need to be involved in something that I’m passionate and care about. Judaism, Israel — you’re going to find me there,” Sayegh said. “I love Judaism, I really do, and I love Israel. If there’s anything I can do to help any organization, then I do it.”

Sayegh got a taste for engaging in Jewish community and religious life as a child, after she moved from Israel to Los Angeles with her family when she was 12. The transition was difficult, Sayegh said, because she barely knew anyone, and most other children she encountered knew little about Israel and the culture she came from.

But Sayegh soon found an exciting way to connect and contribute to her new environment by working as a Hebrew-school

teacher. She began in eighth grade by volunteering at the Hebrew school of the formerly Conservative Temple Beth Torah in West Los Angeles, and by ninth grade she was hired as an assistant teacher for children at the Reform congregation of Temple Isaiah, where she worked twice a week through high school and college.

Having grown up Conservative, teaching at Isaiah was the first time Sayegh experienced Reform Judaism, and she was fascinated. Although she continues to identify as Conservative, she said the experience opened her eyes and made her more appreciative and accepting of different Jewish traditions. These insights led to her support for Sephardic Judaism and the approach of blending ancient and modern traditions and accepting diversity in Jewish life.

“I learned so much about myself and Judaism, and how you can be Jewish in a different way,” she said. “I think it doesn’t matter what kind of Judaism you practice as long as you’re a good person.”

Sayegh, a mother of four and grandmother of three, said her biggest joy is witnessing the impact of the Sephardic Educational Center’s cultural excursions to Israel for teenagers, which take place once or twice a year. “They come back with a different outlook on themselves as individuals and on life,” Sayegh said. “The impact we make on children is the most important thing because they’re going to be different the rest of their lives because of that experience.”

## **An Invitation to UCLA Alumni Who Want to Combat Anti-Semitism on Campus**

I would like to invite pro-Israel alumni to attend a strategy session to share ideas on how to combat the alarming tide of anti-Semitism and BDS activity at UCLA.

You will hear from noted expert on campus anti-Semitism Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, co-founder of AMCHA Initiative, who will speak on this topic and offer tools to help UCLA alumni unite to stop this onslaught of hate.

**Monday, January 12, 2015  
at 7:30 pm**

at the home of Esther Kandel  
2129 Beverwil Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90034

Feel free to invite other pro-Israel UCLA alumni. [Kindly respond with the name of each attendee to: esther@amchainitiative.org](mailto:esther@amchainitiative.org)

***Kosher dessert and  
light refreshments will be served.***

*No solicitations will be made  
Event sponsored by AMCHA Initiative*

# Thinking About a Midrash: Parashat Vayechi

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

As Jacob neared his death, he instructed his son Joseph: “please do not bury me in Egypt” (Bereishith 47:29). Joseph was compelled to take an oath to bring Jacob’s body to the burial place of his fathers in the land of Canaan.

Rashi, citing the Midrash on this verse, offers several reasons for Jacob’s insistence on not being interred in Egypt. One of them has Jacob worrying “lest Egypt will make me into [a shrine] of idolatry.” What exactly does this mean? Did Jacob really think that the Egyptians had such a high opinion of him that they would want to idolize him or worship their gods at his grave? This would be a highly far-fetched possibility. After all, Jacob was a foreigner living outside the mainstream of Egyptian society. He was head of a family of shepherds, an occupation despised by the Egyptians. Why would the Egyptians want to venerate his grave in any way?

So then, what might the Midrash have had in mind?

Jacob and his family constituted a tiny percentage of the Egyptian population. Whereas the vast and powerful Egyptian civilization was mired in idolatry, the small group of Israelites was faithful to One God, Creator of heaven and earth, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca. As he neared his death, Jacob was fearful lest the faith of Israel would be extinguished. Once he died, who would have the authority to keep the growing family true to their religious ideology? Would the faith of Israel disintegrate in the face of the much larger Egyptian culture?

Jacob wanted to be buried in the family’s ancestral grave in Canaan, to serve as a reminder to his family of their roots. If he would be buried in Egypt, his grave would soon blend in with the Egyptian civilization. His own family would eventually treat his grave as other Egyptians treated the graves of their idolatrous an-

cestors. Jacob wasn’t worried that Egyptians would make his grave into an idolatrous shrine: he was worried that his own descendants would do so, succumbing to the overwhelming power of the Egyptian mainstream.

Jacob wanted his children and grandchildren to remember that his final resting place was in Canaan, alongside the spiritual founders of the Israelite faith. As long as his descendants were conscious of their physical and spiritual origins, Jacob was hopeful that they would be able to avoid assimilation into Egyptian society.

Midrashim often include comments that seem strange. In the introduction to his commentary on Perek Helek, Rambam provides a sound approach for dealing with such Midrashim. One should not take them literally but should seek to discover the underlying message being taught by our sages. Rambam criticizes those who insist on the literal meaning of Midrashim, even when they contradict reason. He writes that the literalists “are poor in knowledge. One can only regret their folly. Their very effort to honor and to exalt the sages in accordance with their own meager understanding actually humiliates [the sages]. As God lives, this group destroys the glory of the Torah and extinguishes its light, for they make the Torah of God say the opposite of what is intended.”

So when we come across Midrashim that appear to be strange, far-fetched or irrational, we need to think about them carefully so that we can discover what our sages may really have had in mind. They often spoke in parables, used hyperbole, and couched important truths in enigmatic phrases that catch our attention.

Many important truths and ideas are conveyed obliquely. We may learn many things by paying close attention.

Shabbat Shalom

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