May 2014

Dear Chavera,

The Festival of Shavuot provides an opportunity to stop for a moment, to pause from our daily preoccupations and to contemplate subjects, meanings and values which are relevant to our lives as individuals and as members of a community.

Traditionally read on the second day of Shavuot, The Book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite woman, who, after her husband dies, follows her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, and adopts the faith and land of the Jews during the harvest season in Bethlehem. She asserts the right of the poor to glean the leftovers of the barley harvest, defies the normal rules of behavior to confront her kinsman Boaz, is redeemed by him for marriage, and the child born of their union Oved, was the grandfather of King David.

This narrative is essentially a women's story showcasing the feminine power of Ruth, the main protagonist, as she makes a conscious decision to step out of her comfort zone. She abandons her former identity, everything that is familiar to her and absorbs herself into the fabric of another nation, with a new religion, culture and customs. Ruth is an excellent role model of a leader and a doer. Leadership is not passive it requires decision and action. Ruth’s acts of chesed (kindness) are embodied through action: not just following her bereft mother-in-law Naomi back to the land of Israel, but taking on grueling work in the fields in order to keep them from falling into abject poverty. WIZO chaverot belong to a community of strong, committed and passionate women whose "actions speak louder than words".

Similar to the Book of Ruth, IDENTITY is a central motif in our latest Lapid publication. This edition of the Lapid is devoted to "Identity" is a central motif of the Shavuot story and so to and this edition of the Lapid We acknowledge the contribution of articles from our chaverot around the globe. This is a shining example of the "caring and sharing" spirit that gives such value to WIZO, galvanizing our strength in numbers. We want to hear, share with whatever is in your WIZO heart.

Chag Sameach and warm WIZO wishes,

Chairperson, Organization and Tourism Division
World WIZO
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On Shavuot, we celebrate the giving of the Torah, from which come the principles by which we live. On this holiday, we read the story of Ruth, one of our illustrious ancestors. It is a source of great pride that I carry her name, Ruth, for I was born on Shavuot. When I was conceived, my great grandmother told my mother that I was going to be born few weeks earlier than expected, on the first day of Shavuot. My great grandmother was accurate and I was named Ruth. Ruth who was a Moabite has become a symbol of identifying as a Jew and of committing herself to the perpetuation of the Jewish people. She is a great example of loyalty and determination.

I grew up living in the wonderful Jewish Community of Panama. My parents, family, attending a Jewish Day School and participating in the Maccabi youth group, instilled in me a sense of Jewish pride and Identity. We were taught that before anything else we are Jews.

I have lived in Miami for over 28 years with my wonderful husband, Max and our four children, David, Danny, Isaac and Sarita. They have attended the Scheck Hillel Jewish Day School, the synagogue of Bal Harbor and the Jewish Community Center which has helped us to impress upon them the importance of knowing who they are, proud Jews, and where their future lies, in continuing our tradition. Their many visits to Israel and WIZO institutions have added a reality to what we have been teaching them.

Since I came to live here, WIZO has always been a part of me and has helped me to develop into the Community leader that I am today. It has been my honor for the past two years to be the WIZO Florida Chairperson. WIZO was founded in 1920 and has through the years dedicated itself to educating thousands of children who have passed through its institutions. WIZO has instilled in them the same values of pride in their Jewish heritage and their obligation to future generations to maintain Jewish continuity that I personally have instilled in my children.

If the biblical Ruth was able to leave her family and her nation, to cast her lot with a people and a religion she did not know, then it is incumbent upon us who are Jews, to be connected to our land of Israel, our Jewish way of life, our community and heritage.
JEISH IN IDENTITY IN INDIA
Jews and Jewishness in India: Living evidence

By Remona Divekar – Chavera from WIZO India Federation

A large democratic nation like India is characterized by diverse religious beliefs, faiths and practices. The Constitution of India declares Freedom of religion as a fundamental principle. India, a predominantly Hindu country of more than a billion people has approx. 130 million Muslims, 25 million Christians and less than 5,000 Jews. Judaism was one of the first foreign religions to arrive in India where Indian Jews are a religious minority, but unlike many parts of the world, the Jewish people have lived in India without any instances of anti-Semitism from the majority Hindu population. Nevertheless, the Jews in India are happy souls and they live in complete security and have been accorded an honorable place in the social hierarchy. Jews have added a culturally different religious flavor to India. They combine many of their ancient Israelite customs with traditional Indian lifestyle, and have created a rich culture all of their own. The Jews of India live in harmony with the Indian people and discovered that the Hindu religion is tolerant of their beliefs and practices allowing them to preserve their own distinct cultural heritage for centuries.

Beginning of ‘Jewishness’
With the arrival of the British East India Company in 1674, Mumbai was transformed into a bustling metropolis with enormous opportunity for social mobility. With Western influence, the Bene Israel Jews were introduced to the more traditional Jewish practices and many members of this community rose to prominence. They held influential positions in Bombay, Kochi and Calcutta; Governors, Major Generals and businessmen. They served as officers in the British Indian Army and gained senior positions in Telegraph, Railways, Ports and the medical profession. They were less affected than other Indians by the colonial racially-discriminatory policies. They obtained better paying posts in the British Army in comparison to their non-Jewish neighbors. At that time many of the Europeans who had settled in India persecuted Jews or attempted to convert them, nevertheless a large majority granted the Jews a chance at economic prosperity and freedom.

Our roots
The Bene Israel (“Children of Israel”) is a community of Jews in India, believed to have been one of the Lost Tribes. They trace their history in the city of Mumbai to more than 1600 years ago and their presence in India back to over nearly 2,000 years after a shipwreck stranded seven Jewish families from Judea in a region south of Mumbai. The accepted oral tradition is that the forefathers were sailing in a commercial ship from the Land of Israel to India who fled in 175 B.C.E. from the Syrian-Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, were ship wrecked at Navgaon near the port of Cheul on the Konkan Coast, 30 miles South of Bombay. Only 14 people survived. They swam towards the shore and arrived at a village
called Navgaon. Most of their belongings were lost at the sea. The dead bodies of those that perished were buried in the village. The survivors somehow managed to settle in the village and started working in agriculture and oil production which later on became their main occupation. They were isolated from the formal world Jewish communities however they maintained their religious customs and traditions passing them down from generation to generation. The Bene Israel Jews believe that their forefathers arrived in India before the destruction of the second temple.

The Baghdadi Jews, composite of Jews from Iraq, Syria, Iran and other surrounding areas, settled in the city in the 1800's. These Baghdadi Jews came to India both to escape religious persecution and in pursuit of the enormous mercantile opportunities that this port city offered. Under British rule, the Jewish community of Bombay (now Mumbai) flourished. The Bene Israel community, located in Mumbai is the largest of the Indian Jewish communities. At its peak, in the late 1940's, the Jewish population of Mumbai reached nearly 30,000. It is believed that the first Jews settled in Bombay as early as the 6th century, though they were small in number. Prior to the arrival of the Baghdadi Jews, the Bene Israel community who trace their own roots back to the oil pressers in the Galilee, refrained from work on Shabbat, practiced circumcision and respected Jewish dietary laws. By the 18th century, Jews began to arrive en-masse to Bombay from the nearby Konkan coast area. They however also practiced many customs unique to only their own community in India. They adopted many more mainstream customs after exposure to the Baghdadi Jews who were very much connected with the rest of modern world Jewry. Jews also settled in Madras (now Chennai) soon after its founding in 1640. Most of them were coral merchants from England who were of Portuguese origin and belonged to the Paiva or Porto families.

Identity of its own
In the 19th century, after being discovered by a visiting British Rabbi, they were reunited and learnt about Judaism. They tended to migrate from villages in the Konkan area to the nearby cities, mainly Mumbai, Pune, and Ahmedabad. The unique culture of the Bene Israel community is that they blended into the surrounding culture while retaining their uniqueness as Jews. Most of the Bene Israel have surnames ending with “kar” identifying the villages where they resided. For example people from Navgaon use the last named Navgaonkar (Person from Navgaon). Similarly from Borgaon came Borgaonkars, Chincholi came Chincholkar, from Diva came Divekars; Chordhe came Chordekar, Pen for Penkars and so on. This is similar to the customs followed by the local Maharashtrian community. All in all there are 142 such surnames.

In modern times as they have evolved and gotten closer to their Jewish roots, many have dropped their Indian surnames and taken on the first name of their grandfathers or ancestors to create their own family name; for example Raymond, Samson, Benjamin, etc. Their food, clothing and weddings have influences of the local culture combined with Jewish rituals and traditions as prescribed in the Torah.
With Bombay becoming an important port of British India, the Bene Israel community was encouraged to move to Bombay which offered better employment opportunities. Even though the Bene Israel resemble the local people in appearance and customs, they have maintained the practices of Jewish kosher dietary laws, circumcision and observation of the Sabbath as a day of rest.

**Places of worship**

The first synagogue Shaare Rahamim or Gates of Mercy, built in 1796, was the first Bene Israel synagogue built in Bombay by Samuel Ezekiel Divekar, a Bene Israeli. The establishment of many other synagogues followed in the region. These include Shaare Rason established in 1840, also known as the New Synagogue, in the Kodak area of Mumbai. Tifereth Israel at Saat Rasta, Mumbai was built in 1886. Etz Haaceem Prayer Hall Dongri, Umerkhadi Mumbai was built in 1888. Magen Hassidim synagogue at Saat Rasta, Mumbai was built in 1904. Rodef Shalom synagogue at Samuel Street, Mumbai in 1925. Kurla Bene Israel Prayer Hall was built in 1946. Central to Jewish life in Bombay was the Magen David Synagogue built by David Sassoon in 1861 Byculla which was a popular area for the Baghdadi Jews. The Knesset Eliyahoo, also Kneseet Eliyahu, an 1885 Orthodox synagogue in Fort in downtown Mumbai built by Jacob Elias Sassoon. Kenesset Eliyahoo Synagogue also housed a number of activities of Jewish communal life and included a mikveh, communal halls and an elementary school. Later, following further industrial development, many Jews relocated and resided in the Thane area. Shaar Hashamaim - Gate of Heaven Synagogue in Thane came into existence when the foundation stone for building the Synagogue was laid on 26th March 1878 and was completed on 29th December 1879, dedicated and consecrated on 30th December 1879 during the festival of Chanukka. Tied to the history of the Jews in Bombay is the history of the Jews in Pune, as well. The Red Temple, also called Lal Deval or Lal Deul, Ohel David Synagogue, in Pune was constructed by philanthropist David Sassoon in 1867.

**Establishments of an identity**

Many from the Bene Israel community, whose population peaked during the twentieth century to number 25,000, emigrated to Israel and other countries as the U.S. and Canada, following concern about their economic prospects in India. They migrated with a belief of finding a better sense of Jewish identity in a Jewish state. The majority of Indian Jews have made Aliyah (migrated) to Israel since the creation of the modern state in 1948. Many of the Baghdadi Jews immigrated to other countries to protect financial interests. Over 70,000 Indian Jews now live in Israel (over 1% of Israel's total population). Majority of Jews from the old British-Indian capital of Calcutta (Kolkata) have also migrated to Israel over the last six decades.

The Jewish population of Bombay (Mumbai) today is but a fraction of what it was at its peak in the 1940's. The architectural triumph left behind in the city is a testament of their heritage. Although meager in numbers in India the Jewish community is empowered with a strong belief in Jewish continuity carved with a distinct Indian Jewish identity or rather ‘Bene-Israel Jewish identity.
According to author Benjamin J. Israel, “This Diaspora community is “living evidence that, in at least one country in the world, Jews can exist with pride and honor and without any need for self-consciousness or protective withdrawal into a self-created ghetto.” The tiniest of India’s communities managed to live happily in freedom while preserving their religious and cultural identity until today.

Some of the notable Indian Jews

- Eli Ben-Menachem - Israeli politician.
- Jacqueline Bhabha - Lecturer at Harvard Law School and Harvard Kennedy School.
- Anil Machado - Kalaripayattu Indian martial arts & Fitness professional. David Abraham Cheulkar - Bollywood actor.
- Reuben David (1912 - 1989) Zoologist
- Esther David is a Jewish-Indian author, an artist and a sculptor
- Karen David - British-Canadian actress
- Nissim Ezekiel - poet, playwright, editor and art-critic.
- Lieutenant General J F R Jacob - Former Chief of Staff of the Indian Army's Eastern Command; Former Governor of Punjab and Goa.
- Ruth Prawer Jhabvala - Writer.
- Ellis Kadoorie and Elly Kadoorie - Philanthropists.
- Samson Kehimkar - Musician
- Ezekiel Isaac Malekar - Bene Israel Rabbi.
- Ruby Myers, Bollywood actress of the 1920s known as Sulochana.
- Farhat Ezekiel Nadira - Bollywood actress.
- Abraham Barak Salem - Cochin Jewish Indian nationalist leader.
- David Sassoon - Businessman.
- Albert Abdullah David Sassoon - British Indian merchant.
- Sassoon David Sassoon - Philanthropist and benefactor of greater Indian Jewish community.
- Solomon Sopher - Jewish community leader in Mumbai.
- Bensiyon Songavkar - Professional cricketer.
- Esther Victoria Abraham - aka Pramila. First ever Miss India.
I would like to share with you a personal anecdote about a little gem of a cookbook "A Russian Jew Cooks in Peru" which conjures up memories of my childhood in Lima. At the age of 19 I made aliyah leaving my family behind. This was a different era, before the advent of the Internet and mobile phones. There was no telephone in my dormitory room at the Hebrew University Mt Scopus campus. Whenever I wanted to speak to my family I had to make a special trip to the central post office in Jerusalem and for the hefty sum of NIS7 a minute it was possible.

At times I felt lost and alone. I missed my family and my mother's home cooking. My culinary repertoire was limited and included mainly Peruvian dishes. I felt that something was lacking.

One day while ambling through the streets of downtown Jerusalem I came across a book store, Sefer Ve Sefel (meaning "book and mug" in English), tucked away in an alley off Jaffa Road. This Jerusalem institution houses floor-to-ceiling new and secondhand English fiction and nonfiction titles and is a treasure trove for all Anglo book-lovers. Rummaging through the shelves I found an unexpected treasure, "A Russian Jew Cooks in Peru". What a find! I purchased the book for a meager 5 NIS and headed home full of excitement. This book reconnected me to my Jewish heritage. It contains an interesting mix of Peruvian, Ashkenazi (Eastern European) and Sephardic recipes. Like my grandparents I too am a first generation immigrant in a new country. The dishes I prepare in my home are very eclectic an infused with flavors from Turkey, Romania, Peru and Israel. This delightful cookbook has been my faithful companion throughout the years.

Even during our stint in Russia as emissaries for the Jewish Agency it had a place on the shelf. "A Russian Jew Cooks in Peru" is a source of inspiration especially for the Chaggim. This much used and much loved cookbook is looking a bit shabby nowadays and I am contemplating buying a vintage edition on Ebay to pass on to both my daughters in the hope that they too will be able to prepare these traditional family recipes.
CHEESECAKE RAQUEL

Line a greased pan with the following crust mix:
175g graham crackers or digestive biscuits
55g butter melted

Blend filling (cheese mixture) at high speed in Blender
  o 375ml. sweet condensed milk (large can)
  o 150ml. evaporated milk (small can)
  o 6 egg yolks + 1 tsp. salt
  o 450gr Ricotta cheese
  o Grated rind and juice of 1 lemon

Beat together 6 egg whites gradually adding 1/2 cup sugar
Gently fold egg whites into the cheese mixture
Pour into the greased pan and bake at 170 degrees celsius for approx. 1 1/4 hr.
Test with toothpick, if clean turn oven off. Leave cake in oven with door open till cool. Refrigerate.
SEMOLINA GNOCCHI

I propose a recipe for a dish of traditional cuisine of Rome used for Shavuot. Is an ancient dish that has been handed down to the present day. Try the *gnocchi alla romana* because are really tasty.

**Ingredients:**
- Semolina 250g,
- 1 liter milk,
- Grated Parmesan cheese 120 gr
- 2 egg yolks
- Butter 120 gr., salt

**Direction**

In a large pot put in warm milk Whisk together, semolina, and 1 teaspoon salt and bring to a boil over moderate heat. Simmer, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until very stiff, at least to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in the half of the butter and half of the parmesan cheese. Beat in the two egg yolks. Spread gnocchi mixture 1/2 inch thick on an oiled baking sheet and chill, uncovered, until very firm, about 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 200 degrees (Celsius)

Cut out rounds from gnocchi mixture with a 2-inch round cookie cutter (push scraps into remaining mixture as you go) and arrange, slightly overlapping, in a well-buttered baking pan. Make other layer with any remaining rounds. Brush gnocchi with the remaining melted butter and sprinkle with the remaining Grated Parmesan cheese.

Bake in middle of oven until gnocchi are beginning to brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Note: in my family we love to add a good tomato sauce.
Paralympic athlete Pascale Bercovitch’s path — from the railroad tracks of a Paris suburb, where she hovered between life and death after being run over by a train, to Mount Herzl, where she lit a beacon to mark Israel’s 66th Independence Day — has been a study in sheer willpower. The 45-year-old French immigrant is also an accomplished journalist, author and documentary filmmaker whose work has taken her all over Europe and Africa. Her greatest sense of accomplishment, however, comes from having achieved all this in Israel.

Aged 17, on her way to school she fell under the train she was about to board, losing both of her legs. Lying alone on the rails in the snow for 47 minutes, Pascale underwent a spiritual near death experience. During her eight hour rescue, awake and already aware of her new condition, she took the crucial decision that changed her life forever. She knew nothing could ever stop her again; not a train, social convention, her family, or fear.

Armed with a solid belief that nothing could stop her Pascale followed her dream of going to Israel. In the summer of 1985, seven months after having both legs amputated at the thigh, she defied all odds—as well as skeptical relatives and aliya emissaries and flew alone to this totally new country with only a suitcase, a wheelchair, 2,000 shekels and about three words of Hebrew. She joined the Israel Defense Forces as its first paraplegic volunteer and was an instructor in the Sar-El program that brings foreign volunteers to Israel for short stints in the IDF.

Her move to Israel was not obvious, for a girl who grew up in a typical French Catholic milieu, not even aware of her Jewish ancestry —her father is Jewish, her mother is not—until she was 13. And even then, it was a topic that was not discussed at home.

She was 30 before she learned that part of her family had perished in the Holocaust. During her Army service she converted to Judaism, something she regarded as a formality.

Although she grew up knowing little about Zionism, Bercovitch is in many respects a born Zionist. She is a single-minded, no-nonsense idealist who seems driven by the words of a man she had never heard of during her childhood in a drab working-class suburb of Paris: “If you will it, it is no dream". Bercovitch is a serial dreamer who doesn’t let anything stop her. Her outlook on life is that it can end in an instant and therefore one should savor every moment. How one goes about this doesn't really matter. The day she woke up convinced that journalism was her calling, the new immigrant in a wheelchair was knocking on doors until, just days later, she had landed a position at a French Jewish radio station and from there moved on to French television. With the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991,
she was reporting and producing news for a host of foreign television outlets. She turned an article she wrote for Paris Match on a deaf Bedouin boy in the Sinai who communicates with dolphins into the best-selling book The Dolphin Boy, published in 17 languages.

In parallel to her journalistic career, Pascale challenged herself as an athlete. She trained as a swimmer for Barcelona in 1992 and was part of the Sydney Paralympics team in 2000 and produced an award-winning documentary Three-Hundredths of a Second on the Israeli Paralympic delegation to the 2004 Athens Olympics.

In 2008, when she was 40, the Israeli Olympic committee called her to see if she would train for a new Olympic sport, academic rowing. She pushed herself to qualify, and four months later was on her way to the Beijing Olympics, where she finished what was for her a disappointing eighth.

A few years later, she took up hand cycling to keep in shape. It wasn’t long before a leisure activity turned into a more professional pursuit. In 2013 Bercovitch was rated the No. 3 hand cyclist in the world (in her category for athletes with lower limb disability). She came in sixth at the 2012 London Paralympic Games a result she hopes to better at the Rio games in 2016. She is also a relentless extreme sport amateur, enjoying skydiving, waterskiing and surfing.

After several years, Bercovitch tired of globetrotting had a new dream to become a mother. She gave birth to her older daughter, Eden, 12 years ago; she has since separated from Eden’s father, a French journalist who returned to France. She met Oz Skop, national coach for the Israeli climbing team whom she calls her life partner, eight years ago. Together they are raising their child, Mika, 4, and Eden in their Tel Aviv apartment where Bercovitch has lived for the last decade.

Source:

Pascale Bercovitch rock climbing photo by Romi Nativ
The Jewish people today are mostly divided into two subpopulations: the Jews of Israel (~43%) and those in the Diaspora (~47%). They differ not just in the content of Jewish identity but in its very structure. Jewish identity in the Diaspora consists of voluntary religious and ethnic identification and solidarity.

Alternatively, in Israel, while Jewish identity is of core importance, it is largely automatic. Its major implications have to do with language, territory, citizenship, and political membership. Reigning patterns of Jewish identity are now challenged by dissenting conceptions and emerging new forms. In order to make effective policy, decision makers must deepen their understanding of Jewish identity in each of the two main centers and confront the challenge of forming a common language to bridge these two disparate conceptions of Jewish identity.

Jewish identity and identification in the Diaspora

For the last century the form and structure of modern Jewish identity was stable. This mainstream Jewish identity – ‘Jewish civil religion’ – is increasingly challenged, from one side, by the growing Haredi form of Jewish identification and, from the other, by increasing numbers of secular Jews, intermarried Jews, and those who claim not to identify as Jewish at all. Challenges to modern mainstream Jewish identity are also emerging as a result of a rupture between generations. Strong established Jewish organizations continue to support mainstream patterns of identity. Yet, a younger generation, coming of age in a society dramatically affected by new technologies, is exhibiting radically new configurations of Jewish identity: highly individualized, fragmented, or entirely self-fashioned.

Trends among younger Jews

There is a marked generational shift in Jewish identification from religious to secular, ethnic to cultural, community-oriented to individualistic and universal. Younger people choose how to express their identity and this is frequently individual and idiosyncratic, often with musical, artistic, and literary materials.

Younger Jews frequently embrace the particulars of Jewish culture but reject tribal "us/them" configurations of ethnicity. Is Jewish identity losing its normative character as a result of these developments?

The orientation toward global social justice is related to this issue. The classical Jewish civil religion, while liberal in political orientation was almost exclusively concerned with Jewish defense and
advancement. Many younger Jews find this too confining. They wish to express their Jewishness through social justice work globally, and have created innovative Jewish social justice startups to do so.

What, if any, are the implications of this for traditional Jewish solidarity? Another, overlapping set of challenges concerns the institutional loci of Jewish identity. Many young Jews do not join mainline Jewish organizations—federations and synagogues (especially Conservative synagogues). At the same time, they are finding new venues to express their Jewishness. Very often, these venues include the significant participation of non-Jews. They are not membership organizations, but rather, "alternative" sites of artistic, musical, and literary expression: concerts, clubs, bars, etc.

**Transitioning to a network society**

We wish to explore whether these generational changes are manifestations of a larger phenomenon: the transition to a network society, which has identifiable and predictable features. Has this pattern of joining organizations and finding new Jewish venues been influenced by the "network" paradigm organizing production, firms, and general human interaction? Networks are opposed to top-down, command structured, centralized bureaucratic organizations and institutions. General Motors is not a network. Neither is the modern bureaucratic nation-state. Networks are "flat," decentralized, often without true collective action and leadership – initiative can come from anywhere. Networks emphasize that interaction is based upon material or ideational interests and is very often ad-hoc and short term. This paradigm has been especially prominent in high-tech industries and touches almost everyone who has used the Internet. Young people who grew up online with the new social media will not be interested in joining traditional one-size-fits-all, large, highly-structured, and hierarchical Jewish organizations (such as federations). They will be interested, instead, in projects based on shared interests and mutual quests for meaning.

At the same time, networks and networking also provide opportunities. The Internet and its social media allow young Jews to connect, especially marginal and peripheral Jews who cannot have or do not wish to have ongoing social connections to Jewish organizations, institutions, and social frameworks.

In addition to questions of membership, affiliation and association, the networking paradigm also seems to impact Jewish identity construction itself. In contrast to traditional media, such as television, which played an enormous role in constructing collective identity, the Internet encourages individualization and customization in identity construction. Individual identity-crafting emphasizes a customized and fragmented identity. Recent surveys (including that of the New York Federation) have indicated the significant incidence of individually constructed, customized, and fragmented Jewish identities, and a rising number of unconventional identity configurations (including identifying as Jewish even though lacking any connection to Judaism through birth or conversion).

The increasing customization of Jewish identity is a formidable challenge to maintaining a collective Jewish identity, especially in the Diaspora. While Jews will continue to express a Jewish identity, they will identify differently with various dimensions of Judaism and there will not necessarily be an overlap or common core. The policy question can be simply stated: How do we retain the advantages of networking while mitigating its disadvantages? Because Jewish society operated as a global, networked...
society historically, it has traditions on which it can draw to thicken the idea of a Jewish network. At the same time, new social networks have diminished, if not erased, a traditional "added value" of Jewish belonging: having a Jewish network larger than one’s local acquaintances. How can we best bring back the added value of belonging to a Jewish network? Do we need a virtual porthole in which Jews participate in building communities, new Jewish projects, or an ideal, virtual Jewish civilization?

Source:
VOICING THE WIZO IDENTITY

By Tricia Schwitzer - Special Projects, World WIZO Executive

There is no doubt that the most effective way to reinforce commitment to WIZO is to actually visit Israel and see the fruits of your labour – the projects that benefit from your efforts on their behalf. That 'seeing is believing' experience is one you take back with you to your home country. It is powerful for its galvanizing influence on your sense of identity with WIZO – that through your efforts, indeed the efforts of all of us, WIZO is improving lives here in Israel. Take that message and let the facts speak for themselves.

Each one of us, throughout the world, is a small but vital piece of the jigsaw that comprises the philosophy of the WIZO movement. When each piece interlocks with the other, the picture emerges; and the message is clear: **Women. International. Zionist. Organization.** This is the definition of who we are. At the very core of our movement is our identity with Israel – and through our endeavours we share a sense of belonging, a common identity that makes us all proud to brag about it, completely and totally committed to WIZO. It is that simple. We know who we are, we love what we do, and we do it with love.

True, we are the reason behind 'the smiles we may never see' but that does not weaken the enthusiasm. It merely heightens it. Our greatest challenge is, however, to transmit that same message to others, to prospective members. We need to tap into the emotive perceived value of membership in WIZO, and the most effective way we can do this is simply to talk about it.

Generally, when we need to find a good hairdresser or reliable decorator we will ask a friend for recommendations. Similarly, when we have enjoyed a film, read a riveting book or stayed at a great hotel, we will take great pleasure in recommending that others should try it. We want to share our pleasure; we want others to experience the satisfaction or delight that we have – and there is no more powerful tool to convey the message than that which is under our nose. Word of mouth recommendation is marketing at its most fundamental. Referrals or friend-to-friend advertising works. It is free, easy and totally trustworthy. Furthermore, listening and talking grabs attention far more than the written word. The impact is far greater when chaverot share their experiences directly. So go ahead girls, chat, and gossip and tell. You all have a great gift to share.

Knowledge is greater when shared, and our sense of identity grows when we are in the company of those whose mission is the same as ours. Communicating our experiences engages others and arouses interest. Tell stories, real life success stories how WIZO's intervention has turned lives around. Speak animatedly about your WIZO experience and appeal to the heart of every woman you meet.
Our movement is unique in its diversity. The work of WIZO on the ground here in Israel is multi-faceted. There is certainly some aspect of WIZO that will appeal to every woman, be it women's rights or empowerment, education, culture, advocacy, Jewish education, Israel identity, and not least the betterment of Israel society through education and culture. The fact is that many women do not know WIZO beyond the pre-conceived ideas handed down through the generations. WIZO has so much to offer to its members. You know that. This is your knowledge – now share it.
What does it mean to be Jewish? How do we identify as Zionists in a world where to wear this identity loud and proud often means we are vulnerable to attacks? At a time when levels of anti-Semitism are rising around the world and to be anti-Zionist means you support the current cause du jour, do we dare stand out as supporters of Israel.

The answer is a resounding YES!!! A marketing guru once said that the best time to advertise and promote your business is during a recession. The same rule applies for Israel advocacy. Standing up for Israel is imperative when the noise from her detractors gets louder.

Nearly 80 years ago, the Jews of Europe had no voice. They were powerless against the Nazi propaganda juggernaut. Today, all the tools are in place to give us a platform and a voice. For me, advocating for Israel is just as much a part of my Jewish, Zionist identity as lighting my Shabbat candles and the Israeli flag. It is a part of who I am and I believe that as Jews not only are we responsible for each other but also for the Jewish state. Not everyone is a speaker or a writer – but we are all senders of email, posters on Facebook and disseminators of information.

On occasions when I have been asked to address audiences, the most common question I am asked is “why is Israel’s public relations so bad”. True, there is definitely room for improvement but I am also of the opinion that at a time when levels of anti-Semitism are alarmingly high and budgets to counter this are low, it has become incumbent on us as de facto representatives to be “Ambassadors of Truth”.

This means a call to arms. Arming yourself with the facts to counter the lies and hate filled invective is a great way to not only make the case for Israel but to bring you closer to your identity. We serve as examples to the next generation, the youth, and they are in the front line of defense.

But we also have to listen to our youth. In today’s social media driven world where they are bombarded with information and are much savvier than we are, it is important to engage with them and hear their concerns. University campuses are hotbeds of anti-Israel activity and many, once exposed to the opposing arguments, especially when they are made with such conviction, start questioning their own.

We cannot deny that there is another point of view or shield them from our own transgression but hopefully through knowledge and conviction they can make informed decisions. This is why it is important to be armed with facts. We cannot abdicate responsibility anymore by saying it is the work of the government or politicians. We are all responsible for each other.
As WIZO women we have the privilege of leading the charge. Not only are we grooming future leaders but we are educating our global community. Wearing our identity proudly and unapologetically in our name, we wonder women continue to live up to our tenet we care, we share and we dare. Let us heed the call to arms. Let facts, truth and pride be our weapons of choice.

Rolene Marks is a member of the Media Team Israel, a voluntary body under the auspices of the South African Zionist Federation that counters bias against Israel in the media. Rolene Marks has written numerous published opinion-editorials, addressed groups and has been featured on radio and television countering bias against Israel. Follow Rolemarks on Twitter or read her blog: www.rorosrantings.wordpress.com
The theme of Ruth’s conversion to Judaism is central to the story of Shavuot. “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16). These words, spoken by the young widow Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi, are among the most well known and most powerful words in the Bible. With this declaration, Ruth the Moabite cast her lot with the lot of the Jewish people, and she recognized the God of Israel as her God. Because being a Jew is a life-defining commitment, conversion to Judaism requires a transformation of personal identity. WIZO South Africa launched its national Biennale Campaign two weeks ago and invited Dr Bernd Wollschaeger as their guest speaker. His riveting personal story captivated audiences' country wide. As a convert to Judaism his personal journey echoes that of Ruth, the archetypal convert.

Bernd Wollschaeger, born in 1958 in the small German town of Bamberg, is the son of a former Nazi tank commander and member of one of the elite units of the Wehrmacht, the Germany army, for which he was awarded the Knight’s Cross personally by Hitler. Bernd loved his parents and admired his father, but growing up he needed to know all about what his father refused to discuss with him, what the Nazis did to Europe, Germany and the Jews, and what was his role.

When Palestinian terrorists murdered Israel’s Olympic athletes in 1972, the German press noted that again Jews had been killed on German soil. The fourteen year-old Bernd wanted to know what that meant. However, he could not get a straight answer from his parents. What he learned about the Third Reich at school horrified him. When he asked his father about German crimes his father told him that Bernd’s “teachers were all communists and liars and that a Holocaust never actually existed.” He didn’t know who to believe and started voraciously reading anything about Jews; the more he read, the more he realized maybe his father was one of those who killed Jews. One night, his father admitted it. He said killing Jews was necessary; they had to be purged from society. This was the last straw: and Bernd turned away from his father.

Curious too about Judaism and Jewish faith, Bernd sought out a small orthodox Jewish community in his home town where he met and befriended a Holocaust survivor who began to teach him Judaism. Increasingly rejected by his own family, these mostly elderly Jews became Bernd’s new family.

One day he read about a peace conference being held in a nearby German town for Israeli Jewish and Arab youth organized by Neve Shalom. He decided to attend and from that point on his life would never be the same again. He now wanted to visit Israel. In 1978 he came to Israel on a one way ticket. At a visit to the Kotel he felt a spiritual awakening he had never known before. A kindly Orthodox
man, watching him in his reverie, approached and encouraged him to seek out and reclaim his neshamah (soul).

Bernd returned to Germany, completed his medical degree, converted to Judaism, and made aliyah. These acts severed whatever bond was left with his father and family. In Israel, Bernd joined the Israeli Defense Forces as a medical officer, served for two years in the West Bank during the first Intifada, married and had a son. The First Gulf War frightened his American-born wife, and so with a heavy heart he agreed for her sake to move to Florida. They divorced three years later. Bernd remarried and had two more Jewish children. Today he practices as a family physician in Miami, Florida, where he was awarded family doctor of the year by the Florida Academy of Family Physicians in 2012.

Bernd’s courage to confront the truth and the transformation he underwent in order to create a new life despite his family’s past amazes and inspires. His personal story reflects the courage and conviction of a young man seeking change from the values and ideology he was brought up on and touches the heart of everyone who hears it. Tamar Lazarus, President of WIZO South Africa who accompanied him throughout his visit spoke about the powerful message he conveys “Do not hate. The language of hate is very powerful. Words can sprout into deeds; unchallenged deeds can become habits. Tolerated habits can influence character formation, which can become norms. As a society, we don’t learn. It’s easier to hate than take a corrective stance. We shouldn't re-live the mistakes of the past; rather use the past as a guide to better our future. We all have choices and change is always possible against all odds.”
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