

This week's Tefilla Notebook is sponsored by **Shari & Michael Weiner** in memory of Shari's mother, **Kitty Elsie Finkelstein, Esther Tachel bat Avraham Yaakov a"h**, whose yahrtzeit is on 13 Iyyar.

Tefilla Notebook

18-19 Iyyar • Emor • 34th day of the Omer

April 30-May 1, 2021

Steven Dorfman, President

Rabbi Pini Dunner, Senior Rabbi

Nati Bar-Am, Chazan



SHABBAT SCHEDULE

FRIDAY APRIL 30TH

CANDLELIGHTING 7:18pm

FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICES 6:30pm

SATURDAY, MAY 1ST

GEMARA SHIUR: 8:30AM

SHACHARIT 9:15AM

MINCHA 7:30pm

MAARIV 8:20pm

SHABBAT ENDS 8:22pm

WEEKDAY DAVENING TIMES

Sunday 8:00am & 7:30pm

Mon- Thu 7:00am & 7:30pm

Dear Members & Friends,

If you were on the lookout for a bizarre news headline this week, I don't think you could have beaten this one: "Shock After Christian Family Found Living as Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem". No, it's not a National Enquirer "scoop", nor the ramblings of some dubious blog – this story is actually true. An American Christian, Michael Elk, using the fake surname "Elkohen", together with his wife and five children, has been living as a Sephardic haredi Jew in the French Hill Jerusalem neighborhood for the past six years.

More shockingly, Elk was hardly low-profile. On the contrary, he actively touted his professional expertise as a sofer (ritual scribe) and mohel (ritual circumciser) – and believe it or not, there is a YouTube video of him performing a Brit Milah (ritual circumcision) on his own son, while in another video he demonstrates how to put on tefillin (phylacteries) Sephardic style. And although this deception is outrageous enough – indeed, it is beyond appalling – the story takes on a rather more disturbing tone with the revelation that despite Elk's outward appearances – viz. shaved head, bushy sidelocks and beard, black hat, giant yarmulke, and the strictly-observant lifestyle of a haredi Jew – he has always been and remains a devout Christian who deliberately embedded himself into the clearly credulous Orthodox community to act as a missionary.

According to the website Behadrei Haredim, Elk admitted as much when confronted with the evidence of fake credentials utilized to gain Israeli citizenship, along with countless other lies he has used over the years to burnish his bogus identity. There are also videos of him appearing alongside Christian pastors posing as an "Orthodox Jewish Rabbi" in which he reveals both his intimate knowledge of the Christian gospels, as well as his devoted belief in Jesus.

Make no mistake, my horror at this story is not a reflection of my feelings towards Christians. Truthfully, I am amazed by Evangelical Christian support both for Israel and for Jewish causes – in my view, a true sign of Messianic times, as ancient enmities between our faiths fade into the background, so that the faithful can prepare for the end of days. But that is only as long as we can all feel safe in the knowledge that we respect each other's faith beliefs, and will never attempt to proselytize and convert, even if we feel our faith is right, and theirs is wrong. And certainly not – certainly not! – via underhanded means. Let me make myself absolutely clear to all my Christian friends: whoever set up Michael Elk as a "sleeper" in the Orthodox community – and I don't for a second believe that he acted alone – must be identified and rooted out. This type of behavior is just not on.

Curiously, Elk is not the first person to fake Jewish identity and get away with it. In 2018, it was revealed that Wolfgang Seibert, 71-year-old chairman of the Jewish community in Pinneberg, Germany, wasn't Jewish, and had been deceiving the local community since 2003, climbing through the ranks until he had reached the most senior leadership position. It turned out Seibert had carefully fabricated his Jewish origins and was actually a Protestant – from a family of Nazis!

There was also the stunning story of "Jacob Ben Nistell", who claimed to be from Haifa, Israel, and began teaching classes about Judaism in Poznan, Poland. He was so successful that the small Jewish community appointed him as their rabbi. In 2016, a Polish newspaper revealed that this charming man with long sidelocks, a generous beard, and a wide-brimmed black hat, was actually Jacek Niszczota, a Catholic cook from Giechanow in central Poland. Someone from his hometown had apparently recognized him after he was interviewed on TV.

Then there's the rather more sinister tale of "Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Golding", a high-profile anti-missionary activist in Israel during the 1980s. Claiming to have been rescued as a baby from the Babi Yar massacre, according to his version of events he had ended up in England, where he was raised a Christian and had married the daughter of a prominent bishop. He also claimed that an enigmatic character had appeared out of nowhere while he was a child, and told him he was actually descended from a prominent Hasidic "rebbe". Still, he persisted in his Christianity, becoming a missionary in Turkey, although he ultimately returned to the Jewish fold – or so he said. As it turns out, his fantastic story was a collection of blatant fabrications – he was neither a rabbi nor a doctor, and his name wasn't Shmuel Golding. In reality, he was an Evangelical Christian pastor from England who abandoned his wife and children and reinvented himself as a haredi Jew in Jerusalem, and may very well have been a closet missionary who posed as an anti-missionary, hiding in obvious sight.

What struck me most about the story of Michael Elk's deception is that it emerged in the week we read Parshat Emor, which ends with the rather jarring account of the blasphemer. This story seems out of place, appearing out of nowhere following the Torah's discussions regarding priestly purity and holiness, the mandated festivals, and various other ritual obligations and prohibitions. Additionally, the blasphemer is introduced to us with a rather odd description (Lev. 24: 10): וַיֵּצֵא בֶן אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית וְהוּא בֶן אִשׁ מִצְרַיִם בְּתוּךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – "And the son of an Israelite mother who was the son of an Egyptian man went out among the Israelites." This surprising record of his parental ancestry precedes the details of a heated altercation which resulted in the blasphemer profaning the name of God.

I feel it is worth noting that despite the fact the Torah stresses time-and-again how important it is to show kindness to converts, and those who seek to join our people, this is only if they are not בֶּן אִשׁ מִצְרַיִם בְּתוּךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - a child of the Egyptians among the Jewish nation. A snake in the grass will inevitably lead to devastation and turmoil – both emotionally and spiritually – and may even lead to blasphemy and an abandonment of the Jewish faith. And it is those who are the most devoted to ritual observance, and to the pursuit of sanctity and spirituality, who are particularly vulnerable if someone who appears to be a "son of Israel" but is in fact a "son of Egypt".

This week, as I read through some of the blog reactions penned by Elk's shocked neighbors and friends, especially those who supported him through the grave illness of his wife and after her death, I was very moved by their purity and innocence, evident from their willingness to trust a fellow "Orthodox Jew" and offer him and his family their hearts and resources. At the same time, the pain caused by the revelation that Elk was a conman is beyond description, driving home the message that the gravest of dangers can sometimes be very close to home.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom and a great week ahead, *Rabbi Pini Dunner*

YINBH UAE TOUR
OCTOBER 21-28, 2021

DETAILS COMING SOON

- 5 STAR GOURMET CUISINE
- LUXURY ROOM & SUITES OPTIONS
- FANTASTIC PROGRAM
- HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS

Optional extension to Jerusalem for Shabbat at the King David Hotel

Special Guest
David Freidman

kosher travelers BEVERLY HILLS SYNAGOGUE
YOUNG ISRAEL OF NORTH BEVERLY HILLS

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Simon & Leehe Hakakian



Sisterhood Corner

April

Happy Lag Ba'Omer!

Wishing you fun celebrations, warm fires, and good food!

Save the date!

Shavuot Classes at YINBH

Sunday, May 16th classes beginning at 9:30pm

A Dessert Bar will be available between classes!

Visit beverlyhillssynagogue.org for details & registration

Shabbat Shalom,
Cecile & Ruthie

Sisterhood Co-Presidents



Barbara Doppelt
B'er Shifra bat Moshe a"h
Mother of
Julie Boyer
Yahrtzeit - 22 Iyar



If you would like to join the Mincha/Maariv WhatsApp Group, please send a message to the Rabbi on Whatsapp at 310-499-3407



Debbie Cohen
Maryjo Schnitzer
Shirin Fialkov
Suzi Fischmann
Wendy Wallack
Yehuda Feigen

PAUL FEDER Z"l
GEMARA SHIUR

לע"נ פנחס אליהו בן שמשון הלוי

Join Rabbi Dunner for his Gemara shiur on Shabbat mornings 45 minutes before Shacharit.

Stay Connected on Social Media



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TEEN MINYAN

WITH CHAZZAN NATI BARAM

SHABBAT DAY

MAY 8TH AT 10AM

TEEN MINYAN IS BACK!

Teen led services and participation

in the shul patio

Followed by a *teen only* kiddush to-go catered by Jeff's Gourmet

Sponsorship welcome

RSVP to office@yinh.org to attend

ייןב"ה YINBH
BEVERLY HILLS SYNAGOGUE



Shavuot 2021

AT YINBH BEVERLY HILLS SYNAGOGUE

לא תרצח
לא תנאף
לא תגנב
לא תענה
לא תחמד

אנוכי ה'
לא יהיה
לא תשא
זכור את
בבד את

Sunday, May 16th

Class 1 - 9:30pm-10:15pm

Class 2 - 10:30pm-11:15pm

Class 3 - 11:30pm-12:15am

Dessert Bar Between Classes *Featuring...*

Magnolia Bakery Cheesecake

Gourmet Handmade Cookies

Deluxe Coffee & Herbal Tea

Fresh Fruit

Sign up:

beverlyhillssynagogue.org

310-276-7650

YINBH BEVERLY HILLS SYNAGOGUE
PRESENTS

YINBH GALA BANQUET

A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

marking the full re-opening of our
synagogue and the resilience of our
community over the past year

THURSDAY, JUNE 17

HONORING



Rabbi
Pini Dunner

Chazzan
Nati Baram

IN PERSON & VIRTUAL

PRIVATE HOME IN BEVERLY HILLS
ADDRESS PROVIDED UPON RSVP

www.bhsbanquet.com