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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

BY LARRY GORDON

The Impressive Mr. Oren



Things may have become a bit safer for Israel for now—at least in Washington, DC—as American-born scholar and historian Michael Oren has assumed the position of the Jewish State's ambassador to the U.S. Of course, Israel needs a great myriad of things, but perhaps the void that needs filling most is the position of an articulate and effective spokesperson who

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LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

BY RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

Ten months ago, I, along with my family, had the z'chut of fulfilling a *mitzvah* that Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam could only dream of fulfilling. Coming down the steps off our Nefesh B'Nefesh chartered flight last August, we became part of a dream, part of something larger than ourselves, part of the national destiny of our people. We had come home. We had come to

live in the homeland of our nation, the land which so many throughout our history had yearned, aspired, and hoped for. Now, we, standing on the shoulders of those who preceded us, had come back to our land. What a privilege, what a feeling, what a high.

Today, ten months after that fateful and awesome day, we look back to see what we have accomplished, where we stand, and where we aspire to

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Simply Long Beach



Rabbi Chaim Wakslak of Young Israel of Long Beach with members of Simply Tzfat, who performed Monday night for an audience of several thousand at a concert on the boardwalk sponsored by the City of Long Beach.

Photo by Ivan H. Norman

SETTLERS SLAM 'GOOD NEWS'



A settlement community in Gush Etzion, pictured from a distance. The future of these communities, whose current population stands at over 500,000, is one of the many points of contention between the U.S. and Israel. See Story, Page 47

HEARD IN THE BAGEL STORE

Building Bnei Brak

BY LARRY GORDON

Ahh, the hustle and bustle and the noise of the streets of Bnei Brak. Car horns are blowing as people dart between slow-moving vehicles. Baby carriages jut out from every direction also endeavoring to get to the other side of the street. It cannot be a coincidence that Bnei Brak and Boro Park not only share similar-



Mayors Mike Bloomberg and Yakov Asher.

Continued on Page 14

HAFTR, Rambam Splitting

It was a three-year experiment that originally evolved from the notion that the Five Towns community was experiencing an overall shift to the religious right. Now, in retrospect, the feeling may be in some circles that the move is not as significant or dramatic as originally anticipated, so

Continued on Page 20

THREE KINGS

BY THE LEGENDARY DANNY O'DOUL

After a truly inspirational July Fourth, I awoke on the fifth and realized that our leader, President Obama, was going off on his trip to Russia, the state formerly known as the principal of the Soviet Union (and, intermittently, by only a symbol, the hammer and sickle on the bright red background). I

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HEARD IN THE BAGEL STORE

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sounding names, but at times they look almost identical as well.

Many of us think of the city of Bnei Brak as a place that possesses a unique type of sanctity. Certainly it's an enclave in Eretz Yisrael dominated by chassidic and yeshivish rabbis and rebbes and populated by their followers. Bnei Brak is home to some of the world's greatest and oldest yeshivas as well as internationally famous chassidic dynasties. But then there is the everyday Bnei Brak that is a regular city with mundane needs and requirements not unlike any other metropolis in the world. The city may, to an extent, run on miracles, but it still needs a competent and charismatic personality to manage those miracles.

And that's where Bnei Brak's new mayor, Yakov Asher, comes into the picture. A longtime member of the city's governing council, Mr. Asher was elected about six months ago to be mayor of a city burdened with an accumulated municipal debt of \$55 million and an annual budget deficit of between \$5 and \$6 million. I don't think he was here in New York a few weeks ago to solicit funds for the city, but his visit was rather to make members of the Orthodox Jewish communities here aware of the needs of this unique city in Israel.

Yakov Asher is friendly and talkative as he discusses Bnei Brak while acquainting himself with the nuances of our communities here in New York. He knows that after Jerusalem and pos-



(L-R): Ben Barber, founder of Bnei Brak Foundation; Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz; Mayor Yaakov Asher of Bnei Brak; NYS Assemblyman Dov Hikind; NYC Councilman David Weprin; Ezra Friedlander, The Friedlander Group; and Dr. David Moskovits, President of Endowment for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

sibly Tsfat, the next most frequently visited city in Eretz Yisrael for many of us is the metropolis of Bnei Brak. The city has a round-the-clock pulse as there is always something special going on.

Several of this generation's most revered Torah sages are based there, amongst them Rav Ahron Leib Shteinman, *shlita*, and Rav Chaim Kanievsky, *shlita*. Both Rav Shteinman's home as well as Rav Kanievsky's shul, known as the Lederman shul, are regular stops on the itinerary of travelers with yeshiva roots from around the world. The Lederman shul is known for the crowds it draws for the *vasikin* or pre-dawn *minyan* in which Reb Chaim is a daily participant. Following morning

services, when Rav Kanievsky does not have to leave to attend a nearby *bris milah* (which occur regularly), there is an opportunity to chat for a few moments with the sage.

But this is the spiritual aspect of Bnei Brak. Mr. Asher acts with realism and the understanding that the city cannot continue to function without being able to pay its bills. Today Bnei Brak is a city of 160,000 residents, though it seems to the naked eye that the population is significantly greater. The city is filled with young people, and in fact, the mayor says, over 50 percent of the population is below the age of 22. Yakov Asher also adds that almost half of the working-age population in Bnei

Brak are full-time members of yeshivas and *kollelim*, which means that they basically do not contribute substantially to the tax rolls of the city.

At the same time, he says, there is an extreme housing shortage in Bnei Brak with the country and the municipality feeling the pressure to accommodate its citizens. As we survey an aerial photograph of Bnei Brak, Mayor Asher points to a large tract of land in the northern part of the city where his plans call for the building of an industrial complex with skyscraping office buildings. His hope is to lure businesses from around Israel to relocate to this area just to the east of Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv.

Mayor Asher says that he hopes that someday he will be able to do for Bnei Brak what Teddy Kollek did for Jerusalem. His objective is to interest donors from around the world to undertake projects that contribute to the preservation as well as the strengthening of the city. Asher wants to communicate the rich history and the deep attachment to Torah that is still very much part of the fabric of everyday life in the city.

Mayor Yakov Asher was here in New York to explain to New Yorkers the important role of Bnei Brak as much as he was here to learn whatever he could from the way New York functions. In a meeting in Manhattan with New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, the two mayors shared stories and experiences about their respective obligations to their municipalities.

Mayor Asher said that he was

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- 6/18 - The Klein Family of West Hempstead on the Bat Mitzvah - HANC Rocks!
- 6/17 - Priority One on the Dinner Dance and Rosenberg Barbecue
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- 6/14 - The Meyers Family of Stamford on the Bat Mitzvah - Bi-Cultural Day Rocks!
- 6/12 - Chabad Five Towns on the Pre-School Graduation
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- 6/7 - The Ackerman Family of Cedarhurst on the Bat Mitzvah - HALB Rocks!
- 6/7 - The Wasser Family of Lawrence on the Bat Mitzvah - HALB Rocks!
- 6/7 - The Herkowitz Family of Cedarhurst on the Bar Mitzvah - South Shore Rocks!
- 6/4 - The Safran/Altman Family of W. Hempstead on the Bat Mitzvah - YHT Rocks!
- 6/4 - The Frieling Family of Lawrence on the Bat Mitzvah - HALB Rocks!
- 6/3 - The Mulgay Family of Cedarhurst on the Bat Mitzvah - Shulamith Rocks!
- 5/25 - The Zvulun Family of Teaneck on the Bat Mitzvah - Yeshivat Noam Rocks!
- 5/25 - The Lebowitz Family of White Plains on the Bat Mitzvah - SAR Rocks!
- 5/24 - The Rubin Family of Great Neck on the Bar Mitzvah - North Shore Rocks!
- 5/24 - The Pavel Family of Teaneck on the Bat Mitzvah - Moriah Rocks!
- 5/24 - The Schorr Family of Teaneck on the Bat Mitzvah - Yavneh Rocks!
- 5/24 - The Miller Family of Lawrence on the Bat Mitzvah - Shulamith Rocks!
- 5/24 - The Bekore Family of Merrick on the Bat Mitzvah - Ohav Shalom Rocks!
- 5/21 - The Zalta Family of Great Neck on the Bat Mitzvah - North Shore Rocks!
- 5/21 - The Brandeis School on the Dinner Dance
- 5/17 - The Bulka Family of Woodmere on the Bat Mitzvah - HALB Rocks!
- 5/17 - The Stone Family of Teaneck on the Bat Mitzvah - Moriah Rocks!
- 5/17 - The Marcus Family of White Plains on the Bat Mitzvah - SAR Rocks!
- 5/17 - The Jacobson Family of Brooklyn on the Bar Mitzvah
- 5/17 - The Weiss Family of Brooklyn on the Bar Mitzvah

HAFTR And Rambam

Continued from Front Cover

the HAFTR Board of Directors voted this week to roll the clock back, try to sever ties with Rabbi Zev Friedman of Rambam Mesivta, and begin to dismantle the all-encompassing educational partnership between Rambam and HAFTR, known heretofore as Machon HaTorah.

As an immediate consequence of the board decision, HAFTR will not be funding the second year of Shalhevet High School, the all-girls yeshiva high school created by Machon HaTorah as an alternative to the existing HAFTR high school. The immediate fallout from the HAFTR decision is that some 30 or so young women who had been anticipating attending Shalhevet next year are at present not enrolled anywhere; those involved are seeking to have them placed for the coming school year as soon as possible.

The newly installed co-president of the HAFTR board, Mark Honigsfeld, told the *Five Towns Jewish Times* on

Wednesday morning that the sudden change is primarily a result of the global economic downturn and the inability of HAFTR to continue the funding of Shalhevet as it seeks to establish itself as a viable school in the community. "The commitment was for Shalhevet to be 100 percent funded by HAFTR, with the academics and other aspects of the school to be run by Rabbi Friedman and Yotav Eliach," said Mr. Honigsfeld. He said that with the economy in the shape that it's in, the school has found itself with an increase in applications for scholarships, making it difficult to continue funding for Machon and Shalhevet.

For his part, Rabbi Friedman said that he felt that the decision on HAFTR's part was "unfortunate, unnecessary, and painful" for all involved. Mr. Honigsfeld said that it was still premature to discuss the status of the Machon, because although HAFTR has made its own decision about the funding, the Machon is run by a separate board which has not yet had the opportunity to convene.

Others close to the situation said that another unstated issue was the matter of the disparity in the tuitions between the traditional HAFTR school, Rambam Mesivta, and Shalhevet. The full HAFTR high school tuition is \$24,000 annually, while Shalhevet awarded a large number of partial and full scholarships, with some paying tuition in the \$5,000 range for last year.

While it may take some time to iron out exactly what occurred here and where exactly the fault, if any, lies, for now all involved are concerned about making certain that the students who do not have a school at present are placed appropriately. To that end, Mr. Honigsfeld said that he is working closely with Joey Genachowski and Jay Gellman of HALB, and they are working diligently in the true spirit of *achdus* in the community to make certain that all the students are placed. Rabbi Moshe Zwick of the Shulamith school said that he was also contacted to discuss the possibility that some of the girls might attend Shulamith.

The genesis of the Machon HaTorah

partnership was based on the idea that over the coming years the traditional constituency for HAFTR would erode somewhat, and that a retooling of the *hashkafic* approach would have to take place. While economic circumstances were not cooperative in continuing the new venture, at the same time it seems that the anticipated shift was not as extreme as once envisioned, and it was decided that the old pre-Machon HAFTR can succeed and flourish.

After the students are placed, the next matter of business is to try to disentangle the agreements that were entered into and determine what cost, if any, there will be to rearrange the corporate structure of Machon and allow the existing institutions to continue functioning independently of one another. ♦

HEARD IN THE BAGEL STORE

Continued from Page 14

extremely impressed with Mayor Bloomberg and his extensive grasp of the intricacies of running a complex city like New York. He was in particular able to study up close how New York manages fiscally in these trying economic times. Mayor Asher is hoping to balance his city's budget by the end of this year.

Yakov Asher has big plans for Bnei Brak. "There are so many things that a city like ours needs that we try to do without because we just don't have the money," he said in the offices of the 5TJT in Cedarhurst a few weeks ago. He said that, in reality, and despite its sacred past and a lifestyle steeped in the study of Torah, there are very contemporary social problems that need to be dealt with.

"We have youth that need attention the same as any city," he said. The same kinds of trouble that kids get into anywhere is unfortunately replicated in Bnei Brak. "We need funds to help these kids to function in a proper social environment," he said. "We need enhanced special education programs for our children and on and on." Yakov Asher is a man with a vision who will not be happy bringing this ancient city of Bnei Brak into the 20th century. He is a 21st century man, ready, willing, and looking for the assistance needed to help his city move forward. ♦

Comments for Larry Gordon are welcome at editor@5tjt.com.

Looking Ahead

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tain, to get the most out of the experience of the mountain.

Hashem says, "Moshe, don't just climb Har Sinai, but *be* on Har Sinai; get the most out of Har Sinai that you can get!" After one makes *aliyah*, the challenge is to keep striving, keep growing, to not feel that it's enough just to be in this special land, but to keep going to even greater heights.

Eretz Yisrael is our land, the special gift that Hashem has given to His people, the land in which one feels closer to Hashem. Let us appreciate its qualities, recognize its beauty, and yearn for the day that all the Jewish people will be living within its borders. ♦



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