

Iranian Baha'is Suffer Discrimination in Their Home Country

By Karen Brodsky

We have just completed observing the holiday of Tisha B'Av, a sad day for the Jewish people. Several events over the millennia occurred on this day, including the:

- * destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem;
- * beginning of the First Crusade, when thousands of Jews were murdered;
- * expulsion of Jews from England;
- * eviction of Jews from Spain; and
- * deportations of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka.

These events reflect the myriad times Jews have been persecuted, exiled, and murdered throughout history.

As part of its work of resettling refugees in Charlotte, HIAS NC is familiar with the travails of religious and ethnic minorities from many countries. One such group the agency has resettled are Iranians of the Bahá'í faith. According to the group's website they "believe that humanity is one

race, that men and women are equal and that all religions and prophets are derived from the same source, God."

Iran is the birth place of the Bahá'í religion. With 300,000 Bahá'ís in Iran, it is the country's largest religious minority. In Iran, repression of the Bahá'í community is official government policy. According to the faith's official website, the Iranian government regards Bahá'ís as apostates and "unprotected infidels." Bahá'ís in Iran have no legal rights, and they are not permitted to elect leaders of their community.

A recent survey by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom documented the repression of the group in Iran. More than 200 Bahá'í leaders have been executed since 1979, and more than 10,000 "have been dismissed from government and university jobs" and have endured "increasingly harsh treatment," the USCIRF report said.

The Iranian state-run broadcast-er Press TV reported that seven

Iranian followers of the minority Bahá'í faith are waiting to be tried in Tehran for "espionage for Israel, desecrating religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic." If convicted, the five men and two women could be sentenced to death. The charges are baseless.

One Iranian Bahá'í family settled by HIAS NC agreed to be interviewed only if their names and photos would not be revealed in this article. They hope in solidarity with their seven imprisoned brothers and sisters and are concerned for the safety of friends and family in Iran.

In Iran, the family — father, mother, daughter and son, like all Bahá'ís — was not allowed to work in corporations, industry, or the government, only odd jobs. They were denied licenses to operate businesses. Children were not allowed to attend university. Considered "unclean," Bahá'ís were not allowed to work in the food industry either, the father says. They were prisoners in their

own country. No one of their faith was allowed to practice, and, when they did, they gathered in each others' homes in secret. This recalls our ancestors, who had to study in secret because the Greeks decreed that the teaching or studying of Torah was a crime punishable by death. The Jews studied, and when Greek patrols were spotted, they would pretend to be playing a dreidel game.

In a famous story in 1983, Mona, a 16-year-old held classes for young children in her home. When Islamists discovered her, they imprisoned and tortured her force her to recant her faith. She would not, and was hanged.

The daughter interviewed carries a photo of this girl sheathed in plastic. She is her heroine.

When they decided to leave, the family applied for visitors' visas to Turkey, saying they were going to visit friends. The father suspects they were allowed to go because it is "a relief" for the Islamic government when they do. The family sold everything they owned, trav-

eled to Turkey, rented an apartment and waited until their refugee status was confirmed. All the while, their funds grew scarce. They didn't have enough money even to return to Iran, the father says. Finally, they were granted refugee status, and HIAS brought them to Charlotte.

Most, if not all, Iranian Bahá'ís leave because there is no future for their children. In America, the father says, "my daughter has total freedom and endless opportunities. No one here tells us we can't practice our faith. We have been freed from the cage."

Commemorating Tisha B'Av reminds us that their stories are eerily similar to Jewish stories and the stories of religious minorities around the world. HIAS is here for them.

HIAS NC accepts cash donations and donations of furniture and household items. Volunteers are welcome and always needed. Please contact Ellen Dubin at 704-535-8803 or ellen.dubin@hias.org for more information. ✧

Jewish Wall of Fame



The latest installation of the Jewish Wall of Fame highlights Jewish artists and is sponsored by Barbara and Jerry Levin.

The six honorees are:

- Yaacov Agam**, Israeli-born pioneer of kinetic art movement
- Anni Albers**, pre-eminent textile artist of the 20th century
- Marc Chagall**, Russian-born French painter specializing in Jewish and biblical themes
- Roy Lichtenstein**, innovator in the Pop Art movement
- Louise Nevelson**, Russian-born American creator of "assemblage" sculptures
- Camille Pissarro**, born in St.

Thomas, VI, patriarch of the Impressionist movement

Additional exhibits of the Jewish Wall of Fame are located in the Gorelick Family Educational Building and the Don and Bobbi Bernstein Education Building.

The Jewish Wall of Fame's mission is to disseminate knowledge of the many achievements of the Jewish people and instill pride in our Jewish heritage. To insure future exhibits, you may address your tax deductible donation to the Foundation of Shalom Park, 5007 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226, with "JWF" in the memo line. ✧

Oasis Program Rescued by Levine Family

(Continued from front page)

legal assistance, insurance, nutrition, and many other issues important to older adults," says Berman.

"The elderly population is expected to double by the year 2030," explains Linda Bass, Senior Adult Program Director of the LJCC. "The Oasis program has tripled its participation in the past three years. We need to continue to provide quality resources and programs for the growing number of Jewish seniors in our community."

The Oasis program partners with Jewish Family Services to provide Caregiver Support to baby-boomers and seniors who are providing care for loved ones. The educational presentations are quarterly and the support group meets monthly.

As a way of explaining the enormous cuts, the United Way points to unprecedented increases in requests from critical need agencies as the Charlotte community experienced this year's economic downturn. Critical programs, defined as those providing basic services to sustain life, experienced less significant cuts in funding than the LJCC.

The additional funding must now come from our community members. Anyone interested in donating funds to help maintain the continuity of programming for our senior population is encouraged to call 704-366-5007 or send donations to the LJCC OASIS Program at 5007 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226.

Bass continues, "Oasis participants rely on our program for their

connection to physical and mental stimulation as well as easing the adjustment to the challenges of the aging process."

As one regular Oasis participant explains, "This program is our lifeline. If we lose this than we won't be able to see our friends, exercise our bodies and our minds and get out of our homes. For us, the Oasis program is a critical need." ✧

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JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

Mitzvah Maker Cookers

May

- Donna Emerson
- Patricia Fleishman-Gooder
- Katherine Goldstein
- Shirley Goodman
- Linda Isser
- Sharon Katz
- Audrey Madans
- Carol Sandler
- Stephanie Seitlin
- Faye Sinkoe
- Janice Weiner

June

- Lynne Cojac
- Lynn Edelstein
- Iris Friedlander
- Deborah Goldstein
- Adrienne Gossett
- Gail Green
- Susan Jacobs
- Florence Jaffa
- Marilyn Lippman
- Elise Menaker
- Marnie Moskowitz

July

- Ann Abel
- Emily Chatham
- Sharon Katz
- Judi Lecker
- Phil Levine
- Paula Musler
- Jill Newman
- Marsha Scheer
- Nancy Tarbis
- Lynda White

Marcelle Oxman
Sandy Rosenberg
Jodi Valenstein

Mitzvah Baskets in honor of:

B'not mitzvah of Lydia Safir, Carly Coben, Danielle Adler, Olivia Bear
B'nai mitzvah of Sam Ditesheim, Jacob Greenblatt, Brandon Greenblatt, Jake Goldberg