

# BJC Wensa

“WENSA” MEANS “FUN” IN JUDEO-ARABIC!

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VAYISHLACH

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## PARSHA OF THE WEEK.... VAYISHLACH

Jacob returns to the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, and sends angel-emissaries to Esau in hope of a reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob prepares for war, prays, and sends Esau a large gift (consisting of hundreds of heads of livestock) to appease him.

That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Jabbok River; he, however, remains behind and encounters the angel that embodies the spirit of Esau, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but vanquishes the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Israel, which means “he who prevails over the divine.”

Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and kiss, but part ways. Jacob purchases a plot of land near Shechem, whose crown prince—also called Shechem—abducts and rapes Jacob’s daughter Dinah. Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi avenge the deed by killing all male inhabitants of the city, after rendering them vulnerable by convincing them to circumcise themselves.

Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Reuben loses the birthright because he interferes with his father’s marital life. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father Isaac, who later dies at age 180. (Rebecca has passed away before Jacob’s arrival.)

Our Parshah concludes with a detailed account of Esau’s wives, children and grandchildren; the family histories of the people of Seir, among whom Esau settled; and a list of the eight kings who ruled Edom, the land of Esau’s and Seir’s descendants.

### Hannukkah Latkes



#### DIRECTIONS

Grind the potatoes.  
Add eggs, flour and salt.  
Mix well.  
Warm up oil in frying pan.  
Pour batter onto the oil in spoonfuls.  
Let fry for about five minutes on medium fire.  
Turn over and let fry for another three minutes.  
Take out your latkes and lay them on paper towel to cool.



#### INGREDIENTS

5 big potatoes  
3 eggs  
1/3 cup of flour  
1 teaspoon salt

### TWO THINGS TO REMEMBER IN LIFE:

"Take care of your thoughts when you are alone", and  
"Take care of your words when you are with people."



Inspiring and Positive Quotes



# The Dove Flyer Movie Review

By: Anna Khabbaza Hakakian

On Sunday, Nov. 9, 2014, The Babylonian Jewish Center sponsored the movie "The Dove flyer" to be shown at the Gold Coast International Film Festival. Following the movie at the Bow Tie Great Neck Squire theatre, there was a Q&A and discussion with Maurice Shohet (president of the Iraqi World Jewry) and Regina Gil (founder and executive director of the Gold Coast International Film Festival).

The Dove Flyer (Mafriah Ha-Yonim) tells the story of a Jewish boy (Kabi) in Iraq growing in a Jewish family in Baghdad. His uncle Hizkel, a Zionist, is arrested and taken off to prison to await trial and a possible death sentence. As the family, their friends, neighbors and enemies come to terms with what has occurred, the ground gradually shifts beneath them all, causing new friendships to develop and old ones to break.

The movie aims to describe the scene in Baghdad at the time of the Jewish immigration to Israel in 1950, when between the years 1950-51 close to hundred thirty thousand Jews left Iraq. The most ancient community in the world ceased to exist.

It also portrays the ideological differences of the community with the protagonists being Zionists, Communists, and Iraqi nationalists. Zionism was not hugely popular amongst the Jewish population and there were many factions amongst the community on the question of immigration, which was the essence of the film. The more popular Communist Party, was violently persecuted as they aimed to change the system in comparison to the Zionist movement which was simply calling to the emigration to Israel.

The film also under the name Farewell Baghdad had a huge PR campaign and supported by the Israeli government. The film was made in Arabic, in Iraqi dialect.

Director Nissim Dayan adopted the novel, The Dove Flyer by Eli Amir, and chose to portray his own impressions of Iraqi Jewry and the scenes of Baghdad in 1950, to the extent that it was meant to be an expose of the history of the community and the different political factions within it. Dayan sometimes fell short to give a clear and true picture of the actual events of the period. An introduction to the history of Iraqi Jews would have been useful to foreign audiences.

To be fair, the project is most challenging as there has not been a film made by Israelis in Iraqi Jewish dialect. It is a difficult project to undertake, I imagine. A few actors performed the dialogue and proverbs nicely, and you could tell a few actors could not pronounce with the right accent.

The film is almost entirely in Arabic; among the audience, those who know the language took delight in some salty and picturesque phrases that were lost in translation.


Based on a novel and evidently filmed with the novelist's cooperation (he has a cameo), the film seems to take care to touch on several different angles within the political and social scene-- friendships between Jews and Muslims, the communist movement that was active during the same period, the assimilationist option extending even to conversion, the Zionist movement, the arrival of Arab refugees from Palestine, and the cultural influence of the West. For those unfamiliar with the experience of Jews in the world of Islam, it's an interesting picture and it suggests an important added perspective on today's tensions.

There is no question that the film is politically motivated and Dayan inserted some scenes to spice up the story and appeal to today's audience. Some scenes were fabricated and far from reality, but I suspect the director modified the story to appeal to today's understandings and interests in politics as well as a good story. After all this was not a documentary.

Overall, I thought it was a powerful film especially due to the effort made to have the cast primarily speak in Judeo Arabic. It was probably the first film I personally have watched and understood in Arabic which says a lot about the dying language. My only apprehension is that the film tends to misrepresent and belittle the Iraqi Jews and gives a poor impression of the community. The rich culture, well established and educated class of majority of the people was not portrayed well. For a foreigner viewing this movie, it paints a portrait of Iraqi Jews as low class uncultured, poor society which is far from the truth.

I found the movie both thought provoking and informative and I believe there were many hidden messages within it. The important and wider objective to me is to tell the stories. This is a part of our history. The scenes at times very emotional, sometimes disturbing, makes us stop and think about how we define home and belonging. What lessons have been learned and how we choose to keep our heritage alive through generations. It is our hope that future generations of Jews absorb and delight in this history, and find creative and constructive ways to tell the stories around the world.



Moishe Goldberg was heading out of the Synagogue one day, and as always Rabbi Mendel was standing at the door, shaking hands as the Congregation departed. The rabbi grabbed Moishe by the hand, pulled him aside and whispered these words at him: "You need to join the Army of God!" Moishe replied: "I'm already in the Army of God, Rabbi." The rabbi questioned: "Then how come I don't see you except for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?" Moishe whispered back: "I'm in the secret service." 

# The History of Babylonian Jewry

Excerpts from Professor Efraim Sadka, *chairman of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or-Yehuda*

The story of the Jews of Babylon, modern-day Iraq, began in the land of Israel. The circle closed in Israel in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the *aliya*, or immigration, of most of the Iraqi Jewish community. During the 2,600 years in between—the span of the modern historical record—Babylonia was more than just a safe haven for world Jewry. It was the intellectual, spiritual, and moral center of Jewish life.

The first Jews to settle in Babylonia arrived in an act of force. Uprooted from their homes in the Kingdom of Judah, some 40,000 Jews were forced to follow Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylonia (605-562 BC), to his kingdom, which lay to the east between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. After the King's death, the Jewish slaves were freed and allowed to go back to the land of Israel and the built of the Second Temple. Indeed, Jews were settled in Babylonia some 1,000 years before Islam was born.

Babylonian Jews became the keepers of the Bible in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. They established the academies of Sura, Nehardea and Pumbedita whose heads were considered the highest authorities on religious matters in the Jewish world. Jewish scholars in these academies compiled the Babylonian Talmud, the spiritual codex of Judaism, and the writings of the *Geonim* (the great sages) that interpreted the Bible and Talmud and directed the Jews of the Diaspora in all matters of religion and law. For more than 1,000 years, Babylonian Jewry assumed the role of leader of the Diaspora communities through the influence of these *yeshivot*. Religious and community leaders from distant lands, from Spain to Persia and Lithuania to Morocco, sent questions via messengers and traveled long and far to visit the academies, bringing their newfound knowledge back to their communities throughout the Diaspora.

In these *yeshivot*, scholars and students debated and decided on customs and laws that related, in the broadest sense, to the world around them. Unique in the Middle East, this tradition of learning and enlightenment—as well as philanthropy which sustained these institutions—carried on through the generations and in the dozens of Jewish schools throughout Iraq, which were known for their highest standards of excellence.

For a small group of people that numbered no more than 150,000 throughout the centuries, the Babylonian Jewish community was diverse. The Kurdish Jews lived in the rural, mountainous regions in the north. Kurdistan was an important route of commerce in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and also an important center of Jewish learning. In fact, the rabbis of Baghdad in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries came from Kurdistan. Over time they developed their own special ethnic traditions, dress, and cuisine. The Jews of Basra, on the eastern coast, had close ties to the outside Arab world and points east. Throughout Babylonia, the Jewish community maintained the ancient Jewish shrines, handing that responsibility down through the generations.

In Baghdad by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where one-third of the city's population was Jewish and Jews comprised the majority of merchants, the city's commercial life came to a halt on the Jewish Sabbath and holidays. Other Jewish families became the keepers of particular musical instruments, handing down the musical knowledge and instrument-making expertise to their sons, who passed the torch to their sons.

The Babylonian Jews set new bars in business and banking, where they thrived locally and internationally, opening up channels of commerce to India, China, Hong Kong, Burma, India, and Australia to the east, and England and continental Europe to the west. Their contributions in this realm were enormous and included, for example, the establishment of the first branch banking system in the Middle East, enabling further economic development and a connection to the banking centers of the West. Iraqi Jews who settled in the Far East and the West provided a commercial gateway from the Middle East to the rest of the world, parallel and in part thanks to that created by the British Empire.

But as World War II raged in Europe and six million European Jews were massacred in the Holocaust, disquiet settled in, pervading the streets and alleyways of Baghdad and beginning the end of the Iraqi Jewish community was at hand. The year 1941 witnessed the Farhud, the Baghdad pogrom inspired by the events occurring in Europe at the time. The early 1950s culminated in the mass exodus of the Jews from Iraq, an event that is best viewed through the prism of the political forces sweeping the Middle East in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Nazism, fascism, Arab nationalism, and Communism were causing political upheaval in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

With the establishment of the state of Israel, in 1948, Zionism was on the rise. In 1950-1952, the Mossad L'Aliya Bet, the precursor to the Mossad, orchestrated a mass airlift that relocated nearly all of Iraq's 140,000 Jews to the newly founded state of Israel in Operation Ezra and Nehemia. Those who remained behind, some 6,000, later suffered at the hands of the Ba'ath Party and also eventually left in subsequent decades.

The Jewish community in Iraq is no more. But there are still strong bonds and community life within Iraqi Jewish circles in Israel, England, the United States, and Canada. Today, the descendants of Babylonian Jewry carry on their ancestors' legacy and enrich the communities they live in. It is a legacy that emphasizes advanced, Western-oriented education as essential to future success, and values peace and partnership with other religious groups. It is a legacy grounded in family and community, of active involvement in the world of intellectual life, music and the arts, science and commerce.

## About the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center

The Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center was founded in 1973 to perpetuate the history of the Jewish community of Iraq and ensure that it remains part of the future narrative of the Jewish people. Or Yehuda in Israel was a natural location for the Center, as the city sprung up from what was one of the biggest immigrant transit camps for Iraqi Jews and other Jews of Middle Eastern origin after their arrival, circa 1950.

The Center is the living historical memory of Iraqi Jewry. Since its founding, testimonies from hundreds of members of the community have been located and recorded; thousands of documents, books, and manuscripts have been catalogued and preserved; and thousands of ethnographic items and original Judaica have been assembled. The result is a museum collection focused on a particular Jewish Diaspora, the Babylonian Jewry Museum, established in 1988, which is unique in the world in quality and scope. The Museum's activities are made possible thanks to the generous contributions received from donors worldwide, whose families originally came from Iraq and for whom the heritage of the Babylonian Jewish community and its preservation is close to their hearts.



## Interesting facts about Israel

- Beersheva has the largest number of chess grandmasters per capita of any city in the world
- Israeli bank notes have Braille on them.
- The glue on Israeli stamps is kosher.
- Microsoft has more employees in Israel than it does per capita anywhere in the world.
- Per square kilometre, Israel has one of the highest levels of bird traffic in the world. Over 500 million migrating birds cross its airspace.
- An Israeli company has developed the world's first jellyfish repellent.
- Every year, an Israeli Arab hotel manager called Jaaber Hussein buys all of the state's chametz for Pesach.
- There are around 273 kibbutzim in Israel.
- According to the latest figures available, the most popular name for Israeli babies — both boys and girls — is Noam.
- Politicians hoping to become Israel's president should go by the names of either Yitzhak or Chaim — there have been two of each in the role since the establishment of the state.
- It is well known that the Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth — less well known is that it is 850 feet lower than the next lowest place — Lake Assal, in Djibouti.
- The Dead Sea is also 8.6 times saltier than the ocean.
- Israel has the highest number of museums per head in the world.
- Israeli inventor Rafi Yoeli is currently building the world's first flying car.
- The Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is the world's oldest continuously used cemetery



## BJC Men's club bowling!



# JOKE



An old man went to the Doctor complaining that his wife could barely hear. The Doctor suggested a test to find out the extent of the problem. "Stand far behind her and ask her a question, and then slowly move up and see how far away you are when she first responds." The old man excited to finally be working on a solution for the problem, runs home and sees his wife preparing supper. "Honey" the man asks standing around 20 feet away "whats for supper?" After receiving no response he tried it again 15 feet away, and again no response. Then again at 10 feet away and again no response. Finally he was 5 feet away  
"honey whats for supper?"  
She replies "**For the fourth time it's lasagna!**"

Three men, a Frenchman, an Italian, and a Jew, were condemned to be executed. Their captors told them that they had the right to have a final meal before the execution. They asked the Frenchman what he wanted.  
"Give me some good French wine and French bread," he requested. So they gave it to him, he ate it, and then they executed him.  
Next it was the Italian's turn. Give me a big plate of pasta," said the Italian. So they brought it to him, he ate it, and then they executed him.  
Now it was the Jew's turn. "I want a big bowl of strawberries," said the Jew.  
"Strawberries!!! They aren't even in season!"  
"So, I'll wait..."

I was coming back from visiting my son in my Miami and I stopped at a rest stop to use the bathroom. I just sat down on the toilet when I heard a voice coming from the stall next to mine, "Hey! How's it going?" Although I was quite surprised, and I wasn't in the habit of conversing to the people next to me in the stall, I nevertheless answered him, "I'm fine" I said "thanks for asking."

"What are you doing?" Asked the same voice. To be honest I was a bit taken aback by the brazenness of this fellow, but I would never ignore anyone so I calmly answered, "I'm relieving myself."

Then I heard the same voice again, "I'm going to have to call you back, some smart-aleck is answering all of my questions."

## *The Last Tango in Baghdad*

by Dr. Albert Khabbaza is available at all online booksellers. For more info visit:

[www.khabbaza.com](http://www.khabbaza.com)

