

## Queens Currents

BY SUSIE GARBER

### Agra D'Pirka Sponsors Community Shiur With Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum

On March 5, Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum, *shlita*, *Mara d'Asra* of Khal Nachlas Yitzchok, delivered an inspiring community *shiur* on behalf of the Agra D'Pirka Kollel at Khal Nachlas Yitzchok.

The Rav shared a wealth of sources as he discussed the obligation of women to listen to and read *Megillas Esther*. Some commentators say that women are obligated to both hear and read the *Megillah*, while others say that women are only obligated to hear the reading of the *Megillah*.

Harav Oelbaum quoted the BeHag, who famously said that women only have an obligation to hear the *Megillah*, a fact that affects their ability to read for others.

Harav Oelbaum analogized this obligation to our future obligation to rebuild the Beis Hamikdash. The Rambam determines that the obligation to rebuild the Temple is obligatory for all Jews, even women.

The Minchas Elazar raises the question that, since building the Temple is only by day and not by night, it is a "time-bound" *mitzvah*, from which women should be exempt. The Ohr Avraham answers that building the Temple is a communal *mitzvah*, not an individual one, and therefore includes women.

The "building" analogy applies to women when listening to the reading of the *Megillah*, and informing that difference of opinion.

Another question that has been the subject of debate is whether or not you can read the *Megillah* in a sitting position or a standing one. Rashi says that you can stand or sit when reading the *Megillah* for others. The Rambam says that if you read for the public, you must stand when reading the *Megillah*. The Tur says that if you read in a sitting position you are satisfying your obligation, but only *b'dieved*. In the first instance, you should read the *Megillah* standing.

How do we resolve the conflict? At night, since we only commemorate the *nes*, the miracle of Purim, we do not have to stand, and we may sit when reading the *Megillah*. However, during the day, when we have the obligation of reading the *Megillah* in lieu of saying *Hallel*, we must stand. Thus, we may sit at night and stand during the day, according to this view.

Harav Oelbaum concluded with a discussion of the *mitzvah* of becoming inebriated on Purim, a very difficult *mitzvah* to understand and explain. Harav Oelbaum explained how this *mitzvah* can represent everything that is great in Hashem's creation, showing us how even the most mundane, earthly matters can be



The Ohr Natan shul.



At a shiur given by Harav Noach Isaac Oelbaum.



Rabbi Ilan Feldman



assimilation threatens to take its toll on this group of Jews."

Some developers are seeking to tear down Ohr Natan, one of the major shuls and community centers for the area's largest Bukharian Jewish community. Founded in 1986, Ohr Natan has invested more than \$2.1 million to renovate this building on Queens Boulevard, as well as \$1.2 million in rent for the building.

Trylon LLC developers, which has acquired the building, has informed Ohr Natan of their intention to build a housing development on the site, leaving the

elevated through the *kedushah* of the immutable Torah.

(Thank you, Mr. Ezra Klein for information on this *shiur*.)

Agra D'Pirka, a morning kollel program (Monday-Thursday), based in Harav Oelbaum's shul, is in its third year. It consists of multiple *shiurim* geared to local professionals, business owners, retirees and anyone interested in serious *limud haTorah*.

There are two learning tracks, with one class located in the main shul and the second class provided by Rabbi Ilan Meirov in the social hall. Rabbi Meirov lectures to the Bukharian community daily. For more information call Ezra Klein at (212) 661-9400.

### Rabbi Ilan Feldman, Scholar-in-Residence At Congregation Ahavas Yisroel

Despite arctic temperatures, large crowds gathered to hear Rabbi Ilan Feldman, *Mara d'Asra* of the Beth Jacob Shul in Atlanta and founder of Torah Day School of Atlanta, as well as one of the founders of the Atlanta Scholars' Kollel and son of Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, speak to our community throughout *Shabbos Parashas Pitudei*. Rabbi Feldman brought a measure of southern flavor to Kew Gardens Hills along with plenty of thought-provoking inspiration.

On Friday night, at the home of Avigail and Daniel Strauss, he spoke about *kiddush Hashem*, emphasizing the need to do outreach and also the need to focus on our *neshamah*. *Kiddush Hashem* involves not only noteworthy acts such as returning a huge amount of money but also everyday actions that exemplify

who the Jewish people are, representatives of Hashem in this world.

On Shabbos day, Rabbi Feldman delivered the *Shabbos morning drashah* at Congregation Ahavas Yisroel and then, at a sit-down *kiddush*, he spoke about how to relieve tension in our homes and work towards greater harmony.

After Shabbos, there was a *melaveh malkah* at the home of Allan and Marcia Hochster. Here, Rabbi Feldman offered a fascinating interactive *shiur* centered on the six *zechiros* we recite every day and how we can thread them together to form one cohesive idea that is *ayesod* (foundation) of *Yiddishkeit*. He elicited ideas from the audience about the main point of each of the Remembrances and then tied them together in one powerful sentence.

Among the ideas raised were the following: Remembering leaving Egypt highlights the idea of a human mastering his own passions; freedom is self-mastery. It also teaches us about gratitude, *hashgachah pratis*, love and awe. In remembering Amalek, we are reminded that we must be on guard against evil, to which we are vulnerable. Standing at Har Sinai reminds us of *emunah* and the Divinity of the Torah. We have the responsibility to transmit Hashem's word. The world depends on us keeping the Torah; receiving the Torah is inspiring and exciting.

Remembering how we angered Hashem in the wilderness, referring to the golden calf, reminds us of our fallibility; we must be constantly vigilant, guarding against creating our own golden calf. Remembering what Hashem did

to Miriam reminds us that we never know the greatness of another person. Remembering *Shabbos* teaches us about completion and fulfillment of the world. *Kedushah* involves the ability to connect Heaven and earth.

Rabbi Feldman pulled all these ideas together: "We are people conceived of miracles, devoted to fighting evil by practicing what Hashem told us to do, aware of human fallibility, committed to the Divine nature of man and devoted to elevating the entire world." After composing this sentence, Rabbi Feldman smiled and said, "That is what we are all about!"

The whole program was quite memorable and uplifting.

### A Shul in Our Community Threatened With Eviction

Our community must come together to help the Ohr Natan Shul and Community Center, which is home to 1,000 Bukharian Jews. Rabbi Nachum Kaziev, spiritual leader and head of Ohr Natan, pointed out that Bukharian Jews were already denied any access to their ancient heritage as a result of living under communism for 70 years. Currently, they are being actively recruited by missionaries and now, with this cloud hanging over their shul, they face the ultimate rejection as the shul and center they have adopted sends them packing.

"It is shameful for Jews to destroy a vibrant and dynamic shul," declared Rabbi Kaziev with great emotion. He is sending out an urgent plea to save the shul and the "neshamos" of a thousand Jews who may potentially be lost to our people forever as the danger of

shul and its 1,000 members "on the street." According to Rabbi Kaziev, "Once the developers became aware of our intent to fight the planned 2017 eviction when our lease officially ends, they began a series of legal maneuvers that would move up the date of expulsion to as early as a few weeks from now."

The developers have all but ignored pleas from local elected officials and community leaders, as well as a "tzav'ikah" — an injunction by the Vaad Harabbanim of Queens. Rabbi Kaziev said that attempts by his organization to reach an agreement with the Bukharian Jewish developers, including retaining the beautiful shul and building above it, have been rejected.

Rabbi Kaziev pointed out that attempts are made throughout the city to save synagogues that are no longer functioning, let alone an active shul with 500 people who *daven* there every *Shabbos*.

Rabbi Kaziev referenced a recent announcement by Mr. El Gamal, an Islamic developer, who vowed to rebuild the Garment District Synagogue as part of his large development, despite the fact that the synagogue membership is dwindling.

In addition to its fully functioning shul with *tefillas* and *shivritim*, Ohr Natan offers a full schedule of after-school programs, adult education (including ESL), food distribution and assorted events. Since 1991, it has published *Druzhiba*, a monthly magazine with a circulation of 80,000 throughout the five boroughs, the largest publications read by immigrants of the former Soviet Union.