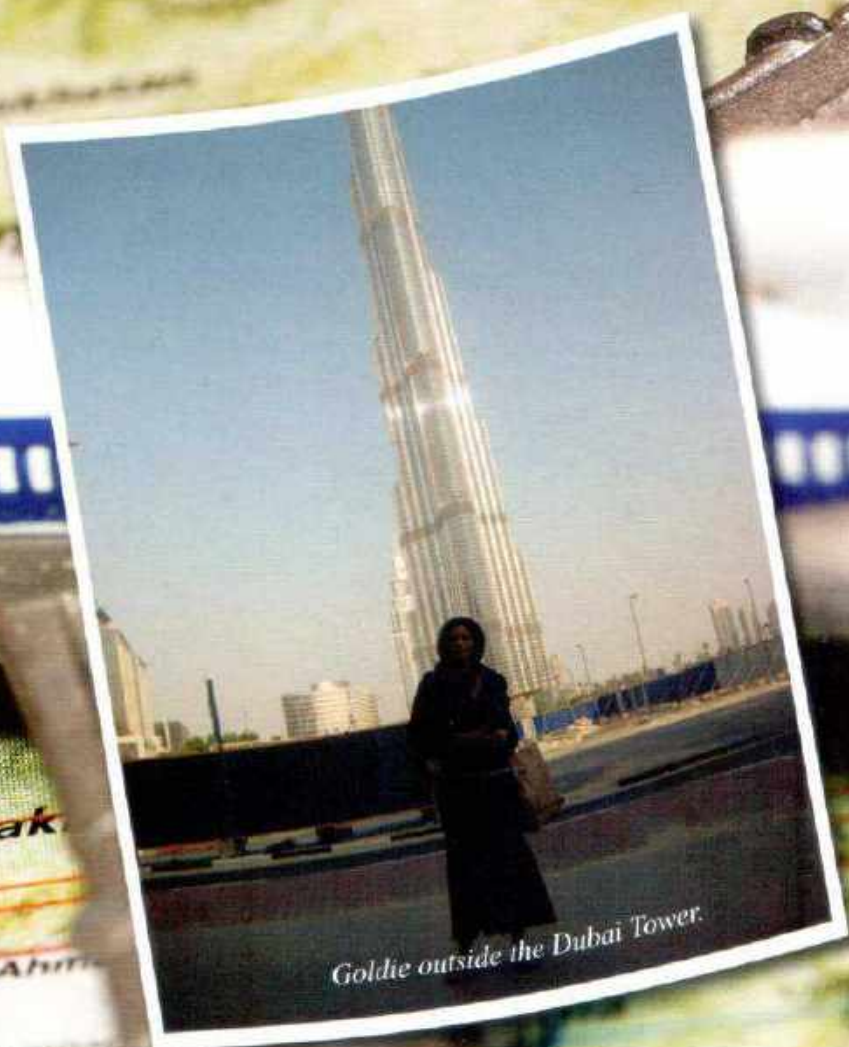


Back Home... with my Family



Goldie with her husband, Reuben Yerushalmi, and their children,
L to R: Devorah Daniella, Yosef Menachem, Daniel David

AIRWAYS



Goldie outside the Dubai Tower.

Goldie Yerushalmi

In 1990, when I left my home and family in Iran, I had no idea when I would see my family, my friends, my hometown, and my country again. For 20 years I felt there was something missing; I didn't feel peace inside me - until the day I went back home. Home sweet home; no matter where it is, how big it is, what type of furniture it has, home is still home. I finally went back to Iran in July, 2010.

Why? What made me knowingly risk my safety, even my life, when I have a husband and three children here in Crown Heights?

I was informed that my dear father, age 75, was sick and in the hospital. My brother told me that my father was asking for me and I really should go home and see him. I went to the Iranian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and got my Iranian passport. (It's much faster and safer to travel that way than with an American passport.) The next day I bought a ticket for the first available flight.



Traveling Alone

On the way to Shiraz, Iran (my hometown), I had an eight-hour stopover in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. After I took a nap in the airport waiting area, I decided

to use the opportunity to see the Dubai Tower, the tallest building in the world. My hair was covered with a scarf and I was wearing a long skirt and long-sleeve jacket, so no one really noticed me – very important for a Jewish woman traveling alone in an Arab country.

The tower was one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen, but it was so hot that standing outside for more than two minutes was impossible; it was over 100 degrees.

After a few hours I came back to the airport to catch my flight to Iran. I was carrying some packs of IV antibiotics for my father. In Iran, the hospital does not provide any medication or supplies for the patient – everything has to be purchased by the patient or family and brought to the hospital. When I get to airport security in Dubai, they gave me a very hard time. I couldn't believe it when they told me to leave the IVs in the garbage because they were liquid and I couldn't bring them on to the airplane.

I've learned that in America when a worker or employee gives you a hard time, the best thing is to ask for their supervisor. So I told the Arab woman that I wanted to see her boss. She said, "I'm the boss."

I said, "No, you're not. Who's your boss?"

While we were arguing, a woman who speaks Farsi and English came up to me and said that she works at the airport and maybe she could help. I told her that this medication had to be brought with me on the airplane because it must be kept at room temperature, not too cold, not too hot. She understood and directed me to the police department in the airport. I told them the story and showed them a doctor's prescription with all the explanations. They agreed to send someone with me to the gate so no one would bother me again. I accepted, thanked them and went to catch my flight to Iran.

The flight took one hour. The airport in Iran was crowded. When I went to the customs window to get a stamp on my passport, they gave me a very hard time. (In the Middle East it is very unusual for women to travel alone – they usually go with either their children or their husbands.) The customs agent checked my American passport, my Iranian passport, and all my filled-out forms (first name, last name, religion). When the agent realized that I was a Jew I thought, "Oh, my G-d. Just help me."

After 20 Years

Fortunately, in the end I was allowed through customs. By the time I passed all interrogations and came outside to baggage claim, almost everyone who had arrived on my flight was gone. My family was about to leave as well because they didn't see me. Then my brother came to check one last time. Suddenly, after 20 years, we saw each other again.

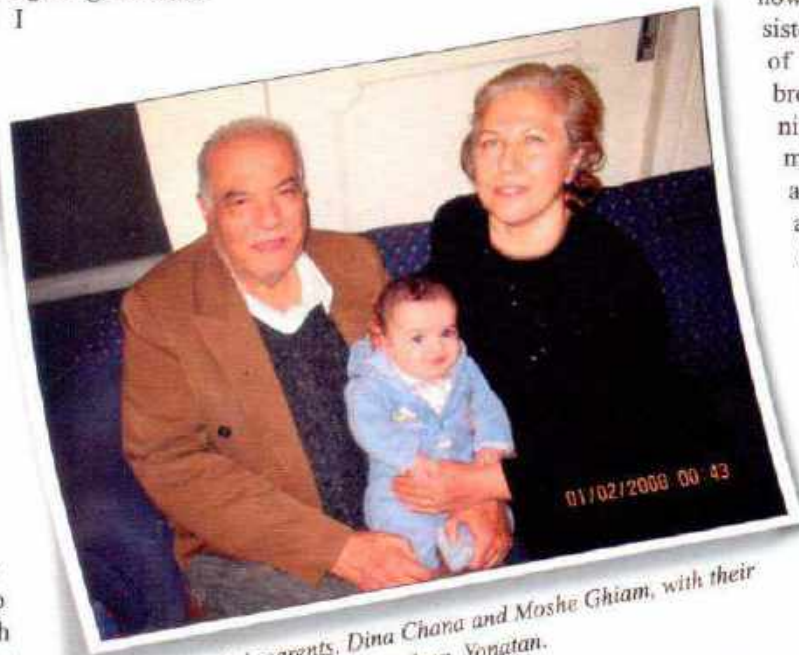
Shimon had been 14 when I left, and now he was 34.

My younger brother Reuven had been five, and now he was 25. I met my sister-in-law, Rivka, wife of my only married brother, Meir, and my niece and nephew. My mother held me in her arms and hugged me after 17 years apart (she had come to the U.S. for my wedding). All the loneliness, pain and sorrow I had been through all those years melted away. I felt that all my praying and crying to Hashem had been accepted and I had the merit

to see my family again.

As soon as we arrived at our house, I quickly ran to see the kitchen, the dining room and all the bedrooms. I relived the memories of my childhood; all the birthday parties my mother made for me, all the good times. The only one who was missing, who I really longed to see, was my father, who was in the hospital.

The next day we went to see him. He had been alert until the day before I arrived, but then doctors gave him a sedative and when I got there he wasn't conscious. He now was sick with a bacterial infection which he caught in the



Goldie's parents, Dina Chana and Moshe Ghiam, with their grandson, Yonatan.



bath, and the other which is more modern and new. Teheran and Isfahan also have mikvaos and beautiful shuls.

In Shiraz we used to have a Jewish school but unfortunately it does not exist anymore, although there still is a Jewish school in Teheran. Twenty years ago we had our own school building, but many Jews immigrated to other countries or preferred to send their children to



Goldie (L) with her sister, Sarah Rose.

other schools. Soon there were so few students left that the city decided that it wasn't worth it to send teachers (they used to provide teachers for secular studies). Then the government took over the building as they needed the space.

My father tried hard to encourage people to keep up the school and send their children there. He literally became sick from the terrible strain of all the work he did. But unfortunately, people didn't understand the importance of this issue, and in the end the government took over the land and building. This is how we lost the property and school belonging to the Jewish community of Shiraz.

During my visit to Iran, the head of the Jewish community asked the government to give back the school. They said that the best they could do was to put it up for auction; if the Jews wanted it they could buy it back from the government. As it stands now, the city is left with two shuls, but with Jewish kids in public school.

This was not the only time my father tried very hard to help the community.

Several years ago, the Chacham, the Rabbi of our community, wanted to encourage more women to go to the mikvah. Some women believed that it would cause infections or disease to have so many people sharing the same water. The Chacham asked my father, who was a doctor, to write an article from a medical perspective about how healthy, good and beneficial mikvah is for women. My father wrote a powerful article that influenced many women to start using the mikvah. This is to his eternal merit.

The Jewish community in Shiraz recently built a beautiful Jewish center. It has a small restaurant, a matzah bakery, a kosher kitchen for catering and, for the first time in Iran, a butcher store with ready-to-buy, koshered chicken and meat.

Until last year, people used to buy their chickens live and bring them to the shochet. As a child, I remember buying the chicken, bringing it to the shochet to shecht, then bringing it home for my mother to pluck, clean and kosher. It was not easy at all, removing all the feathers, opening the body and removing the organs, washing, cutting, salting, freezing... I don't know how my mother and all the other women did it. It was the same story with meat. Even tomato sauce or pasta, pickles, lemon juice, grape juice, wine, and many other products all had to be made at home in order to be kosher. (G-d bless America.)

In addition to the matzah bakery and restaurant, the center also has a shelter for old people whose families all left to America or other countries. They are unable to care for themselves at home, so they live in the community center and volunteers come each day to care for them. The center also has a large yard that is used during the summer months as a Hebrew school for children. The children are taught Siddur and Chumash by volunteer teachers, and also receive a snack. My family sponsored the snack a few times in zchus of a refuah shleimah for my father.

The people in charge of the Hebrew school are careful to serve a healthy snack to the children, without chemicals or artificial flavors. I wish we were as careful in the U.S. That was one of several things I admired about the people of Shiraz.

Another thing I admired was that whenever you talk to people, Jewish or not, they express such bitachon and emunah in Hashem. They truly believe that everything is in Hashem's Hands. In every action they do, they mention the name of G-d. But the Jews there are very much in golus, may Hashem help all of us and take us out.

Also, when I went to shul, I really enjoyed praying there



hospital. This is not uncommon.

In Iran, society is repressive even when there is no reason to be. For example, patients are not free to receive visitors. You first need to get special permission. Finally we got permission for me to enter. After 20 years, I got to sit at his bedside, speak to him, and hope and pray that maybe he would open his eyes and see me.

I must thank my dear professor from my university days, Dr. Henry Cohen of Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center, who helped me a great deal in making decisions for my father. I would speak to the doctors in the hospital, they would tell me they wanted to try a new drug or treatment, and I would email the idea to Dr. Cohen. He always answered me right away with his wise and expert advice. G-d bless him; it was so good to have someone in the U.S. who was so knowledgeable, caring and trustworthy. In America, when you are a patient in the hospital, you don't have to worry about providing your own medications or devices that are needed. But in Iran, there is not even a pharmacy in the hospital. The nurse would call and tell us what he needed and instruct us to bring it that afternoon. Patients who have no family or friends to provide for them must simply do without.

A Bit of History

My hometown of Shiraz, Iran, has quite a colorful history. Jews have been living there since the time of the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdosh, when they were brought there by King Cyrus the Great (Koresh).

Today there are about 20,000 Jews left in Iran, living mostly in the three largest cities: Teheran, the capital, in the north, which has the greatest Jewish community; Shiraz, in the south, which has about 7,000 Jews, and Isfahan in the center of the country, which has the smallest community.

Isfahan used to have a large Jewish community in the 16th century, but the king who ruled the country hated Jews and loved Armenians. One year, the king came to the Jewish ghetto on Yom Kippur. Everyone was in shul davening. The king, Shah Abbas Safavi, went and stood next to one of the shuls where Jews were davening. When they got to "kadosh-kadosh-kadosh" in Nakdishach, they said it so loudly (as was their custom) that the king's horse got scared and started to rear wildly. The king became very upset and ordered his guards to kill all the Jews in that shul and other shuls immediately, unless they converted to Islam of course. Many Jews were massacred that Yom Kippur. The Jew-hatred and violence experienced by the Jews of Iran are difficult to describe.

There is another story told about this wicked king, Shah Abbas Safavi. One day he was hunting and saw a beautiful deer. He went after her and she led him to an old building

(this area today is the Jewish cemetery). Jews believe that Yaakov and his sons used to bring their animals there for the summer. The deer went to the building and the king followed her in. Some of the doors in this building had doors made out of stone, very heavy, with Hebrew writing engraved on them. The king entered one of the rooms and suddenly the stone door closed behind him. The king realized that he was trapped, and nobody knew he was



Girls learning Chumash in the Jewish Community Center in Shiraz, Iran.

there.

Suddenly, the deer started to speak and said that she was an incarnation of Serach bat Asher. She would let him go only if he promised not to bother Jews anymore. The king accepted the condition and was able to leave the building. After that he bothered Jews much less than before.

In Isfahan it was very dangerous for women to go out at night, so the Jews there used to build mikvaos in the basements of their homes. They would dig a well deep in the ground and build a small pool around it to serve as a kosher mikvah. There are many Isfahani Jews living today in America and Israel, and it's in the zchus of the mesiras nefesh that their mothers and fathers had in the past.

Jewish Life in Iran Today

During my visit I spent most of my time with my family in Shiraz. The Jewish community in Shiraz is quite religious. There are ten shuls in the city, and the two main shuls have daily minyanim for shacharis, minchah and maariv. On Shabbos many young people come to these shuls to socialize. There are also two mikvaos for ladies, one of which was built many years ago as part of a public



because I was able to pray with kavanah in a quiet and holy atmosphere. Before entering the shul, the men take off their shoes and place them in an outdoor shelter. The

shul is covered with Persian carpet and there is no talking during davening. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many shuls in America, which is why I sometimes refuse to go.

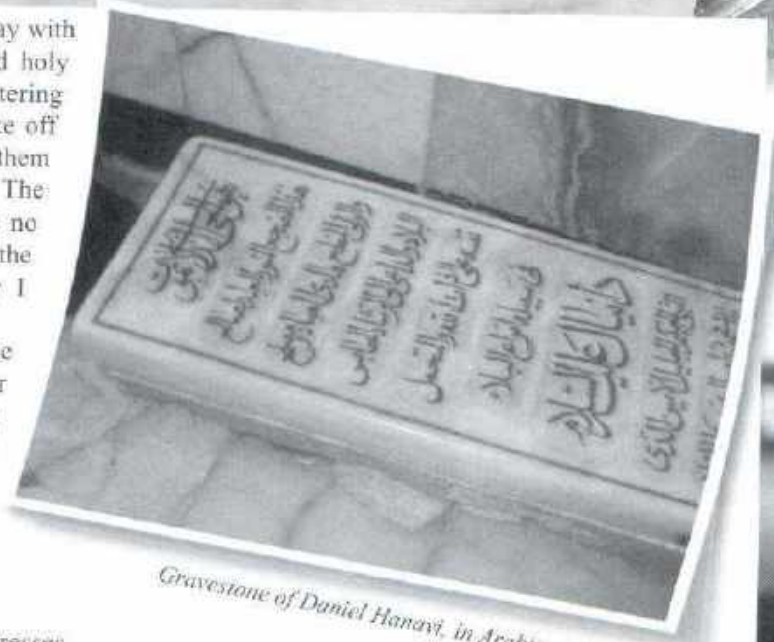
Lastly, my trip to Iran taught me a lot about the value of tznius and what a vital matter it is for women. As Iran is a religious country, women must cover their hair no matter what, and wear a long knee-length jacket with loose pants underneath, which is considered tzniusdik by Sephardic Jews. I saw when I was in Dubai and in Iran that *because I was covered up totally I was safe*. I remember my grandmother a"h used to keep her hair covered all the time and always wore long dresses. Because my grandfather was the rabbi of the community, she also encouraged other women to cover their hair.

A Visit to Kever Daniel

Before leaving Iran I decided to visit the kever of Daniel Hanavi, to ask for a blessing for my father and to thank Daniel the Prophet for helping me whenever I called his name. I named my son Danny after him. My brothers Shimon and Reuven agreed to drive me to Shoosh in the south of Iran, the city where Daniel is buried, a twelve hour drive! I couldn't find any flight to the closest city, because there were only two airlines that flew there and they had flights only once a week, on Mondays. (Note: Shoosh is not the same as Shushan, which is in the north of Iran and is now known as Hamadan.)

When we arrived in Shoosh, it was so hot it was impossible to stand outside for more than ten minutes. We wanted to go to the basement where the kever was, but they were doing construction, so we went to the top floor, which was decorated nicely. We could not stand for long in that heat. I just said Tehillim, lit candles, and we got right back in the car to return to Shiraz.

The kever of Daniel is cared for beautifully by the Iranian government. The Muslims believe very much in the power of this holy prophet, and come there with their problems, to pray for help. During the Iran-Iraq war, the tomb was damaged and the government repaired it with great respect. They also respect the burial places of Mordechai and Esther in Hamadan, in northern Iran, as well as the burial place of the Novi Chavakuk (the child whom Elisha revived) which is near the graves of Esther and Mordechai.



Gravestone of Daniel Hanavi, in Arabic.

Letters to the Rebbe

While I was in Iran, I met a friend of mine from high school. After talking a while I realized she had sholom bayis problems. When she realized I was connected with Lubavitch she was so happy, as she had heard of the Rebbe and his legendary ahavas Yisroel. She told me that she carried his picture with her all the time to remind her to do the right thing, and to remind her that Moshiach is really coming soon. She asked me to please pray for her at the Ohel when I return to the U.S.

I told her to write a letter to the Rebbe and I would deliver it. She came to our house two hours before I had to leave to catch my flight back. I explained to her how to write the letter and encouraged her to consider taking on a mitzvah, as a zchus to help solve her marriage problem. The Rebbe often requested people to start keeping a new mitzvah or improve observance in a mitzvah when troubles would arise. When we bring Hashem into the marriage more and more, it raises us up to a higher level and our life situation becomes much improved.

She accepted this, and soon she was not only lighting Shabbos candles herself but also encouraging others to do so. Many other people gave me letters to bring to the Ohel and now they continue to do so via email. I go regularly to deliver them from people in Iran to the Ohel.

I am so thankful to Hashem who gave me the chance to go back home one more time, see my family, our home, our street, our shul, and everything I grew up with. A friend of mine once told me, "Goldie, you will go back to Iran, but at the right time; when you are ready to go and make some changes, you'll go." And I think she was right. When I found out that I have the ability to do mitzvot, I was ready to go.



I started to talk to people in Iran about Torah and mitzvos, about Hashem, about all the mitzvot instituted by the Rebbe, about how much he cares for all of us and how he wants the best for us, which is a life of Torah and mitzvos and being close to Hashem. Many have my email address and write me their problems or questions. Whatever I can do for them, I do it with pleasure. If they need an article or book on a topic, I try to send it to them. And for those who read English, I encourage them to visit the website, Chabad.org.

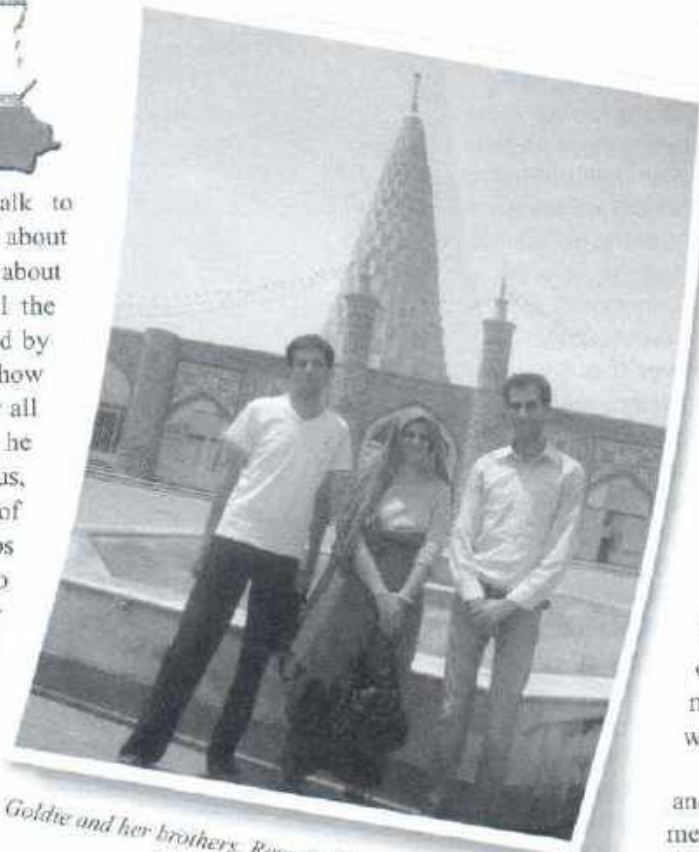
...And Home Again

Seventeen years ago, when I first came to Crown Heights, I remember asking Hashem to bring me to a nice and beautiful place where I could be close to family and friends. I read a letter in Igros written by the Rebbe to someone who said they don't know what they are doing in their place. The Rebbe writes, "You are like a Shlucha there, so clearly you must be there!" I realized that I must think that way too, and behave as a Shlucha wherever I am, even in Crown Heights.

People leave from Crown Heights to go on Shlichus. I came here to Crown Heights to start doing Shlichus with my Iranian community.

When Iranians from all over U.S. come to New York, they find my house. We bring them to the Ohel and help them write letters to Rebbe, put on Tefillin, go to shul, light Shabbos candles, learn about mikvah, experience a Shabbos, ... We try to do as much as we can to bring fellow Iranian Jews closer to Hashem.

Today we still live in Crown Heights and have the most



Goldie and her brothers, Reaven (L) and Shimon (R) at the Kever of Daniel Hanavi.

wonderful friends who have become family to us. I am very thankful to Hashem for all of them. May all Jews, wherever they are, gather in one place and welcome Moshiach.

In conclusion, I want to thank my husband, my mother-in-law and my sister Rosa for caring for the children during my trip to Iran. I thank my children, who understood the necessity of me being gone for a month and never complained, though they are young – ages 12, eight and six.

Thank you, Mrs. Bayla Spalter, for encouraging me to go to Iran to be with my father. She missed the opportunity to be with her own mother before her passing and did not want to see that happen to me.

Thank you, my dear friends Ety and Yossi Gurevitch, for the beautiful menorahs that you gave me for the children in Iran from your store, Judaica of Great Neck. I know you were as nervous as I was when I left. I want to thank Rische Deitsch of *N'shei Chabad*

Newsletter for encouraging me to write my experiences of my trip to Iran. I am so glad I did.

Thank you Hashem for all your kindness, and thank You for bringing me back home safely.

I always thought home was in Iran, the place where I was born and grew up. That is why I couldn't wait to get back. But when I got there I realized that home is where my husband and children are. I belong with them. For that realization alone it was worth going.

Parents are the biggest gift Hashem gives us, no matter how old they are or how far away they live. We must call them every day and go to see them when we can, and thank Hashem for such a big brachah. We don't know the value of these gifts until we lose them.

Before I left Iran I went to the hospital and kissed my father, and told him I was leaving to the U.S. By the time I reached JFK, my father had passed away. I came home to Crown Heights and began shivah immediately. Thank you, relatives, friends and neighbors, for your help.

Yehi zichro baruch.

May we always share simchas and be zocheh to greet Moshiach very speedily in our day. ■