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Multiple Shuls Hold IDF Kiddushim and Shabbat Chayal Fundraisers

By Allyson Gur-Aryeh | April 30, 2015

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 Ilan Tokayer, ז"ל, when he served in the IDF. ©CREDIT: COURTESY OF REVA TOKAYER.

For many people living in Teaneck and Bergenfield, it's obvious that the character of the area is more than defined by the tight connection to Eretz Yisrael and the unwavering support of the Israel Defense Forces. It rarely comes as a surprise when a local family picks up and makes aliyah or a child grows up and decides to join the IDF.

In this spirit, well over a decade ago Jon Bendavid of Congregation Bnai Yeshurun in Teaneck began holding an annual IDF kiddush in his synagogue. It was to raise awareness, show appreciation, and, most importantly, collect money for the organizations supporting the young men and women in the IDF.

"We sing Hatikvah during the kiddush," said Bendavid. "We don't get to sing that too often."

According to this year's IDF Kiddush letter to the Bnai Yeshurun community, "Not a single penny of what we collect for them will go towards administrative or

overhead costs, which are generously paid by the Moscovitz family." Even vendors donate food to support this well-established kiddush, which will take place on May 2.

"People are very happy to give money for this cause," added Bendavid. Bnai Yeshurun raises \$45,000–\$50,000 every year from their membership of approximately 550 families.

The IDF Kiddush letter further reads that the shul "will honor all of our children and grandchildren who have served in Tzahal in the past, or who are currently on active duty."

Enter into this thoughtful, generous scenario a loving mother who is mourning the loss of her son, a former IDF combat soldier, who passed away unexpectedly in March 2011, although not in Israel nor in battle. Ilan Tokayer, ז"ל, served in the IDF in 2005–2006 before coming back to attend Yeshiva University. He'd developed an interest in winemaking and



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learned the craft working at City Winery and in a New Zealand winery before attending graduate school at the University of California at Davis, which is not so far away from the famous winemaking region of Napa Valley. Tokayer was earning his master's degree in enology, the study of wine and winemaking.

"He was in his first year of a two-year program and loved it," said his mother Reva Tokayer. "He was especially excited about introducing his fellow classmates to Israeli wines. His goal after graduation was to make aliyah and work in the wine industry."

Tragically, 25-year-old Tokayer didn't get the chance to live out his dream. He died suddenly in his car after pulling over to the side of the road. The family still is not 100 percent certain of what happened.

"He was seemingly in perfect health," said his mother.

In 2014, Ms. Tokayer, a member of both Bnai Yeshurun and Congregation Rinat Yisrael, worked with Jon Bendavid to bring the IDF Kiddush to Rinat in memory of her son, but with the same goals to raise awareness, show appreciation, and collect funds for organizations supporting the soldiers of the IDF. They raised \$25,000–\$30,000 through their approximately 450 member families. The addition of honoring Tokayer's son was also expanded to the Bnai Yeshurun community's kiddush, per their letter for this year's event, "We also memorialize and remember our very own Ilan Tokayer A"H who served valiantly in an IDF combat unit from 2005–2006." A mother in mourning found a way to turn an unspeakable tragedy into something positive and constructive that will benefit countless soldiers volunteering in the IDF. This year's Rinat IDF Kiddush will take place on May 16.

Looking to expand the idea, Tokayer asked two of her closest friends if they could bring the IDF Kiddush, also taking on the name "Shabbat Chayal," to their own synagogues: Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck and Congregation Beth Abraham in Bergenfield.

Shifra Shafier of Beth Aaron, which was the first to hold the event this spring on April 25, said the kiddush was created "in memory of my very, very dear friend's son Ilan Tokayer. Ilan's name is being memorialized in this way." Beth Aaron also held a motza'ei Shabbat screening of *Follow Me: The Yoni Netanyahu Story*. Shafier added her hope "to have more and more shuls participate in Shabbat Chayal and in some way celebrate chayalim from our community and raise money." Shafier and Beth Aaron co-organizer Mordechai Ungar distributed an email to the community stating, "Together we will celebrate our values and honor the children of our community in the IDF whose passion and idealism continue to inspire us."

Debby Rapps of Congregation Beth Abraham spoke of the local area's constant connection to the Jewish State, and said, "We send our kids to camp there and to school there." She added, "I just want to bring awareness to the community..." The letter sent out by Rapps, along with numerous other co-organizers, to the Beth Abraham community reads, "While our children are planning which yeshiva or college to attend, Israeli youth are contemplating which military units to serve in as they prepare to sacrifice three prime years to defend our beloved land." While Beth Abraham is the only synagogue not holding a formal kiddush, they are dedicating their entire Shabbat on May 15–16 to the IDF and will weave the theme throughout, as well as tie it into Yom Yerushalayim since it falls only a couple days later on the calendar.

Even before Reva Tokayer spearheaded the effort to expand the IDF Kiddush, Harold Steinbach of Congregation Beth Sholom of Teaneck brought the event to his synagogue after learning about it from its originator Jon Bendavid. This year's Beth Sholom kiddush will be its third and is taking place in the fall.

The organizations that benefit from the funds are chosen individually by each synagogue and are among some of the following: Friends of the IDF Lone Soldiers Program, Yashar LaChayal, Beit Halochem, Bishvil Ha'Machar, and the Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin.

The public can get involved by either donating to one of the current synagogues holding events or by holding their own kiddush or Shabbat event in the future. The ultimate goal is to keep spreading the message and holding the event in more synagogues each year.

Allyson Gur-Aryeh lives in Teaneck with her psychologist husband, two adorable daughters, and two sweet cats.

By Allyson Gur-Aryeh

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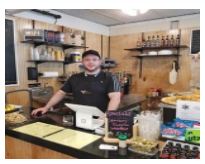


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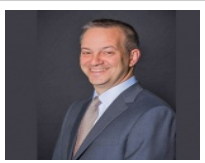
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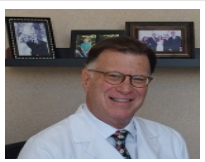
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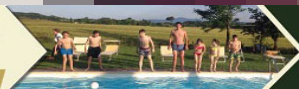


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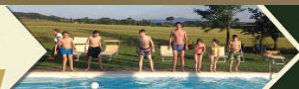


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