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The community sings for Debbie



PHOTOS: JOHN POULIOT IMAGESTAR PRODUCTIONS
Top: Josh Nelson (center) and Rabbi David Paskin (far right) and other song leaders perform at Temple Israel as slides of Friedman are projected on the wall. Above: Julie Silver.

More than 1,000 at Friedman tribute

By Elise Kigner
Advocate Staff

More than 1,000 cantors, song-leaders and fans crowded the sanctuary at Temple Israel of Boston on Sunday to mourn and celebrate Debbie Friedman in the way she had taught them: through song.

Friedman – a singer and songwriter whose music transformed the services of congregations across the country – died Jan. 9 at the age of 59.

At “Remembering Debbie: A Tribute Concert,” a group of

clergy and professional musicians led the audience in songs that ranged from solemn (“Mi Sheberiach”) to silly (“613 Commandments”) to jubilant (“Miriam’s Song”).

The concert began with the screening of a video of Friedman singing “Mourning into Dancing” and the lighting of a havdalah candle.

Some 50 cantors and song-leaders stood on the bima, leading a niggun. In the audience, a mother swayed with her

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Is best stance on Egypt to back off?

US, Israel risk playing into extremists’ hands

By Charles A. Radin
Advocate Columnist

Saad Eddin Ibrahim is perhaps the most credible of all Egyptian dissidents.

He spoke out in defiance of Hosni Mubarak’s authoritarian

rule long before anyone else dared. He was imprisoned; his Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies was trashed; and he was beaten and abused before he finally exiled himself to the United States three years ago. He’s taught at Columbia, Indiana and DePauw universities, been a visiting fellow at Harvard and is currently a professor at Drew University.

A founder of Egypt’s civil society and one of the country’s most-prominent advocates of democracy, Ibrahim also is firmly on record against religious as well as military hegemony over the public sphere. He took tremendous heat in Egypt for reversing his initial

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Framingham rabbi’s marching orders: Kabul

State Guard’s only Jewish chaplain to be deployed in spring

By Elise Kigner
Advocate Staff

Kabul is a long way from Framingham, but Rabbi Laurence Bazer says taking time off from Temple Beth Sholom to serve as a chaplain for troops in Afghanistan comes with the territory.

It’s “part of who I am as a rabbi,” said Bazer, a lieutenant colonel with the Massachusetts National Guard. This month, he heads to Fort Hood, Texas, for training before flying to Afghanistan in spring.

Stationed at a base in Kabul, he will lead Shabbat services

‘I think I am personable and a good listener. They see the chaplain and not a rabbi.’

Rabbi Laurence Bazer
referring to soldiers

and the major Passover seder; coordinate worship for all faiths; and counsel Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers alike.

“It is not my job to go find Osama Bin Laden in the foothills of Afghanistan. My job

is to bless the soldiers going into their missions, and support them throughout,” said Bazer, the first and only Jewish chaplain in the Massachusetts National Guard.

In the past, it has been Bazer’s role to send spiritual leaders on missions. In November, he learned he would need to go himself, his first deployment in his 22 years in the service.

“Given the lemon, I am going to make lemonade out of it,” said Bazer, who is leaving behind not only his 265-family

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Rabbi Laurence Bazer

Song-leaders pay tribute to their friend and teacher

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son in her lap. An older woman dabbed her cheek with a tissue.

Throughout the concert, the performers shared stories of their relationships with Friedman, and the songs she taught them. Many, like Jeff Klepper, had shared a stage with Friedman.

"Debbie had a wicked sense of humor," said Klepper, recalling that she did a great horse impression. Klepper, cantor of Temple Sinai in Sharon, said he sang "613 Commandments" to pay tribute to Friedman's sillier side – and her wish that no student be bored in Hebrew school (a sample lyric: "Because the Torah was much too long to describe to all the Jews, our G-d decided to write Ten Commandments that said the don'ts and do's").

Josh Nelson, who sang at Friedman's funeral, said he got to know her at a song leader retreat she founded in Wisconsin. Sunday, he sang "Sholom Aleichem," a song she taught him last summer.

"You are not here because we lost a great song-writer ... You are here because everyone in the room had some kind of relationship [with her]," said

Nelson, whose brother Jon and his band Yom Hadash were also on the bimah.

Julie Silver gave one example of this web of connections. The Newton native performed "Not By Might, Not By Power," which she first learned at Temple Beth Avodah, practiced at Camp Pembroke on the South Shore and taught at Temple Isaiah in Lexington.

Silver, who now lives in California and performs Jewish music professionally, asked the audience: "Has anyone ever seen Debbie Friedman eat a chicken?"

Pausing, Silver then added: "In a half hour, there was very little left. I know that was the way she lived her life."

Children's musician Ellen Allard – who sang Sunday with her husband, Peter – said she first bought some Friedman



Cantor Jodi Sufirin (left) with Ellen and Peter Allard.

cassettes at the suggestion of her cantor. She chose to sing "V'Shamru," she said, because the song helped her learn the importance of Shabbat.

Peter Allard recalled the way Friedman drew strength from her audience.

"When she was in front of you, and when she was in front of us, the love that was sent to her was palpable, was overwhelming," he said. "I take great comfort in knowing how much she knew we loved her."

Rabbi Larry Milder of Con-

gregation B'nai Shalom in Westborough reflected on the unusual way Friedman played the guitar. "I loved to watch her play," Milder said, before picking up his own guitar and performing "Sing Unto G-d" and "Save a Life."

The most boisterous moment of the night was when the 50

singers came onto the bimah for "Devorah's Song" and "Miriam's Song." The performers shook tambourines as the audience clapped and danced. When the group sang the "Mi Shebeirach," friends, family, and strangers wrapped their arms around each other and swayed to the beat.

In an interview, Cantor Roy Einhorn of Temple Israel said one example of Friedman's influence was the way she helped the Reform movement "reclaim" the Mi Sheberach and

make it part of its liturgy. At Temple Israel, as at many other liberal shuls, the prayer is now sung at every service.

"I think we are more in touch emotionally with our feelings, and I think she helped usher in that period for us," Einhorn said.

Rabbi David Paskin of Temple Beth Abraham in Canton organized the concert with the help of event planner Ellen Kaye. "It is hard to imagine not doing something for her," Paskin said in an interview.

Paskin recalled a young girl in his Canton community who would sing Debbie Friedman songs while she was getting treatment for cancer. To help ease the girl's pain, the rabbi helped arrange for Friedman to visit her at home so they could sing together.

"The thing about Debbie was that it was never about stardom or fame," Paskin said. "It was about healing; it was about music; it was about prayer. I don't think it mattered much that it was Debbie in that room. It mattered that there was a loving, caring, healing soul."

A video of the tribute concert can be viewed online at www.rememberingdebbie.com.

Egyptian dissident: Give the people a chance

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opposition to the peace treaty with Israel. He has variously praised and criticized the United States as its policies in the Middle East have waffled and wandered from calling for democracy to defending dictators.

So, amid worries about what the current upheaval in Egypt means to the United States and Israel, it meant something to hear him on NPR the other day saying we should not worry – that there would be no abrupt change in Egypt's security agreements with the United States and Israel.

What's happening "is a surprise to everyone including the Egyptians themselves," Ibrahim said. "People feel empowered; they feel that they can change the rulers and that they can do it peacefully. This is a new turn in the history of the Middle East."

The US response "came a little bit hesitantly, but better late than never," he said. "America supported [Mubarak] for 30 years, it's about time to support the Egyptian people even for one year."

Ibrahim does not promise relations will never change. No one could do that. As Senator John Kerry points out, what's happening is not controllable by the United States, Mubarak, Israel, opposition leader and Nobel laureate Mohammed ElBaradei, the Muslim Brotherhood or any other country, individual or organization.

But Ibrahim probably knows Egyptian society better than any-



While crowds rule Cairo's Tahrir Square today, the scene was much different five years ago (above) when police routinely turned out in force for much smaller demonstrations.

one – certainly better than the TV reporters who have been shoving their microphones into the faces of Islamically dressed demonstrators for days, the better to get dramatic, fire-breathing shots of how much people in Tahrir Square hate Israel and the United States.

He knows that this is not a country whose people would relish renewed warfare, continued severe economic hardship or a rush into the arms of Wahabi-style fundamentalists.

None of this is to deny that very serious consequences could flow from a change of regime in Egypt.

Most profound for Israel is the potential that it will once again have to be ready to defend its southern front like in the bad old days when that was the locus of the greatest military threat.

Durable peace with Egypt made it far easier to cope with the Lebanese and Syrian borders, and to concentrate on developing the country. Now, and until the nature of the next Egyptian regime is known, it would be imprudent for Israel not to be on guard against a Yom Kippur War-style surprise attack.

Ironically, emergence of a democratic Egypt would produce two quite different problems. One is that free balloting might lead to the election of an Islamist party. The other is that truly free elections would put an end to Israel's status as the only democracy in the Middle East, a status that has brought with it much political benefit.

Most profound for the United States is the potential loss of its strategic cornerstone in the re-

gion. Alienation of Egypt would be a body blow not just militarily speaking, but also politically and even culturally.

There is a need to worry, long term, about all these possible developments. But that is different from what we need to worry about now.

Change was coming anyway. Not even presidents-for-life live forever, and there is no reason to believe it would have been better if the 82-year-old Mubarak had died in his sleep a year ago, or a year from now.

The Egyptian people are standing up, like the Chinese, the South Africans, the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Eastern Europeans – the list is very long. According to David Brooks, writing in *The New York Times* this week, "more than 100 nations have



PHOTOS BY CHARLES A. RADIN

Saad Eddin Ibrahim: "America supported [Mubarak] for 30 years, it's about time to support the Egyptian people even for one year."

seen democratic uprisings over the past few decades. More than 85 authoritarian governments have fallen. Somewhere around 62 countries have become democracies, loosely defined."

What we need to worry about right now is keeping out of the way. The United States and Israel must avoid lending any substance to the claims of the more extreme Arab rebels that we are trying to manipulate the situation or subvert the movement against authoritarianism.

This movement is in some ways like the Islamist movement, but it is supremely important to remember that they are not one and the same. Machinations from outside will surely encourage the anti-authoritarians to make common cause with the Islamists. It has happened, in various forms and to varying degrees, in Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. It would be a true disaster in Egypt.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim showed real insight when he wrote these words in a *Washington Post* op-ed article in 2006:

"President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may be quite right about a new Middle East being born. In fact, their policies in support of the actions of their closest regional ally, Israel, have helped midwife the newborn. But it will not be exactly the baby they have longed for. For one thing, it will be neither secular nor friendly to the United States. For another, it is going to be a rough birth."