



# Saving Jewish Graves

## Salvaging a Pakistani-Jewish Identity

**K**arachi's Magen Shalom Synagogue was demolished in July 1988, to make way for the Madiha Square shopping mall. The majority of Pakistan's Jewish community had already dwindled and left this now hostile environment and the remaining Jews there live in virtual anonymity. While the history of the community has been documented, there are few remaining monuments. There is perhaps though one seemingly unlikely champion for this lost community, Faisal Benkhal. He now chooses to

be identified by the adopted name Fishel and he has taken on the task of attempting to preserve, clean and restore the Jewish cemetery in Mewah Shah Karachi.

He is outspoken and relentless in his efforts to make the story of this cemetery known and fears that it could potentially be entirely destroyed. In a place where a historic synagogue was grazed and the community now nearly entirely forgotten, this is perhaps not an unfounded fear. So what would

drive one to protect neglected Jewish graves? Fishel's own family story is largely responsible for this. He was born in Karachi to an Arab father and a Jewish mother in 1987. Though there is no way to verify it, he says that he was told as a child by an elderly Jewish gentleman that he knew only as Mr. David that there were 200 Jews living in Pakistan at the time.

He speaks of having a fascination with the cemetery since his teens and is perhaps clinging onto what little is left



# Feature

by Erica Lyons



of his Jewish family's roots in Pakistan. Orphaned when he was just 13, for Fishel this cemetery perhaps holds the key to his own past.

He seeks to have the Jewish section within the Mewah Shah graveyard preserved, cleaned and protected, as its neighboring Muslim graves would be (the Jewish graveyard is part of the larger Mewah Shah cemetery). And personal story aside, on a very fundamental level he recognizes the inherent social, historical, genealogical and cultural importance of the cemetery. This cemetery, like others around the world,

provides a unique glimpse at a historical community and is an invaluable tool for understanding its values, its people, its demography and its spirituality.

Fishel has made a plea to local Pakistanis to allow him to borrow land surveying equipment in order to be able to accurately assess the cemetery grounds, which he indicates are heavily vegetated and many of the graves are hidden. He estimates there are anywhere from two to three hundred Jewish graves in the cemetery. His task is further complicated, he explains, by the fact the cemetery is in a dangerous

part of town where notorious "war gangs and criminals" are commonplace. And while there are a few local Muslims that are sympathetic to his quest, he says that, "their support has only been verbal and am waiting for their worded support to materialize into a tangible form." Perhaps this isn't entirely unexpected.

He hopes that his efforts will ultimately "pressure the Pakistani government and local city government of Karachi to consider the Jewish cemetery as a protected heritage site". Similarly he says the cemetery can't be maintained by volunteers (there have been none





(from left) Chand Sulaiman, cemetery gatekeeper, with Fishel Benkhald



other than him) and he hopes that an N.G.O or Jewish organization will step in and create a fund that can hire laborers to work on the most damaged and eroded areas of the cemetery and that such a fund can later be used for timely maintenance.

Though Pakistan is likely not on the itinerary of any but the most intrepid Jewish tourists, Fishel is able to point out other Jewish sites in Karachi. Namely, the famous Merewether Clock Tower is recognizable not merely by its impressive size and Victorian Gothic Revival architecture but most notably by

its iconic and prominent Magen Davids. There is also the Cutchi Memon graveyard located in another area of Karachi. Fishel indicated that this cemetery is under the care of Memon society. "The Memon society is a very well organized and a close knitted community in Karachi. I spoke earlier with Mr. Aziz Memon who told me that there are just a few Jewish graves and the Memon community is taking care of them," Fishel relays.

So that leaves Fishel perhaps alone on his campaign. And while for Fishel, this drive to protect and preserve the Mewah Shah Jewish cemetery comes

from a deeply Jewish place in his heart, it comes from elsewhere as well. "My father being secular always emphasized humanity and reasoning with logic to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad." ✡

Fishel may be reached through his Twitter handle @Jew\_Pakistani

Please see our website for a list of the names and dates that Fishel has recorded from the Mewah Shah Jewish cemetery. He hopes to expand this list.

**SUB: 82** Names and dates on tombstones. In Jewish cemetery MewahShah, Karachi Pakistan.

n Sn	Name	Date of birth	Date of death	Age	Picture
1	MW Esther (wife of Mr. Joseph Reuben Doodker)		5-April-1880	20	
2	Mr. Joseph Reuben		6-Nov-1882		
3	Serraha (daughter of Mr. Samuel)		8-Mar-1891	2.4	
4	Reuben (son of Mr. Abraham Reuben Kamarlaker)		5-Sep-1892	7m	
5	Elijah Moses (son of Moses Solomon Mhedeker)	13-Oct-1883	7-Apr-1897	13	
6	Abraham (son of Mr. Joseph Salomon)		10-Apr-1900		
7	Segullabai (daughter of Isaac Abraham)		6-May-1906	15	
8	Rahelbai (widow of Subedar David Balaji Oomerdakar)		9-Oct-1907	80	
9	Sarahbai (daughter of Mr. Daniel Solomon Mhedeker)		22-Sep-1907	18	
10	Shegool Abay (wife of Mr. Solomon David)		21-April-1908	50	
11	Enoch Bhonker	11-Dec-1933	18-Dec-1910		
12	Simhabai Satamkara		15-Aug-1913	60	
13	Benjamin (son of S.E.Benjamin Kandlekar)	23-June-1895	15-Sep-1913	18	
14	Mrs. Leeyabai Simon Mhedeker		8-Jun-1914		
15	Mazaltob (widow of Jacob Solomon Kharvilker)	1852	8-Feb-1915		
16	Mrs. Estherbai Nowgaukara		20-Oct-1915	70	
17	Miss Rachel (daughter of Solomon Kasuker)		22-Aug-1917	11	
18	Malhabai Moses Solomon Nagawker		8-Dec-1917	78	
19	Rahamin Solomon Mendrekar		31-Aug-1918	24	
20	? Brocawkara		25-Apr-1918		
21	Esther Eliezer Kolabkar		25-Dec-1919	37	
22	Eliezer Joseph Kolabkar		30-Dec-1919	48	
23	Anah (daughter of Judha Daniel Mhedeker)		13-Aug-1922	12	
24	Isaac Abraham Bhonker		2-Oct-1922	2	
25	Esterbai Satamkara		2-Sep-1924	50	
26	Mrs. Mary Greenfield		5-May-1925	43	
27	Mr. Asher (son of Daniel Solomon Mhedeker)		7-Nov-1926	33	
28	S.E. Benjamin Kandlekar		15-Aug-1927	55	
29	Benjamin (son of Mrs Michael Daniel Dighorker)	4-Aug-1926	3-March-1927		
30	Samuel Sassoon Kandlekar		11-Feb-1927	25	
31	Bathsheba (Wife of B. Solomon Birwadker) P.W.D		12-Feb-1928		No Pic yet
32	Son of Samuel Moses Nagawker (Chazan)		21-Mar-1928		No Pic yet
33	Maisey (Mazaltob) [son of Mr. & Mrs S.M. Solomon]	6-July-1926	11-March-1928		
34	Mr. Ezra Elijah Nagothneker		15-May-1929		No Pic yet
35	Solomon Kulabker	11-Dec-1927	6-Mar-1929		
36	Lena (wife of Samuel Elizer Solomon)		1-Dec-1929	25	
37	Gershone Solomon Oomerdakar	15-Sep-1861	16-Jul-1930	69	
38	Ezekiel Samuel Talker	Mar-1837	16-Oct-1930	93	
39	Saul Solomon		16-July-1930	64	
40	Abraham Samuel David Dighorker	5-Nov-1880	29-Apr-1931		No Pic yet
41	Elijah Joseph Kolabkar		24-Dec-1933	43	No Pic yet

**DATE: 13-Aug-2014**

Fishel Benkhalid ( twitter @Jew\_Pakistani )

n Sn	Name	Date of birth	Date of death	Age	Picture
42	Sadick David Dighorker (Pensioner Havildar)		10-Aug-1933	78	
43	Mr. Elijah Ruben Bhonker	7-Sep-1875	17-6-1934		
44	Milka (wife of J.D. Haem)		18-Jan-1934	36	
45	Daniel (son of Mr. & Mrs Enoch Michael Daniel)	30-Apr-1933	July-1935	2	
46	Samuel Benjamin Elijah	8-Jan-1881	25-Jan-1935	54	
47	Abraham (Son of B. Solomon Birwadker) P.W.D		1-Sep-1936		No Pic yet
48	Shegulla (Wife of B. Solomon Birwadker) P.W.D		1-Sep-1936		No Pic yet
49	Richaard Saul Solomon Loofoforeman	6-May-1898	6-Nov-1936	38	No Pic yet
50	Miss Abeshagh (Helen) Hyams (Daughter of Mr. U.D. Hymas Kiker)	25-Nov-1923	11-Apr-1936		
51	Sheilm (son of Elijah Aaron Ashtamker of Bombay)	8-Sep-1934	3-Mar-1936		
52	Abraham Reuben Kamarl	29-May-1871	28-May-1936		
53	Mozel Daniels (wife of Moses Daniel)	28-Sep-01	2-July-1938		
54	Jueli [(eldest daughter of E.J. Jacob (Mendriker)]	4-Nov-1928	11-Sep-1943		
55	Joseph Hyeem Awaskar (Kirtanwala)		26-Jan-1945	80	
56	Peris David Jacob Bhorupker	21-Mar-1929	15-Nov-1945		No Pic yet
57	Miriyambai (wife of Soloman Digkorkar)		4-Feb-1945	80	
58	Rachel Moses David Maleker	24-July-1886	31-July-1945	59	
59	Julie (daughter of Mr. & Mrs R. Samuel)		13-Dec-1945		
60	Eliezer (Eric) David Jacob Bhorupker B.A.B.s.c	6-Dec-1923	18-Aug-1946		
61	A. G. Abrahams Miller		11-Feb-1950		
62	Ester Jacob S. David Dighorkar		9-Nov-1952	48	No Pic yet
63	Mr. Levy Solomon J.P.	14-July-1877	16-Oct-1952		
64	Lily Joseph Awaskar		28-June-1956		
65	Samson J.D. Hyams Kieker	30-Jan-1914	17-Oct-1959	44	
66	Sheba David Penkar	1892	8-Apr-1960		
67	Mrs. Yakhobeth Bai Samuel (Dhokerker)		1-Oct-1963	73	
68	Mr. Mehdi Nassim (Son of Rahamatullah)		27-June-1972	69	No Pic yet
69	Mrs. Ellis Joseph	24-Dec-1918	28-June-1980		No Pic yet
70	Mrs. Ellis Joseph	9-Jul-1910	14-Dec-1980		No Pic yet
71	Granpa Hraim Joseph Awaskar	25-Dec-1903	12-Feb-1987	84	No Pic yet
72	Eve (wife of H. Wyse)		7-Mar-190?	32	
73	Yashua (daughter of Brukha & wife of Ari Samuel)		29-Nov-195?	46	
74	Dorothy		17-Feb-83		??
75	Benjamin (son of Shallom Ezekeil)	22-Mar-88	17-Dec-88	9m	
76	Mr. Solomon David				
77	Mrs Esther Abraham (Pic not full)				
78	Somon A. Reubrn JP				
79	Mrs Schrabai (wife of Mr. Asher Daniel Solomon M.)				
80	Rebecca Samuel Joel				
81	Mrs. Sippora Samuel Joel				
82	Abraham (son of Mr & Mrs EzekeilSamson*)				