

COVER STORY

Call for Support for LA's First Kosher Soup Kitchen

by Rachel Wizenfeld

Tiferet Teman, located on Pico Boulevard near La Cienega, has been a quiet Yemenite synagogue for so many years; but now close to thirty little faces crowd the seats there each weekday afternoon, as children come to fill their stomachs at what has become LA's first kosher soup kitchen.

Sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by their mothers, these children and families come from a diverse group of backgrounds that share one thing in common - economic struggle, says Ifat Shlomi, who currently runs the soup kitchen.

"Each day there are more and more people, more new faces," she says.

Intended to be a place for children to get a hot dinner, the soup kitchen, which



launched just a week before Rosh Hashanah, is open on weekdays from 4:30-7:00pm and serves hot meals including meatballs, schnitzel, chicken, potatoes, fish and soup. It opened under the auspices of Rabbi Moshe Yazdi, a rabbi in Israel who runs an anti-poverty organization there called Amude Hashalom. Rabbi Yazdi visits Los Angeles on occasion to fundraise and teach, and on his most recent visit in June, he observed that the poverty in the Orthodox community here was becoming unbearable for many families. Under his watch and using donated funds from American Friends of Amude Hashalom, Ifat Shlomi launched the soup kitchen. However she hopes that other organizations and individuals will step up to partner and allow the soup kitchen to flourish.

"This is not a project of Amude Hashalom only," she says. "We're the ones that came up front and did it, but we want the community to feel that this is their project, too."

While the idea of a kosher soup kitchen in the LA community had been tossed around before, most people felt that Jewish hunger was being covered by organizations like Tomchei Shabbos or Sova, says Shlomi. However, sadly, the strong response to the soup kitchen in just its first month of operation shows the need for such a place.

While the kids who come are happy and excited to eat and play with their

friends, for the parents it can be uncomfortable.

One mother came to Shlomi and quietly asked if she could take the leftovers on her children's plates home; another mother of four called before Sukkot to see if there would be meals during Chol Hamoed, say-



ing she didn't know how else she would feed her kids.

"You can't imagine things like that," says Shlomi.

Families come from all religious and cultural backgrounds, whether Ashkenazi, Sephardic, American, Israeli or Persian. While most are Orthodox, anyone is welcome. "It doesn't matter what type of religious level you are and you don't have to fill out forms. Here you can just come," she says.

The soup kitchen is also a lifesaver for mothers of large families who have a hard time preparing and serving dinner to their multiple children. One mother of six kids has been coming daily with her children since the kitchen opened - they sit together and dine at a table each evening.

But should the kitchen be reserved for people in financial need, in contrast to those feeling overwhelmed or in crisis? Shlomi says the philosophy of Amude Hashalom is that anyone who is coming to ask for help or dine at a free soup kitchen day after day is in need; otherwise he or she would feel ashamed. While sometimes the primary need may not be financial - a person may instead need attention, companionship, or has trouble taking care of himself - any person in need is welcome.

Kosher soup kitchens have been operating in New York for several years, and have been successful at supporting and nurturing the elderly, children and families. An organization called Masbia operates four kosher soup kitchens in Brooklyn and Queens, dubbing them "free restaurants," and in addition to the hot meals, offers connections to local social services and companionship from caring staff and

volunteers.

Tiferet Teman would like to expand its capacity and offerings, but is in sore need of donations and volunteers. Nearly ev-



eryone staffing the soup kitchen is a volunteer, including Shlomi, who works fulltime as a physical therapist. More volunteers are needed who can be trained to prepare and serve food and commit to a consistent schedule, as well as volunteers to help publicize and fundraise for the kitchen and help fill other needs as well.

"The goal is to take care of people from A-Z," says Shlomi, who has noticed that the clothing and shoes of children who come to the kitchen is often old and worn.



Clothing and toy donations are welcomed, as well as packaged food from local stores, and are distributed directly to the families. While they don't have storage space, if people drop off items in the beginning of the week, it will likely be taken by Friday, when the space has to be cleared out and organized for synagogue services.

"We need the help of the community to make it happen; more and more people are coming, and it looks like people really need this," says Shlomi. "This is something that can happen to everybody, and we're more fortunate to be able to give to them. 'Im yirtzeh Hashem (G-d Willing) may we be the givers and not the takers.'"

For those in need of a hot meal, the Tiferet Teman soup kitchen is located at 8589 Pico Blvd, entrance from the alley of Holt St. Hours are Monday-Thursday 4:30 to 7:00pm, not including holidays.

Food is provided by "Bazilikum Catering" under the kosher supervision of Rabbi Gavriel Hakohen.

Donations are needed to keep this initiative going. Please make checks out to American Friends of Amude Hashalom, and mail to 1041 S. Wooster St., #2, LA, CA 90035. To donate via credit card, call 323-449-8184. All donations are tax deductible.

Volunteers are also needed to help serve, clean up, and offer support to families. To volunteer or get involved, please contact Ifat Shlomi at Ifat08@gmail.com.



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