

# A Legend For Lovers



Young Orthodox Jews desiring marriage pray at the grave of Rabbi Jonathan Ben Uzziel at Amuka, Israel, that it will happen for them. Legend has it that such prayers there work.

—UJA Press Service Photo by Joel Fishman

AMUKA, ISRAEL — You would need a very large map of Israel to show Amuka. There is no settlement there, no village. But you will be able to find it, if you believe in miracles. For Amuka is said to be the source of many miracles, and the reason that Orthodox Jews travel from all across the world to come here.

To reach Amuka you must circumvent the beautiful city of Safed in the Galilee, Israel's north, and find the road that leads to Rosh Pina. Then take the opposite direction along a narrow road twisting and turning through fragrant pine forests.

Arrows thoughtfully provided by believers will lead you towards the mountain summit. There you will come upon a deep valley and see a lonely grave at the bottom. You have found Amuka.

It is the grave of Rabbi Jonathan Ben Uzziel, born in the first century B.C.E., Rabbi Hillel's most outstanding pupil. Rabbi Jonathan translated the Prophets into Aramic, and it is said that a Heavenly Voice was heard demanding to know who it was that had revealed his mysteries to man. Rabbi Jonathan answered that he had done so, "not for the sake of personal honor, but in order that disputes shall not multiply in Israel."

And that's not all. It is said that the words of Torah were so sweet on the lips of Rabbi Jonathan that bands of angels gathered overhead to listen.

How this learned man came to occupy a revered place in the minds and hearts of many Orthodox Jews so that his grave site would be a destination

of hundreds of pilgrimages, is a story in itself.

It seems that because the Rabbi married very late in life, he and his wife were unable to fulfill the commandment, "Be fruitful and multiply." To compensate, he told his disciples on his deathbed that anyone who fervently wished to marry should pray at his tomb and their petition would be granted within a year.

I visited Amuka after a young Australian told me in Jerusalem, "I have been wanting to marry for several years, but somehow it never happened. Then I prayed at Amuka and two days later I was introduced to the young lady who will be my wife before the end of the year." He believes it is a miracle made possible by his visit to Rabbi Ben Uzziel's tomb.

Who knows? It's happened enough times for the legend to develop. Another example. A few years ago, a young girl praying for a husband here forgot her prayer book at the tomb. It contained her name and address. A young man found it, sought her out, and you can guess the happy ending. Marriage by miracle or coincidence? Since then, you'd be surprised how many single men and women forget their prayer books with their names and addresses at the tomb.

When we reached Amuka, it was early morning. At the top of the flight of steps descending to the grave, a Chassidic man chanted "Shacharit," the morning prayers. His cadences rose, fell, and were lifted by the pine-scented breeze towards heaven. Birds sang as we descended the stone steps between avenues of olive trees, their leaves glinting silver-green in the warm sunshine, giving way to walnut trees as we approached the whitewashed stone tomb.

It is a humble site. Over the grave, a roof has been built of asbestos sheet. A small table holds prayer books and there is a metal stand with spikes to hold candles. It is easy to be caught up in the magic of the site, in this hidden valley of enchantment high in the mountains of Galilee. Somehow you seem so close to heaven and to the Creator. The words of Genesis return to mind, "Male and female, created He them."

Although it is very early, people are already

praying there — a yeshiva boy in his teens, and a family that has come specially from New York to pray for a husband for Rivka, 20. Rivka's father has curled pails dangling in front of his ears and her mother wears a sheitel, a wig. Rivka's eyes are closed, her forehead touches the cool stone of the tomb.

"Of course I believe the legend," Rivka said later, surprised at such a question. "Why else would we have come from New York? I know so many friends who were married within a year of praying at Amuka — how can you not believe?" Rivka's younger sister is also praying for Rivka and perhaps also for her own chances.

## LETTERS

Dear Mike:

Thanks a billion for the wonderful coverage you gave the Las Vegas Chapter of Women's American ORT in the Israelite for our ORT Day luncheon.

I have been out of town, and was unable to attend the luncheon. (My grandson and I both have birthdays the last week of March and I always spend that week with my son and his family to celebrate both our birthdays).

Everyone commented so very favorably on the great coverage you gave us, and I am sure the wonderful attendance at the luncheon was due in great part to the publicity we received in the Israelite.

Again, thank you so very much for your very much appreciated cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Lillian Hilde  
Las Vegas Chapter  
Women's American ORT

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