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# JEWISH SPIRIT

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**Zach & Nancy Brooks:  
Working to Build  
Our Community**

**Finding the  
Maccabees in  
Today's Jerusalem**

**PHOENIX**  
Community Kollel

*Building Jewish Unity Through Learning*

a message from

# rabbi zvi holland

kollel dean

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Dear Friends,

Let's talk about the elephant on the room. THE ECONOMY. There - I said it.

Now let me tell you a story. One Pesach, I received a call from an elderly Holocaust survivor. He asked me a question. "Why does the Torah describe the Pesach Seder as a family event or a meal shared with neighbors? I'll tell you why!" he said. "In the concentration camps, when the Nazis gave us food, every person wanted to run to a corner to eat alone. You know why?"

He continued, "Because when someone is oppressed, he can only think of himself. When you eat alone, you don't have to share. On Pesach especially, a Jew must act like a Jew and eat as a family and as a neighbor, sharing what he has with those around him. Only then can we really celebrate our peoplehood."

Along these lines my teacher, the revered Rosh Yeshiva of Mir - Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, once explained that this lesson is the test of being a Jew. When G-d gives something to us that our peers do not have, we are faced with a challenge: do we extend ourselves to include others in the security of our own lives? Rabbi Finkel taught, "It is during this defining moment that we learn the power of the human spirit, because we must extend our own comfort to others."

In the current economic climate, we must do the same. We must do our best to set aside our fear of what may be coming next and continue to share whatever we have with community and with our brothers and sisters in need. We must fearlessly spread our blanket over many others and continue to invest in the future of the Jewish People by supporting Torah institutions and ALL Jewish charities.

And we will because we are Jews and that is what we do.

With Blessings for Our Entire Community,

Rabbi Zvi Holland  
Kollel Dean

"In the concentration camps," he said to me, "when the Nazis gave us food, every person wanted to run to a corner to eat alone.

You know why?"

## phoenix spotlight...



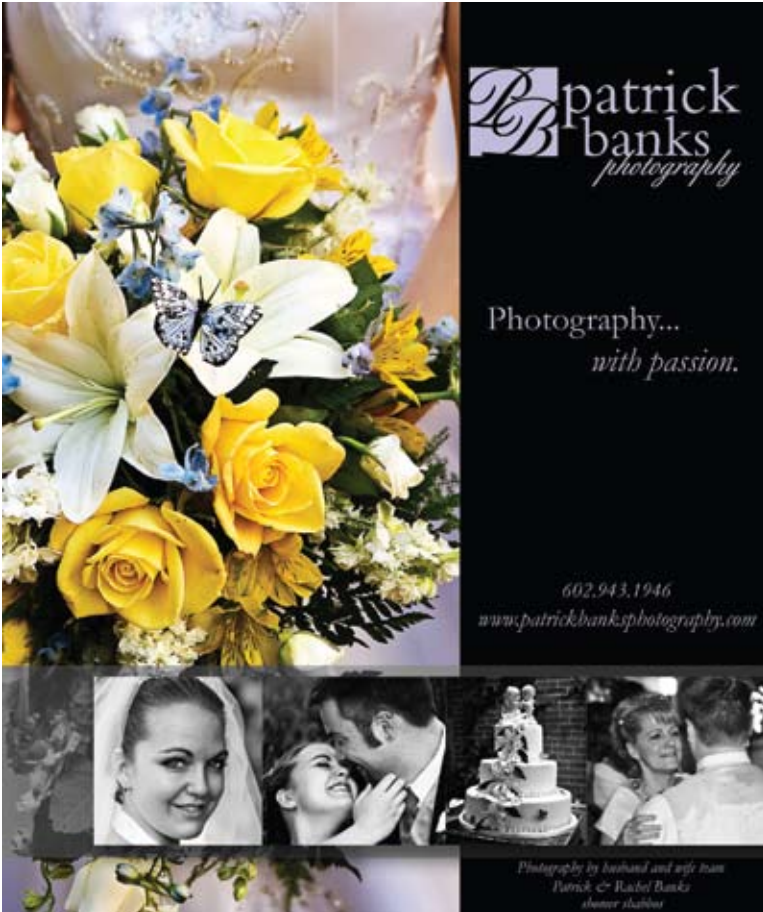
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Zach & Nancy Brooks -  
Working to Build Our Community



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# Zach & Nancy Brooks: Working to Build Our Community

Owners of the Jewish Collection Make Community a Priority

Zach and Nancy Brooks of Phoenix are perhaps best known as the owners of The Jewish Collection - a Judaica store in Scottsdale on the corner of Shea and Scottsdale Road. The couple opened the store in April of 2006 after the closing of both the Israel Connection in Phoenix and the Jewish Quarter in Scottsdale (the Jewish Quarter has since reopened).

The Brookses say they opened the store "to provide a place where you can get all the items you need for life events,

holidays, and gifts – but also to contribute to the growth and quality of life of the Jewish community in the greater Phoenix area."

And contribute they have. With their financial assistance, materials donations, programming, and more, the Brookses have successfully been able to turn their store into a place of *chesed*/kindness that is an asset to the entire community.

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Zach, a native Phoenician, met Nancy at the Arizona State University Hillel and they were married soon after Zach completed his MBA. Nancy taught at the Beth El preschool for a few years, but with four sons and Zach traveling often, it was difficult for her to work full time. During the 1990s Nancy worked part time at Israel Connection, which closed in 2003. When the closing of the Scottsdale store was announced in 2005, Zach and Nancy felt that the community should not be without a Judaica store, so they reopened in the same location in 2006, doing business as the Jewish Collection.

giraffe-themed menorah. The Brookses have developed relationships with artists and artisans all over the world and house the largest collection of Southwestern Judaica in the United States. As a service to the Scottsdale and area communities, the Jewish Collection also houses a large selection of kosher groceries, wine and meat from Segal's Kosher Foods in Phoenix.

As service to the community goes, what happens within the walls of the Jewish Collection is just the beginning. The Brookses have hosted a community-wide Shofar Blowing contest for kids in all of the area Jewish Day and Hebrew schools. They have invited authors to come to the store to speak and sign books. Children's books and cookbook demonstrations have been popular as well.

The Brookses have successfully been able to turn their store into a place of *chesed* - kindness - that is an asset to the entire community.

Zach credits the store's success to Nancy's "Black belt in shopping," great taste, and buying trips to New York and to Israel. Nancy also gets to know her customers well. The overwhelmed bride or mother of the Bar Mitzvah boy who visits the Jewish Collection will get Nancy's personal attention and assistance throughout the entire planning process. Custom printed invitations, ketubot, tallitot, kippot – Nancy and her staff, including Debbie Cooperman and Laura Leibhaber, will make sure they have everything they need.

When customers are collectors of a specific type of item, Nancy goes out of her way to find and stock those items even if they are as obscure as a

The Brookses have decided to make their Phoenix community a priority. All their customers can register their information, including their favorite charity. Throughout the year, their purchases are recorded and tracked and at least 10% of their total purchases are sent to the charity of their choice.

Since opening the store in 2006 the Brookses have donated through this program approximately \$150,000 to Jewish Day Schools, Synagogues, the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix, Israel and Israeli Charities, as well as many secular charities. Due to the current economy, this program had to be put on hold for the last few months, but according to Zach, "We are optimistic that we will be able to reinstate the program again soon."

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Through their charity work, the Brookses have been able to establish a close relationship to many Jewish institutions in the area. When you reach out to the community the way the Brookses have, through their store and otherwise, you bring power and strength to your community and hope to inspire others to become more involved as well.



The Phoenix Community Kollel is only one of the many Jewish organizations in town that have benefited from their dedication. In 2008, the kollel's popular Abraham S. Friedman Distinguished Speaker Series was presented by the Jewish Collection, bringing four prominent educators to the community.

Zach believes the Kollel plays a vital role in the community, and currently serves on the Kollel's Board of Directors. "The Kollel has given me the opportunity to begin to appreciate the breadth and depth of Jewish learning, law and history," Zach says. "I can move at my own pace through a variety of texts and concepts that are opening the doors of Jewish learning to me."

Each customer in the store can register their information, including their favorite charity. Throughout the year, their purchases are recorded and tracked and at least 10% of their total purchases are sent to the charity of their choice.

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Zach and Nancy also chaired the Kollel's "Jewish Unity Live 2008 Dinner of Tribute," honoring Ruth Ann and Ray Perlman of Sinai Mortuary. "Zach and Nancy brought their passion for a well-run event and their dedication to the Kollel's mission of building Jewish unity through learning to create a night that will not be forgotten for a long time," says Rabbi Zvi Holland, Dean. "Zach even composed a special song satire for the occasion that was performed live by Kol Zimra. Ray and Ruth Ann, along with their children and grandchildren, will remember that one for a long time."

More important than the time, energy, resources and talent that Zach and Nancy so freely gave to the evening was their dedication to furthering the message of the Kollel, and empowering the Jewish people that are a part of the city they love. The Brookses have proven themselves to be not just active members of the Jewish community, but pillars of the Jewish people. Throughout the world, the media bombards young and old alike with messages of frivolity and materialism. The Brookses send out a message of caring and sharing. Who is in a better position to help a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to start their path into adulthood, or a bride and groom to begin their lives together?

"The Kollel has given me the opportunity to begin to appreciate the breadth and depth of Jewish learning, law and history," Zach says. "I can move at my own pace through a variety of texts and concepts that are opening the doors of Jewish learning to me."

"The Brookses set wonderful examples and they are good role models for the community," says Laura Leibhaber, who has worked at the Jewish Collection since it opened. The Brookses' four sons, Andrew, Micah, Justin and Ari, have big shoes to fill, but their parents have so clearly marked a path of values and respect for others, that they will surely live their lives in a way that makes their family and the Jewish People proud.

In Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, it states that the world stands on three pillars and that one of them is "gemilut chasadim" -- "acts of loving kindness." The example of kindness that comes naturally to the Brookses keeps the



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world spinning -- from the Bar Mitzvah boy who is just beginning his life as a Jewish adult, as he comes in to try on his first tallit that he will wear as he makes a blessing at the Torah for the first time, to the bride and groom, who will start a new life together as he hands her the carefully selected ketuba under the Chupah. But also the worlds of all the individuals who are touched by the organizations they support and who are able to learn from middot tovot -- fine character traits - that Zach and Nancy display.

On that night last March, Zach and Nancy brought people together from across the entire community and helped create a night to celebrate Torah study, which is the unifying force in Judaism.

Chanukah literally means "Dedication on the 25<sup>th</sup>," as the Jewish People were able to rededicate their Holy Temple on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev after defeating the Greek Army. As the holiday approaches and we prepare to celebrate Chanukah, it should be a time of introspection and renewed dedication to contribute our time and energy to keep the world spinning, so that we too can add momentum to our community and strength to Jewish People everywhere.

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