

Yonah Goldman, z"l

By Rachel Rabinowitz

KIRYAT ARBA – Sorrow and bewilderment filled the small house in Kiryat Arba where a family and community mourned a favorite son. Yonah Goldman, z"l, son of Bruce and Freida Goldman of Pikesville, Maryland, was killed in a car accident on Wednesday November 21st at the age of 24, leaving behind his wife Dina and their 10-month old son, Binyamin Tzvi.

The accident took place around 8:40 a.m., in the midst of heavy rain, on an infamous S-curve on the Kiryat Gat - Beit Guvrin Road. The preliminary police report indicated that this section of road contains a blind curve, where drivers from either direction cannot see cars approaching from the opposite direction, and defensive maneuvers are usually taken too late to be effective.

Yonah was en route to his office in Ramat Beit Shemesh when he spotted a hitchhiker. He took the hitchhiker to a gas station since it was raining, and was on his way back towards Ramat Beit Shemesh when the accident occurred. This act of kindness was typical of the young man who wanted to live in the land of his forefathers.

Yonah was known for his friendly smile, charismatic personality, and true concern for others. Person after person, young and old, visited the *shivah* house to tell Yonah's family about the wonderful effect he had on their lives.

A babysitter for five-year-old twins told the story of taking the children to a small playground outside of Yonah's apartment. If Yonah was there with his own child, he would give attention to the twins, too. On their own, the twins named the place the Park of the *Ish Tov*.

Another visitor to the *shivah* house said he had been to Yonah and Dina's apartment only once but was so impressed that he hoped one day to show the same hospitality to others as the Goldmans had showed him.

Rabbi Shraga Dahan, an IDF captain and army rabbi from Beit Shemesh, came upon the scene barely a minute after the collision between Yonah's car and an oncoming truck transporting large plastic barrels. The cause and details of the collision are still under investigation, but when Rabbi Dahan arrived Yonah's car was directly behind the truck and the road was littered with barrels. The driver's side door was jammed closed and Yonah was pinned under the crushed dashboard. He was wearing his seatbelt at the time of the collision, and aside from some blood visible on his head and confirmation that his leg was in pain, Dahan thought the situation looked hopeful and that Yonah was going to make it. Yonah could not speak but gestured with his head, and he nodded in response to each verse of *Tehillim* that the rabbi read

aloud on his behalf. "I told him that when he gets out of this, he will have to make a *seudat hoda'ah*," Dahan recollected, "and he nodded his head emphatically in agreement. He really rallied his strength for the *tehillim* and [the idea of making a *seudat hoda'ah*] more than when asked questions about how he was feeling."

Rabbi Dahan expressed consternation that none of the emergency response teams came from nearby Beit Shemesh. The police, for example, came from Kiryat Gat, about 20 minutes away from the site of the accident.

He also elaborated on a statement he made to the media that "nobody came for 45 minutes" after he called for emergency assistance. After checking the call log on his cell phone later, Dahan corrected himself and confirmed that Hatzolah was actually on the scene within 15 minutes of receiving his phone call. "First Hatzolah came from Beit Lachish, close by. Second came the police, then an ambulance, then the fire truck, and then Magen David Adom." The rabbi was taken aback when he found out that someone from Magen David Adom who was also interviewed live at the site claimed that MDA was present within 15 minutes, which was simply not true.

It was the fire truck, however, that arrived approximately 40 minutes after Rabbi Dahan contacted the fire department — a fact all the more disturbing because he was assured that the fire department was already aware of the situation before receiving his phone call.

Only the firemen had the necessary equipment to extricate Yonah from his car and make him fully accessible to the paramedics, and he died from internal bleeding shortly after being freed from the wreckage.

Locals say that the road was built before 1948 to bypass an Arab village that was abandoned and empty for at least the past four decades. Its curves are treacherous at this time of year, when the first winter rains mix with oil rising from the pavement, and it was spoken of in the *shivah* house as a known death trap that has claimed the lives of a number of people in the community.

On Sunday alone, two couples who each lost a child on that same stretch of road stopped by to console the Goldmans and share their feelings. The *yartzeit* of one of the children was a week earlier, while the *yartzeit* of the other



Yonah Goldman, z"l

near Gilo so drivers would no longer find themselves suddenly going from bright sunlight to complete darkness.

An *olah* from the States, she also pointed out that in America people change their tires or at least have them checked in preparation for winter.

"Here, they don't even check the right things," she said. "They should make a law for it" and have standards so both drivers and cars are prepared.

Yonah's mother refused to rest and went from one visitor to the next expressing her indignation and sadness.

"It's not enough to sit *shivah* for one young person after another. I'm sorry, but I am very

angry. They tell us to make *aliyah*, and then they let us die here on the streets. If there's been so many accidents right there, that means something has to be done. I don't want my son's death to be in vain. I want something to come of this."

And she concluded, "A government has a responsibility to its people."

Donations in Yonah's memory can be made out to:

Congregation Shomrei
Emanah
6221 Greenspring Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21209
Memo: Legacy of Yonah
Foundation

is coming soon. A relative pointed out that only after tragedies like these does the government take notice, but then no one had an answer for why the road has remained unchanged despite the ever-rising death toll. Aerial views of the road clearly show that the road could be straightened to eliminate this dangerous curve.

One of Dina's former teachers, whose child was killed in a car accident at the entrance to Kiryat Arba, shared her feelings about the current situation. "It is difficult, because you know you have to bless the bad just as you bless the good, because it's all from G-d. On the other hand, there are so many other ways that a person could be killed that aren't preventable that to have a young person die in a car accident is [so painful]."

"This week there were 7 fatalities [from car accidents in Israel]. Last week there were 12, and before that, 15...[Something must] be done to protect the people."

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2006 there were approximately 17,306 car accidents in Israel, with 373 resulting in fatalities. While records for January-October of 2007 indicate a decrease in the total number of accidents per month, the average number of fatalities per month — 33 — is almost identical to last year's statistics.

Various callers at the *shivah* house expressed exasperation with other hazards on the roads in Israel, problems with fairly simple solutions.

One couple described the intersection where people turn in to Efrat as "a nightmare," the cars speeding with impunity because everyone knows there is not a cop in sight.

A resident of Kiryat Arba wondered how much it would cost to put lights in the *minarot*