



WOULD YOU LIKE SOME CHUMUS WITH THAT POKE?

facebook invades the holy land

Benji Lovitt

where the social circles are unbelievably small and most people are members of the “Israel” network. Want to find out more about the sexy Jewish whose profile you came across? Study her profile, find out who her friends are and walk around her neighborhood...you'll probably run into her.

Or you could just join one of the countless popular Facebook groups which illustrate vital aspects of Israeli culture and society. Take “Mondays at Socca.” Started last summer by socialite and American immigrant Brad Bernstein, this group gathered other Anglo *olim* (immigrants) to a Tel Aviv club for hip-hop music and shmoozing. Fast-forward a few months... Socca spawned the bigger “Tel Aviv Party List” group (currently around 800 people), a move to a bigger bar, and a write-up in the *Jerusalem Post* (plus a new side gig as a party promoter for Brad).

But Brad's an American. Do native Israelis use Facebook? But of course, and there are just as many silly (or important, depending on perspective) causes to promote as in America. Here's one: Only one hundred years ago, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah single-handedly revived the Hebrew language. One hundred years later, Israelis mucked it up and modernized it, breaking grammar and conjugation rules, and driving *ulpan* teachers crazy across the land. More and more people have begun to incorrectly conjugate, saying for example, “*yeh-lekh*” (“He will go”) instead of “*eh-lekh*” (“I will go”). Enter the Facebook group named “The Organization to Keep the Letter Aleph in First Person Future.” Seventeen hundred members and seventy-four wall postings aren't going to let Eliezer's efforts go down without a fight.

There's also the “*Ema*, Stop Freezing Pitas” group and the “Movement to Expel Those Who Translate Movie Titles into Hebrew.” But, as in America, Facebook isn't all fun and games. There's nothing fun about the tens of groups, numbering thousands of members, calling for the release of Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser, and Eldad Regev, the three soldiers who have been missing since 2006. As you scroll through these groups, you also hope that the emotion of these social networkers is matched by real-life activism on their part.

Who'd have thunk that in only 60 years, Israel would go from making David Ben-Gurion's dream of making the desert bloom come true to shmearing virtual chumus? It's enough to make us Israelis open an H&M store and bring Dunkin' Donuts to the Holy Land. I guess it can't be too far off...not if the Bookface groups have their say. ▲

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Shimon Peres is a living legend—a founding father of the Jewish State. He arrived in Israel before the War of Independence, served in the Knesset, held numerous minister positions in the government, led Israel as both Prime Minister and President and has won the Nobel Peace Prize. And yet, he will forever be remembered as the man who just recently introduced Israel to...wait for it...“Bookface.”

Even though he's a young 84, Shimmy ain't the online hipster that the rest of us are. A little late to the party, he told a group in Jerusalem that the social networking site called “Bookface” can be used for noble causes like fighting hate and anti-Semitism. But despite not knowing the name, the current Israeli President knew what he was talking about: everybody's favorite social networking site is just as huge in Israel as it is in the States.

Some nonscientific sources reported in late 2007 that Israel was experiencing the second highest rate of Facebook growth of any country in the world, from 18,000 members in August 2007 to about 400,000 today. Readers out there still picturing the classic Israeli as a blue-collar kibbutznik should wake up and smell the chumus; the young generation of Israeli Facebook users is adding their own unique flavor to the site.

First, a history lesson: In the beginning, there was poking. (Do I need to explain what that is? We all know? Ok, let's move on). On the seventh day, G-d (or some Silicon Valley developer) created SuperPoke, enabling the masses to “throw sheep,” “slap,” “tickle,” or engage in various other meaningless online non-activities. In Tel Aviv? Shalom, Israpoke! Who needs to “throw sheep” when you can “call someone *motek*” (sweetie)? “Shmear chumus”? “*Shnorer cigariyah*” (bum a cigarette)? (Eat your heart out, new Israeli anti-smoking laws—virtual smokes are beyond your jurisdiction).

But let's not forget the mathematical equation of why we're all on Facebook anyway: Jewish geography + online social networking = unprecedented level of acceptable stalking. Want to research a potential romantic interest? Google is soooo 5767. Facebook's where it's at today. Access to information is ridiculously easy in Israel,