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Chelm Awards reveal the quirkiest side of Israel

BY DANIELLA ASHKENAZY, JTA

(partial list of papers that ran the story)

http://www.jewishjournal.com/israel/article/chelm_awards_reveal_the_quirkier_side_of_israel_20101222/

http://www.jewishtimes.com/index.php/jewishtimes/news/jt/israel_news/chelm_awards_reveal_the_quirkier_side_of_israel/22323

<http://www.jewishexponent.com/article/22570/>

<http://jewishworldnews.org/2011/01/13/chelm-awards-reveal-the-quirkiest-side-of-israel/>

The Turkish flotilla to Gaza? Disagreement over a settlement freeze? Severe drought? Wildfire on the Carmel?

Those aren't all the stories that preoccupied Israelis in 2010.

The following is a roundup of some of the best odd news stories from [Chelm-on-the-Med Online](#), an Israeli Internet news outlet in English that features snippets of daily life gleaned from the Hebrew press, revealing the lighter side of Israeli life.

Take Israeli innovation. Blue-and-white advances ran the gamut from a gadget jury-rigged by army engineers that enables a religiously observant amputee to put on tefillin, single-handed, to naturally dehydrated tomatoes for spreading on bread like avocado that plant geneticists designed to end the bane of packing sandwiches garnished with lip-smacking tomatoes for lunch-soggy bread.

One of this year's most promising gizmos may finally convince 70,000 pelicans to stop feeding at kibbutz fish ponds when migrating between Europe and Africa: a lifelike motorized plastic Nile crocodile, a predator with a predilection for pelican meat. It works on the principle that even pelicans probably know it's better to miss lunch than to become lunch.

At the other end of the food chain, an Israeli in New York has debuted hummus in a plastic squeeze-it condiment bottle for the local market after his American-born wife told him “wiping up” hummus with a pita was disgusting.

The Chelm Prize for weirdest behavior by an Israeli politician goes to two Russian-born parliamentarians.

Think you have trouble juggling work and domestic duties? Floored maintenance personnel found Knesset member Anastassia Michaeli of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party (Israel Our Home), who has a brood of eight children ranging in age from 12 years to 18 months, fast asleep in her PJs under a homey comforter before hours, having crashed on the floor of her office suite. Michaeli said it was the one place where she could get some peace and quiet.

Knesset member Marina Slodkin of the middle-of-the-road Kadima Party authored one of the strangest private bills in 2010: a failed bid to make it a crime “to publish a national daily and give it away for free for more than one year.” Slodkin argued that free papers were unfair competition that would undermine a free press.

The Chelm Prize for out-of-the-box pedagogy is a tie between the Technion and the University of Hard Knocks.

Technion alumnus Moshe Yanai charged that his alma mater’s uncompromising drive for excellence had turned Israel’s MIT into a gauntlet lined by exceptionally smart but exceedingly inhospitable faculty that took the fun out of learning, leaving a trail of suffering students in their wake.

So Yanai, now a senior vice president at IBM, is donating a total of \$10.5 million in grants over 20 years to the faculty’s 15 most outstanding lecturers, with the annual \$26,000 award to each recipient based not only on knowledge and didactic skills. Yanai expects the recipients, who are chosen by the student body, first of all to be empathetic and supportive—in short, a mensch. Maybe they should call the program “Honorable Menschen.”

Equally praiseworthy is the Shaarei Mishpat Law College in Ramat Hasharon, which decided to provide students with some hands-on experience in the real world by inviting Ali Jo’arish to speak to them as part of a lecture series to enrich students’ skills in mediation and conflict management. Jo’arish, a 45-year-old Ramle Arab, is one of the underworld’s most outstanding arbitrators and mediators (and purported to be the head of one of the most illustrious organized crime families in Israel).

Israeli students are notoriously disrespectful of any sage on the stage, but in the case of this dude, not one dared disrupt the judge’s lecture by walking about, talking or toying with their cell phones.

Only-in-Israel stories? They abounded.

In the adult division, the Chelm Prize did not go to Ikea, whose new branch in Rishon Lezion heralds falafel, not just hot dogs and Swedish meatballs.

It does go to a 34-year-old unmasked assailant who held up a gas station in Ashkelon at knifepoint and was captured on a security cameras duly kissing the mezuzah on the door (perhaps out of habit) before demanding the meager contents of the cash register. The robber then fled on foot—perhaps because it was Friday night.

In the junior division, the unrivaled winner was an 8-year-old boy who stumbled upon a rare artifact during a school outing to an excavated biblical site. The small 3,500-year-old kiln-fired Canaanite fertility charm he picked up dated the “Biblical tel” his class was visiting all the way back to the late Bronze Era. While the Antiquities Authority took possession of the rare relic, the archeologists—thinking the youngster might lead a charmed life—invited the second-grader to spend next summer working on a dig in the hopes that maybe he would luck out again.

Last but not least, Hadera is at it again. The city of 77,000 in the Sharon, which made the Chelm Prize finals last year as one of the quirkiest municipalities in Israel thanks to its plan to install singing traffic lights, remains in the Premier League after city elders sportingly approved a petition from a group of new residents—200 Parisians requesting to build their own Eiffel Tower right in the city. The new immigrants said the scaled-down model would lift their morale and hasten their adjustment.

This story reprinted courtesy of the [Jewish Telegraphic Agency](#).