



INSIGHT

news from *Jewish Institute For The Blind, Jerusalem*

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Home for Israel's Blind: Retrospect of a Century

As Jerusalem celebrates 3,000 years of its history this year, tales of the capture of the city by King David abound. The ark of the covenant was moved into the city and Solomon, David's son, was responsible for the construction of the first Temple. Although the city has been attacked and rebuilt time and time again, the Jewish connection to the city has never been severed.

The city of Jerusalem has served as the cornerstone of western civilization since 1,000 B.C.E., and the city has had untold influence upon Jews, Christians and Moslems from all corners of the world. Throughout Jerusalem's colorful history of temples and the words of prophets which have touched the hearts of man throughout the ages, another historical tale needs to be recounted. This story may be far less grandiose, but it has influenced the life of the blind of Eretz Yisrael for 94 years. This is the story of the Jewish Institute for the Blind.

One of the oldest special education facilities in the country, the Institute was founded after Nachum Nathanson, a merchant in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City witnessed a young blind boy severely injured by a camel in one of the alleys of the quarter. Nathanson was shocked into action, and after caring for the boy, he raised the question of a school for the blind. Nathanson was friendly with the Jerusalem scholar Rabbi Avraham Moshe Lunz, who had lost his eyesight as a young man of 25, and together, the two men called for the



Aerial view of the JIB today in west Jerusalem close to the gateway to the city

establishment of an institute to care for blind children. Nathanson, Lunz and their friend Dr. Yitzhak Krishevski wrote to newspapers and made public appeals on behalf of the blind children of Palestine. Not only did the wealthy answer their petitions with generous contributions, but those of more moderate means also opened both their hearts and purse strings to help provide education and a home for the blind of the land of Israel.

Although beginnings were humble in small facilities in Jerusalem's Old City, an educational institution was at last open for the blind of the Land of Israel. Years later, a large house was rented outside the walls of the city on the Street of the Prophets, and children from all over the country registered for enrollment in the Jewish Institute for the Blind. At first, the educational endeavors included Hebrew, music, basket-weaving and minimal academic subjects. After morning prayers, Rabbi Lunz would deliver a short Torah lesson. As he was blind, his scholastic accomplishments and personal life set an important example for the pupils. Nathanson also continued to work for the well-being of the Institute until his final days. It is said that he neglected his shop, while travelling all over the world to help raise money for the Institute. He died on one of these fund raising missions.

From generation to generation, the administration and day to day operations at the Jewish Institute for the Blind



Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert visits ceramic workshop at JIB

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