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Photo essay: Shmuley Boteach invades Nessah Synagogue

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"I am no ordinary rabbi, I am the love prophet!" announced Rabbi Shmuley Boteach to a crowd of nearly 500 Iranian Jewish young professionals and parents last night at the Nessah Synagogue in Beverly Hills. For the past six days during High Holy Day services, Boteach, a best-selling author of Judaism relationship books, offered his wisdom on life, love and Judaism to members of Nessah's professionals through a series of lectures. His words of advice were peppered with his unique style of comedy that had the crowd entertained and in a way educated at the same time. Bring Boteach to Nessah has been a part of a larger campaign by the synagogue to lure back young Iran Jews who have left the flock for local Ashkenazi temples where English is spoken or those young Iranian Jews who have been disenfranchised with the Judaism of their parents. "This is one of the youngest synagogues I have spoken at," said Boteach. "The youth are honest, committed and they are really seeking a deeper connection with god and seeking their soul mates".

Interestingly, Boteach was not far from his roots at Nessah as he hails from an Iranian Jewish background. His father was born in the Iranian city of Esfahan and those in attendance last night said they felt an indirect connection with Boteach for that reason. "Hearing him speak for the past six days has been like taking a clear breath of fresh air," said Simon Etehad, who heads Nessah's young professionals group. Last night sushi was abundant and sake flowed through Nessah's banquet hall as young Iranian Jewish singles mingled before Boteach's lecture on "Kosher Sex" based on his popular 1999 book. The lecture specifically focused on explaining the power and place of sex within a marriage according to the Talmud and Torah. Open discussions of sex are generally taboo in the Iranian Jewish community which by far has been socially conservative. So Boteach's lectures have been a unique and new avenue for many local Iranian Jews to explore. Of course Boteach also couldn't help promoting his many books and national television program "Shalom in the Home" featured on The Learning Channel.

Despite all the talk of sex in a fun partying atmosphere, a group of young Iranian Jewish men still managed to gather in Nessah's main sanctuary of evening prayers after the gathering.



(left to right: Shmuley Boteach, Nessah Rabbi David Shofet, Nessah Rabbi Hillel Benchimol)





(left to right: Nessah members Rona Ram and Bruce Hakimi)



(Roy Kimia busy talking on the phone rather than partying)





(Iranian Jewish photographer Mansour Pourtahad telling someone to "shape up!")





(Boteach chilling out after a long night of lecturing)



(left to right: Nessah young professionals Shannon Gabbai and Ravash Ram)





(left to right: Boteach having a lively chat with Rabbi Shofet)



(Iranian Jewish businessman Neil Kadisha)



(Good Iranian Jewish young man Eman Esmailzadeh praying)



(Iranian Jews still praying hard after partying hard)

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