



**Aluma Mekaiten displays a metal pellet that once lodged in her brain, as a result of a 2002 suicide bus bombing in Jerusalem, as her mother Rachel, looks on. The two were in Chevy Chase this month.**

(Photo by Paula Amann)

## **Ohr Kodesh embraces terror victim**

by Paula Amann  
*News Editor*

Aluma Mekaiten shakes hands from the left and bears a series of scars along her right arm. Otherwise, it's hard to tell this reserved 20-year-old Israeli ever got on the wrong bus. On Nov. 21, 2002, she was bound for an important math exam at her Jerusalem high school. Two stops after she boarded, the vehicle exploded.

A suicide bombing that morning killed 11 people. Mekaiten, comatose and among the 50 wounded, was nearly left for dead.

Now, she quietly notes her ambition to become a physical therapist, like those who helped her relearn to walk, and shows off a metal pellet that once lodged in her brain. Some 40 others, doctors tell her, still remain in her left arm and leg.

Last week, thanks to Ohr Kodesh Congregation in Chevy Chase, the young Israeli wrapped up a month's visit in the Washington area.

Mekaiten is one of four terror survivors adopted by the Conservative synagogue, but the first of the adoptees to come here.

Her stay at the home of Bob and Ariella Lerman came through a partnership between the shul and Operation Embrace, a locally based group that promotes ties between Americans, as congregations and as individuals, and terrorism victims and their families.

"I can't say it in English like I can in Hebrew, but they're wonderful," said Mekaiten's mother, Rachel, who joined her daughter in Chevy Chase last week, praising the Ohr Kodesh and Operation Embrace volunteers.

"I don't know if they know what they did," said the high school teacher and mother of four, noting the U.S. visit's impact on her daughter. "She learned again how to be independent."

During her stay, the younger Mekaiten volunteered three days at the Ohr Kodesh nursery school or gan, as she calls it, saying, "I love children."

In between, her new friends planned field trips for the the art-loving Israeli to such Washington-area spots as the National Gallery and the Renwick Gallery.

It all started when Alice Abramson, 78, invited OE activist Anne Clemons to speak to the Israel

Solidarity Committee at Ohr Kodesh three years ago.

"Our group made a unanimous and spontaneous decision to adopt four families" right after Clemons' slide show, recalled Abramson, who now heads the Operation Embrace Committee.

To date, the congregation has adopted French-born Moshe F., 42, of Kiryat Arba, a father of eight who lost one leg in a November 2002 terrorist explosion; father of four and Ethiopian immigrant Baruch D., 42, of Kiryat Arba, who was shot in an November 2002 ambush in Hebron; Eytan D., 43, of Jerusalem, who was left with internal injuries from an August 2002 attack in Israel's capital and Mekaiten.

Volunteers at Ohr Kodesh raised money, in part through the sale of Israeli roses, for Mekaiten's visit.

Operation Embrace, meanwhile, is underwriting a prosthesis upgrade for former security guard Baruch, reflexology training for former electrician Moshe and a cosmetology program for Aliza, the wife of Eytan, a former telephone technician.

At five major Jewish holidays, Ohr Kodesh sends money to each of the adopted families, to the tune of \$500 a year, but those involved in the effort say the human ties matter most.

"We keep track of bar mitzvahs they're having and new births," said David Moses, chair of the Israel Solidarity Committee. "It begins to feel like a family."

Meanwhile, Aviva Tessler, a co-founder of Operation Embrace with Clemons, Jocelyn Krifcher and Avivah Litan, all of Potomac, lauds Ohr Kodesh as a "real model" for its engagement with terror survivors.

"The real healing for trauma requires people to stand by each other," said Tessler. "One of the key challenges for terror victims is this feeling of, one day, being news headlines, and the next day, being forgotten."

Tessler says she's in touch regularly with some 10 hospital social workers who refer terror victims to the group.

Besides Ohr Kodesh, she says, not only her own Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah in Potomac, but Kemp Mill Synagogue in Silver Spring, Bethesda's Kol Shalom, Agudat Achim in Memphis, Tenn., and Beth Jacob Congregation in Dayton, Ohio, are in touch with Israeli survivors. Meanwhile, a New Jersey church has contributed to a new alternative healing center at the Rambam Medical Center in Haifa.

The Operation Embrace program, in tandem with Rambam Hospital, provides complementary treatments, such as hydrotherapy, massage therapy and other methods to terror survivors at a reduced rate.

For the past two years, the group also has funded the Ralph and Sherry Foxman Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Follow-up Program at Rambam, which offers injured victims of terror an ongoing relationship with hospital social workers.

Operation Embrace is planning a Nov. 30 fund-raiser for all their efforts at the home of a local supporter.

As for Rachel Mekaiten, she has no doubt as to the value of such solidarity projects. "I didn't know any American Jews before Aluma was wounded," she said. "I come from a very Zionist home. ... I begin to think it's very good there are Jews in other places. Now I'm glad that we're here and you're there."

---

*This story was Published in the Washington Jewish Week on 8/18/2005  
© Copyright, Washington Jewish Week*