



שבט תשעז"ט – February 25, 2017

*Druze Attend Unique Shabbat Service
at Great Synagogue of Jerusalem*

A scene like this, the Great Synagogue of Jerusalem has never seen. Over 50 members of the Druze faith, some of whom were Sheiks dressed in clerical attire and sporting impressive mustaches, while others were young, idealistic students of the Druze pre-military academy. All were seated in the front pews in the Synagogue. Dozens of Druze women, many in a Jewish house of worship for the very first time, marveled from their places in the balcony at the happenings in the resplendent sanctuary below.

It all happened last Shabbat [February 18, 2017], when we read the portion of Yitro, the figure revered by the Druze as their founding prophet. Shabbat morning services were dedicated to the memory of Zidan Seif z"l, the Druze police officer, who was killed in November 2014 while battling terrorists at the Bnei Torah Synagogue in Har Nof. A traffic cop, without proper armor or weaponry, Zidan heard over his radio that an attack was in progress, and he rushed to the scene. He engaged the terrorists in a close-range gunfight, killing one, and drawing the other away from additional victims. Ultimately, Zidan paid for his heroism with his life, as he was shot in the head by the second terrorist.

Since that tragic time, the [Yakir Organization](#), led by Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier, has nurtured the Jews-Druze relationship. Rabbi Kermaier brought Zidan's family to Fifth Avenue Synagogue, where he served as rabbi until his family's recent Aliyah, and the community hosted a Shabbat eve tribute and community feast to honor Zidan's heroism. Though Rabbi Kermaier has arranged other programs in Israel with the Druze, this was the first time the Druze community participated in a special memorial service at the Great Synagogue.

The Druze guests, including Zidan's 23-year-old widow, Rinal, and their baby daughter, Laren, arrived at 8:00 AM, and sat for the duration of the service in respectful silence, many following along in the prayer books... They were stirred emotionally when the story of Yitro was read from the Torah. Zidan's father was then invited to open the Holy Ark for a memorial prayer chanted by Cantor Chaim Adler and the full Synagogue choir, conducted by Eli Yaffe. Synagogue President Zalli Yaffe spoke, and then Rabbi Kermaier delivered the sermon, which emphasized our debt of gratitude to Zidan and the entire Druze community, with whom we have a modern-day covenant sanctified by sacrificial blood of the children of both our peoples... The Druze visitors were moved to tears. After services, the Druze and the Jews shared a Shabbat lunch at the nearby King Solomon Hotel.

Zidan's family members commented that they were overwhelmed by the event organized to honor their slain son at Jerusalem's Great synagogue. Rinal added, "I especially value the fact that we have developed such a close relationship with the religious Jewish community. After all, Jews or Druze, we are all people who believe in one G-d."