



# Say Amen



David Deri is a successful film director – a gay man living in Tel Aviv, the pink center of Israel. "Say Amen" follows his journey of coming out to his family in Yerucham. His sisters already know, his brothers suspect, and his traditionally religious parents – devout immigrants from Morocco - continue to pray for him to find a wife. As we follow Deri's journey, we learn about the distance between Tel Aviv and Yerucham, and the mixed blessing of a close-knit loving family.

## On the difference between Tel Aviv and Yerucham...

[Tel Aviv is the pink center of Israel.](#) In general, the city is also the center of partying, western culture, and secular behavior. Tel Aviv is also the geographical and economic center of the country, whose population is mostly Ashkenazi (of European origin).

Only 90 miles away in Israel's south, Yerucham is Tel Aviv's opposite. Back in the 60s Yerucham was a way-station to Eilat before a by-pass road was built, stunting the new town's growth. Now isolated in the under-privileged "periphery" of Israel, it is mostly populated by working class Mizrahi Jews - Jews originating from Arab lands.

The difference between Tel Aviv and Yerucham is so marked, that when veteran broadcaster Yaron London wished to engage with "traditional Mizrachim" for his documentary series "The Chosen People", he traveled to Yerucham together with the director of the series, one David Deri...



40% of the Yerucham's population is of Moroccan descent. The Moroccan wave of immigration to Israel in the 50s and 60s was rife with difficulty. Moroccans were not easily accepted by the mostly Ashkenazi (European) establishment, and were damaged by the then-prevailing belief in the "melting pot" approach to absorption. Moroccans' names were often changed to sound more "Hebrew", the rich Arab-tinged culture of Moroccan Jewry was shunned, and many Moroccans were sent to distant out-post towns such as Yerucham rather than be absorbed in the center of the country. Poverty levels, poorer educational achievements, and resentment among Israeli Mizrachim has continued to this day.

David's parents' speak Hebrew with a strong Moroccan immigrant's accent, and they occasionally throw in phrases in Moroccan. His siblings have a Mizrahi intonation in their speech, whereas David himself has all but erased his Yerucham roots from his speech.

For a person to come out in a Moroccan family, in a largely Moroccan town like Yerucham, is a very different business from coming out in Tel Aviv!



A Wider Bridge works to bring the LGBTQ communities of Israel and North America closer together. Our programs include educational and cultural activities here in the U.S., including this film series, LGBTQ trips to Israel, and our online magazine, [www.awiderbridge.org](http://www.awiderbridge.org).

A Wider Bridge commissioned these study guides from Makom, and consulted fully in their development. Makom is the think-and-do tank for adult Israel engagement. You can find Makom at [www.makomisrael.org](http://www.makomisrael.org) and at [facebook.com/makomisrael](https://facebook.com/makomisrael).

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THE JEWISH AGENCY  
FOR ISRAEL**



## More on the Moroccan Experience in Israel

For further exploration of the Moroccan experience in a small periphery town, here are two poems you may choose to look at, written by a Mizrahi activist Sami Shalom Shitreet. One laments the changing of children's names, and the other recalls when his father returns home after attending a state-subsidised visit of the Koln Opera.

### Sami Shalom Shitreet - These are the Names

<p>And we had names with an overseas scent: <i>Allén, venez à la maison, vite.</i> <i>JACQUIE, TL' A AL-DAR, D'GHYA.</i></p> <p>And there was Beber with a triangle bod and Pàtrick and Jojo and Dede.</p> <p>The girls had names like bells: Brigite, Alise, Michelle Georgette and Anette.</p> <p>And the teacher wrote for us in her roster our names in Hebrew: Ilan, Ya'akov, Avraham, David and Aliza, Zehava and Hanna.</p> <p>Whatever... She thought she was gonna tell us. We knew. But we insisted on a bit more of an overseas scent before the ringing of bells is silenced.</p>	<p><i>Vehayu lanu shemot in reyach chuss la'aress Alain, viens a la maison, vite.</i> <i>Jacquie, tla al-dar, dghya</i> <i>V'Bebber im gufa meshuleshet</i> <i>uPatrick veJojo veDede</i> <i>Labanot hayu shemot pa'amonim:</i> <i>Brigite, Alise, Michelle</i> <i>Jorjette Anette.</i></p> <p><i>Vehamora rashma lanu beyoman shmoteynu ivriyim: Alain – Ilan, Bebber – Avraham, Jackie – Ya'akov</i> <i>David, Aliza, Zahava v'Channa.</i></p> <p><i>Chchchchchch...</i> <i>Ya'ani ba'ah lagid lanu</i> <i>Yada'nu</i> <i>Aval hitakashnu</i> <i>Od ksat nichu'ach chuss la'aress</i> <i>Lifney sheyidam tziltzul</i> <i>hapa'amonim</i></p>	<p>נהיו לנו שמות עם ריח חוס לארס אלן, וניה אל-מזו, ויט יאקי, טלע אל-דאר, דר'יה נבבר עם גופה משלשת ופטריק ו'ו'ו'ו ודדה</p> <p>לבנות היו שמות פעמונים בריא'יט אליס מישל 'ור'ז'ט אנט</p> <p>המורה רשמה לנו ביומן שמותינו עבריים אלו - אילן, בבר - אברהם, יאקי - יעקב דוד עליזה, זהבה וחנה</p> <p>כככככ... יעני באה לגיד לנו ידענו</p> <p>אבל התעקשנו עוד קסת גיחות חוס לארס לפני שידם צלצול הפעמונים</p>
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### Sami Shalom Shitreet - After the Opera

<p>After the opera he will undo his tie and wrap his body with a <i>jalabah</i>, hand made by a craftsman (special order from Morocco). Then, he will rinse his ears, with the flowing streams sweet streams of the <i>Oud</i>.</p>	<p><i>Le'achar haopera hu yifrom aniva</i> <i>Vya'ateh legufo jalaba</i> <i>Ma'aseh yedey uman</i> <i>Mimaroko bahazmana</i> <i>Achar</i> <i>Yishtof ta'oznayim</i> <i>Kiluchim kiluchim</i> <i>Metukim shel oud</i></p>	<p>לאחר האופרה הוא יפרם עניבה ויעטף לגופו ג'לבה מעשה ידי אמן ממרוקו בהזמנה</p> <p>אחר ישטף ת'אזניים קלוחים קלוחים מתוקים של עוד</p>
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