
JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER WASHINGTON**Podcast: Imagine Israel Podcast***August 12, 2016*

Robbie Gringras: Welcome to the Imagine Israel podcast, brought to you by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. Every podcast, we're going to get to meet with innovative Israeli influences and change-makers, addressing social or economic challenges in Israel. In particular, we're going to be meeting people whose lives and whose work blend and address issues in Israeli society. I'm your host, Robbie Gringras, and I'm coming to you from Makom, the Israel education lab of The Jewish Agency for Israel.

And in this episode, I'd like you to meet Kobi Paz. Kobi Paz is a prolific and talented TV director living in Tel Aviv. Originating from Jerusalem, he's best known for his pioneering work in children's TV actually and, in particular, a blockbuster kids' drama called "*Mea b'Tanach*", or I'd guess you call it "A+ in Bible Studies". It was a show about teens, performed by teen actors, which actually came to an end after its third season when the star actors were all conscripted into the army. But for this episode, we're going to be talking to Kobi about another TV series for which he's known, a series called "*Ima ve Abas*", "Mom and Dads". This was at the same time a groundbreaking and entirely ordinary TV series about two gay guys in Tel Aviv who have a baby with a straight woman. It was groundbreaking because there's never been a show about this "new normal" kind of family, and entirely ordinary because its reception was also, well, normal.

I met with Kobi Paz in the backyard of his Tel Aviv apartment. We were

out back because it was bath time for his kids, who ended up being part of 1
the story too, because, like his TV show "*Ima ve Abbas*", Kobi himself is 2
raising three of his kids together with his partner, Doron. Together they 3
are also two *abbas*. And this would be why Kobi strikes me as such a 4
great person to begin our Imagine Israel podcast series. There's something 5
unique about the interaction between Kobi's work, his personal life, and 6
the way they reflect upon Israeli society in an unobtrusive, organic kind of 7
way. 8

So, join us as we sit outside in the Tel Aviv backyard with a beer, with the 9
mosquitos, and with the neighborhood cats, talking about LGBT rights, 10
about TV in Israel, and of course about Jewish mothers. 11

Welcome, Kobi. 12

Kobi Paz: Hey. 13

Robbie Gringras: Good to meet you. Good to meet you. Good to see you. We're 14
sitting outside in the patio in Tel Aviv. And so I think the folks in 15
Washington are going to be really interested to hear about the TV series 16
that you directed not long ago, called "*Ima ve Abbas*" -- 17

Kobi Paz: Yeah. 18

Robbie Gringras: -- which is a strange word, "*abbas*". What does that stand for? 19

Kobi Paz: "*Abbas*" is like "fathers". 20

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 21

Kobi Paz: "*Ima ve abbas*", it's about a family made of a gay couple, two fathers, and 22
a straight woman, that decide together to bring a child to the world. 23

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 24

Kobi Paz: And the series go with them the first year of the time together with the 25
new boy. 26

Robbie Gringras: So, TV series in Israel, two gay guys bringing a child into the 27

world, together with another woman. Is this something which TV often
deals with in Israel? 1 2

Kobi Paz: No. No, it was the first Israeli TV series that deal with this issue. But in
Israel, gay and lesbian are often seen on TV. In that perspective, we are
not very -- we're pretty - 3 4 5

Robbie Gringras: "Progressive", I suppose -- 6

Kobi Paz: Progressive. 7

Robbie Gringras: -- would be the word. 8

Kobi Paz: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But this issue that -- issue of the new family, is pretty
new in the Israeli -- 9 10

Robbie Gringras: And -- 11

Kobi Paz: -- TV. 12

Robbie Gringras: -- it's new in Israeli society or is it just new on TV? It seems like
an interesting combination of the anti-establishment push of LGBT world
together with the biggest establishment ever of family. 13 14 15

Kobi Paz: In Israel especially, these new families that combine any -- this kind of
family or similar ones, are very, very popular. In Israel there are hundreds
of children that was born, in the last ten years, to gay people, in many,
many combination, different combinations. But it's a huge phenomenon.
It's very Israeli and also a Jewish phenomenon, I think. It's something that
for a Jewish gay man to bring a boy -- or a grandchild to his mother, to his
Jewish mom, is something that is very, very strong. 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

Robbie Gringras: And so how do Jewish mothers take to this idea that they've got a
grandson, delighted? How does this play out in the TV series itself? Who
are they? 23 24 25

Kobi Paz: The guys, the couple? 26

Robbie Gringras: Yeah. 27

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- Kobi Paz: Okay, the guys in the show are Sammy and Erez. Sammy comes from a very religious house, *Sepharadim Mizrachi*. His mother getting a hard time to accept that he lives with a man. And of course she can't embrace the new child he brings. And this is very sad for Sammy because all he wants is to make go make her happy, like every Jewish son.
- Robbie Gringras: Like every good Jewish boy --
- Kobi Paz: Yeah.
- Robbie Gringras: -- he wants to make his mom happy.
- Kobi Paz: Maybe like every boy in the world. Erez, on the other hand, is a secular man, he believes in nothing. He's very -- I think he's New Age man. He's *Ashkenazi*, he's academic, is more educated, more complex.
- Robbie Gringras: Yeah, sometimes it seems that Erez makes his own problems.
- Kobi Paz: Yeah -- Sammy comes from a difficult house but loves himself and accept himself. Erez come from a very progressive house. But having big problems with themself --
- Robbie Gringras: And so in this complicated relationship anyway, they decide to have a child.
- Kobi Paz: Yep.
- Robbie Gringras: Particularly I remember, one of the episodes which struck me, when you're talking about that this is a very Jewish Israeli approach to LGBT things, was when they decide to give a *brit milah* to the kid, as in a circumcision to the kid. And how do all the various people around their lives and in their lives respond to this?
- Kobi Paz: There're two layers in this particular chapter, because on one hand Sammy wants to get a *brit milah*, it's in his blood. He wanted also to get married, he wanted the *chupah*, and Erez didn't want. It's a motif in their life, in the common life. Sammy likes ceremonies, he wants to be like everybody
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- else, not because he's very sophisticated; just because it seems very
simple for him. I mean, *chupah*, it's common, it's obvious. He doesn't
make a big deal of this. For Erez, all of his --
- Robbie Gringras: A specifically Jewish religious wedding --
- Kobi Paz: Yeah. Yeah. That's what he [was] brought up with and that's what he want
to bring to his child, to his new life. Erez, on the other hand, have
questions about everything. Nothing is easygoing with him. He doesn't
want to get married. He doesn't want a *brit milah*. Not because he --
- Robbie Gringras: Circumcision.
- Kobi Paz: It's not because *brit milah* is very -- it's problematic for him. It's because
everybody who does *brit milah*, so he doesn't want to do *brit milah*. He
ask question about everything.
- Robbie Gringras: Okay.
- Kobi Paz: So it seems to be conflict about Jewish ceremonies, and tradition and no
tradition. But it's -- I think it's not about it. For Sammy, the *brit milah* is a
symbol for acceptance that is trying to get from his --
- Robbie Gringras: From his mother in particular.
- Kobi Paz: Yeah, for his mother in particular and all his --
- Robbie Gringras: And in the end the mother --
- Kobi Paz: -- surrounding.
- Robbie Gringras: -- she pays for it but doesn't actually come to the ceremony.
- Kobi Paz: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.
- Robbie Gringras: I remember that. It's a terribly --
- Kobi Paz: Yeah.
- Robbie Gringras: -- terribly poignant moment.
- Kobi Paz: Yeah. Yeah. Right. There's two sad moments in this chapter, because first
his mother doesn't come, and then the first thing, he's making a lot of
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effort that there will be a *brit milah*, and eventually he feels like a guest in
his own son *brit milah*. 1
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Robbie Gringras: And why is that? 3

Kobi Paz: That's because he doesn't have family to bring; first one. And the first
problem that he had in the series, that the mother doesn't consider him a
father like Erez, but he's not the biological father -- 4
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Robbie Gringras: And Erez is the biological father. 7

Kobi Paz: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. 8

Robbie Gringras: Sammy's not the biological -- 9

Kobi Paz: Sammy's -- 10

Robbie Gringras: He's already on the outside. 11

We're going to take a little bit of a break, and I need to advertise
something. 12
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Hey, batter, batter. (I'm sure that sounds much better with an American
accent, but that's what you got). The Jewish Federation of Greater
Washington invites you to the Second Annual Grand Slam Sunday,
Jewish community day at Nationals Park, on August 28th, 2016. Join the
Jewish Federation for a fun day at the ballpark as we celebrate the rich
history of Jewish playmakers who influenced the game of baseball. Buy
your tickets now at - this is now an Internet address -
shalomdc.org/grandslamsunday; that's all one word, grandslamsunday,
and you need to say it with a Manchester accent because otherwise it
won't sound so good. 14
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Kobi Paz: Sammy's very, very sad story because he's very -- he's a great father, he's
dedicated. He does everything from full of his heart, but he's struggling to
get recognition all the time. 24
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Robbie Gringras: He also happens to be a very gorgeous-looking straight man, the 27

actor who plays him. 1

Kobi Paz: Yeah. 2

Robbie Gringras: Was that an issue? Am I not mistaken that both the gay guys were 3
played by straight actors? 4

Kobi Paz: Yeah, that's right. 5

Robbie Gringras: Was that an issue? Did anyone jump on you for that? 6

Kobi Paz: Yes. It's not an Israeli issue; it's all the time. It's -- when straight man 7
plays gay characters, there's always a debate. It's not very, very important 8
to me. It's not very significant. 9

Robbie Gringras: This was quite a big star, Yehuda. 10

Kobi Paz: Yehuda Levi, yes, who plays Sammy is a big star in Israel, a very, very 11
big star in Israel. He's, like, one of the sexiest men in Israel. 12

Robbie Gringras: And having said that, it may be that people in Greater 13
Washington may have come across the film "Yossi & Jagger". 14

Kobi Paz: Yep. 15

Robbie Gringras: And there actually, he also played a gay guy, in a lovely army 16
gay romance film -- 17

Kobi Paz: Yeah. Yeah. 18

Robbie Gringras: -- which did very well back in the day. And across Israel, this 19
series came, taking on quite a few taboos. You've got family and LGBT 20
issues. You've got the insistence on turning this into basically an 21
established family with a *brit milah*, with a circumcision and with a desire 22
for a wedding. And here we are in Israel, which would seem, certainly on 23
the outside, not to be the most progressive of societies. Was there any 24
backlash against the TV series itself? 25

Kobi Paz: I think Israel, like in many other issues, are state of contradictions. 26

Robbie Gringras: If not schizophrenia. 27

Kobi Paz: Schizophrenia, exactly, because if you talk about our government or our legal issues, we are not very progressive society. But it's one of the liberal societies that you can ever ask for yourself if you're a gay man, because it was -- the series was accepted very, very, very calmly. It wasn't an issue at all, because the part of Israel that might not accept the series or the issues that rises from it, didn't watch it. As simple as that.

Robbie Gringras: Okay.

Kobi Paz: But where we live, yeah, like, in Tel Aviv or many parts of Israel, it's not an issue. I mean, people accept it very, very calmly, I must say. We're a very liberal society. That's the truth.

Robbie Gringras: Well, it's a lovely image to have. I mean, I even remember that when the TV series came out and there was a great deal of coverage in the press, there was a whole double-page spread about you yourself and your family --

Kobi Paz: Yeah.

Robbie Gringras: -- as some kind of parallel or --

Kobi Paz: Yeah, yeah. It's very much parallelic (sic), because we have a family that very similar by structure to the family that in *"Ima ve Abbas"*. I mean, I live with my boyfriend for 12 years --

Robbie Gringras: And, his cats?

Kobi Paz: And the cats, yeah. The cats are visitors.

Robbie Gringras: Okay.

Kobi Paz: Yeah. And our three children.

Robbie Gringras: You've got three children?

Kobi Paz: We got three children.

Robbie Gringras: Okay.

Kobi Paz: And two mothers.

Robbie Gringras: You've got two mothers? 1

Kobi Paz: Two mothers, yes. 2

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 3

Kobi Paz: Actually -- 4

Robbie Gringras: So, even more complicated than -- 5

Kobi Paz: More complicated, actually, yes. But it's -- we're handling not bad at all. I 6
made two children with a mother that we raised them together, and -- 7

Robbie Gringras: Who's "we"? 8

Kobi Paz: Me, my boyfriend and the mother brings up three children; two of them 9
are mine biological, with one -- with the mother. 10

Robbie Gringras: Yeah. 11

Kobi Paz: And my partner made another one with another woman. They're involved 12
because the two young ones are very, very close in age; they are both -- 13
they have 60 days between them. 14

Robbie Gringras: Wow. 15

Kobi Paz: Almost twins. 16

Robbie Gringras: But from two different fathers and two different mothers? 17

Kobi Paz: Yeah. They are in the same kindergarten. They treat themselves 18
completely as -- they are completely together all the time. But they have 19
no connect -- no biological connection at all. They can marry if they want. 20
Yeah. 21

Robbie Gringras: So, Seder nights must be very interesting ... 22

Kobi Paz: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's funny, because Sammy, in the series, wanted 23
to do surrogacy, because he's more progressive gay, because -- yeah. 24

Robbie Gringras: Why does that make -- 25

Kobi Paz: It's new answers of gay people that you -- 26

Robbie Gringras: What makes it more progressive? 27

Kobi Paz: -- ... -- what? 1

Robbie Gringras: What makes it more progressive? 2

Kobi Paz: Because if you're a conformist -- 3

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 4

Kobi Paz: -- a gay conformist -- 5

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 6

Kobi Paz: -- you probably believe that your child has to have a male father and a 7
female mother. 8

Robbie Gringras: Okay. 9

Kobi Paz: In that perspective, Sammy's more progressive; he believes that his child 10
doesn't have to have a female mother. 11

Robbie Gringras: That's because he's just had such fun with his own mother, so -- 12

Kobi Paz: Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. But for me it's very, very real, because when I -- 13
when me and Doron discussed this issue, I always told Doron that I don't 14
want my children -- to raise them without a mom. It's not a very 15
progressive thing to say. You understand what I'm saying? Young gays in 16
Israel, very, very young, don't feel like that at all. 17

Robbie Gringras: They don't need any -- 18

Kobi Paz: They don't need mother in the picture. 19

Robbie Gringras: It's just life -- 20

Kobi Paz: The need to have mother, it's very conformist observation on the world -- 21

Robbie Gringras: Okay, so you -- 22

Kobi Paz: -- on families. 23

Robbie Gringras: -- you're more of an Erez -- 24

Kobi Paz: I'm -- 25

Robbie Gringras: -- as that goes? 26

Kobi Paz: I'm more -- yeah, yeah, yeah. 27

Robbie Gringras: Do you watch "Modern Family"? Did you ever see that -- 1

Kobi Paz: Yeah, of course. 2

Robbie Gringras: -- in these things? 3

Kobi Paz: Of course. It's great. 4

Robbie Gringras: Kobi Paz, thank you very, very much for talking to us. 5

Kobi Paz: Thank you, Robbie. 6

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Robbie Gringras: And so Kobi left me pondering the amazing paradox that is Israel, 8
embedded in an ancient traditional culture, and at the same time so 9
groundbreaking and progressive in an almost instinctive way, a paradox 10
that Kobi pretty much embodies in his life and in his work. Is he 11
traditional? Is he progressive? Is he a unique Israeli hybrid perhaps? 12
And *a propos*, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington is always 13
really proud to be supporting the Edlavitch DCJCC Kurlander program 14
for GLBTQ outreach and engagement, which for short is "GLOE". It 15
supports multiple points of access in an open and welcoming environment 16
for the LGBTQ community and their friends and their families. 17
So, finally, as I scratch my mosquito bites, I'm also left wondering about 18
what Israelis call the state of Tel Aviv, almost a country within a country, 19
light years away from Jerusalem, and in a totally different galaxy from 20
other more peripheral cities in Israel. Is Tel Aviv in a category of its own, 21
with its wanton progressiveness and tolerance? Or is the whole of Israel 22
buoyed up by the Tel Aviv bounce? 23

That's the end of our episode today. Imagine Israel podcast is created by 24
the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, hosted and produced by 25
myself, Robbie Gringras of Makom. The Imagine Israel podcast is 26
produced every month for your enjoyment, and show notes are found at 27

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Until next time. 4
(End of audio) 5
