

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

# QOL HA-QAHAL

# קול הקהל



Issue 23: Shemini 'Asseret & Simhat Torah  
**IN MEMORY OF MARK & RUTH GINDI**  
BY JEANETTE & JOE SABBAGH AND FAMILY





*In Memory of Mark & Ruth Gindi  
By Jeanette & Joe Sabbagh and Family*

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# QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

To promote Torah throughout our community  
by providing a platform for our rabbis, lay members, students and institutions.

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# Simhat Torah

## SELEM ELOHIM – THE GREATEST PRINCIPLE OF ALL

Rabbi Joseph Beyda

The Torah begins with a narrative description of the creation of the Earth. There are many noteworthy elements of this opening section of the Bible, but perhaps none is more important than the notion that God creates humans in His image. This concept, *Selem Elohim* or *Imago Dei*, has captured the attention of an untold number of readers and interpreters of the Torah, not least of which was our dear teacher, Rabbi Ezra Labaton a"h. Indeed, in a statement recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud, the sage Ben Azzai considers this the most important principle in the Torah, even greater than the Golden Rule.

***“It stands to reason, then, that  
the creative faculty of the human  
being is what is most Godly  
about him.”***

In and of itself, awareness of this idea is considered a blessing. As Rabbi Aqiba states in Pirkei Abot, “Beloved is man in that he is created *b’selem*; it is a further [sign of] love that this is made known to him.” The benefit of understanding *Imago Dei* stems not merely as a reward granted for having knowledge of a fact, rather, from the value of understanding the enormous implications of this principle and thereby be able to act upon it. Although this article is inadequate to fully develop this idea, we will provide some examples of how awareness of the concept can inform the way we live our lives for the better.

### Defining Selem Elohim

The greatest scholars of all time have pondered the meaning

of this idea. What is it about humans that can be described as *Selem Elohim*? In what way are humans like God? Maimonides felt that *Selem Elohim* is the intellect, for it separates us from all other creatures and we, in some way, share with God. The famed Rabbi Judah Loew, the Mahar”al of Prague, disagreed and explained that human moral volition, the ability to make ethical choices, was that which was most Godly about us and, therefore, *Selem Elohim*. It is said that Rabbi Nahman of Breslov taught that the unique human faculty of imagination is what constitutes *Selem Elohim*.

A novel approach to this question might be suggested based on a contextual reading of the Creation narrative. Given that the phrase *Selem Elohim* appears in the twenty-third verse of the Torah, we have precious little information about God when we hear humans are created in His likeness. This can be an advantage to understanding what *Selem Elohim* means. To that point in the Torah, what we primarily know about God is that He creates. Indeed, most of the previous verses are dedicated to His creation of one aspect of nature or another. It stands to reason, then, that the creative faculty of the human being is what is most Godly about him.

Whichever of these approaches one chooses, and they are not mutually exclusive, one has acquired a directive for purposeful living. For example, under the Maimonidean approach, a human is guided to develop his intellect as much as possible, for that is what is most Godly about him. Following the Mahar”al’s thinking, one would do all that he could to live a moral life, recognizing that each ethical decision one makes is a unique opportunity to be like God. In Rabbi Nahman’s view, it is our mission to imagine the world as it is not and then work to actualize that vision. In the last approach, we understand that God purposefully left His world unfinished. He gave humans the creative capacity to perfect or complete His creation. He invites us to join Him by individually contributing to bettering His world. This creativity can be physical, technological, artistic, social, or in so many other ways.

### Unusual Kindness



Working off of a verse in Mishlei (11:17) that states, “He who provides for himself is a man of hesed,” a midrash tells of the students of Hillel the Elder escorting their teacher as he left the house of study. When asked where he was heading, he replied, “to perform a *misvah*.” Not surprisingly, the students wanted to know which *misvah* Hillel was going to perform. Always the teacher, Hillel continued to pique their interest, “I am heading to the bathhouse.” Taking the bait, the students questioned, “what *misvah* is there in going to the bathhouse?” To make his point, Hillel drew upon an analogy: when a king places a statue of his likeness in a prominent place, the person who rinses and shines the statue not only receives a stipend, but is considered to have an honorable position. How much more so I, who am created in the image of God, do I receive reward and honor for caring for His image – my body.

This masterful lesson taught by the great Hillel is another critical implication of humans being created in the image of God – we must take care of ourselves. This simple message means that we must treat our bodies well, not because we like how we will look, or because we feel better, or even because we will live longer or happier lives. Rather, the motivation is to best represent our Creator. Therefore, it is a *misvah*, an important one, to eat well, to exercise regularly, to get sufficient sleep, to groom ourselves, to dress neatly, and even to smile regularly. All of this and more goes into the overall goal of making sure we put forward our best presentation of ourselves, for we are each a “likeness,” a representative of Hashem.

### Attacking God

Our final lesson is gleaned from the Ten Commandments. In another Midrash (Mechilta of R. Yishmael, Yitro 8), the Rabbis note that on the Tablets, the First Commandment “I am the Lord,” corresponds to the Sixth Commandment, “Thou shall not murder.” This goes to teach us that one who murders is guilty not only of that crime, a sin against one’s fellow man, but also of diminishing God, as it were. Since each person is a representative of God, murdering a person is an attack on God in addition to an attack on man. Of course, this principle extends well beyond murder. The same reasoning applies to maiming another person or even to insulting another person. In fact, all of the commandments between man and man stem from this one root – hurting man in one way or another is in some way hurting Hashem. The principle of *Selem Elohim* essentially is the underlying

motivation for good interpersonal relations.

In summary, the idea that humans are created by God in His image, featured prominently in Bereshit Chapter 1, has enormous implications for how we are to live our lives. It shapes how we view our purpose in life, how we treat ourselves and how we treat others.

*Rabbi Beyda is the Rabbi of Bene Yitzhak and the dean of Students at Yeshiva of Flatbush High School*

## From the Archives

### INTRODUCTION TO SHEMINI ASSERET

*Mr. Sam Catton A"H*

After the joyful observance of Sukkot, the Lord pleads with Israel to remain in Jerusalem an extension of one more day to the Sukkot Holiday; a one day individual holiday by itself known as Shemini Hag Asseret. God is saddened at the thought of the people going back home.

On this day, prayers were offered to the Lord to provide us with enough rainfall for our crops and for all other needs.

At this point, the cycle of the weekly Sabbath Torah readings is completed, and immediately a new cycle begins.

This day is also known as Simhat Torah, rejoicing in the Law. Unrestrained dancing with the Torah is accompanied with singing takes place. The Tebah is encircled seven times in a ceremony known as "Haqafot." Children of all ages participate. Candies, goodies, toys, and flags are generously distributed to children, thus instilling in them a love of Torah and of this holiday. The children overflow the Synagogues. Every inch of space is occupied.

# SIMHAT TORAH: THE ENDLESS BEGINNING

*Rabbi Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo*

Jewish learning is a tradition of constant beginnings without any end in sight. At the end of Succoth, Jews over the world will be completing the reading of Torah in their synagogues and immediately starting all over again. This is a most remarkable tradition which takes place on Simhat Torah. Instead of being satisfied with this last reading, they conclude that they really did not read it well enough and that there is a need to read it once more. Taking into account that this kind of re-reading has already gone on for thousands of years and that there are no indications it will end in the future, one wonders when Jews will ever complete their reading of the Torah.

*“When it comes to the learning of Torah there are only perpetual beginners.”*

They won't. The message is clear: When it comes to the learning of Torah there are only perpetual beginners. The text may have a beginning but it has no end. Its divinity is rooted in the world of eternity and consequently one cannot do anything other than embark on its beginning without any hope of finishing it. Layers of meaning will constantly emerge, new colors will appear and an ongoing revelation will manifest itself.

But it is not only the study of Torah which is never ending. It is also true about all other sacred Jewish texts. When ending a tractate in the Mishna or the Talmud, Jews gather for a festive celebration but while doing so they read a text which in fact tells them that they had better start all over again. This is called the “*hadran alakh*,” “we will return to you” prayer. It states: “May we return to you, tractate so and so, because we know we have not even started to understand you.” The celebration is therefore not so much about finishing the last tractate but about the knowledge that it will be studied again. Finishing gives reason for

thankfulness, having the opportunity to start again is an excitement and requires an inaugural party.

This stands in sharp contrast with modern times and its secular intellectual goals. When studying books and texts the main question in the minds of the students is when they will finish them. The attitude is one which reveals a preoccupation with getting matters over with, completion.

Not so Judaism. It protests against the culture of the need to end. It runs against the current because it knows that completing a text is only the beginning. A new encounter



*Rabbi Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo*

will be necessary, because the last time we did not even start. True, not every text is open to such an approach. Some texts do not hold the potential to start again. One reading has made them old and outdated.

But if a Torah scholar considers himself to have finished, he is literally at an intellectual dead end and has not understood anything of the Torah. Not even its beginning, because there is no beginning without the knowledge that there is no end.

*Rabbi Dr. Cardozo is the Founder and Dean of the David Cardozo Academy.*

# BERESHIT: YOU NAME IT

Rabbi Joseph Dweck

If there is one consistent idea throughout rabbinic literature regarding the Parasha of Bereshit, it is that it is not meant to be taken at face value. Bereshit is more than a simple story of how G-d created the world and how the first human beings came to be. It is meant to be questioned, carefully examined, responsibly scrutinized and explained.

*Maase Bereshit is a deep secret that cannot be understood from simply reading the verses... (Ramban<sup>1</sup>)*

*Maase Bereshit refers to nature...[it is] presented to us in parables, riddles and extremely enigmatic phrases. (Rambam<sup>2</sup>)*

The primal protagonist of our story, *HaAdam*<sup>3</sup>, or “The

***“Bereshit is more than a simple story of how G-d created the world and how the first human beings came to be.”***

Human,” as “he” is called throughout the first and second chapters, suggests that this entity is representative of all of humankind.<sup>4</sup> We thus see the story of *HaAdam* in Bereshit as a story of all of us, presenting us with essential aspects of the underpinnings of our humanity. It is intriguing, then, to note that the very first act performed by *HaAdam* is to name animals:

G-d formed from the soil every living thing of the field and every fowl of the heavens and brought each to The Human to see what he would call it; and whatever The Human called it...that became its name.<sup>5</sup>

The rabbinic commentators saw the act of naming as more than just an exercise of human judgement, but also as a deep interaction with animal life. According to the Midrash<sup>6</sup>, the sacred act of naming continued beyond the animal kingdom and ended with G-d Himself:

G-d asked, “And yourself — what is your name?” “I am Adam, for I am of Earth (*adama*).” “And I,” asked G-d, “What is my name?” “You are Adonai, for You are master (*adon*) of all.”

What is most intriguing about the episode of naming is that G-d does not **command** *HaAdam* to name the animals. G-d is quite passive in the story, only presenting the animals to *HaAdam* in “hopes” that he might engage and name them.

“G-d brought each to The Human, to see what he would call it.”<sup>7</sup>

The Human does name them, and we are told that “whatever The Human called it...became its name.” Thus, making the human interface integral to the nature of reality.

The act of naming is the first human act in the Creation narrative, because it is the essential human act. Naming is the primal act of definition and connection. It is our first step into building a world with unique creativity and personal meaning. Thus, the world is presented to us — as the animals were presented to *HaAdam* — miscellaneous; without definitions and categorizations. We are the definers and categorizers, and we, through study, interaction, care and connection, find meaning in the world. By engaging in the act of defining and discovering meaning, we find the world to be personally precious. G-d looks forward to seeing what the world might mean to us personally, and thus, He presents us with a wide-open world that awaits our individual input. The first act of humanity teaches us that we are meant to impact the world with our own perspectives. As partners with G-d, we build a world *together* with Him that bears the unmistakable mark of the human mind and creative spirit.

*Rabbi Dweck is Senior Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi Community of the United Kingdom.*

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Torah, Bereshit, 1:1

<sup>2</sup> Introduction (Petiha) to Moreh Nebukhim.

<sup>3</sup> It is not until leaving Gan Eden that the personal name “Adam” is used.

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with this, the talmudic sages understood *HaAdam* to be both male and female (Yalkut Shimoni Bereshit, 2:7, s.v. Vayitser) until male and female was separated into different bodies. (2:21-22)

<sup>5</sup> 2:19

<sup>6</sup> Bereshit Rabba, 19:3

<sup>7</sup> 2:19



## ZOT HABERKHA

Mr. Leon Beyda

We can understand Moshe's desire to bless his people before his imminent death. However, one cannot help but ask, was it not the job of the Kohanim to give the blessings to the people and wasn't Moshe himself told directly to tell his brother that it is up to the Kohanim to bless the people?

If we look at the wording of *zot* (this is) *haberacha*, we can see what Moshe's blessing actually is. First of all, he does not refer to the tribes right away in blessing them. He first gives an introduction about Hashem, and then the famous *pasuk* "*Torah siva lanu Moshe morasha kehilat Yaaqob*" (The Torah that Hashem commanded us is the heritage of the Jewish people, Debarim 33:4). In other words what Moshe is really telling them is that the real blessing that Moshe is giving them, is something he already gave them, the Torah. It is the source of all blessings. That is why each blessing that he gave the tribes has a connection to the Torah blessing. It explains why his blessing to Reuben was that he should live forever and not die. Since we are all human that is impossible, unless of course, you keep the Torah and *misvot* and earn *olam haba* (the next world). If we go through each of the tribes that Moshe mentions we can find a connection to the Torah. Two very obvious ones are Yissakhar and Zebulun, Zebulun is happy to go out to support the Torah that Yissakhar is learning.

For someone who keeps the *misvot* and who learns Torah, they know that the Torah in itself is a blessing, and it also leads to more blessings in our lives. This is why when they take the Torah out of the ark and hold it up to the congregation we say *Zot Hatorah* which is basically equivalent to saying *Zot Haberacha*. This answers the original question of why Moshe is blessing the people, it is actually Hashem who is blessing them by giving them the Torah. And that is why Moshe in the beginning of this parasha is referred to as "*Ish Haelokim*" (the man of G-d, Debarim 33:1), but after he finishes blessing the people he is referred to as the servant of Hashem (*'eved Hashem*, Debarim 34:5). After all his accomplishments and accolades, he is still the messenger of Hashem.

*Mr. Beyda is a community member currently writing a book on parashat hashabua.*

## RISING ABOVE THE NORM

Rabbi Sion Setton

We are each born into unique circumstances and try our best to be the most accomplished individuals we can be. At times, we may be hard on ourselves and say "I will never be as great as so and so," or even compare ourselves to people of the past and say we can never be as great as them. At those times, we sell ourselves short.

We first read about Noah at the end of parashat Bereshit. We read that Noah was:

אִישׁ צָדִיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֵרָתוֹ

*A righteous and wholesome man of his generation.  
(Bereshit 6:9)*

***"The hero of our Parasha, Noah, demonstrates the proper way of assuming responsibility."***

Rashi comments on this verse and asks why the text mentions Noah's righteousness in the context of his generation? Why not just say that Noah was righteous? He answers that if Noah was born in a different generation, like that of Avraham, he would not have been considered as righteous.

Based on Rashi's exegesis, I would like to suggest that Noah's story teaches us to strive to be the most righteous and wholesome beings that we can given our life situation.

In the first Parasha of the Torah, Bereshit, we learn about the temptation to avoid responsibility and shift the blame to others. When Adam eats from the forbidden fruit he blames Hava, who is then to blame the snake. When Hashem confronts Cain over the murder of his brother Hebel, Cain tries to deny his actions.

The hero of our Parasha, Noah, demonstrates the proper

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# ORIGIN OF THE CUSTOM OF HAQAFOT

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

It is currently the custom among all Jewish communities to encircle the *Tebah* with the *Sifre Torah* on *Simhat Torah* seven times. What is the origin of the custom known as *Haqafot* on *Simhat Torah*?

The custom of *Haqafot* on *Simhat Torah* does not seem to be known at all until the final third of the sixteenth century in Safed during the days of HaElohi Rabbenou Yisshaq ben Shelomo Louria Ashkenazi (1534-1572), better known as HaAR"l. From Safed the custom of *Haqafot* spread to the entire Jewish world.

We first hear about the custom from Rabbi Haim Vital (Safed 1543 - Damascus 1620), who writes in his *Sha'ar HaKavanot*:

"Regarding the custom on *Simhat Torah* of removing all the *Sefarim* from the *Heikhal* and to do *Haqafot* with them, it is a true custom and it is mentioned in the *Zohar Perashat Pinehas* page 256. And I saw my teacher HaAR"l was very scrupulous with this and he would encircle with the *Sefer Torah* and as he did so he would dance and sing with all his might and he was very diligent to do all seven *haqafot*."

This is actually the first documented source for seven *haqafot* on *Simhat Torah*! The problem is that *Sha'ar HaKavanot* was first published in Salonika in 1852. So how did this custom become so wide spread before this time?

It would seem that numerous passages regarding HaAR"l were copied from the manuscript and published elsewhere. The earliest printed source we have for the custom of HaAR"l

is a book by Rabbi Ya'aqob Semah entitled *Nagid U'mssaveh* (Amsterdam 1712). In it he quotes what we read above from the original manuscript of *Sha'ar HaKavanot*. Next there is an anonymous work entitled *Hemdat Yamim* (Izmir 1731) which also mentions the custom of HaAR"l by quoting not from *Sha'ar HaKavanot*, but from *Nagid U'mssaveh*.

Rabbi Haim Vital never gave us a reason for the seven *haqafot* but we first find the reasoning behind it in *Tour Barequet* (Amsterdam 1654) by the prize student of Rabbi Haim Vital, Rabbi Haim HaKohen.<sup>1</sup> Rabbi HaKohen tells us that the 7 *haqafot* on *Simhat Torah* are parallel to those on *Hosh'ana Rabah* and he goes on to give a deep Kabbalistic interpretation to them. The *Hemdat Yamim* also correlates these *haqafot* to

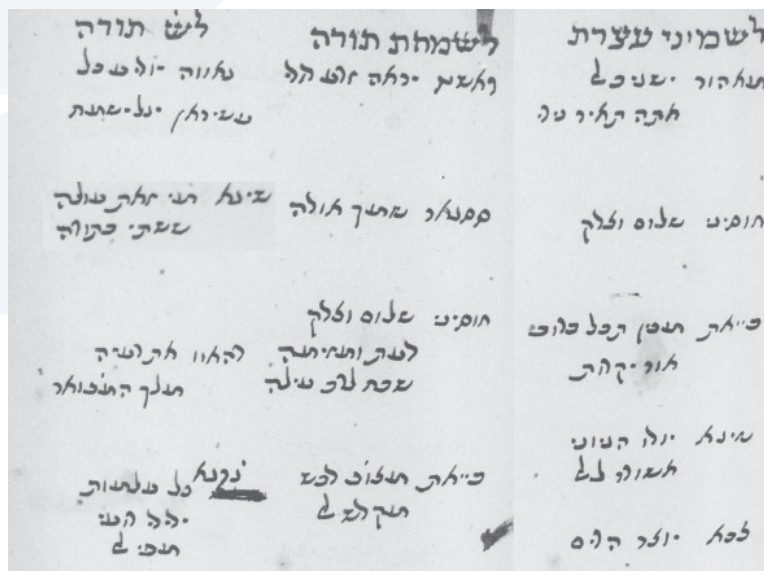
those of *Hosh'ana Rabah* and provides an equally mysterious reasoning.

One would wonder if these 7 *haqafot* are so shrouded in mystery and part of the ways of the Lurianic Kabbalists how did the custom become so popular throughout the Jewish world?

Firstly the books *Nagid U'mssaveh* and *Hemdat Yamim* became very popular. So much so that in the 18th century they were published eight and seven

times respectively. As we mentioned earlier these books only hit the market about 150 years after the passing of HaAR"l.

Secondly, the *Shelihim* (emissaries) from *Eress Yisrael* played a pivotal role in spreading this custom. These emissaries from the Holy Land were the only direct link between the Diaspora communities and their brothers in Israel. Wherever they went they not only collected funds but they taught Torah and influenced the enactments of certain laws and customs. The Jewish community of Modena, Italy published the order of *Simhat Torah Haqafot* in Mantua in 1783. From



Sassoon Manuscript #647 of *Pizmonim* used for the *Shemini Asseret* and *Simhat Torah* festivals in Aleppo, circa 1850

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Haim HaKohen was born in Egypt to a great Spanish family, later moved to Israel to study with Rabbi Vital, then was appointed as a rabbi in Aleppo in 1579

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# Shemini 'Asseret

## SHEMINI 'ASSERET IN THE TORAH

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

The first thing to realize is that there is no festival named “*Shemini 'Asseret*,” in the Tanakh. The festival that occurs on the day following the seventh day of “*hag hassukkot*” (Lit. The pilgrimage festival of Booths) is not named in the two places that the Torah speaks about it. It is referred to as an “*asseret*,” which is not really a name but a generic description of a kind of day (see below for more on the meaning of “*asseret*”).

The festival that immediately follows the *sukkot* festival is referred to in the talmudic tradition as “*yom tob aharon shel hag*” (the concluding holiday of the festival) or “*shemini shel hag*” (the eighth day of the festival) all this while asserting that “*shemini, regel bifne 'assmo hu*” (“the eighth day as a pilgrimage festival unto itself”). The reference to the festival in the liturgy varies. The Sephardic tradition refers to the day as “*yom shemini hag 'asseret*.” The Ashkenazic tradition refers to the day as “*yom hashemini hag ha'asseret*.”<sup>1</sup> There is another tradition (*nusach sfard*) that refers to the day as, “*shemini 'asseret hehag*” (the eighth day, the solemn gathering of the festival).

In short, “*Shemini 'Asseret*” as the name of the festival that immediately follows *Sukkot* is a very late development. The name, however, does come from the Tanakh, even though it is not used as a name of the festival. We will now examine the verses where the festival is mentioned.

### The “Festival Following Sukkot” in the Torah

Although there are five places in the Torah that refer to the festivals, only two of them are “complete,” Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29 (the other places, Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus

34:18-24 and Deuteronomy 16:1-18, lack “*Shemini 'Asseret*” as well as Yom Kippur and what we call “Rosh Hashanah”).

At the end of a list of the “appointed times of Hashem, which you are to proclaim to them (as) proclamations of holiness” (*mo'ade Hashem asher tiqre'u otam miqra'e qodesh*), Leviticus 23 writes:

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day after this seventh New-Moon: the pilgrimage festival of Huts (*hag hasukkot*), for seven days, to Hashem. On the first day (is) a proclamation of holiness, any kind of servile work you are not to do. For seven days you are to bring-near a fire-offering to Hashem; on the eighth day, a proclamation of holiness shall there be for you, you are to bring-near a fire-offering to Hashem—it is (a day of) Restraint (*'asseret hee*)—any kind of servile work you are not to do. (Leviticus 23:33-36; SB)

The festival is characterized by a separate “fire-offering” and by a prohibition of doing “servile work.” It is referred to as the eighth day following *Sukkot* but is clearly not part of the *sukkot* festival, which lasts only seven days.<sup>3</sup>

Numbers chapters 28 and 29 is concerned with the details of the sacrificial offerings on every day of the year. It begins with the daily sacrificial offering, continues with the offering to be brought on Shabbat and the New Moon and then describes the offerings to be brought on each of the festivals. The list ends with the festival on the “fifteenth day of the seventh month” (*Sukkot*), describing the offerings to be made on each of the seven days of the festival, as each day has a different number of animals offered. From the second day on, each of the days is introduced with “Now on the second

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the phrase “*beyyom shemini hag asseret hazzeh*” that occurs in the Sephardic liturgy is somewhat ambiguous. One possible translation is, “the eighth day of the festival, a solemn gathering.” This translation reflects the attested rabbinic usage of *shemini shel hag* (or treating it as a kind of *semichut*, *shemini hag*). The punctuation of the phrase according to this translation would be *shemini hag, 'asseret*. An alternative translation, “eighth day, a festival of solemn gathering,” (punctuating, “*beyom shemini, hag 'asseret hazzeh*”), refers to the day as “a festival of solemn gathering,” a name that does not appear in the rabbinic writings regarding this day. This is the meaning of the festival’s name in the more common Ashkenazic tradition (the addition of the definite articles resolves the ambiguity).

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 16 does in fact have an “*asseret*,” but it is the seventh day of Pesah, and not the eighth day of *Sukkot*. Although, all of these three Torah portions refer to Pesah (or “*hag hammasot*”—“feast of the unleavened bread”) as lasting seven days, only Deuteronomy 16 refers to *Sukkot* as lasting seven days. As stated above, there is no reference to the eighth day in Deuteronomy 16.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the day is referred to as the “eighth day” should not cause us to think of it as necessarily connected to the *hag* in any other way than numerically. For example, Leviticus 8:33-36 prescribes a period of seven days of their inauguration into the *mishkan* service. It is followed by an “eighth day” which is of a clearly different character.

(third, fourth, fifth, etc.) day...” The description of the eighth day is:

On the eighth day (*shemini*): Restraint (*‘asseret*) there is to be for you, any-kind of servile work you are not to do! You are to bring-near an offering-up, a fire-offering of soothing savor for Hashem: one bull, one ram, lambs a year in age seven, wholly-sound, their grain-gift as well as their poured-offerings, for (each) bull, for (each) ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the regulation, and one hairy-one as a *hattat*-offering, aside from the regular offering-up, its grain-gift and its poured offering. (Numbers 29:35-38; SB)

Although this day is called the “eighth day” here, it is also distinguished from the preceding days. Not only by the fact that the introduction to the day begins with the words “on the eighth day” (*“bayom hashemini”*) as opposed to “now on the second (third, fourth) day” (*“ubayom hasheni”*), but by the break in the downward progression of the bulls offered on each of the days of *Sukkot*. On the first day there were to be 13 bulls offered. On each subsequent day one less bull was offered so that on the seventh day there were 7 bulls offered. On the eighth day there was only one bull offered. This break in the progression along with the designation *“‘asseret”* indicates that the festival is not connected to the seven day *sukkot* festival (the holiday is listed as a seven-day festival in Numbers 29:12).

Incidentally, it is from this Torah portion that the contemporary name of the festival derives. Ignoring the punctuation of the verse (which derives from the meaning), the words *“shemini”* and *“‘asseret”* are adjacent to one another.

### The Day Following Sukkot in Tanakh

There are three other places in Tanakh that refer to this day. Two of the sources give differing traditions concerning the same event, the inauguration festival of Solomon’s temple. At the conclusion of the inauguration festival the

Book of Kings relates:

So Solomon and all Israel with him—a great assemblage, [coming] from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt—observed the feast at that time before Hashem our God, seven days and again seven days, fourteen days in all. On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their homes, joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness that Hashem had shown to His servant David and His people Israel. (1 Kings 8:65; NJPS)

Although the timing of the two seven-day periods is not very clear, most of the commentators take them as referring to a seven-day inauguration festival that immediately preceded *Sukkot* and seven days of *Sukkot*. Understanding the

verse this way means that the people did not fast on Yom Kippur (as Rashi points out) and that they were sent home on the day following *Sukkot*, *“Shemini ‘Asseret.”*<sup>4</sup>

The account in 2 Chronicles is clearer:

At that time Solomon kept the Feast for seven days —all Israel with him — a great assemblage from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. On the eighth day they held a solemn gathering (*‘asseret*).

They observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the Feast seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he dismissed the people to their homes, rejoicing and in good spirits over the goodness that the Hashem had shown to David and Solomon and His people Israel. (2 Chronicles 7:8-9; NJPS)

Although the account does specify when the two festivals were celebrated, it also differs with regards to the “solemn gathering” celebrated on the eighth day. It is as if this account is “correcting” the earlier 1 Kings account to bring it in line

<sup>4</sup> Traditional commentaries attempting to reconcile Shelomo’s practice with Jewish practice explain that prophets in Shelomo’s time made an emergency ruling to allow them to eat and celebrate on the “Day of Atonement.” They also explain that Shelomo took his leave of them on the eighth day but that they did not actually leave until after the eighth day.

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with the practice known to its author.

The third place where the festival on the eighth day is mentioned is in the book of Nehemiah. That source describes the celebration of the holiday of *Sukkot* that was done by those that returned to Zion in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra the Scribe.

The whole community that returned from captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths – the Israelites did not do so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day – and there was a very great rejoicing. He [Ezra] read from the scroll of the Teaching of God each day, from the first to the last day. They celebrated the festival seven days, and there was a solemn gathering on the eighth, as prescribed. (Nehemiah 8:17-18; NJPS)

### Meaning of “Asseret” in the Tanakh

The word that is consistently associated with this festival is the word “*asseret*.” The word means gathering (Jer. 9:1), specifically for the sake of prayer or sacrifice (2 Kings 10:20; Amos 5:21). Sometimes the gathering was for the sake of fasting as in Joel (1:14, 2:15), “Solemnize a fast, proclaim an assembly (*‘assarah*).” The prohibition of doing work on the *‘asseret* is found in Deuteronomy 16:8 where the seventh day of Pesah is called an *‘asseret*. The attribute of prohibition of work is also found concerning the day following *Sukkot*. The day following *Sukkot* is the one that most often is associated with the word “*asseret*” in the Tanakh.

### Significance of the Festival

The portions of the Torah that speak about this festival are silent as to its meaning. This silence has led to various rabbinic attempts to derive the festival’s meaning from the meaning of the word “*asseret*,” from scriptural hints and from the seasonal needs. The following passages from *Pesikta Derab Kahana* reflect the kinds of derivations that are commonly

made in the rabbinic literature and classical commentators.

Why were they restrained (*“ne’essru”* similar to the Hebrew word “*asseret*” –RT) for another day? To what can this be likened? To a king who had a festive day. His laborers and his children came to honor him. The matron told them since the king is happy make sure to ask for your needs. Since they did not understand she forced them to stay another day so that they can ask their needs from the king. This is the way the Torah hints to the children to ask for their needs. (By spelling the Hebrew word for water, *mayim*, through the minor variations in the list of sacrifices offered on *Sukkot*. –RT) Since they did not understand she restrained them another day –that is the eighth day.

“You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem; one bull, one ram...”—R. Pinhas son of Hama said: The seventy bulls that Israel would offer on the festival were for the seventy nations of the world that they should sit in serenity. (The sum of the bulls offered on the *sukkot* festival is seventy--the same number as the “nations of the world” as seen from the list of Noah’s descendants in Genesis chapter 10. –RT) The Holy one said: My children all the

days of the festival you were busy with the guests lets me and you have one meal together, that “is one bull, one ram.”

The present-day celebration of *Shemini 'Asseret* includes a prayer for abundant rains, as this is the festival immediately preceding the beginning of the rainy season in Israel. (In addition, in Israel, *Shemini 'Asseret*, doubles as the day when the cycle of the annual Torah reading is completed, Simhat Torah.)

*Rabbi Tawil is the author of Shabbat-Table Talks (Tebah Educational Services, 2014). He currently lives in Jerusalem with his family.*







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# Sephardic Rabbis

## RABBI SHELOMO ALQABETS, AUTHOR OF LEKHA DODI

*Rabbi Yosef Bitton*

Rabbi Shelomo haLevi Alqabets was born in Salonica, Greece, in the year 1500. His father was Moshe haLevi Alqabets, a refugee from the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Rabbi Shelomo studied Tora, and particularly Qabbala, under Rabbi Yosef Taitatsaq. In 1529 he married the daughter of the philanthropist Isaac Cohen. Soon after their wedding, he and his wife determined to settle in Eres Israel. In a speech that he delivered before he left the city he said that once we have the possibility of living in Israel, even if the conditions there are far from ideal, it is the duty of every Jew to return to Israel to help building the Bet haMiqdash, to study Tora and serve HaShem with passion.

In his way to Israel he stayed for two years in the city of Adrianapolis (today Edirne, in Turkey). The townsmen begged him to instruct them in his ways of serving HaShem. He refused to stay saying that only in the Holy Land one could fathom the secrets of Tora. He agreed, however, to write for them several works while in town. One of these books was *Berit HaLevi*, an explanation of the Hagada of Pesah, dedicated to his disciples in Adrianapolis.

Rabbi Shlomo arrived to Safed around 1535. Rabbi Alqabets' passion for Israel inspired many of his community members from Salonica and Adrianapolis to come with him to Israel. Among the people who came with him was his brother-in-law, the famous Rabbi Moshe Cordobero (1522-1570). Rabbi Moshe Cordobero, was probably the most important qabbalist of his time, until the Ari haQadosh. He had a great respect and admiration for Rabbi Alqabets, and even though he was married to his sister, he always addressed him as his teacher. Rabbi Alqabets was indeed his first teacher. But over the time, Rabbi Cordobero grew immensely in his learning and fame as a qabbalist and talmudist. Rabbi Alqabets read his writings and learned from him and addressed Rabbi Cordobero as his teacher, a

testimony to Rabbi Alqabets' great humility. Rabbi Alqabets and Rabbi Cordobero created a circle of pious men dedicated to study Tora in Safed.

On his way to Eres Israel Rabbi Alqabets met also with Rabbi Yosef Caro, who was also on his way to Eres Israel. They became good friends and shared many years together. It is said that it was Rabbi Alqabets who inspired Maran Rabbi Yosef Caro to establish the *Tiqun LeL Shabu'ot*, a long Tora study session which takes place during the entire night of Shabu'ot.

With Rabbis Alqabets and Rabbi Cordobero in town, the city of Safed became the center of Qabbala. And with the presence of Rabbi Yosef Caro and his teacher, Rabbi Yaaqob Berab, Safed was also the city of Halakha.

Rabbi Alqabets was a very charismatic speaker, a great teacher, and a fantastic community leader and mentor to his students. He made *taqanot*, internal rules, for his students. He established for example, that the students should behave

***“Rabbi Alqabets’ passion for Israel inspired many of his community members from Salonica and Adrianapolis to come with him to Israel.”***

with humbleness one to another. And when a student sees one of his peers doing something wrong he should approach his friend discreetly and explain him his mistake. The one who was rebuked, should not refute or say anything in his own defense before three days have passed, so he has time to reflect dispassionately on his own actions.

### Books

Rabbi Alqabets wrote many books, mostly commentaries



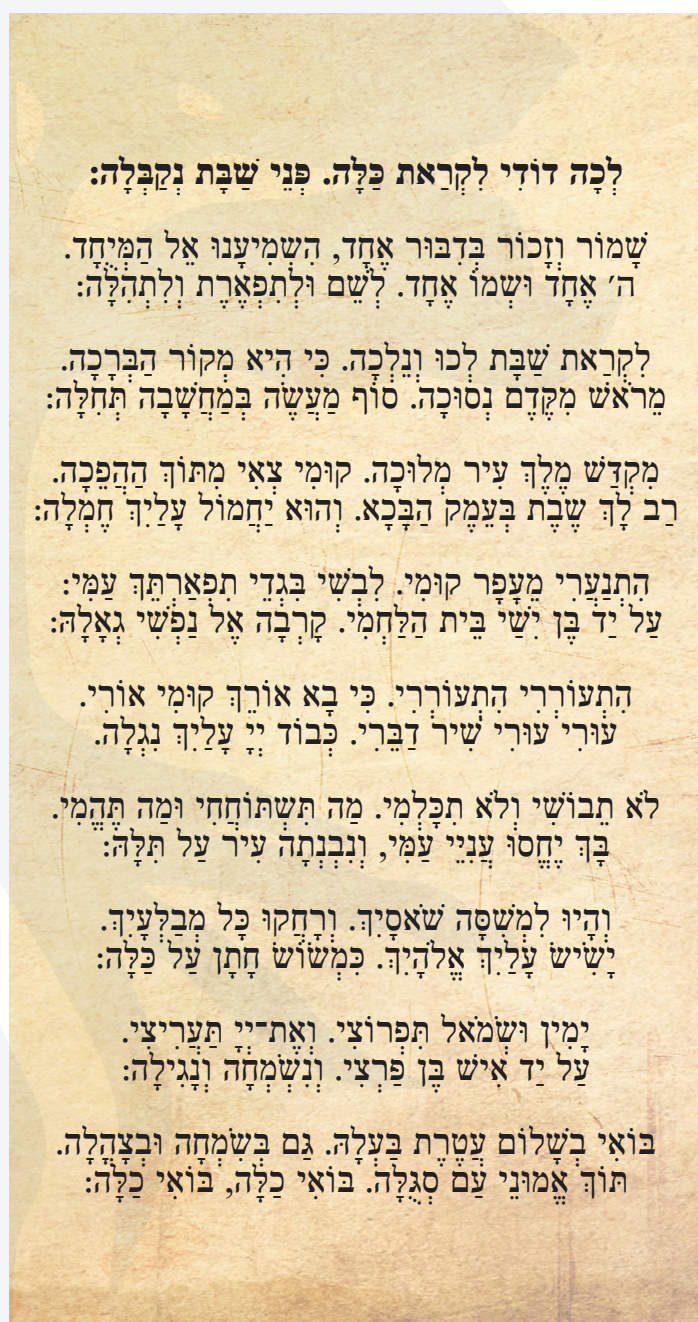
on books of the Bible and many books on Qabbala. Some of them are: *Manot HaLevi*, on the Book of Esther; *Ayelet Ahabim*, on Song of Songs; *Shoresh Yishai*, on the Book of Ruth; *Or Sadiqim*, a book of sermons.

Despite the many books he wrote and the great influence he exerted on many prominent rabbis, Rabbi Alqabets is famous for his liturgical poem *Lekha Dodi*, a hymn sung at the inauguration of the Shabbat. *Lekha Dodi* was composed according to qabbalistic teachings, expressing the yearning for the final redemption. He based the theme, “Come my beloved to meet the bride” on the Talmudic description in

Shabbat 119a “Rabbi Hanina robed himself and stood at sunset of Sabbath eve [and] exclaimed, ‘Come and let us go forth to welcome the queen Shabbat.’”

Rabbi Shelomo Alqabets passed on in 1580.

*Rabbi Bitton is the Author of Awesome Creation (2013). He regularly chronicles the lives and great accomplishments of Sephardic Rabbis.*



לְכָה דוּדֵי לְקִרְאָת כָּלָה. פָּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה:

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד, הַשְׁמִיעֵנוּ אֵל הַמִּיחָד.  
ה' אֶחָד וְשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד. לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת וּלְתִהְיֶיָה:

לְקִרְאָת שַׁבָּת לָכוּ וְנִלְכָה. כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה.  
מֵרֵאשׁ מִקְדָּם נְסוּכָה. סוּף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה תִּחְלָה:

מִקְדָּשׁ מְלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָה. קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה.  
רַב לָךְ שַׁבָּת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא. וְהוּא יַחְמוֹל עָלֶיךָ חֲמֻלָּה:

הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעַפְר קוּמִי. לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תַפְאֶרֶת עָמִי:  
עַל יָד בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּית הַלְחָמִי. קִרְבָּה אֶל נַפְשִׁי גְאֻלָּה:

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי. כִּי בָא אוֹרֶךְ קוּמִי אוֹרִי.  
עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרִי. כְּבוֹד יְיָ עָלֶיךָ נִגְלָה.

לֹא תִבוֹשִׁי וְלֹא תִכְלָמִי. מֶה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוִי וּמָה תִּהְיֶיָה.  
בְּךָ יִחְסוּ עֲנִיִּי עָמִי, וְנִבְנְתָה עִיר עַל תִּלָּה:

וְהָיוּ לְמִשְׁפָּה שְׂאִסְיָה. וְרַחֲקוּ כָל מִבְלָעִיָּה.  
יִשְׁיֵשׁ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ. כְּמִשּׁוֹשׁ חֲתָן עַל כָּלָה:

יְמִין וּשְׂמָאל תִּפְרוּצִי. וְאַתְיִי תַעֲרִיצִי.  
עַל יָד אִישׁ בֶּן פְּרָצִי. וְנִשְׁמָחָה וְנִגְלִילָה:

בּוֹאִי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטָרַת בַּעֲלָה. גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבִצְהָלָה.  
תּוֹךְ אֱמוּנִי עִם סִגְלָה. בּוֹאִי כָלָה, בּוֹאִי כָלָה:

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## ...RISING ABOVE THE NORM

way of assuming responsibility. Noah has every excuse in the world to not be good. The Torah says that in Noah’s time the world was filled with social corruption (*hamas*). If he would have given in to peer pressure, Noah should have been just like everybody else. But Noah chooses to be different and to walk righteously.

While some commentators criticize Noah for not influencing others to follow in his good example, we should not forget the immense significance of the fact that he manages to remain good and wholesome, rising above a culture of overwhelming inequity. How often do we ourselves refuse to be different when everyone around us refrains from doing the right thing? How often do we blame our own conduct on social pressure and collective norms?

Let Noah be an inspiration for us. He does not just survive a flood and rise above the thundering waters. He is able to stand up to an entire society and chooses to be good in the face of corruption. Noah’s story teaches us the power of one person who chooses to do the right thing and take responsibility, saving himself, humanity and the world as we know it.

*Rabbi Setton is the Rabbi of Magen David of Manhattan.*



# Student Corner

## LANDING IN THE HERE AND NOW: RE-FRAMING THE WAY WE LOOK AT LIFE AFTER STUDYING FOR A YEAR IN ISRAEL

Ms. Esther Leventer

I remember it well. Stepping onto that plane. Leaving behind the only existence I had known for what seemed like a lifetime but in truth had barely been a year. Tears streamed down my face at the heart-wrenching news of the loss of the three boys that we as a nation had been searching and praying for over many painstaking weeks. And I was alone. In every sense of the word. And I was abandoning my country in its time of need and loss. I was heading back to a place where few people would understand me.

After returning from an incredible year in Israel, many of us face a tremendous challenge. Some of us face challenges getting this opportunity in the first place, and once we finally return to our communities, we see the world in a whole new way. It seems as if everything and everyone around us has changed. The people around us seem foreign and different; the culture seems strange. But in truth, everything is exactly the same. It is we who have changed. We have grown as individuals spiritually, intellectually, and religiously. Our Amazon shopping carts become filled with books on philosophy and Tanakh in place of vampires and young adult thrillers. Our minds have been opened up to endless different cultures and philosophies within Judaism and beyond. You may hear us play devil's advocate and ask countless questions because we now thrive on a good debate; don't worry, we're striving for the truth and want to hear what you have to say. Our appreciation, admiration, loyalty, and love for our history and our homeland are no longer things that our limited vocabulary is capable of describing. You may find us broken beyond repair when tragedy strikes in Israel and overly enthused when we drink coke from a glass bottle. Our longing to remain connected to that experience makes it difficult for us to re-adapt to the life we have grown

up with for 18 years.

It's been almost a year now since I have been back from my unforgettable Israel experience, and I have learned so much about myself and life in general since I've returned. One of the most important things that I've learned while readjusting, is that life is not about longing and waiting to be somewhere else. Rather, it's about making the best of the here and now and applying our unforgettable experiences to our daily lives. It's about sharing those experiences with those that we love and admire, and remembering to remain grateful to the families and communities who have raised us and provided us with a foundation. It's about finding new people to connect with and learning that there are many people who feel the same way and are out there waiting to meet us and share in our lives.

***“...that life is not about the answers. It's about the struggle to reach them.”***

I have made a serious effort to stay connected to my homeland and maintain my spiritual, intellectual, and religious growth, by finding things to do that drive me, inspire me and keep me connected. For example, in order to stay connected to my homeland I joined the radio team at Yeshiva University known as “WYUR,” where I have my own show called “IHeartIsrael.” I research and discuss news, events, politics, conflicts, and advancements in our country. This incredible opportunity has allowed me to be up to date with everything that is going on in Israel on a constant basis. In order to share and maintain my personal growth I started a modest fashion blog on Instagram called @imbringingclassyback, which allows me to share ways that we can dress fashionably while still remaining modest. I have also become part of a start-up website called “TorahExchange.com” where teens and twenty somethings will be able to B”H share videos of ideas and *shiurim* (email

us at TheTorahExchange@gmail.com to be a part of this incredible opportunity). In addition, I give weekly classes at my synagogue- Bet Rachel- which allows me to share all that I have been so privileged to learn with others.

In order to stay connected with my friends and community, I learn Torah and philosophy with my friends on Shabbat and during the week, which allows me to learn and grow from other people as well as share in our experiences together. I surround myself with people who inspire me and keep me grounded and motivated. I've learned that it is extremely important to maintain all that you have learned by incorporating it into your regular life. If we find things that we love and have a passion for, these things will help us keep a genuine connection with our homeland and keep us true to ourselves and the people that we strive to be.

Another thing that I've learned after returning from an unforgettable Israel experience is that life is not about finding ultimate answers and truths, but rather, it's about searching and becoming as close as we possibly can to them. My year in Israel opened me up to a variety of *hashkafot* and ideas in Judaism and I returned thinking that I would have to find a way to define and label myself as a Jew, as well as find perfectly satisfying answers to all of my questions. But I realized that life is not about the answers. It's about the struggle to reach them. I express myself better through song and poetry and I think the following poem will help convey this idea:

I'm a tortured soul and I love it  
Or maybe I'm not but pretend to be  
We cry till our tears hit the ground  
So entrapped in our minds  
So engulfed by our towns  
The heavens consume us  
Just the very thought ignites us  
Step back from those frozen maps  
And ponder  
Maybe the purpose is to let our minds wander  
And come so close to the answers  
Without risking completion  
And thrive on the process  
Until our ultimate deletion  
At least from this earth  
At least from this time  
From these moments we fail to live in

Until the sunsets remind us  
That they're passing us by  
And the stars mesmerize us  
And in awe we cry  
For redemption  
For love  
For clarification  
A life that fits like a glove  
But is that how we want it  
I mean truly just imagine  
Without all the mystery  
A severe lack of drama  
Without sheer desperation  
No set backs  
No trauma  
Well then maybe we'd just  
Feel nothing at all  
And the thrill would be gone  
And forever we'd fall  
And the achievements would lose  
A bit of their sweetness  
We'd crumble  
Fail to climb  
Eternally give in to our every weakness  
The pleasure is in the struggle  
In recognizing that we have what to fight for  
What to live for  
What to lose the fear of dying for

As I grow older, I recognize that life is about being lost and wandering. It's about thinking and asking the better questions. It's about taking every experience and growing. It's about the *journey* and the *struggle* we go through in search of the ultimate truth.

So keep pushing through and always look for ways to make every experience last and become a permanent part of your life, wherever the road may take you. If you're lucky, it just may take you back to your homeland. But until then, keep making the most of the here and now.

*Miss Leventer is a Psychology Major at Stern College. She is a founding member of TorahExchange.com and is passionate about helping spread Torah ideas in a way that brings the Community together.*





# SCA Poll

## SCA POLL REVEALS COMMUNITY DATA

Professor David Passig PhD

Mr. Murray S. Mizrachi MS

As one of its primary goals, the SCA seeks to engage and understand our Community's college age and young professionals. The youth in our community are a strong indicator to how the Community will look in 10, 20, or even 30 years. A recent poll conducted at an SCA event revealed some important and insightful information about the attitudes and needs of our Community. This survey was conducted by Murray Mizrachi with the help and guidance of Professor David Passig, one of the world leaders in Future Studies.

Just from the preliminary results we can decipher some very important statistics about our Community. The survey results below indicated a need for our more senior Community members to take leadership roles on issues that the youth care about. Data and insight provided by these results gives our Community the ability to directly address the concerns of our young Community members.

### The participants

The average age of those polled was 23 years old, with a range of ages between 18-32, the quintessential college and young professional age set. A more or less equal amount of both genders participated in the survey to get the most accurate results. 50% of respondents indicated their gender as female, 42% indicated male, and 8% preferred not to answer. The sample consisted of single and young married Community members.

### Limitations

The sample chosen was a "convenience sample," a sample taken from those available at the time of the administration of the survey, in this case a Thursday night class. This is significant in that there is a selection bias that probably skewed the results due to the sampled group and may

therefore not represent the stratified group being studied. Nonetheless, it is more likely that these results reflect the attitudes, identity and concerns of our most engaged young Community members.

The reader must remember as stated above that the result were gathered from a convenience sample, in this case one that may represent some of our best and brightest, the individuals committed to coming to a class on a Thursday night.

### Identity

Close to 87% of those polled, identified as Sephardic Jews, with 96% likely to continue identifying as members of our "Community." As a further articulation of their identity, the sample group indicated that ritual [Jewish] observance was important to them. The group further specified that the

***"93% of our young people felt that the anti-Israel/anti-Semitism needs to be addressed by Community leaders..."***

most important factor in deciding higher education is Jewish life followed by job opportunities. The sample group also expressed a strong desire to see more programming from the Community featuring guest lecturers and in particular regarding Israel.

### Concerns

When asked an open ended question about the biggest challenges of our Community, an overwhelming tally responded that financial and social pressures can be very difficult to cope with. Some other concerns raised included the difficulty of having honest discussions about the economic and social challenges facing their generation and lack of quality programming.

Many felt that the growing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism biases in this country were very concerning. 93% of our young people felt that the anti-Israel/ anti-Semitism needs to be addressed by Community leaders in a serious way.

### Striking results

Only 16 % felt their religious education was “very good” or “excellent” in preparing them for the modern world. 42% felt their religious education was just “fair” or “poor.”

Many of our youth are considering establishing permanent residencies outside of the traditional borders of the Community in Brooklyn and Deal. Over 70% of those polled were considering moving, with 10% indicating they were “definitely” moving out permanently. One could make the argument that this is perhaps strongly linked to their concerns of financial and social pressures which seem to have increased in recent years. As may be recalled from above, despite the openness to move, 96% of those polled still identify as members of our Community.” This most likely means that the way we define our Community will significantly change in the coming years.

### Conclusions

More polling and survey data should be collected to better understand the needs of our constituents. For example considering the hundreds of millions of dollars spent annually by our Community on Jewish education, how can we increase the only 4% of those polled who felt this education was 'excellent'? Collecting data will help us further improve our Community by directly addressing the issues that need attention.

In particular our young people are facing unprecedented changes to the Community and, more broadly, the world around them. By gathering information, the Community can position itself to be more pragmatic about the opportunities ahead of us as we round out the second decade of the 21st century.

*Professor Passig is a professor of Futures Thinking at Bar-Ilan university. He currently heads the Graduate Program in Information and Communication Technology and the Virtual Reality Laboratory at the School of Education at*

*Bar-Ilan. He is also a best selling author.*

*Mr. Mizrachi is the Editor in Chief of Qol Ha'Qahal and Executive Director of the SCA.*

*Readers are encouraged to write to the editor and open up a discussion regarding the issues raised here and request a copy of the full results. Please write to: Qahalnewsletter@gmail.com.*

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*Continued from page 9*

## ...ORIGIN OF THE CUSTOM OF...

the introduction we learn that in 1772, two *shelihim* were in Modena, namely Rabbi YomTob Algazi and Rabbi Ya'aqob Hazan, and it is they who taught them about doing the seven *haqafot* on the night of *Simhat Torah*. They not only taught them but they put it into practice and firmly established the custom, as they had known it in Israel. This custom quickly spread to the rest of the communities in Italy and elsewhere. The most important *shaliach* to introduce the custom of *Haqafot* and make sure that it was firmly established in text, format, and song was Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulai (1727-1806) better known as HID”A. He first published his text for the order of the seven *haqafot* in 1786 and then reprinted it again and again until it was being reprinted throughout the world. In fact our text today is that of the HID”A.

The current practice in our Brooklyn Sephardic Community (Syrians, Egyptians, Lebanese, etc.) is to have two to three sets of *haqafot*. It is interesting to note that the custom in Halab was that *Simhat Torah* was celebrated two days, that is on *Shemini 'Asseret* and *Simhat Torah*. They did *Haqafot* on both days, totaling 7 sets of *haqafot*, and in fact that was the custom in Brooklyn at Magen David of 67th Street until at least 1940.

*Tizku Leshanim Rabot Ne'imot VeTobot.*

*Mr. Mosseri is a well-known community member who among other things is highly regarded for his knowledge of hazzanut, Sephardic history, hakhamim, laws, customs, and books.*



# ILEAD Experience

Challenging, Inspiring and Empowering

## THE CHILD IN US

*Ms. Merle Dweck*

When I was seven, I dreamed of being a power ranger. Of having the superpower of invisibility or being able to run as fast as gravity would allow. During recess as I would feel the wind rush through my hair, I would imagine myself in a light blue suit fighting battles. When I was 12 my lens expanded to encompass time travel. I wanted to be able to fix all the mistakes I'd previously made, to feel my body dissolve and reappear in a different era.

Coming into a leadership program carries the expectation of defying reality. Of entering a bubble of people who can help you get through anything. You open yourself to the possibility of friendship. You only look for the good times and your horizon is filled with memories you hope to make. You wait for the moment the jittery feeling of being in Israel goes away but it never does. If it wasn't glamorous, it was educational. If it wasn't educational, you were having the time of your life. If you weren't having the time of your life, just wait; the best is yet to come.

There is nothing extravagantly extraordinary about ILEAD that you have never heard about yet. The 4 AM hikes, the woods as our bathrooms, showers, kitchen, and bedroom. How our counselor's bag got blown up and how a numerous amount of kids would go to the hospital if they had so much as a paper cut. "It was amazing" is what you will hear from every person who is asked, "how was ILEAD?" Don't you ever wonder about the details? Not about one single defining moment but many moments that led to the statement, "it was...amazing."

Picture this: waking up groggily by the person who was chosen to be leader for the day by them either blasting music outside, jumping on you, or timidly and cautiously tapping on your shoulder. The sun just rose and you slur something of no importance, dreading the moment you have to get out

of your bed because the night before your bunk talked until 3 AM. You manage to pull yourself together enough to muster up a feasible expression of happiness and make your way towards prayer. And then breakfast. And then an hour long lecture in which you fight to keep your eyes open because in addition to the conversations until 3 AM with all the girls packed into one bed you had a 5 minute dance party that drained all your energy. But then you appreciate the lecture and smile before you drift into a state of unconsciousness. After the lecture you race to get a seat on the bus. The whole bus ride you're belting out music to a dance off that's happening before your eyes in the aisle of the bus. Suddenly, the bus halts to a stop and you run off hysterically laughing, arms flailing, reaching out to grasp someone's hand to pull them towards the circle in which a couple is taking their wedding photo shoot by the side of the road, that you are randomly crashing right now.

Now, picture something else. You've just undergone a day full of hikes, classes, tours of synagogues, and a get-to-know-each other game in which you're happy you didn't have to dunk your head into a bucket of dirty water and hold your breath like last time. You're bubbling with excitement because the

counselor said they have a surprise for you. You're too tired to do anything else but surprises are rare so you trudge off the bus. And then the surprise is revealed: you get to pretend it's 1947, sneaking around Israel to avoid the British.

These events may not be what you expected, but it gave us something to talk about, mull over, and write in our journals. Together. At 2 AM under the stars by the Lebanon border.

When ILEAD came to a close, I found myself lacking the capability of invisibility; we were on an expedition where being invisible was nonsensical. It didn't matter how fast you could run because one person didn't hold the title of being

***"My mistakes weren't something  
I wished to repair, they were  
something I learned from."***



The ILEAD Corner is a new addition to Qol Ha'Qahal that will provide unique perspectives, insights and stories from our graduates and staff.

“faster” because a hierarchy didn’t exist. I didn’t have to fight battles alone, eat dinner alone, wake up alone, shower alone in my bathing suit, or struggle alone. My mistakes weren’t something I wished to repair, they were something I learned from. You don’t have to be supernatural to be successful. To reach the best version of yourself. I went on ILEAD expecting a miracle-and I came back the witness of many.

I guess I was a power ranger after all. But then again, aren’t we all?

*Miss Dweck is an ILEAD graduate and current senior at the Yeshivah of Flatbush. She enjoys writing and playing soccer.*







# Sephardic History

## NEVER FORGET OUR NOBLE HERITAGE

NUNCA OLVIDES MUESTRA HISTORIA DESTINGUIDA  
נזנכה אולבידיס מואיסטרה איסטוריה דיסטניגידה

*Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman*

### Rise of the Omayyads

Abd ar-Rahman I was able to escape from the Abbasids of Syria and establish the Omayyad Kingdom in Spain in 756. A generation or two earlier a prediction was made to Caliph Hisham, the grandfather of Abd ar-Rahman I that an "Abd ar-Rahman" would one day rule the Omayyad Kingdom in Africa. The prediction was passed on from generation to generation. Around 756, in Kairawan (Tunisia) the governor-general was Abd ar-Rahman Habib al Fihri. He was familiar with the prediction made to Caliph Hisham. Habib asked his Jewish soothsayer to confirm the prediction. The soothsayer did confirm it but added: "Abd ar-Rahman with curls will establish a dynasty over Africa." The governor-general planned to grow curls but the Jewish soothsayer told him not to bother because it was another Abd ar-Rahman. The governor-general then planned to kill Abd ar-Rahman, but the soothsayer warned, "If my prediction is wrong you will be a plain murderer; and if I am correct your efforts will be in vain." Thus Abd ar-Rahman's life was saved and the prediction was to be fulfilled.

The Abbasids and Omayyads of Syria were bitter enemies. The Abbasids hated the Omayyads and vowed to destroy them by every means including trickery and lies. Thus the Abbasids in their effort to remove the Omayyads from power promised them amnesty. But as soon as their conflict was over the Abbasids gathered large numbers of the Omayyads together at Jaffa and killed them all. Abd ar-Rahman was only 20 years of age at the time. During his escape he traveled from Syria to Palestine to Egypt and traveled across North Africa to Morocco. He searched Morocco for Berber relatives of his mother. He wandered for four years and he was able to locate some near the Straits of Gibraltar. From there he was able to look across the straits to Spain and it was at that time that he set his sights on establishing his

kingdom there. He sent emissaries to Cordova in an effort to negotiate some sort of foothold there but was unsuccessful. He was left with no choice but to fight to acquire such a foothold. Abd ar-Rahman crossed into Spain with a force of troops and wherever he went, he gained followers. They joined him in Malaga, Sidonia and Sevilla. In March 756 Abd ar-Rahman entered Sevilla and attacked Cordova from there and conquered it. In the Great Mosque of Cordova he declared himself the ruler of Muslim Spain and thus became Abd ar-Rahman I. He was just 26 years of age and ruled for 32 years (756-788). He was a despot and tyrant but he had a great deal of respect for the non-Muslim Christians and Jews. He used them as intermediaries in negotiations with foreign governments.

The stability he created in Spain attracted much immigration, including large numbers being Jews. He also attracted Berbers who held important military and court positions. Abd ar-Rahman died in 788. He was succeeded by his son Hisham I (788-796). Hisham I continued the Omayyad dynasty for eight years. For the most part they were tranquil times. The exceptions were the disputes between Hisham I and his brothers Sulaiman (governor of Toledo) and Abdullah. To bring peace, Hisham I bribed his brothers so that he would have unhampered control of the dynasty. He was now free to attack the Christians in the north and he did this with cruelty, tears, and blood. Hisham I was religious and encouraged his people to make pilgrimages to Mecca. He was impressed with the Muslim theologian Malik b. Anas and required his people to follow Malik's religious beliefs. Legal cases were decided by religious code. It was a very conservative form of religion and did not tolerate deviation or variance. Neither was it tolerant of other religions. Hisham died in 796 and was succeeded by his son al-Hakam I (796-822), the third Omayyad ruler of Spain. He was to serve 26 years. Al-Hakam I was strong and decisive. He put down revolts in Toledo, Merida and Cordova. He made time to fight the Christians in the north. At times he would personally lead his troops in those battles.

Among the activities of Abd ar-Rahman II in Cordova were the following: he built a shipyard and improved the

naval fleet in Sevilla; he established a mint in Cordova so that he could increase the money supply of his people; and he built many magnificent edifices including city walls, fortresses and mosques. Abd ar-Rahman II even had the wisdom to employ consultants. He envied the pomp and circumstance of the court of the Abbasids in Babylonia (Iraq). There was a famous Jewish musician in Babylonia who was an expert in art and culture. His name was Zirab and he was brought to Cordova to advise the king and court of the latest styles. Religion, of course, was a major consideration during the reign of Abd ar-Rahman II. The Jews tried to avoid conflict by keeping to themselves and trying not to be involved in religious disputes that were taking place. They remained completely loyal to their Muslim rulers.

Relations between Muslims, Christians and the Church were volatile. A Berber by the name of Yahya b. Yahya was a devout Muslim and of the greatest influence over Abd ar-Rahman II. The king followed his every dictate. Yahya was not a zealot but he was strict. He turned the king against the Christians, trying to get them out of office to be replaced by Muslims. Cordova was becoming a major Muslim center with large numbers of Muslim theologians coming there to study and be influenced. The Christians resented this anti-Christian policy and became insubordinate and more and more began to oppose Muslim rule. There were religious disruptions in Toledo and Merida. The Christians even called upon the French emperor Louis the Pious and the King of Asturias for help.

Abd ar-Rahman II died in 852. After his death there was religious chaos in Spain. But it was during the life of Abd ar-Rahman II that the seeds of this chaos were planted. Interestingly the seeds came from outside of Spain. The seed came from Germany and France. That seed was Bodo, a German who lived in the first half of the ninth century. He came from a noble family in south Germany but he lived in the land of the Franks (France) across the Rhine River. He had been given a very good education and became a priest in the court of King Louis the Pious of France. Bodo was concerned that men of learning differed so much from one

another in their beliefs. He was confused and disappointed. He came into contact with many Jews while he was in the court of King Louis the Pious. They were usually wealthy men of commerce. He would hold many religious discussions with these people and found that he received clearer answers to his religious questions. He was troubled by the concept of "trinity" (father, son and holy ghost) as well as the nature of Jesus (being both man and G-d at the same time). In 837 Bodo received the emperor's permission to visit the Pope in Rome. For some reason he never got to Rome but instead to Muslim Spain. The following year, 838, at about Passover/Easter time he converted to Judaism in Saragossa. He was circumcised and changed his name from Bodo to Eliezer. His servants would not convert so he sold them into slavery.

He took a Jewish wife. He joined the Arab army. He studied Hebrew and dedicated most of his time to acquiring knowledge of the tenets of Israel, biblical commentaries and the laws.

French emperor Louis the Pious was shocked when he learned of this. Eliezer became a typical voluntary convert, an ardent believer. Both orally and in writing Eliezer made war on the Christians. He emphasized that Jesus was not the Messiah and that the Messiah was due to arrive soon. The Christians in Muslim Spain became alarmed that a prominent priest should convert. They feared the negative influence he might have on their religion. A debate that lasted for ten years developed between

Eliezer and Paulus Alvaro, a leader of the Christians in Cordova. Paulus' family had been Jews in the time of the Visigoths. At the time they had converted to Catholicism. The family was wealthy and learned. The Christians and Jews of Muslim Spain followed this debate very closely from 837 to 847.



*Mr. Goldman is a retired Chemical Engineer who is a member of Congregations Beth Torah and Kol Israel. From 1978 through 1992 he was the Editor of the Beth Torah Bulletin. He was Secretary of Beth Torah from 1980 through 1995 and is currently the Editor of the Beth Torah Calendar.*



## The Sephardic Community Alliance

# Women's Learning Program

Fall

Start date:  
Wednesday, October 7

2015

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<b>10:30-11:45</b> Tehillim <b>Anne Savdie</b>	<b>10:30-11:45</b> Midrash <b>Esther Hidary</b>	<b>10:30-11:45</b> Jewish History <b>Rabbi H. Ovadia</b> via Video Link	<b>10:30-11:45</b> Rambam <b>Rabbi Y. Bitton</b>
Allegra Franco School of Education Leadership at Congregation Beth Torah*			
<b>11:00-12:30</b> Torah <b>Vivien Hidary</b>	<b>12:00-1:30</b> Yirmiyahu <b>Gitta Neufeld</b>	<b>12:00-1:30</b> <b>Special Events</b> <b>(Rosh Hodesh)</b>	 <p><b>ROSH HODESH SERIES: Special Guest Speakers Monthly</b></p>
at Bnei Yitzhak**	Allegra Franco at Beth Torah*	To Be Announced	

### Tentative Rosh Hodesh Series Dates

October 14  
November 11  
December 9  
January 13  
February 10  
March 9  
April 13  
May 11

\*Congregation Beth Torah  
1061 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn

Check the SCA Website and Social Media for Updates  
[www.SephardicCommunityAlliance.org](http://www.SephardicCommunityAlliance.org)    @SCA\_Updates

\*\*Bnei Yitzhak:  
730 Ave S, Brooklyn



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