



QOL HA'QAHAL קול הקהלה

SPONSORED BY THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

10/09/14 Sukkot Edition 5775

*Dedicated in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Stanely and Cookie Chera
By their Children and Grandchildren*

READING AGAIN, READING ANEW.

By Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Every year, we embark again in the adventure of rereading our Torah. This repetitive cycle affords us the opportunity to, each time, try to encounter in the Torah new meaning and novelties, *hiddushim*. The Torah is like a deep sea, filled with immense treasures of wisdom. But this infinite reservoir of meaning lies completely hidden, until one dares to dive inside the waters. And even when accepting the challenge, most of us are only able to explore this ocean's surface, and collect some pretty seashells from the shore. Isaac Newton expressed a similar feeling when confronting the awesomeness of the world: "To myself, I am only a child playing on the beach, while vast oceans of truth lie undiscovered before me."

The Torah is God's Book—the work of an Author with infinite Wisdom—and, as such, the Book too is infinitely wise. The same God who gave us the Torah at *Har Sinai* also wrote a second book, the cosmos. Some individuals dedicate their lives to study the world; scientists, astronomers and biologists observe the cosmos and try to articulate the best explanation they are capable of coming up with, given their present knowledge and the tools at their disposals, like the telescope or the microscope. However comprehensive the scientific theory these individuals come up with, it will still always be possible for humans to learn things we didn't before know about the world, to look farther into the cosmos or more closely into the mysterious world of subatomic particles. Similarly, each and every individual and each and every generation that grapples with the words of the Torah is bound to find new meanings in God's infinite Book.

It is true that our knowledge of Torah, our intelligence, and

“The Torah is God’s Book—the work of an Author with infinite Wisdom—and, as such, the Book too is infinitely wise.”

cognitive abilities pale in comparison with that of the Rabbis of the *Talmud*. Intellectually, they were giants and we are dwarfs.

We would never be able to see as far as those giants saw – except when we stand on their shoulders. Then, we can see as far, or farther.

Sometimes, new discoveries in one of God's two books enable us to understand the other book better. Advances in science help us comprehend the Torah more deeply, and new Torah *hiddushim* color anew some aspects of our perception of the physical world. Consider the following: Four thousand years ago, God blessed our forefather Abraham, assuring him that his descendants would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the shore of the sea and as the stars in the sky. This seem-

Our Mission

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

Contents

<i>Reading Again, Reading Anew: Rabbi Yosef Bitton</i>	1
<i>Sephardic History: Mr. Murray J. Mizrahi</i>	2
<i>Maqam of the Week: David Betesh DDS</i>	3
<i>Student Article: Sukkot, The Holiday of Exile: Mr. David Kassin</i> ..	3
<i>Three Festivals - Three Relationships: R. Yaakov Savdie</i>	4
<i>Bringing Judaism to the Workplace: Mr. Louis Shamie</i>	6
<i>Origin of the custom of Haqafot: Mr. Joseph Mosseri</i>	7
<i>Creation and Modern Science: Prof. Nathan Aviezer</i>	9
<i>Israel: Anything but Normal: Rabbi Haim Ovadia</i>	10
<i>Community Focus: Yehoshua--Finishing What Moshe Started:</i> <i>Mrs. Doris Cohen and Mr. Jesse Salem</i>	13
<i>Shabbat-Table Talks: Rabbi Ralph Tawil</i>	14
<i>In appreciation of the teachers of the SCA</i>	18
<i>Birthright</i>	20

Continued on page 16

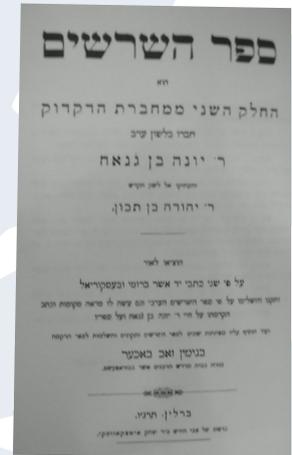


Sephardic History

RABBI YONAH IBN JANAH جناح, ابو الوليد مروان ابن

By Mr. Murray J. Mizrahi

Rabbi Yonah ibn Janah¹ (ca. 985-1050) was born in Cordoba, Spain and is considered one of the most important *Rishonim*² for his contribution to the Hebrew language. He studied at the prestigious *yeshibah* of Lucena under Rabbi Isaac ibn Saul and Rabbi Isaac ibn Gikatilla. After several years of study he returned to Cordoba and took up the profession of medicine, and was a practicing physician. Ibn Janah is known to have written a medical text book which is no longer extant. In 1012 as extreme Muslim Berbers (an ethnic group for which the English term ‘barbarian’ originates) besieged the city of Cordoba, Rabbi ibn Janah – along with many of the Jewish community – fled. Eventually, he settled in Saragossa where he formed a study group and began the bulk of his scholarly work in the field of Hebrew Grammar.



The title page of Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janah's *Sefer Hashorashim*, translated into Hebrew by Yehudah Ibn Tibbon. Published in Berlin 1897

The works of the medieval Jewish Grammarians brought Hebrew language, literature, poetry, culture back to life. Prior to this period, Aramaic and Arabic were the primary languages in which Jewish works were written by Jews residing in the Middle East, North Africa, and Muslim Spain³. Consider the *Babylonian Talmud* written in Aramaic or Maimonide's *Moreh Nebuchim* written in Arabic. In fact even ibn Janah's own works were written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew long after his death by Yehudah ben Shaul ibn Tibbon (1120-1190).

The significance of ibn Janah's works and other Hebrew grammarians is of extreme importance. As a nation in Diaspora, Language was, and is, an essential characteristic that preserved and continues to preserve Judaism; it helped define the Jewish people not as just a religion but as a nation as well. A language is the gateway for many other characteristics of national identity such as poetry, song and literature, which were subsequently developed. Ibn Janah therefore remains one of the important links in a long chain that have helped the Jewish nation thrive into modern times.

Ibn Janah is considered the “Greatest Hebrew philologist of the Middle Ages”⁴ writing dictionaries, guides and linguistic theory of the Hebrew language. Before writing his books on Hebrew grammar ibn Janah tells the reader that he re-read the *Tanakh* no less than eight times to become fully acquainted with the ancient language.

Many of the sage's works were built and expanded upon the works of his predecessor Yehudah ben David Hayyuj (ca. 945-1000⁵, Morocco and Spain, mid-late tenth century). Ibn Janah's first major work was titled *Kitab al-Mustalhaq* (Heb. *Sefer haHassagah*), a critique of Hayyuj's work, that helped codify and clarify the three letter *shoresh* (root word) system. This work caused many waves with some of ibn Janah's contemporary scholars of Spain such as Shemuel Hanagid. This controversy was the subject of many subsequent works in which the Ibn Janah provided a rebuttal to his critics. After several round of challenges, proofs and refutations ibn Janah emerged vindicated and respected as the foremost authority of Hebrew language in his era.

“As a nation in Diaspora, Language was, and is, an essential characteristic that preserved and continues to preserve Judaism; it helped define the Jewish people not as just a religion but as a nation as well.”

His work titled *Kitab al-Taqrub wa al-Tashil* (Heb. *Iggeret haKeruv ve-haYishur*) was intended as a grammatical guide to aid students with only a minimal understanding of the Hebrew language.

His last book to be published, *Kitab al-Tanaqih* (Heb. *Sefer ha-Diqduq*), is considered his most important contribution to the development of the Hebrew language. This comprehensive work contained two sections: the first entitled *Kitab al-Luma* (Heb. *Sefer ha-Rikmah*) which deals with the grammatical rules of the Hebrew language, and the latter *Kitab al-Usul* (Heb. *Sefer ha-Shorashim*) provides a complete Hebrew dictionary. Ibn Janah's thoroughness and recognized authority made his *Sefer ha-Diqduq* the textbook by which all *hachamim*, scholars and even Karaites followed. In the subsequent centuries we see the likes of R' Abraham ibn Daud, R' David ibn Tibbon, R' Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides repeatedly quoting *Sefer ha-Diqduq* as the authority on Hebrew language. These sages along with many others use Ibn Janah as a foundation to prove grammar based biblical interpretations. Some of these scholars such as R' Abraham ibn Ezra and R' David Qimhi (Radaq) built upon Ibn Janah's work in their own grammar works, further developing the Hebrew language.

¹He was known by his Arabic name Abu al-Walid Merwan ibn Janah and is still searchable in Amazon with this name

²The rabbinical leaders that lived from the 11th-15th centuries.

³During the early middle ages over 90% of Jews worldwide lived in these areas.

⁴"IBN JANAH, ABU AL-WALID MERWAN." *Jewish Encyclopedia*. ed. 1906. Print.

⁵Arabic: أبو زكريا يحيى بن داود حيوج. Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Dawud.

Mr. Murray Mizrachi is on the Board of the SCA and the Director of the SCA-OU Birthright Trip.

STUDENT ARTICLE: SUKKOT, THE HOLIDAY OF EXILE

By Mr. David Kassin

The central *misvah* of the holiday of *Sukkot* is eating our meals and sleeping in the *sukkah*. The question is why? What is the significance of this *misvah*? Why must we leave our homes and spend eight days "exiled"¹ in a makeshift shack?

Maran, Rabbi Yosef Karo, explains in the *Shulhan Aruch*, that the reason why we sit in *sukkot* is to commemorate the days that *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert and were surrounded and protected by the miraculous *annanei hakavod* (clouds of glory). Another more symbolic reason for why we sit in the *sukkah* is brought down by Rabbi Yonatan Eybeshuetz in his book *Ya'arot Devash* (Lvov, 1798). He explains in the name of *Maran* that the normal way for a *sukkah* to be built is for the stars to be visible through the *sekhach*. Although this law is not an obligation, a lesson can be learned from it. While one is sitting in the *sukkah*, his gaze will shift upwards and he will see the Heavens. His thoughts of Heaven will engender thoughts of the Creator.

On the holiday of *Sukkot*, we leave the luxuries of our homes and move into temporary dwellings. All year round, as we are going about our everyday lives, we fail to think about our responsibilities to the Creator. By leaving our homes, and changing our everyday routines, we are given a unique opportunity to reflect upon and renew our relationship with *Bore Olam*. Our "exile", which allows us to recognize our Creator, is similar in fashion to the way that our forefathers lived all year round. *Abraham*, *Yishak*, and *Ya'akov* did not settle down in permanent dwellings. They chose instead to live in tents, and they would change their location based on the circumstances. The *Abot* saw the bigger picture. They realized that their earthly existence was only temporary and that their true home was in *'Olam Habah* (the world to come). It is incumbent upon us, their children, to follow in their footsteps. We must take advantage of *Sukkot* while we spend eight days in "exile" to renew our faith in the Creator, and let it propel us throughout the year.

¹*Ya'arot Devash* Volume 1, Section 6

Mr. David Kassin is currently studying in the Sephardic Rabbinical College

MAQAM OF THE WEEK

Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com

by David Betesh DDS

Bereshit

For *Shabbat Bereshit* (Genesis 1:1-6:8), *Maqam Rast* (Arabic for 'head'), is applied to the prayers according to all Syrian sources, because we are beginning a new *Humash*. Similarly, this *maqam* is used for the beginnings ('heads') of the other *Humashim* (i.e. *Shemot*, *Vayiqra*, *Bemidbar*, but NOT *Debarim*) as well as the Shabbat Afternoon services due to the reading of new *perasha* of the upcoming week. In the vast majority of Syrian pizmonim manuscripts, *Rast* is typically the first *maqam* encountered in the book. In addition, the word *Rast* or *Rosh* is alluded to with the word "beReShiT." **HAZZANUT** (Hazzan Moshe Ashear): *Nishmat: Hasdakh Qadam Al Kol Adam* (page 145), *Semehim: Roni Simhi Sahali* (page 124), *Pizmon Sefer Torah: Miyamim Yamima* (page 125). **ALIYOT**: Each day of the Creation in Chapter 1 gets its own *aliyah*, and then extra stops are added. **MISHMARA**: *Bereshit*, *Joshua 1-11*, *Psalms 1-11*, *Mishnah Hagiqah* (Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com).



Guest Articles

THREE FESTIVALS - THREE RELATIONSHIPS

By: R. Yaakob Savdie

On each of the *Shalosh Regalim* (3 festivals: *Pesah*, *Shabuot* and *Sukkot*) every male is obligated to ascend to Yerushalayim in order to ‘appear in front of God’ in the *Bet Hamikdash*. Each of the following *pesukim* delineate that obligation. However, there are slight nuances in the description of God.

“שָׁלַשׁ פְּעָמִים בְּשָׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָה אֶל פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹן ה’”
(שמות כג:יז)

“שָׁלַשׁ פְּעָמִים בְּשָׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָה אֶת פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹן ה’ אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל”
(שמות לד:כג)

“שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בְּשָׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָה אֶת פְּנֵי ה’ אֱ-לֹהֵיךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בְּחַג הַמִּצּוֹת וּבְחַג הַשְּׁבִעוֹת וּבְחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת וְלֹא יִרְאֶה אֶת פְּנֵי הַרְיָקִים”
(דברים טז:טז)

The first verse states: “...you shall appear in front of the **master God**.”

The second states: “...you shall appear in front of the **master God, Lord of Israel**.”

The third states: “...you shall appear in front of the **master God your Lord**.”

What is the meaning of these nuances?

Rabbi Shemuel Ibn Sid¹ explains that these nuances represent three stages in the development of *Am Yisrael* in the desert. The first verse is speaking of the time when *Am Yisrael* received the Torah. At that time, the nation was considered righteous and upright. Hence the language in the *pasuk* is “**the master God**” – just as a master is proud of his servants, so too *Hashem* was proud of each member of his nation. The second verse comes after *Am Yisrael* committed the sin of the Golden Calf. Since the people fell to such a low level, *Hashem* was no longer “proud” of each individual. Hence his name is only proclaimed upon the nation as a whole, as it states “**master God, Lord of Israel**”. The third verse is from *Sefer Debarim*, spoken by *Moshe* to the generation who were about to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. They were on a higher level than their predecessors. They didn’t take part in the sin of the Golden Calf and they spent many years studying Torah with *Moshe Rabenu*. Each individual had special merit and was worthy of having God’s name called upon them, as it states “**master God your Lord**”

**“Abraham Abinu
proclaimed and
preached that God in
fact does watch over
the world as a whole.”**

Alternatively Rabbi Meir Shapira² explains that these nuances represent the development of the understanding of God’s relationship with this world. The *Rambam* states that until the time of Abraham, people believed that after God created heaven and earth, he had no further involvement in this world (earth). *Abraham Abinu* proclaimed and preached that God in fact does watch over the world as a whole. The Torah tells us that while he was in *Eress Kena’an* “he called out in the name of God “*El Olam*” – “*The GOD of the world*”. (*Hilchot Aboda Zara* 1:1). As well, the *Gemara* states that Abraham was the first to call GOD “*Adon*” - “**Master**.” He was the first to educate the people on

earth about this concept. *Ya'akov Abinu* continued this teaching and revealed the concept that God has special *hashgaha* (“providence”) over *Am Yisrael*. Hence the Torah states that he called God, “**the Lord of Yisrael**”. At *Har Sinai*, God proclaimed “I am God your Lord (*Shemot 20:2*)”. With this statement God revealed the concept of *hashgaha peratit*- that he watches over each and every individual of *Am Yisrael*.

The *Shalosh Regalim* allude to each of these concepts.

Sukkot is a universal holiday. During the course of the holiday a total of seventy bulls were offered in the Holy Temple, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world. Hence, the first verse describes God as the “**Master**”, denoting his *hashgaha* over the entire world.

On **Pesah** we celebrate the period in history when God displayed his special *hashgaha* (“providence”) over *Am Yisrael*. Hence, the second verse describes God as the “**Lord of Israel**”, denoting his special relationship with us.

On **Shabuot** we celebrate “*Mattan Torah*” (the giving of the Torah), during which we learned of God’s *hashgaha peratit* for each member of *Am Yisrael*. Therefore, the third verse describes God as “**your Lord**”, denoting the special relationship he has with each one of us.

The holiday of *Sukkot* is followed by *Shemini Asseret* and *Simhat Torah*.

Shemini Asseret is a holiday that reinforces the unique and close relationship God has with *Am Yisrael*. This idea is expressed in a *Midrash*³. The *Midrash* gives a *mashal* of a king who has a large banquet with an abundance of food for the entire royal court. Following the banquet he turns to his closest friend and asks his friend to stay an additional day. He states that food is irrelevant; the purpose of the day is simply to spend time with him. So too, after *Sukkot* which corresponds to the nations, God requests that we celebrate an additional holiday. The *korban* (the number of bulls brought) is inconsequential; the purpose of the holiday is for *Am Yisrael* to intensify their connection with God.

Simhat Torah is a holiday that reinforces the special relationship God has with each individual. Every single member of *Am Yisrael* has “his portion” of Torah (his innovations in Torah that are relevant to his soul). Hence we pray to God “*Sim Helkenu Beto-rahtakh*” – “Give us our portion in your Torah.” This Torah is what connects us to God. On *Simhat Torah* we celebrate the portions of Torah each of us merited to study and innovate throughout the year.

The period from *Sukkot* until *Simhat Torah* allows us we to experience and feel God’s *hashgaha* on all three levels.
Ashrenu Ma Tob Helkenu – How fortunate are we!

¹A great Rabbi, Posek and Dayan who lived in Egypt and Yerushalayim in the 16th-17th Century. He did great deeds to help the Jews of the communities he lived in. His writings laid unpublished for hundreds of years. A voluminous work of derashot entitled “*Ner Hashem*” was recently published by Cong. Ahava Ve’ Ahva. He was the great-grandson of the famed R. Shemuel Ibn Sid who lived in Castalia, Spain & moved to Egypt during the expulsion. *Zechutam Yagen Alenu*

²A prominent Hasidic rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva (1887–1933) also known as the Lubliner Rav. He is noted for his promotion of the Daf Yomi study program in 1923, and establishing the *Hachmei Lublin Yeshiva* in 1930.

³*Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Pinhas 15*. Also quoted briefly by Rashi on *Vayiqra 23:36*.

Rabbi Savdie has served as a rabbi at Cong. Ahava Ve Ahva of Ocean Parkway since 1999. He is also a teacher at Magen David Yeshivah High School, where he currently serves as Chairman of the Halakha Department.

BRINGING JUDAISM TO THE WORKPLACE

Mr. Louis Shamie

When we think of religion, we tend to think of the synagogue, or maybe the home. We serve God through prayer and observance, we commit ourselves and our families to the strictures of kashrut and the holiness of the Jewish calendar. And yet, Judaism has more to tell us than which foods we must not eat or on which days we must not work. On those vast majority of days that we do work, the way we conduct our business is of vital importance. Who we are in the workplace is as much a part of our commitment to Torah as who we are in the sanctuary.

Careers are empowering. We serve important roles among friends and family, but those circles are limited. In an advanced economy, a person's influence can be far greater than his social circle. A manager may employ hundreds of workers and serve millions of customers. A landlord's decisions may affect the lives of thousands of tenants. A mid-level buyer for a large retail chain can make or break the fortunes of a handful of companies. And the decision of an engineer at a car company to disclose a design flaw can save dozens of lives.

The Torah commands us to keep consistent weights and measures¹ in very elaborate language, emphasizing the supreme importance of straight dealing. If a butcher uses a skewed scale to sell nine tenths of a pound of meat as a full pound, he directly violates this law. However, we can take the spirit of this law further. What if instead of mislabeling the meat's weight, the butcher misrepresents the cut of meat, labeling chuck as filet mignon? What if a used car salesman fiddles with an odometer to show less mileage, or a home owner hides flood damage from prospective purchasers? Adam Sandler movies notwithstanding, selling off-brand electronics as having "Sony guts" is not a very Jewish thing to do.

The Torah spoke of a situation where a merchant would use one weight for purchasing (weighing a little more than a pound) and one for selling (weighing slightly less), to take advantage of everyone he did business with. The true modern equivalent may be the practice of keeping multiple sets of accounting books. A business owner may show an inflated

accounting of his earnings to the bank to secure a loan, and then show a deflated set of books to the IRS or to his business partners to deprive them of their rightful share of profits.

That's right, cheating the IRS is theft – the kind of theft that is easy to shrug off, because the immediate victim is faceless. A retailer may start a fire to claim insurance money. A doctor may order unnecessary tests to pad a bill. A contractor may pay his employees "off the books." This crooked activity effectively steals from all of us who pay taxes or insurance bills. Money must come from somewhere, and if you take more than your legal share, it means someone else has less.

The Torah forbids placing a stumbling block before a blind person.² This idiom clearly applies more generally to taking advantage of someone's naiveté, to their detriment. Sneaking a clause into the fine print of a legal document, to which you expect the other party to be "blind," is just a more sophisticated version of this despicable practice. Similarly, if you know of a product defect that may cause someone harm, it is not only

a grave sin to continue selling that product, but you have an obligation to inform anyone who has already purchased the product.

The Torah demands that we respect the dignity of all people, high or low. If a lender takes a poor man's garment as collateral³, he must return it at night so that the borrower will not sleep in the cold.

This necessary care and consideration should speak to real estate owners. A landlord has great responsibility for the lives of his tenants; failing to provide heat or sanitary conditions degrades the humanity of those who depend on him. Likewise, giving proper notice of rent increases or evictions can help ease the lives of people who may be living on the margin.

An employer has enormous influence over his employees. The Torah cautions against delaying payment or otherwise taking advantage of a hired worker. Making sure payroll goes out on time is hugely important. Follow Hillel's take on loving your fellow – what is hateful to you, do not perpetrate on others⁴. If you can imagine yourself depending on that paycheck to feed a family, you know just how painful any delay

“Living a straight life is what God wants of us, and this way of living must go deep into our personalities and the culture of our families, businesses, and communities.”

can be. The employer should take care not to abuse employees in other ways. Don't make empty promises to motivate workers if you don't intend to follow through on them. Don't fire someone the day before he expects a bonus. Don't work people overtime without compensation.

Another variation on loving your fellow as your self is the Biblical command to have the same regard another's property as one would have for his own.⁵ While this ideal is hard to keep in its fullest, there are narrow situations where this must be applied. A money manager has a responsibility to manage her client's assets to maximize returns, not her own commissions. Agents and brokers are expected to get the best deal in buying or selling for their clients, not direct business to their own friends or family. Workers have responsibility to their employers as well. To shirk responsibilities is to cheat your employer - you are expected to work diligently for that paycheck. Often an employee will have the discretion to help or hurt a company's suppliers or customers, and can leverage this power for personal benefit. This can be as simple as directing the employer's business to a lower quality vendor who doles out football tickets, or involve taking cash bribes from a customer in return for special treatment. Either way, perverting your employer's interests for personal enrichment is a betrayal of trust. Claiming the employer is already rich doesn't justify taking what is his.

Most people realize that stealing a laptop from their company is wrong, but have little hesitation about stealing far more valuable intellectual property. Businesses run on information – client lists, supplier information, trade secrets, internal research – and by law, much of this information is consid-

ered company property. The employee who saves off key documents to a flash drive before leaving to start a competing business is stealing on a far greater scale than the one who lifts an iPad.

I have only scratched the surface of the rigorous ethical conduct that Judaism insists on. There are a million ways to go wrong. Cheating, stealing, and cutting corners are all very tempting. Beyond the financial gain, there is a thrill in getting away with something, a feeling of superiority at being smarter or more brazen than the dupes who fell for the fraud. But if we brag at the dinner table over the latest ingenious scam, or respect the tycoon who made his money crookedly, we perpetuate an immoral way of life, a society that values deceit over honesty. Beyond all the specific situations, there is the overriding injunction that we must “do what is straight (*yashar*) and good in the eyes of God”. Living a straight life is what God wants of us, and this way of living must go deep into our personalities and the culture of our families, businesses, and communities. This way, we can be living examples to our fellow Jews and the world at large of the beauty of the Torah.

Louis J. Shamie is a partner at Zimmer Partners, an investment firm.

¹See Deuteronomy 25:15: “You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures.” See further Maimonides, *Mishne Torah, Laws of Theft* 7:3.

²Leviticus 19:14: “You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am Hashem.”

³Exodus 22:25 “If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets.”

⁴See further *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 31a.

⁵Leviticus 19:18: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am Hashem.”

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”I. From *Safed*, the custom of *Haqafot* spread to the entire Jewish world.

“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”I 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”I were copied from the manuscript and published elsewhere. The earliest printed source we have for the custom of HaAR”I 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”I by quoting not from *Sha`ar HaKavanot*, but from *Nagid Oumssaveh*.

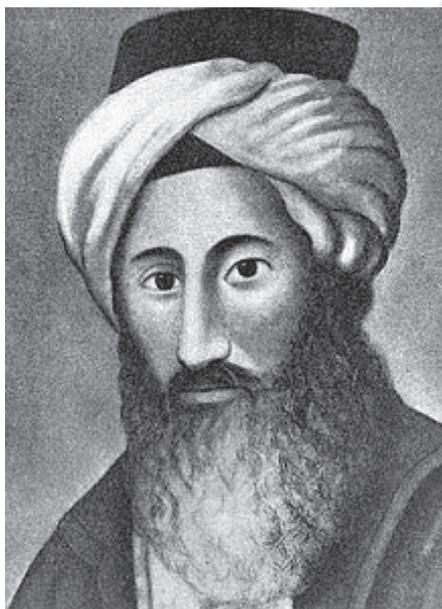
Rabbi Haim Vital never gave us a reason for the seven haqafot but we first find the reasoning behind it in *Tour Bareqet* (Amsterdam 1654) by the prize student of Rabbi Haim Vital, Rabbi Haim HaKohen¹. Rabbi HaKohen tells us that the 7 haqafot on *Simhat Torah* are parallel to those on *Hosh`ana Rabah* 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”I.

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 Jew-

ish community of Modena, Italy published the order of *Simhat Torah Haqafot* in Mantua in 1783. From 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 *shaliah* 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.



Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulai
(1727-1806)

¹Rabbi 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

Mr. Mosseri is a noted expert on Sephardic history, culture, and customs.

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.

CREATION AND MODERN SCIENCE

Prof. Nathan Aviezer

The harmony between the biblical account of the origin and development of the universe and many new scientific discoveries has recently become a subject of interest to many scientists. A single example suffices to make the point. The Bible begins with the famous words, “In the beginning God created...,” from which it follows that the universe was created *ex nihilo*. This is also the position taken by modern science.

For over two decades “creation” has been commonly used by cosmologists to describe the beginning of the universe. The Big Bang theory maintains that the universe was indeed created out of nothing. Creation has essentially become a scientific fact. It is instructive to quote several first class cosmologists on the subject (for references, see my book, *In the Beginning* [Tel Aviv, 1994], pp. 14-15):

Nobel laureate Paul Dirac, from Cambridge University, a leading physicist of the twentieth century, wrote, “It seems certain that there was a definite time of creation.”

Prof. Allan Guth, an important cosmologist, wrote, “The instant of creation remains unexplained.”

Prof. Joseph Silk, from the University of California, began his new book on modern cosmology, *The Big Bang*, with the words, “The big bang is the modern version of the creation of the universe.”

Prof. Steven Hawking, of Cambridge University, a highly reputed cosmologist, wrote, “The actual point of creation lies outside the scope of presently known laws of physics.”

The titles of recently-published books and articles also indicate this development. Two scientific works on cosmology, published in the eighties, were entitled *The Moment of Creation* and *The Creation*, and an article recently published in Physics Letters carried the title “*Creation of the Universe from Nothing*.”

All these citations clearly show that the term “creation” has left the private preserve of biblical scholars and has become part of the scientific lexicon. There can no longer be any meaningful scientific discussion of cosmology where creation does not play a central role.

What essentially was created at the inception of the universe? Scientists have discovered that the universe began with the sudden and inexplicable appearance of a vast explosion of light, called by cosmologists the “primeval fireball,” but more popularly known as the “big bang.” This we see as the scientific correlation to Scripture’s “God said: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The remains of the primeval fireball were discovered in 1965 by two American scientists, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, winning them the Nobel prize in physics in 1978.

We conclude with a few words on chronology. How long did the cosmic events having to do with the creation of the universe take? Surprisingly, only a few minutes. This fact has been stressed by Prof. Steven Weinberg, Harvard Nobel laureate, who decided to call his book on modern cosmology *The First Three Minutes*. However it takes Weinberg 151 pages to describe the momentous cosmological changes that took place in *a mere three minutes*.

The correlation between modern science and the account of creation given in Genesis is, in my opinion, quite striking in all areas: the emergence of the solar system, the ice age, the mysterious origin of life, the sudden appearance of the animal world and the inexplicable appearance of modern man. To see this, the reader has but to refer to the relevant discussions in my aforementioned book.

“How great are Your works, O Lord, how very profound Your designs!” (Ps. 92:6)

Professor Aviezer is a Professor of Physics and former Chairman of the Physics Department of Bar-Ilan University.



Israel Spotlight

ISRAEL – ANYTHING BUT NORMAL

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

On the night the first rockets were launched towards Israel, we had just come back to Tel Aviv after spending a week in the North of the country. My wife, her mother and our children went upstairs, and I stayed behind to bring the luggage, when sirens sounded and explosions were heard and seen in the skies above, at a distance of roughly ten miles from the airport. I left the bags in the car and hurried inside to take shelter in the building, only to find an elderly woman standing by the elevator, trembling. I tried to calm her and suggest that we go into the stairway but she refused, saying that it would be more dangerous over there. Thankfully, it was a short attack and I was able to gather my belongings and go inside, where I learned of what had transpired while I was outside. My mother-in-law, it turns out, has a protected area in her apartment, but she took her time in entering and making sure that everyone removes their shoes first. My daughter, meanwhile, couldn't understand how her grandmother and mother, not usually known for nerves of steel, can stay relatively calm. She was also deeply shocked to think that humans are capable of sheer evil such as was displayed with the rocket attacks. This was just the beginning. Although we decided not to give in to terror, we had to avoid certain areas and certain activities, relocating eventually to Jerusalem and not being able to see our family who lives in the south of the country. We left Israel on July 22nd, having spent two weeks under fire in a relatively safe place (not counting riots in Jerusalem or the rocket attack on Ben Gurion Airport which forced us to disembark after boarding). We counted every rocket and siren and prayed for those close to the border, with pursed lips and burning hearts followed the horrific death toll this cowardly war took on our bravest and finest.

In order to illustrate what the war meant for Israelis, I suggest that the reader take our experience, our discomfort, upheaval and anxiety, take the minutes lived by five people

over two weeks, multiply it by a million and a half, extend it over six weeks, and amplify them to the intensity felt by the children, women, and men, among them many octogenarians who survived the Holocaust, for whom Israel is the only place they call home. You might get a glimpse of what it means to be an Israeli. You will probably understand me when I say that when we landed at JFK, the difference between what we left behind and what we came back into was so stark, that I felt like an alien stepping out of his flying saucer to contemplate unknown landscapes. Even Brooklyn, with its infamous road-raged and red-light oblivious drivers seemed like a quiet, private reading room at the Library of Congress compared with the tension and uncertainty which were permeating the Israeli psyche.

I was nothing short of flabbergasted when a couple of days later, at a community function, an acquaintance welcomed me with a cheerful question:

“What other country was able to build, while being singled out and attacked, one of the most sophisticated and powerful armies in the world?”

me with a cheerful question: “So how’s Israel, is everything *normal*?” He apparently thought that computerized Iron Dome posts are taking care of Hamas’ missiles, the army loiters at the border with Gaza, using its artillery

from time to time, and Israeli citizens are just going about their daily routine, hitting the gym, sending their kids to camp and tanning at the beach. To my astonishment, in the weeks that followed I found out that he was not alone in his ignorant bliss, but that there is an abysmal gap between the way Jews and Americans perceive Israeli and the genuine reality. I spoke to a young man who rallied for Israel but admitted he has no answers to the arguments of fellow pro-Palestinian students, and I met many others who had no idea what the Oslo accords were, what is the strategic importance of *Yehudah* and *Shomron* (Judea and Samaria) or simply what it means to live in Israel and hold the fort for tourists to come waltzing in at times of peace.

I briefly described to him the cities in the south which stopped functioning, the kids who were traumatized and are still suffering from PTSD, the businesses which were crippled and the many bereaved families who were mourning their loved ones. I told them that after we boarded the plane on

our way back, we were asked to get off and wait in the terminal while Israel's international airport came under rocket attack. It is true that as we left the aircraft we passed by the captains and co-pilots who reassured us with their steady gaze that things are under control, causing us to feel tremendous respect for them and pride in the IDF fighter-jet pilots who sit at El-al's cockpit, but is it normal for a sovereign country to have its airport shut down completely because of terrorism? Do we not remember the panic, terror and frustration felt here on 9/11 as all air traffic was suspended?

So, to finally address my friend's question: Israel is not normal. As a matter of fact, nothing about Israel was ever normal. What is normal about a country which has been under attack even before its inception? Yet our country is able to defeat the armies of its hostile neighbors which were aided by international forces, including Russia and Qatar. What other country was able to build while being singled out and attacked, one of the most sophisticated and powerful armies in the world? To develop its own tank, missiles, airplane, satellite, and to top it all – the Iron Dome? This all completed against all odds in one fifth of the time and one tenth of the cost it would take another nation to do so. Any other nation with Israel's military prowess and history of aggression towards it would have gone on expansion wars, and examples abound, but instead it offered its neighbors peace. Again and again, paying for that precious peace with territories for which its finest soldiers sacrificed their lives.

In a normal country a man such as Menahem Begin, whom the international media hated with a passion and dubbed a terrorist for his role in the underground struggle against the British mandate, would never have been able to orchestrate the peace agreement with Egypt and let go of the vast Sinai desert, but that is exactly what he did. No normal country would have negotiated with terror leaders with blood on their hands like Israel did, because Israel seeks peace and not war.

The famed IDF is not an army of professionals, but rather an army of young boys and girls who must serve their country right after high school. Out of these young high school graduates who usually serve three years, only a small percentage chooses an army career. The rest will go to college or start working, becoming cab drivers and professors, entrepreneurs and teachers, lawyers, doctors and construction workers. Unlike the United States of America, where Memorial Day is a day of shopping and BBQ and the majority of the people have

never seen or known a soldier, in Israel everybody is a soldier or a relative of one. Memorial Day is a day of national mourning and solemnity. The soldiers in Israel are neither professionals nor mercenaries – they are beloved sons, brothers, fiancés, husbands, and fathers.

In one very telling anecdote, an Israeli entrepreneur was on the phone with his American investors when they heard background noises which sounded like gun shots. They asked the Israeli to turn off the video game but he explained that he is doing his reserve service as a naval officer and his ship had just got into a gun fight with a terrorist boat. How is it conceivable that amidst all these difficulties and the repeated onslaughts from our enemies, Tel Aviv has managed to become one of the Hi-Tech capitals in the world, and that Israel is a world leader in many scientific and medical fields?

No other country in the world absorbed so many immigrants, so willingly, over such a short period, and it is the only country in the Middle East which respects ethnic and religious minorities. Contrary to the hostile reporting about Israeli "Apartheid", we heard during the war the language of the "enemy" – Arabic, spoken freely everywhere, including universities, malls and even by security guards. While in "enlightened"

European countries angry mobs attack Jews indiscriminately, in a way eerily resembling *Kristallnacht*, Israelis are drawing a very clear line between the enemy and other Arabs or Muslims who want to live in coexistence with Israel.

Israel's disproportionate coverage in the world's media is perhaps due to corrupt leaders' and ruthless dictators' discovery long ago that it is very easy to use Israel as a scapegoat. Who can forget Kofi Anan who so shrewdly used Israel as a punching bag to distract the world's attention from his native Africa which was going up in flames? Syria, Libya and Iraq, to mention but a few, massacre and oppress their own citizens. Even those who share their faith are not spared. But even with ISIS and its blood chilling agenda, Israel still grabs headlines, causing some non-Jews to believe that it is a mighty and populous empire. I remember a conversation in a hotel lobby in Bogota, Colombia in which several tourists were talking about their countries. When I said that I was from a place with 5 million people (that was in 1991), they asked "in which city?"

Not normal is Israel's willingness to extend precious and expensive humanitarian aid to disaster victims all over the

world, including countries which deny its right to exist, not normal is its reluctance to use its full military power, and not normal because it is that the lives of its foot soldiers are put at risk in order to maintain its integrity and not to harm “innocent civilians” – terrorists who are hiding in mosques and hospitals.

It is not normal for a country to be so small yet so powerful and successful. Recently, I read an article about an Arizona restaurateur who bragged that he only uses locally grown foods, which come from a radius of 250 miles. I couldn't help but laugh when I envisioned the same parameters applied to Israel. In Israel, this kind of “local” produce would mean crossing several enemy borders or growing your food in the Mediterranean Sea. Israel's isolation has forced it to be innovative, from inventing its own lines of baked and dairy goods, to retrofitting the Phantom and the Boeing 747 to become super modern fighter-jet and a surveillance platforms, after it was barred from purchasing the latest American developed (although they were sold to the Saudis).

So yes, there are many things about my beloved country which are not normal, mostly in a good way, but during this summer's war they were not normal in a different way. Kids had to seek shelter within 15 seconds of hearing the sirens, and one of them, 4 years old Daniel Tregerman, did not make it. Drivers had to stop their vehicles, get out and lie down at the roadside with their hands on their heads, as I did with members of my mission as we were visiting *Sederot*. The war, in which Israel did not use its full capacity, has become a war of attrition and took a heavy toll on businesses and commerce. In every mall, hospital and even in the airport there were signs directing people to the nearest shelter and when the army started deploying troops in the south the move sent ripples throughout the country. Tank carriers were jamming the northern roads, reservists left their everyday jobs and put on uniforms and all of our friends and relatives were worried

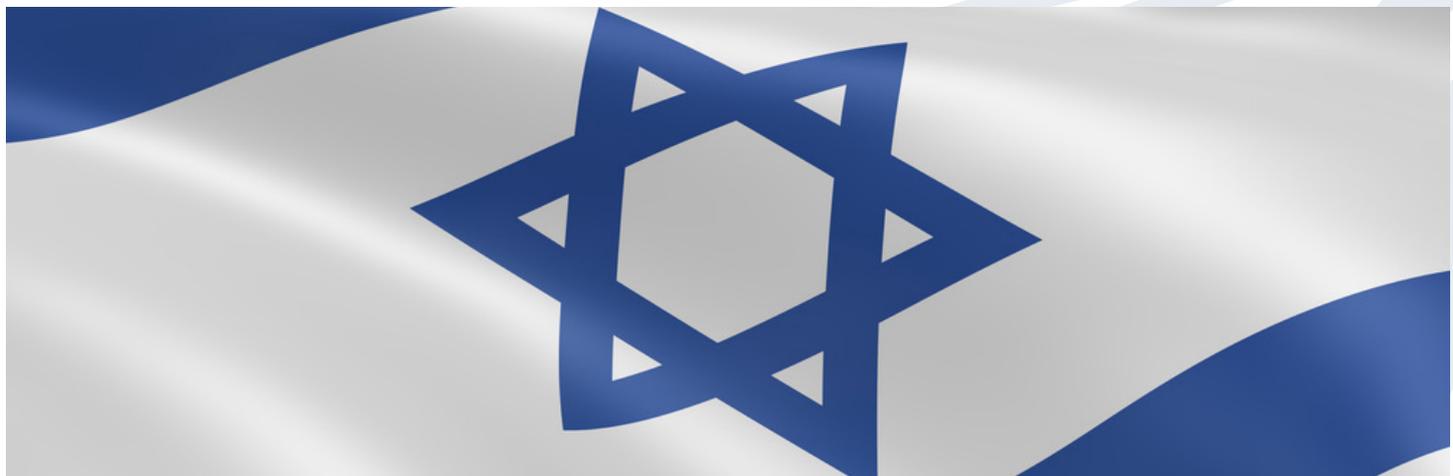
about their son/brother/husband in the army. Most of the soldiers in the front lines, and therefore most of the wounded and the fallen, are in their late teens and early twenties. In most normal countries, they would have been vacationing, partying, attending college or just slumping in their parents' homes, but in Israel there are mandatorily drafted and called to protect not only the borders but the lives of every citizen, knowing very well that each mission could be their last.

Not normal is as Israeli as could be and it is up to us, Israelis and Jews the world over, to make sure that it remains such, but in only a positive way. We must stand up to the media, call on our representatives to take action in favor of Israel or let them know that we are disappointed with their attitude, we must support Israel financially and morally, go visit, invest, do business and send our kids to learn and volunteer there. We must educate ourselves and our children about the history of the region, Zionism, Bible, and our own roots in order to stand strong with Israel.

Am Yisrael is the Eternal Nation, and God has given it the opportunity to return to the Promised Land and to reestablish its life and legacy which have been almost shattered in Diaspora. We are all committed to make sure that its message of peace to the world and light unto the nation will continue to reverberate through the stubborn minds of the leaders of the world, until we fulfill the divine prophecy and turn this world into heaven on earth.

Rabbi Ovadia will be leading more missions to Israel in November. Please contact hovadia@gmail.com or visit <https://www.facebook.com/ZionistSephardicAlliance> for details.

Rabbi Ovadia holds an MA in Hebrew literature from UCLA and has served as a rabbi and teacher in Israel, South America, California, the Jersey Shore and New York.



YEHOSHUA: COMPLETING WHAT MOSHE STARTED

By Mrs. Doris Cohen & Mr. Jesse Salem

Our Rabbis teach us that every word of Torah text is deliberate and significant; no word is superfluous, accidental, or redundant. In many instances the text calls out to the reader with the use of specific words and phrases, pointing us in a particular direction to broaden the scope of a story or to deliver an important message.

An avid *Tanach* student will realize this significance frequently throughout his or her studies. Intertextual relationships are what many times prompted our *Hakhamim* to seek inspiring interpretations. Learning Torah through this lens can truly enhance our studies. Let's take a phrase in Yehoshua and analyze it as an example.

Yehoshua is about to fight his first war against the inhabitants of Jericho, when a “man with an unsheathed sword in his hand”¹ comes to give Yehoshua strength and courage before he heads out to his first battle in Israel.² A conversation grows where the *Mal'akh* instructs Yehoshua: “שֶׁל נִעְלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוּא אֲתָה עֹמֵד עָלָיו קֹדֶשׁ הוּא” – “Remove your shoe off your foot since the place that you are standing on is holy” (Joshua 5:15).

A very similar statement was told 40 years prior to none other than Yehoshua's mentor, Moshe Rabbenu: “שֶׁל נִעְלֶיךָ, מֵעַל” – “Remove your shoes off your feet since the place that you are standing on is holy land” (Exodus 3:5).

The language is nearly verbatim, and a careful reader of Torah would immediately hear the echo and make the connection. What are we to make of this repeated occurrence to Yehoshua at the early stages of his *sefer*? What is the text trying to tell us?

To answer this we must return to the greater context, the instance in which *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* (HKBH) approaches Moshe at the burning bush. Essentially, this scenario marks the very first mission that HKBH imparts unto Moshe (Exodus 3:8):

וְאָרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם, וְלְהַעֲלֹתוֹ מִן-הָאֶרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה...

“I will descend to:

- 1) save them from the hand of Egypt,
- 2) and bring them out of this land to a great and spacious land...”

At this point HKBH turns to Moshe and say יַעֲתָה לָכָה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ וְיָצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם” “And now: Go, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and take my nation, *Bene Yisrael*, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). Moshe only takes *Bene Yisrael* out of Egypt. The second half of the mission to bring *Bene Yisrael* into Israel is omitted, and left incomplete.

Yehoshua is the one who completes God's original mission. He splits the Jordan River and leads *Bene Yisrael* across on to dry land into the Land of Israel. Additionally, at that moment, as Yehoshua fulfills the second half of God's words and enters into the Land, just before he is about to fight his very first war, he experiences the same vision as Moshe. Through these textual and thematic similarities, we understand that Yehoshua has indeed completed the mission that Moshe started. Yehoshua was the leader that followed in Moshe's ways and led the nation to a period of peace and tranquility and an era of mutual loyalty between the people and God, an aspiration that we all strive for until this very day.

This is only one of countless examples that illustrates the importance of studying the text of the *Tanach*. By studying the text and its interrelationships, we can gain great understanding and appreciation for our Torah and create a fuller, more comprehensive picture of our history and identity.

It is with pride and excitement that we invite everyone to join us at *Tanach Study*, as we set forth in studying a perek a day, word for word, of *Nebi'im* and *Ketubim*. It is an opportunity for all of us, through the words of our prophets, judges, and leaders, to strengthen our heritage, and develop our personal and national identities like never before.

Sign up for the program www.TanachStudy.com for our daily e-mail, which includes Hebrew/English recordings, texts and summaries of each *perek*. We look forward to starting all together on OCTOBER 15th, with Yehoshua 1:1, the *Haftarah* of *Simhat Torah*.

¹Joshua 5:13

²The man appears with an unsheathed sword in his hand, symbolizing strength

Doris Cohen is a teacher in Barkai Yeshivah. Jesse Salem is the founder of *Tanach Study Project*



Shabbat-Table Talks



Vayiqra 23:40: “וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הַדֶּרַךְ כַּפַּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי נָחַל וּשְׂמֹחֶתֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים”
“On the first day you shall take the product of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.”

SUKKOT: APPRECIATING AND REJOICING IN THE DIVERSITY OF THE CREATION

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

One of the *misvot* of the festival of *Sukkot* is the taking of the four species of plants, *Eetrog* (citron), *Lulav* (palm), *Hadas* (myrtle) and *Araba* (willow). Many allegorical explanations are connected with these four species. Although the allegory is sometimes stretched, each of the explanations has a point reflecting an important value. In this talk, we will speak about some of the explanations of the four species and the values to be learned from them.

Background: Culminating a section of the Torah describing all the festivals of the year, the Torah describes the festival of *Sukkot*. Then, following a verse of summing up, the Torah mentions the commandment to take the four species. This section connects the idea of rejoicing specifically with the festival of *Sukkot* and specifically with the taking of the four species.

Text: Vayiqra 23:33-44 (Schocken Bible)

Mark, on the fifteenth day after the seventh New Moon, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you are to celebrate the pilgrimage festival of Hashem, for seven days: on the first day (is) a Sabbath ceasing and on the eighth day is a Sabbath ceasing. You are to take yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of a beautiful tree, branches of palms, boughs of thick tree foliage, and willows of the brook. And you are to rejoice before the presence of Hashem your God for seven days, you are to celebrate it, a pilgrimage festival to Hashem for seven days a year—a law for all your ages, throughout your generations: in the seventh New Moon you are to celebrate it—in huts you are to stay for seven days, every native in Israel is to stay in huts—in order that your generations may know that in huts I had the Children of Israel stay when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am Hashem your God!

Discussion:

These verses describe the commandment to take the four species and the commandment to live in *Sukkot* (huts) for seven days. Notice that the

“Look at all the diversity that Hashem has put into creation. This diverse beauty is exciting and is part of the beneficence that God shows to us.”

commandment to live in huts has a reason associated with it and the taking of the four species is not associated with a reason. Our sages have suggested various reasons with the taking of the four species.

Abarbanel sees a connection between the rejoicing and the four species. In an agricultural society, this is the time when all the harvests were already gathered into the house. The gathering of the four species reminds one of the gathering of all the harvests, a reason for rejoicing. In addition, Abarbanel explained that these four species make the heart rejoice because of the way they look and the good that they provide for man. The beauty of the *Etrog* and *Lulab*, along with the shade provided by the *Hadas* and the *'Araba*, especially to a people that were coming from the shadeless wilderness were all a source of joy to *BeneYisrael*.

Expanding on this idea: Look at all the diversity that *Hashem* has put into creation. This diverse beauty is exciting and is part of the beneficence that God shows to us. (Suggested activity: Take the time to notice the different trees that grow around your house. Notice the colors and shapes of the leaves. Notice the different greens and the other hues that are visible in the fall. Better yet, *Sukkot* is a great time to make a trip to the Botanical Gardens and enjoy the diversity of *Hashem's* creation.)

One of the rabbinic *midrashic* explanations of the four species connects them to the different types of people within *Bene Yisrael*:

"Fruit of a beautiful tree"—That is Israel, just as the *Etrog* has taste and fragrance, likewise Israel has people who have Torah and good deeds.

"Branches of palms"—That is Israel, just as the *Lulab* has taste but no fragrance, likewise Israel has people who have Torah and but lack good deeds.

"Boughs of thick tree-foliage"—That is Israel, just as the *Hadas* has fragrance but lacks taste, likewise Israel has people who have good deeds but lack Torah.

"Willows of the brook"—That is Israel, just as the *Araba* lacks both taste and fragrance, likewise Israel has people who lack both Torah and good deeds.

What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? He cannot destroy them. Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, said let them all be bound together into one group and they will atone for each other. And when you do this, I also am raised up, that is what is written: "Who built His chambers (*ma'alotav*) in heaven," and when is He raised up? When they become one group (*aguda*) as it says: "and founded His vault (*agudato*) on the earth (Amos 9:6)." That is why Moshe warns them: "You are to take yourselves..." (*Vayiqra Rabbah* 30:12)

"The message in this Midrash is that we only atone for one another when we join and become one"

This beautiful *Midrash* sees the connections of all the different types within our people as ultimately leading to the raising up of *Hashem*. This *Midrash* gives us an important message. There might be people with whom we disagree with as far as their Torah knowledge is concerned, but they might have good deeds. On the other hand, there might be people within our nation who lack good deeds but have Torah knowledge. There might be people who lack both. The message in this *Midrash* is that we only atone for one another when we join and become one unit. We should not cut off one part of our people because it lacks one or another of these good traits. Rather, even the one with all the good traits must be connected to all the other parts of Israel. By doing this, we cause God Himself to be raised up!

In our times, in particular, it is important to recognize the need for unity within our nation; to appreciate the diversity within nature and within people; and to thank *Hashem* for creating these diverse and beautiful plants, and for allowing us to join with the different people within our nation.

Reprinted with permission from the Sukkot Reader: Volume 2 (Tebah Educational Services, 2012), pp. 57-60.

Rabbi Tawil is presently the principal of Yavneh School in Qiryat Tiv'on, Israel.

READING AGAIN, READING ANEW *continued from page 1*

ingly disproportionate comparison of sand to stars must have been puzzling to the readers and students of Torah for millennia. There are about ten thousand grains in just a fistful of sand; millions in just a cubic foot; billions in a segment of a shore. But there are just one thousand or so visible stars in the darkest sky. Apparently, the Torah should have found a better parallel for the grains of sand, perhaps a different element that could be counted at least by the millions, not in the thousands. The Torah could have compared the grains of sand, for example, to the leaves of the trees of the forests, or the water drops in a rainy storm.

Our puzzlement over the Torah's choice to compare stars to sand might have remained unanswered but for the advent of modern science. In the 17th and 18th centuries, scientists began to develop powerful telescopes which enabled humans to look better into the deep space. Instead of thousands, we began to see *millions* of stars in the universe. Finally, in 1980, we were able to understand the precision and sophistication of God's blessing to Abraham when Carl Sagan, probably without realizing his contribution to Biblical exegesis, proclaimed that the total number of stars in the universe is larger than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of planet Earth.

The universe and the Torah are two books written by the same Author. If *we* fail to find them compatible, it is because *our* reading of one of such two books is not sufficiently well-developed. *We* may have yet to encounter more meanings, or more precise readings, in either book. Thus, the appearance of dissonance between these books is *our* want—that of the reader or of the times—and not of the books or their divine Author.

Let us examine one instance in which individuals might find contradictions between the Torah's story of creation and science's modern discoveries: the issue of the age of the universe. While scientists posit that the world is several billions of years old, this past *Rosh Hashana* we have celebrated that this day, 5775 years ago, was the birth of the world! Can this contradiction be resolved?

There are many ways to engage with this question and resolve this seeming contradiction between *Hashem's* two books

(for a more comprehensive analysis see my book *Awesome Creation* [Gefen Publishing House, 2013], Chapter 2). Here two possible resolutions will be explored. The first approach to resolve this question is that Rabbinical tradition, preserved in the *Midrashim*, mentions that God created the first things and creatures in a state of maturity—*כל מעשי בראשית בקומתו נבראו*. An external observer who overlooks Creation could not help perceiving planet earth and the universe at large as very old structures. This phenomenon, to which I refer in my book as “Mature Creation,” inevitably leads to two conflicting calculations of age: that of science and that attributed to the Biblical account.

Take, for example, the trees. The Torah says that, at the moment of their creation, the fruit-trees were already bearing fruit (*'etz peri, 'ose peri*). This means that the trees were not created as roots, shrubs, or saplings, but as fully formed trees with their fruits already grown, i.e., at the peak of their maturity. The fruit-bearing trees happen to be the only creature the appearance of which the Torah depicts somewhat explicitly.

“The universe and the Torah are two books written by the same Author. If we fail to find them compatible, it is because our reading of one of such two books is not sufficiently well-developed.”

And this visual description helps us understand that trees were created in their fruit-bearing maturity. Although this is but one example, the Rabbis maintained that *all* creatures were likewise fashioned by God in their fully developed state. If, as the Rabbis said, God created the world already evolved, in a mature state, then it is not only *possible* but also *necessary* that science should attribute to the world an age older than the world actually

has. Using the wisdom of our sages, we can resolve any inconsistency regarding the age of the universe.

A second way to resolve this question is to examine the concept of time itself as it relates to light. This year, when we said that today “is the birth of the world,” what do we mean? What is the starting point we are counting from? Is it the *beginning* of Creation (Gen. 1:1), is it the end of Day One (1:5), or is it perhaps the establishment of the sun (1:16)? Or, alternatively, could it also be perhaps the creation of Adam (1:27)?

For all we know, the six days of Creation might well be considered altogether outside the framework of normal time, as many commentators like Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508) explained. However, regardless of whether one con-

siders the six days of Creation to be within the counting of the 5775 years or outside of that count, there is a previous point to consider. The initial act of Creation, the act where God brought heavens and earth to being from nothing, the act reported in the first verse of the Torah, happened *before* the first day!

As defined by the Torah itself, the Biblical day is explicitly defined by the transition between light and darkness and between day and night. This, is Day One. Now, if Day One is determined by the transition between light and darkness, then it depends on there being “light” and “darkness.” Day One cannot be said to begin before light is functional (which only happens in the third verse). Therefore, heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1) were clearly created *prior* to the creation of light, i.e., *before* Day One began. If this is so – if the initial act of Creation of the earth and the rest of the universe occurred before the first day began, in an *undefined* past, outside the timeframe of the six days of Creation – eons of time might have passed between the first and third verses, thus rendering the debate on the age of the universe irrelevant.

The fact that we can find a compatible path between science and Torah does not mean that we must subject the Torah to scientific discoveries. The Torah is not a book of science. As a general rule, the Torah does not seek to reveal to us what we can discover on our own. In essence, the Torah is a book about *Bore ‘Olam*; it is the Book that reveals to us that God is the Creator of the universe, that we are His creatures and that we must find the purpose of our existence in light of our knowledge that He is our Creator.

To fully internalize this, let us examine the very first verse of the Torah, “In the beginning, God created heavens and earth.” In these words, the most important idea is not “*bereshit*,” when God created the universe; nor is “*bara*,” how God created the primeval matter; neither is it “heavens and earths” which conveys *what* God created in the first act of Creation. The most important word and the central message of this verse and of the entire Torah is God, “*E-lohim*”: *Who* created the world.

In the Sephardic tradition, God is referred to as *Bore ‘Olam* – the Creator of the World. From the Biblical point of view, this is the most fundamental understanding of God. In light of this principle, there is a fantastic *hiddush* on the first word of the Torah, *bereshit*, written by the Italian commentator Rabbi

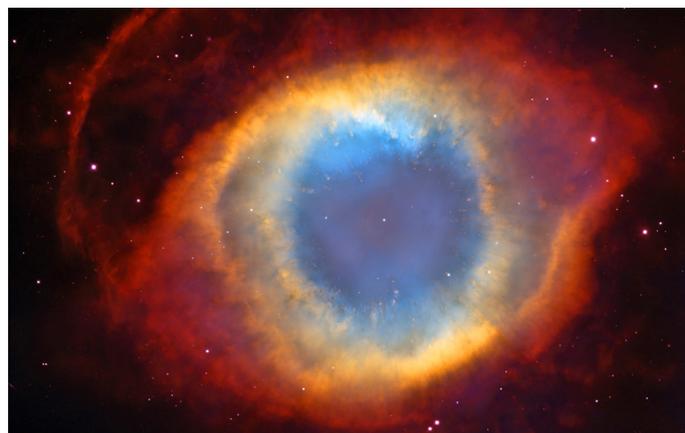
Moshe Hefets (1663–1711).

In his book *Melekheth Mahashebet*, Rabbi Hefets proposes a *derasha*, a creative interpretation of the word *bereshit*. Unlike the traditional reading of *bereshit* as a *time clause* for the first verse, Rabbi Hefets suggest to read it as an introduction to the whole Torah. *Bereshit*, “firstly”, the *first and main purpose of the Torah*, is to tell its readers that the world has a Supreme Creator: the God of Israel, who revealed Himself at Sinai. It is Him, the Creator, who is the Supreme Ruler and the One we need to seek to find our existential mission. Accordingly, for Rabbi Hefets the word *bereshit* should be understood not as “In the beginning” but as “To begin with...” Following this interpretation the first verse will be saying roughly this: “[The reader of this book should know that] *bereshit* [to begin with]: God is the Creator of heavens and earth.”

We are now at the time when we begin reading the Torah from the beginning. We are immensely blessed by *Bore ‘Olam* to have been given the opportunity to – year after year – study His words and find new meanings in them. This year, let us be inspired by the words of Rabbi Hefets and look at the Torah as a divine book which must provide the context to our lives and to our interaction with our God, the Creator or the world and the Author of the Torah.

With His help, guided by the timeless wisdom of our sages, and with our own intellectual abilities, may we continue learning *Bore ‘Olam’s* infinite books.

Rabbi Bitton is the Rabbi of Congregation Ohel David u’ Shlomo and the author of Awesome Creation (Cefen Publishing 2013)



*The Helix Nebula NGC7293: Hubble Space Telescope
This nebula, located in the constellation Aquarius, is often referred to as "The Eye of God".*

IT IS WITH GREAT APPRECIATION AND ADMIRATION

THAT WE THANK THE RABBIS, SCHOLARS, TEACHERS,
WOMEN AND MEN WHO HAVE SO GREATLY HELPED
MAKE THIS YEAR'S SCA SUMMER PROGRAMS AN
OUTSTANDING SUCCESS.

We thank you for giving of your time and energy for the greater good and spiritual growth of our community. With your continued commitment, we hope to bring expanded Torah programming in the future. Hazzaq u'Barukh!

Rabbi Ari Azancot

Rabbi Harold Bald

Rabbi Naftali Besser

Rabbi Joseph Beyda

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Ms. Adele Chabot

Dr. Ronnie Choueka

Mrs. Doris Cohen

Mr. Ricky Cohen

Rabbi Joseph Dana

Rabbi Gad Dishi

Rabbi Nathan Dweck

Mrs. Ariella Falack

Rabbi Victor Gheriani

Mrs. Michelle Gindi

Rabbi Moses Haber

Rabbi Ike Hanon

Rabbi Avi Harari

Mrs. Vicky Harari

Mrs. Esther Hidary

Rabbi Richard Hidary

Mrs. Vivien Hidary

Mr. David Kassin

Rabbi Meyer Laniado

Mrs. Marie Mazon

Rabbi Joseph Mizrachi

Mrs. Sara Mizrachi

Mrs. Gitta Neufeld

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Rabbi Charles Safdieh

Mr. Jesse Salem

Rabbi Yaakob Savdie

Rabbi Albert Setton

Mr. Josh Setton

Rabbi Harold Sutton

Rabbi Ikey Tawil

Mrs. Michal Tawil

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Mrs. Grace Timsit

Rabbi Richard Tobias

SCA MISSION

The Sephardic Community Alliance is an organization established to reinforce and preserve the traditional Sephardic way of life of our ancestors based on the principles set forth in our Declaration of Values. Our commitment is to serve as a platform for lay leaders to work in unison with Community Rabbis, institutions and organizations in promoting the perpetuation of these Values. We support all those who embrace our traditions and rich heritage and that uphold and endorse these values.

SCA MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

AHABA VE AHVA
BETH TORAH
BNEI YITZHAK
KOL ISRAEL CONGREGATION
MAGEN DAVID SYNAGOGUE
MAGEN DAVID BELLE HARBOUR
MAGEN DAVID OF WEST DEAL
OHEL DAVID AND SHLOMO
OHEL YISHAK OF ALLENHURST
SAFRA SYNAGOGUE OF DEAL
SAFRA SYNAGOGUE OF MANHATTAN
SAFRA SYNAGOGUE OF TURNBERRY

SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE
SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE OF ELBERON
SHAARE SHALOM
ALLEGRA FRANCO
BARKAI YESHIVAH
HILLEL YESHIVAH
MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH
SEPHARDIC RABBINICAL COLLEGE
MIKDASH ELIYAHU
TEBAH EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
JERSEY SHORE ERUB

The SCA would like to welcome our newest member organization:

AVENUE N SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION

The SCA is a non-profit 501(3)(c) charity.

This is a publication of the SCA.

To contribute articles, for more information and dedication opportunities, contact QahalNewsletter@gmail.com.

Editor in Chief: Murray J. Mizrachi

Content Editors: Rabbi Harold Sutton, Rabbi Yosef Bitton, Rabbi Nathan Dweck

Layout Design: Lenore Cohen





A Fun and Free Israel Trip

January 4th-14th

*A partner trip for ages between the SCA,
SCC and OU Israel Free Spirit for ages 18-26*

- Spend time in Israel's best cities
 - Hiking all over the country
 - Sightseeing of historic+contemporary sites
 - Get to know IDF soldiers
 - Meet new people from your community and across the USA
 - SCA free extension option
 - Direct flights to and from JFK with no stopovers
 - Meet VIPs from Israels political, business and military community
 - Create memories that will last a lifetime
-

**Limited spots, don't miss out
sign up now at**

www.IsraelFreeSpirit.com/SCA

For more information contact Rachel Shammah:
rachel@israelfreespirit.com 732-443-0511

