

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



SCA

Issue 46: Pesah

IN MEMORY OF HARRY AND YVONNE TAWIL
BY THEIR LOVING CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN



*In Memory of Harry and Yvonne Tawil
By their loving children and grandchildren*

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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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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Your article, "Tu Bishbat: History and Customs" (Issue 44: Tu Bishbat Shabbat Shira) outlining the elaborate Tu Bishbat "seder" states:

The Meqoubalim of 16th Century Safed invigorated this holiday by prescribing what fruits and nuts to eat and in what order. They also said that 4 different cups of wine had to be drunk just like when the *Haggadah* would be recited on the night of *Pesah*... There have been Sephardic Jews in every country over the last 350 [sic] years who have been reading from a book entitled *Peri Ess Hadar* (Salonika 1753) and following this ritual of eating fruits, drinking wine, and reading portions of the TaNaKH, Mishnah, and Zohar.

This is misleading and incorrect. The 16th Century Meqoubalim did no such thing. The Tu Bishbat Seder was first published in the 18th Century book *Hemdat Yamim*, a collection of works including the work which would eventually be published on its own as *Peri Ess Hadar*. On the very first page of that work, the author acknowledges:

ועם כי בדברי כתבי הרב זל"ה לא נמצא מנהג זה מ"מ לדעת
תקון נפלא הוא בנגלה...ובנסת'

Even though we do not find this minhag in the writings of the Ari (16th Century), nonetheless in my opinion it is a great *tikkun* both in the revealed and hidden Torah. (Translation mine)

The elaborate "seder" and readings from the *Peri Ess Hadar* were not nearly as widespread as the article implies and certainly not, based solely on publication dates, 350 years old.

Jacob Sasson
New York, NY

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

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SCA
Issue 44: Tu Bishbat Shabbat Shira

TU BISHBAT

TU BISHBAT: HISTORY AND CUSTOMS

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

Tu Bishbat (תש"ב) is a minor Jewish holiday celebrating the New Year of the Trees. It is one of the four *Rosh Shanah* ("New Years") mentioned in the Mishnah. Tu Bishbat marks *Rosh HaShanah La'lanot* (ראש השנה לאילנות) "the New Year of the Trees". The name Tu Bishbat comes from the date of the holiday, the 15th day of Shebat (תש"ב). Shebat is the name of a Hebrew calendar month and ט"ו, read as "Tu," is how the number 15 is represented by Hebrew numerals using the Hebrew alphabet. This date generally falls on the second full moon before Passover, or, in a leap year, the third full moon before Passover.

Tu Bishbat started out as merely the date used in calculating the tithe on tree fruit, and evolved into a minor holiday.

by partaking of the fruits of Eress Yisrael that Israel was blessed with.

Over the centuries this custom became well known among Jewish communities in every corner of the globe but it wasn't until the 16th century that this holiday was given a greater dimension. The *Mequbalim* of 16th century Safed invigorated this holiday by prescribing what fruits and nuts to eat and in what order. They also said that 4 different cups of wine had to be drunk just like when the *Haggadah* would be recited on the night of *Pesah*.

These *Mequbalim* were generally great Sephardic Rabbis who were steeped in the mysteries of the Torah. They had a belief that Creation is composed of four separate

Continued on page 6

"... we must strengthen the bonds of each generation to our ancestral home that Hashem has so lovingly given back to us."

Tu Bishbat is not mentioned at all in the TaNaKH. The earliest mention of it is the Mishnah which was completed around the year 200 CE. In fact even in the Mishnah it is only mentioned once in *Masekhet Rosh Hashanah* 1:1, which states there are four new years. Only two of the new years listed have any observances associated with them today: Rosh Hashanah and Tu Bishbat.

The Mishnah states:

There are 4 New Years. On the first on Nisan is the New Year for Kings and for Festivals. On the first of Elul is the New Year for the title of the animals, but according to Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Shimon it is on the first of Tishri. On the first of Tishri is the New Year for the years and for Sabbatical Years

Dear QQ,

Many English language Torah printed publications neglect to place a small notice within their publications- an alert to the public that the material they are reading is considered Torah literature. Once a person has finished reading it, should it have been printed, these printed sheets need to be placed in a *shaymus* (*genizah*) box for burial.

Some people will realize that these Torah booklets need to be buried and others will try to find a loophole by stating that material is in English not *Lashon HaKodesh* (Hebrew) but this argument has no leg to stand on as Torah in any language is still Torah.

Teezku L'Mitzvot,

Rabbi Alan Ira Silver
Philadelphia, PA



Dear Rabbi Silver,

You are correct in stating that Torah in English is still Torah and must be treated with respect. However, there are other reasons as to why they might not require *genizah* such as if the name of *Hashem* is not mentioned.

Some *Poskim* hold that it is sufficient to dispose of it in a respectable manner, as in placing in a separate plastic bag. Other *Poskim* hold there is no problem of '*gerama*' in regards to the destruction of *divrei torah* (while not relevant in Israel it would be relevant in America where the people who destroy the garbage are not Jewish).

As the SCA does not *Posek Halacha* for its member congregations, we leave it to the discretion of the Rabbis of the synagogues to instruct their congregants as to how to proceed.

A notice in our publication would infringe on the authority of the '*Mara D'atra*' of our member synagogues, and thus we have not printed one.

Thank you for your concern about the proper way to dispose of our Torah publication.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Albert Setton
Deal, NJ



PESAH INSIGHTS

THE TWO SIDES OF MAROR: A LESSON FROM REISH LAQISH

Rabbi Isaac Tawil

The nights of the Passover Seder are the pinnacle of the year. It is when we gather our loved ones around the table, reenact the Exodus and pass the torch of Jewish education, our religion's hallmark, to the next generation. We flood the evening with special cuisine, role play, sensory stimulation and mental exercises, all to engrain the concepts of our holy Torah and our revered sages into our children and grandchildren.

One of the central foods of the night that is integral in the *Pesah* story is the *Maror*, the bitter herbs. We read in the *Haggadah* that the reason why we eat *Maror* is because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our forefathers. While eating the *Maror*, we do not recline and we must shake off the sweet *Haroset* we dip it into. What else is there to learn from the command to eat the *Maror* on *Pesah* Eve? I believe there is more to this commemoration than just pain that was inflicted onto our ancestors who left Egypt.

Let us begin our analysis by focusing on a different taste that is highlighted by our Torah that also finds itself at the Seder...salty. The *Gemara* states¹ in the name of *Resh Laqish* as follows:

נאמר "ברית" במלח ונאמר "ברית" ביסורין; נאמר ברית במלח, דכתיב: "וְכָל קֶרֶבֶן מִנְחָתְךָ בַּמֶּלַח תִּמְלַח וְלֹא תִשְׁכֵּית מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹהֶיךָ יַעַל מִנְחָתְךָ, עַל כָּל קֶרֶבֶן תִּקְרִיב מֶלַח" (ויקרא ב: יג), ונאמר "ברית" ביסורין, דכתיב: "אֵלֶּה דְבָרֵי הַבְּרִית" (דברים כח:סט). מה "ברית" האמור במלח - מלח ממתקת את הבשר, אף "ברית" האמור ביסורין - יסורין ממרקין כל עונותיו של אדם.

"The word "ברית" is mentioned in the Torah by the passages that talk about salt and suffering. By salt the Torah states:

*"And you shall **salt** every one of your meal offering sacrifices with salt, and you shall not omit the salt of- your **God's covenant** from [being placed] upon your meal offerings. You shall offer salt on all your sacrifices." By suffering the Torah states: "These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel"--Just as salt makes meat sweeter."*

To fully understand this *Gemara*, we need to understand its context. In the ancient world, salt was considered a miracle compound. It had many abilities; to enhance taste,

remove blood and other foul substances from food, but most importantly, it had the power to preserve. Without salt, many families would have perished due to their inability to keep things fresh. We also must understand the history of



¹ BT: Berachot: 5A

Reish Laqish, the author of this statement. The *Gemara*² tells us the story of a young *Reish Laqish* being reunited with his peer *Rabi Yohanan*. *Reish Laqish* at the time was a bandit, thief and a warrior “capable of leaping over a river in a single bound”. This man had no interest in becoming a scholar or living a Torah lifestyle. Upon expressing admiration to *Rabi Yohanan* about how beautiful he is, *Rabi Yohanan* offers *Reish Laqish* the hand of his sister in marriage, who was much more beautiful than he was, on the condition that *Reish Laqish* abandon his current lifestyle and commit to become a Torah scholar. Once *Reish Laqish* agreed to the deal and entered the study hall, he was hooked. His diligence in Torah study was unmatched³. Once he adopted this new lifestyle, he was unable to jump across the river and his life was forever changed...for the better.

and experiencing setback after setback, they can reflect on those difficulties and see how they not only enhanced their successes but were an integral part of the process. One may think that all of their success is solely due to hard labor and many hours spent on the job. We don’t realize that we cannot be successful without help from above. A man who went through suffering is able to appreciate every little nuance of good tidings that Hashem has bestowed upon him because he knows how difficult those good times are to come by.

When we eat the *Maror*, we must have this concept in mind as well. It is not just a symbol of past suffering in Egypt. It is a sign of the suffering we have endured in our own lives that has made us better. When we experience the bitter taste of the *Maror*, it must not stay in the past or

“... do we internalize this and try and turn our bitterness and suffering into fuel for the good that is to come?”

Reish Laqish shares with us the concept of salt being so important that it is like the covenant itself; connected to the word “ברית”. The Torah also uses the word “ברית” at the end of the descriptions of the sufferings that will befall the nation for not following Hashem’s word in “The Admonishment” (תוכחה) in *Perashat* “כי תבא”. He compares the two: just like salt “sweetens” the meat, so to suffering “sweetens” a person. The usage of “sweeten” here should not be taken literally. Rather to sweeten here means to make it “the most pleasant”, choicest or best. While it is easy to see how salt enhances food, how can we possibly understand that suffering enhances the person?

Resih Lakish wishes to impart to us the lesson that through suffering, a person’s character may be sweetened or refined. Had *Reish Laqish* not experienced the past that he had, he would not have had such a bright future. The same energy that made him an almost mythical character in the world of thieves made him a legend in the *Beit Midrash*. When a person finally tastes success in his or her life after enduring a difficult road, facing many hardships

merely be a present reminder of what we need to experience on *Pesah* night. Rather it needs to cause us to look to the future. How will I be able to learn from my failures, my bitter experiences and my sufferings in order to “sweeten” myself and become the best I can be? Just as the Matza at the Seder has two roles in being both the bread of affliction as well as the bread of freedom, *Maror* has the same duality.

Our Torah impresses upon us the unique belief that we must acknowledge and bless Hashem for bad tidings as well as good tidings.⁴ It all comes from above; the question is, do we internalize this and try and turn our bitterness and suffering into fuel for the good that is to come? Let us learn from *Reish Laqish* and make sure that this year we do not roll our eyes before eating the *Maror* or rush through it. Let’s use it to make our futures brighter and more enriched.



Rabbi Isaac Tawil is the head Rabbi at Congregation Kol Israel. He is also the director of student life and Hesed activities and Magen David Joe and Celia Esses A”H High School.

² BT: Baba Metziab: 84A

³ BT: Sanhedrin: 24A--“Ullah remarked (regarding *Reish Laqish*’s diligence in Torah): a person who saw *Reish Laqish* delve into a text in the study hall was like watching someone uproot two mountains and grind them down against each other.” Meaning; he was able to take what seemed to be established concepts and break them down and challenge them.

⁴ BT: Berachot: Mishna 9:5

PASSOVER, BEN GURION, AND A LESSON IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

In 1936, standing before the Peel Commission (established by the British Mandate with the task of creating a “Partition Plan” in Palestine), David Ben-Gurion offered the British diplomats a brief lesson in Jewish history:

“Three hundred years ago, a ship called the Mayflower set sail to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England. Yet I wonder if there is one Englishman who knows at what time the ship set sail? Do the English know how many people embarked on the voyage? What quality of bread did they eat? Yet more than 3,300 years ago, before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt. Every Jew in the world, even in America or Soviet Russia, knows what kind of bread the Jews ate — matzah. Even today, the Jews worldwide eat matzah on the 15th of Nisan. They retell the story of the Exodus and all of the troubles Jews have endured since being exiled, saying: This year, slaves; next year, free! Now we’re scattered throughout the world, but next year, we’ll be in Jerusalem. There’ll come a day that we’ll come home to Zion, to the Land of Israel. This year here — next year in Jerusalem, in Zion, in *Eretz Yisra’el*. That is the nature of the Jews.”

Twelve years later, on May 14, 1948, Ben-Gurion stood before the provisional government in Tel Aviv and

pronounced these historic words: “We hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisra’el*, to be known as the State of Israel.”

Many take Israel’s existence for granted, forgetting the political condition of the Jews before Ben-Gurion’s declaration. Lest we forget, the Passover Seder presents a good time to sit and contemplate the powerful lesson in political science rooted in the Passover story.



David Ben-Gurion pronouncing the Declaration of the State of Israel, May 14 1948, Tel Aviv, Israel

In transitioning from Joseph’s death to a new era, the Book of Exodus records: “A new king arose over Egypt, who did know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). This “new king” proceeded to enslave the Jews.

Who was this “new king”? The Talmud (Sotah 11:a) records a debate between Rav and Shmuel on the meaning of the words “new king.” According to Rav, the “new king” was actually a new pharaoh. Never having met Joseph, this new king ignored his predecessor’s policy of friendship with the Jews. Shmuel argued that the “new king” was actually the same pharaoh under whom Joseph served. The word “new” does not imply a “new person,” rather “new policies.” This means that the exact same pharaoh who was friendly to the Jews ultimately turned on them.

Through their sharp political interpretations of the

Passover story, Rav and Shmuel described the political condition of the Jewish people long after the Exodus from Egypt. Rav teaches that cordial relations with one leader in no way guarantee that the next administration will behave the same way. Things are as good as they are today, but in no way can today's policies indicate what tomorrow will bring. Leaders change, and each administration will act in its own political self-interest.

Age to expulsion, and in Germany we were intellectual elites who became concentration camp inmates.

In light of our experiences in the Diaspora at the mercy of different leaders and governments, it is unfortunate that in 1948, after Ben-Gurion's historic declaration of the State of Israel, the rabbis did not change the opening words of the Haggadah to an updated language reflecting our new political reality: *"Last year — slaves, this year —*

"... the Passover Seder presents a good time to sit and contemplate the powerful lesson in political science rooted in the Passover story."

Shmuel's lesson is a bit harsher. When it served the pharaoh's political interests with Joseph, he was friendly toward the Jews. But now that he perceived them as problematic, he changed his policy from friendship to enslavement. Shmuel reminds us that even while in power, the same leader who acted as our friend yesterday can change his policies at the drop of a dime.

Rav and Shmuel never lived in Egypt under Pharaoh. They offered their interpretations thousands of years later, through the lenses of their own political reality in third-century C.E. Babylonia. They were Diaspora Jews whose people had by now been exiled from their homeland twice. Jewish self-determination was gone, replaced with prayers for the government that reflected our innermost political fears: "May the supreme King of Kings in His mercy put into the hearts of all officials to deal kindly with us." We recited these prayers with the hope that "new kings" would not arise — neither Rav's version nor Shmuel's version.

We went on to see many "new kings who did not know of Joseph." In medieval Spain, we went from the Golden

free. Last year in exile, this year in Jerusalem, in Zion, in Eretz Yisra'el."

As you sit down to your Passover Seder and prepare



to discuss the various sections of the Haggadah that yearn for the Jewish return to independence in our own land, contemplate the magnitude of Ben-Gurion's words in 1948. His declaration of Jewish independence may not have caused a change to the words of the Haggadah, but his

historic words certainly changed the course of the Jewish people in the 20th century and beyond. Had this been all Ben-Gurion did for the Jewish people — *Dayenu*.



Rabbi Bouskila is the Executive Director of Sephardic Educational Center Based in Los Angeles and Jerusalem.

GENERATING THINKING BY ASKING QUESTIONS¹

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

One of the most important ways that we find out more about the world is by asking questions. We ask questions of people when we are trying to understand what they are saying or when we think they have something to teach us. We ask questions of books and answer them through careful reading. Scientists ask questions of the world and answer them through controlled experiments. We ask questions of ourselves when we are trying to understand ourselves. Teach your children the value of asking questions and you will teach them a most important learning and growth tool. Create an atmosphere in the home where all questions are allowed. Compliment the question when appropriate and thank your child for asking it, as it helps you know what to teach him.

Texts:

The first two texts are from the perasha, and are used in the Passover Haggadah. The third text is also found in the Passover Haggadah.

And it will be when your children say to you, “What does this service mean to you?” then say it is the slaughter-meal of Pesah to Hashem who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt.... (Shemot 12:26 [SB])

It shall be when your child asks you on the morrow, saying, “What’s this?” You are to say to him: By strength of hand Hashem brought us out of Egypt.... (Shemot 13:14 [SB])

When your child asks you on the morrow, saying: What (mean) the precepts, the laws, and the regulations that Hashem our God has commanded you? Then you are

to say to your child: Slaves we were to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand. (Debarim 6:20-21 [SB])

Regard the days of ages past, understand the years of generations and generations ago; Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will declare it to you. (Debarim 32:7 [SB])

The bashful person does not learn and the impatient person should not teach. (Pirke Abot 2:6)

Discussion:

Why is it good to ask questions? (Asking questions is the way to learn.) When should you ask questions? (Whenever you have one, without interrupting, of course.)

Did you ask a question to your teacher today, or this week? Is it easy to ask questions to your teachers? What can you do when your teacher says, “No questions now”? (Write them down to ask later.)

Can you ask a book a question? (Yes. A simple example is asking a phone book for a number. Asking a cookbook how much flour to put in a recipe.) What questions do you have and which books could you turn to for the answers?

If you could ask God three questions what would they be? How can you ask them of God? (Prayer, learning Torah.) What books could you turn to for the answers? Which people can you ask? (Parent, teacher, Rabbi, friend, all of them.)

Why do you think our Rabbis told us that the bashful person does not learn? Do you ever feel embarrassed to ask questions? Why?



The Sassoon Spanish Haggadah, Spain, c 1320

¹ Republished with permission from Rabbi Tawil's Shabbat-Table Talks (2014, Tebah Educational Services), pp. 61-64

Why do you think our Rabbis taught us that the impatient person should not teach?

Are there any questions that you should not ask? (Prying personal questions.)

Further discussion on questions and thinking:

The types of questions that our children are exposed to in school are very often of the short, one-right-answer type. These questions are usually testing the recall of information. We should get our children used to thinking about questions where there is not one right answer, but many possible answers. The questions in these talks are meant to be open ended, with many possible answers. The idea is to spur on discussion, and not to spew out information.

Whether in the classroom or at home, we want to get our children to think and to articulate their thinking. We must deepen our children's thinking by giving them time to think. I know this sounds simple, but it takes some getting used to. Educators use a concept called "wait time." There is "wait-time 1" and "wait-time 2."

- "Wait-time 1" is the time that the student is given after the question is asked before he is expected to answer. Some teachers have the practice of not accepting any answers for at least one or two minutes after a question is asked (especially if it is an open-ended question with many possible answers). This allows more students to think of answers that are more thoughtful. It also breaks the game show kind of competition that can

sometimes prevail in the classroom or at home. What does this mean practically? Inform your children that you will ask a question that has many correct answers and that you want them to think about the answer. You will give them as much time as they want, and will not accept any answers for the first three minutes. Then make sure to give them the time to think through the answers.

- "Wait-time 2" is the time between the child's answer and the teacher's (or parent's) reaction. Give the child time to complete the answer without any reaction. He will go on and on defending his answer or bringing examples or in many ways elaborating his answer. All that deepens the child's thinking. How can we put this into practice? When the child answers, do not interrupt him. When he stops, do not say anything for at least five seconds (it is a long time for silence, count it out!). More often than not, the child will continue talking, elaborating his answer that is deepening his thinking.

Use these concepts at home when you are discussing the perasha or having any discussion. You will see how it can really enhance your children's (and your own) thinking abilities.



Rabbi Tawil is the author of Shabbat-Table Talks (Tebah Educational Services, 2014).



met with Pharaoh privately by the Nile. For the second plague of each set, 1b) Frogs [Shemot 7:26], 2b) Epidemic [Shemot 9:1], and 3b) Locust [Shemot 10:1], Moshe went to the Palace to speak with Pharaoh before all of his advisors. The third set of each did not have a warning.

There is one more point to notice. Each set has a distinct purpose expressed by the first of each set. Note the following *pesuqim* which make the reason for each set clear. For the first set see Shemot 7:17, for the second, see Shemot 8:18, and for the third see Shemot 9:14. The first set is introduced with *bezot teda ki ani Hashem*, with this you shall know that I am God. The second set is introduced with *lema'an teda ki ani Hashem beqereb haAres*, so that you will know that I am God in the midst of the Earth. The third set is introduced with *ba'abur teda ki ein kamoni bechol haAres*, so that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the Earth.

These nine *makkot* progress from lesson to lesson in sets of three, with each of these lessons responding to a statement of Pharaoh¹⁰. The first lesson, that of *Dam* [Blood], *Sefardea* [Frogs], and *Kinim* [Biting Insects], was to teach about the existence of a single creator of the world. This concept is introduced with *bezot teda ki ani Hashem*, with this you shall know that I am God¹¹. This was in direct response to Pharaoh's statement: *lo yadati et Hashem*, I do not know God. God, The Creator, is the cause of all that we experience as nature. The only reason that this world functions as it does is because God is causing it. There is no 'nature' besides for His will. It is God that allows for existence, it is Him that is the cause of all that we experience as 'nature.' If He did not cause the world to function as it

does, it would not function separately from Him. It is God that constantly ensures that our world runs properly¹².

The second set, *Arob* [swarms], *Deber* [epidemic], and *Shehin* [boils] teach us about God's *hashgaha*, divine providence, His precise control over 'nature.' This is introduced with the phrase: *lema'an teda ki ani Hashem beqereb ha'ares*, so that you will know that I am God in the midst of the Earth. The lesson is that God has precise control over each and every aspect of this world. He can create phenomena that only affect a part of the population, and thereby show He has very precise control over the world. Note that in the following *makkot* only the Egyptians were affected: *Arob* 8:18-19, *Deber* 9:4, *Shehin* 9:10. How incredible for a plague to differentiate between groups of people with no way to differentiate based on biology. How would a swarm, epidemic, or boils know which person was part

of Benei Yisrael and who was Egyptian? The message is clear; God is involved in the land, *beqereb ha'ares*¹³.

The third set, *Barad* [hail], *Arbe* [locust], and *Hoshekh* [darkness], educate us about God's unique



The Fourth Plague: The Plague of Flies by James Jacques Joseph Tissot at the Jewish Museum, New York

¹² Abarbanel Shemot 7:17: ופרעה כחש לו מפני שהיה חושב שאלוה העולם הוא הטבע ושהגם: השמימיים הוא היה מנהיג הטבע השפל ולכן כשאמר משה כה אמר ה' השיב פרעה לא ידעתי את ה' כל איני מודה במציאותו

Ramban Shemot 13:16: ריעשה עמהם מופת בשנוי מנהגו של עולם וטבעו: Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14

¹³ Ramban Shemot 13:16: כי לא עזב אותה למקרים כדעתם: Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14: כמלך משגיח על כל דרכי בני האדם לתת: Abarbanel Shemot 7:17: בתוך המדינה להיותו קרוב אל הקצוות For boils ש' משגיח גם בארץ: Malbim Shemot 7:14: "לאיש כדרכיו ופרעה כחש זה באמרו מי ה שער ל' עקדת יצחק: כמו שנאמר ולא יכלו החרטומים לעמוד לפני משה כי היה השחין בחרטומים ובכל מצרים, ירצה, שלא עמד עוד בשם טעמם, ולא יכלו לכלכל דבריהם מפני המכה הזאת, שהיתה בחרטומים ובכל ארץ מצרים לבדם, שאם היו גם אהרן ומשה וכל ישראל מוכי שחין איך נבהלו מפניהם ולא יוכלו עמוד

¹⁰ הזכיר משה כן לפרעה לפי שהיה פרעה כופר בשלשון במציאותו, Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14, והשגחתו, ויכלתו

¹¹ Shemot 7:17

Continued from page 13

power and is introduced by the phrase: *ba'abur teda, ki ein kamoni bekhoh ha'ares*, so that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the Earth. This is in response to Pharaoh's statement: *mi Hashem asher eshma beqolo*, who is this God that I should listen to his request? Pharaoh was making the point that even if there was a God of Benei Yisrael, He was not a power that needed to be heeded. The response by God directly addresses Pharaoh's statement with plagues that have never before been seen in Egypt¹⁴. Note that by both *barad* and *Arbe* the Torah states: *asher lo haya khamohu* that there was never anything like this, emphasizing that nothing like this has ever been seen in Egypt¹⁵. This expresses the unique power of God. Not only is God the Creator, and involved in the details of this world, He is also the greatest power, and there is nothing even comparable to Him. He is the master of the universe, and there is nothing that could restrict His will¹⁶.

These three lessons that God is the Creator of the

¹⁴ Shemot 10:7

¹⁵ Shemot 9:17, 9:24, 10:7, 10:14, Note it also appears by *makkat bekhorot* Shemot 11:6

¹⁶ Ramban Shemot 13:16: *אין מעכב בידו* and Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14

world, that He is involved in the world, and that He is the ultimate power, with nothing comparable to Him, are the fundamental ideas of Judaism. These are the ideas taught to us at the start of our nation that we must educate ourselves about and pass on to the next generation. It is a *misva* from the Torah to relate these messages to our children during our Pesah seder, as Rambam states: *misvat ase shel Torah lesaper benissim veniflaot shen'asu la'aboteinu bemisrayim*, it is a *misva* to recount the miracles and wonders that God did for us and for our forefathers in Egypt¹⁷. The *misva* is not just to relate the miracle itself, but to relate the messages, the fundamentals of Judaism.

Moadim leSimcha



Rabbi Meyer Laniado is a Rabbi at Congregation Magen David of West Deal and Hillel Yeshiva High School.

¹⁷ Mishne Torah Hilkhoh Hames uMassa 7:1

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COMMUNAL MATURITY

Rabbi Avi Harari

The detailed laws that *Am Yisrael* was commanded on the night before their exodus from Egypt reveal a recurring theme of the “house” and “household.” They were instructed with regards to the *korban Pesah*, “let every man take a lamb for a father’s *house*, a lamb for a *household*” (12:3), and further informed that if the household was too small to consume a full lamb, “it must take together with its neighbor who is close to its *house*” (4). The blood of the lamb was to be placed on “the doorposts and lintel of the *house*” (7), serving as “a sign for you upon the *house* in which you are” (13), in order that “He shall not allow the Destroyer to come into your *houses* to scourge” (23). Each man was commanded to not leave the entrance “of his *house*” until morning (22), and to teach his children in the future: “A Passover sacrifice to God, who passed over the *houses of Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt when he scourged Egypt, and our *households* He rescued” (27).

The significance of the “house” and “household” to the story of *yessiat Mitzrayim* became clear when the nation was twice commanded to remember the exodus from the “*house of slaves*” (13:3, 14).¹ They were perhaps being taught in that instance that their freedom from a “house of slavery” was appropriately designated by the establishment of independent “houses” and “households.”

The Torah surprisingly shifts from its emphasis on the “house,” however, when commanding future observance of the laws of Pesah. Whereas the nation was initially commanded, “The very first day you shall expunge leaven (*se’or*) from *your houses*,” and, “Seven days no leaven shall be found in *your houses*” (12:19), the command upon entrance into Israel was different: “And no leavening of yours shall be seen in *all your territory*” (13:7). Whereas the theme of “house” and “household” dominated the description of Pesah in Egypt, its repeated command for future observance bore no mention of it whatsoever.

This conspicuous change in theme was repeated in the

context of another dominant feature of the commands – the distinguishing “sign” (*ot*) of *Am Yisrael*. In Egypt, the blood on the houses stood as their “sign”: “And the blood will be a *sign* for you upon the houses in which you are” (12:13). The future “sign,” however, bore no connection to houses or households and instead lived on through the *tefillin*: “And it shall be a *sign* for you on your hand and a remembrance between your eyes...” (13:10, 16).

The establishment of *Am Yisrael* as a free and independent nation began with complete separation. This was initially performed by God through the plagues, and then symbolized by the nation’s various observances in their “houses” and “households” which separated them from the “house of Pharaoh.” The future vision for the nation, however, was considerably different. The distinguishing “sign” was no longer displayed on their houses, but instead concealed on their arms. The spatial isolation necessary for *Am Yisrael*’s establishment in Egypt was replaced by self-realization and demonstration.

We often misunderstand our communities’ source of strength. We believe that it is the separate “houses” and “households” that empower the members, and we therefore fear involvement with others. The Torah’s deliberate shift in description from the initial creation of *Am Yisrael* to its eternal existence teaches otherwise. Freed from the “house of slavery,” the nation was further freed to endeavor from their “houses” and appropriately engage with others. Though a sense and practice of separateness was eternally enduring, it no longer existed as a spatial segregation but as an existential realization and performance.



Rabbi Harari is the Rabbi of Congregation Shaare Shalom of Brooklyn, NY.

¹ A depiction of the bondage as a “house entrapment” is particularly striking considering the etymology of the name “Pharaoh,” from the Egyptian words “great house.”



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

THE SILENT REFUGEES

An introduction by Mrs. Natalie Mizrachi

“When we reached Paris we didn’t advertise what had happened to us. We had nothing but what we could carry, but my husband called up his French business contacts and bluffed. *We are going forward*, he said, and we did, without the world’s help.”

—Lebanese Refugee, circa 1990

This couple had arranged a midnight escape from Beirut in the belly of a tank, thanks to Maronite Christian soldiers whose duplicity the wife hesitated to expose, even years later. Over the last century, thousands of displaced Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews like them left their homes, resettled around the world and rebuilt their lives in quiet dignity. That these episodes of flight occurred at the end of a staggering 2800 year presence in the region adds insult to injury; as many fled their birthplaces on fear of capture and certain torture, while others were beaten, evicted and left penniless.

With the Middle East currently in turmoil, the exile of Jews from the region is an important component to understand. The exodus that first began for economic reasons in the early 20th century increased in earnest with the rise of fascist, socialist and anti-Jewish movements across the region. From Yemen to Turkey, North Africa to Iran, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews made their way to the Americas, Western Europe and Israel. As this “bridge” generation fades and history is re-told, their descendants must seek to understand the facts of intolerance and bigotry that led to this cultural catastrophe.

The Silent Refugees is a community based project which gives an authentic chronicle of Middle East and Levantine expulsion and persecution through art. Exploring these events through first person interviews, objects and photographs, the aim is to show these stories from a personal perspective. The artworks visibly showcase what was lost to individuals as they left their home countries while also

celebrating the lives they built anew.

Over the past year, artists Lenore Cohen and Raquel Mizrachi have been interviewing people who left Muslim countries as part of this project. The testimonies they have collected are instructive and inspiring, showing the human side of this often overlooked part of recent Jewish history. It is our privilege to share parts of these interviews with the readers of Qol Ha-Qahal.

For the first installment in this series we turn to Syria. We begin with a brief overview of the modern history of that country, followed by excerpts from an interview with an individual who left Damascus in 1993. The artworks at the end of this article were created using his testimony and artifacts.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Jews in Syria numbered close to 15,000. In the space of just 100 years, these communities were completely dissolved. Community members began to leave between 1915-1947 for mostly economic reasons. The breakup of the Ottoman Empire after WW1 and the opening of the Suez Canal caused Aleppo to lose its prominence on the world commerce stage. With the loss of status as a center for trade, the people of Syria struggled with scarce employment opportunities. Many left to seek their fortunes in countries all over the globe, establishing new communities as far away as New York, Panama, Mexico and England.

In 1948, after Israel declared independence, the situation for Jews in Syria became measurably more dangerous. The famous riots which broke out in the streets the day after the UN resolution recognizing Israel as a state pointed to a new reality: As Jewish neighborhoods were vandalized and burned, the remaining Jewish community realized that after 2,000 years of continuous settlement in Syria, there was no future for Jews in the country. Unfortunately this

coincided with new government policies restricting the Jews' movement and freedoms. Jews were forbidden to leave the country unless on temporary visas, and often were forced to leave behind family members as "collateral" to ensure their return. Jews could not sell their homes without the government's permission, another measure that effectively trapped many people who had no means to starting over without their life savings.

Despite this, many people, especially young men, continued trying to leave the country. Through a series of smuggling networks that ran through Lebanon, Turkey and Israel, many escaped without their families, in some cases not to see or hear from them for more than ten years afterward. Some were caught trying to leave and subsequently arrested, tortured and even killed for their efforts. Many family members that remained behind were likewise arrested and tortured once it was discovered that one among their household had escaped. Still, the community continued to

dwindle until there were less than 2,000 Jews left in Syria by 1992. At this point, members of the international community intervened to pressure the Syrian government to release the remaining Jews. Even then, the visas granted these individuals were conditional upon their eventual return, and people had to leave as if going on vacation. That meant two suitcases each-- most of people's precious possessions and livelihoods were left behind in the ghost towns that had once been thriving communities.

The presentation of these interviews has been made possible by a generous grant provided by the Sephardic Community Alliance.



Mrs. Mizrachi is an author based in Brooklyn, NY.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. ELI HALABI

Mrs. Lenore Cohen

Dr. Eli Halabi was born in Damascus and currently lives in Brooklyn with his wife and children. The following are excerpts from an interview he granted us for *The Silent Refugees*.

Lenore Cohen [LC]: Tell us a bit about growing up in Syria.

Dr. Eli Halabi [EH]: Growing up in Damascus, I always thought that my unique interaction with the different cultures was what distinguished me as a person and helped form my character. Living in a predominantly Muslim country, attending a French Catholic school while observing Jewish laws and customs, I was well acquainted with my multi-cultural surroundings. Despite the many positive cultural experiences, however, the life of an observant Jew was quite challenging and largely dependent on the geopolitical status of the conflict with neighboring Israel.

I have memories as a child growing up in the eighties of living in a large apartment building in the middle of the city just outside of the Jewish Quarter. My brothers and

I used to play soccer in the streets with balls we made out of crumbled paper held together with scotch tape. Economically, Syria was (and still is) a socialist third world country. So, many things that kids in the U.S. take for granted, we simply didn't have or didn't even know about. For example, it was completely normal for us to have no electricity or running water for 6 or 7 hours a day during the summer months because the river that generates power to the city dries up from the excessive heat. To preserve energy, the city would turn off the power and water during the day. You can imagine how that affects everyday life. Food refrigeration was a challenge. We used to stand in line for hours at the public water fountain to fill our buckets with drinking water. To us, this was completely normal.

Many items were not readily available like they are here. Basic things like tissues, sugar, tea and oil were rationed to each family by the socialist government or were obtained at a much higher price from the black market.

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[LC]: What was it like for the Jewish community in Syria during your childhood (1980-1993)?

[EH]: The attitude of the Syrian population towards the Jewish people living in Syria always depended on how things were with Israel. If things were bad with Israel, then things were bad for our community. Jewish life became exceptionally difficult in the sixties, especially after the capture of the Israeli spy Eli Cohen in 1965. Eli penetrated the hierarchy of the Syrian government and was even running as the Minister of Defense of Syria before he was caught. He was tried for treason and executed by hanging in a Damascus public square. My father, who was a young man then, attended the execution. He told me that the attitude towards the Jewish people in Syria after that was that of distrust and disdain. They looked at every Jew as a possible spy for Israel. The word “Cohen” became synonymous with the word traitor. Jewish students were banned from attending college for two years after the incident and the entire community was placed under strict scrutiny and constant surveillance by the special secret service, “Mukhabarat.” There was a travel ban on Jews to leave the city, let alone the country. Things got even worse after the 1967 Six Day War, during which Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War, which the Syrians call the October War, was a historical turning point in the Syrian-Israeli conflict. Syria was thoroughly convinced (and still is) that they won that war. They felt somewhat vindicated of the earlier humiliation they had experienced in 1967. October 6th became a national holiday with fireworks and special events to commemorate what they believe was a crushing defeat of their enemy Israel. The aftermath of the war paved the way to the peace process with Syria and the 1978 Camp David Accords with Egypt. Things became much more tolerable for the Jews in Syria as the focus of the general population drifted away from war with Israel to concentrate more on the internal economy and everyday life. I was born shortly after that, and grew up in the eighties in an environment certainly better than what my parents and grandparents had experienced.

[LC]: What effects did these restrictions of freedoms have on your family?

[EH]: Before 1992 if you are a Jew seeking to travel outside of Syria you would need a special permission from the government to do so. They would never grant permission to more than half of the individuals in a given family to travel. This way they ensured your eventual return. In my family, we used to take turns who traveled every year. Although we were granted certain rights as Syrian citizens, we were looked at differently; perhaps as hostages or a potential bargaining chip against Israel if the time ever came when that was needed.

In 1948, shortly before Israel declared its independence, Israel sent a special unit into Syria to try to get as many people out as possible. My uncle, (my mother's brother) who was only 6 years old at the time, was sent away by my grandparents with this unit. They planned to follow him shortly after they sold their business and got their things together. What they did not anticipate was how quickly things would change. The war started and the border between Israel and Syria was closed. My grandparents were stuck. The next time they saw their son was in 1978; 30 years later! They escaped to Israel shortly before I was born and they lived

*“The next time they saw their son
was in 1978; 30 years later!”*

there until they passed away. My mother was born in 1956 and never knew her older

brother who lived in Israel. She met him for the first time in her life in 1988 in Turkey.

This all changed in 1992 after the treaty that was brokered between the U.S., Israel and Syria to grant permission to all Jews to travel. For the first time visas were granted to entire families. The Syrian government proudly proclaimed its tolerance to all its citizens and promised that, although the Jews might go away on trips outside of Syria, they would surely return to their beloved country that protected them for hundreds of years. However, within a few years, the predominant majority of Jews left never to return.

[LC]: Where did you go to school?

[EH]: Most Jewish children attended the yeshiva or “kittab.” However, my parents felt that secular education

was much better in the French Catholic school. Since they were educated themselves (my father was an engineer and a teacher and my mother a pharmacist), education and becoming a professional was a top priority for their children. So they sent me there. Being the only Jewish child in my class was confusing and somewhat daunting. I always knew I was different but just didn't understand why. I became aware of the very deep conflict of being both a Jew and a Syrian. At a very young age, defining my true identity was a challenge.

As a Jew, I knew I had a connection to the Land of Israel and the Jews living there. However, as a Syrian citizen, I was taught that Israel and Zionism are the enemies that constantly threaten our country Syria's existence. In retrospect, it is interesting to me how the school's curriculum made a clear distinction between Judaism and Zionism. They always taught that Judaism is a recognized and holy religion. Jews (whom they called "Mousawi" or followers of the religion of Moses) ought to be respected and should be allowed to live peacefully as citizens in any country they choose. They warn, however, that a "select few" Jews exploited certain stipulations in their religion for their personal gains and founded an imperialistic movement called Zionism. Zionism is the enemy, not Judaism. Every day, we would salute the Syrian flag and sing the national anthem and state loudly our national goals:

"Only in the confines of our homes and in synagogue, could we be who we truly were."

Unity, Freedom and Socialism. And we call for death to the enemy: Imperialism, Zionism and Apartheid. I would go home and see my father sitting by the radio listening to the "Voice of Israel" in Arabic. I would see him get happy with good news from Israel. So we were pro-Israel at home, but never dared to say so outside. As a young child, this was the political side of my personal internal conflict.

Catholics are a minority in Syria. We befriended them because we were a minority as well. However, it is no secret how Catholics historically felt about Jews. My school was no different. Despite the calls for tolerance, I certainly felt the tension whenever it was pointed out that I am the Jew in their midst. The school was in a monastery where French nuns lived. My personal experience was certainly unique in that I was faced with three diametrically different religions all at once. Imagine listening to Christmas carols during the

day as you watch your classmates decorate a nativity scene, then walking home through the empty market streets as the mosque speakers blast the afternoon prayers calling for people to rush home to break the fast of Ramadan, and then getting home to pray Arvit and light the Hanukkah candles.

Muslims and Catholics did not always get along. And of course we, as Jews, never wanted to draw attention to us from either one of them. We looked and acted the same on the street as everyone else. Only in the confines of our homes and in synagogue, could we be who we truly were. This was the religious side of my internal conflict.

Even my mindset as a student growing up in Syria was certainly different than, say a student in a yeshiva in New York. For example, students here in the U.S. learn American and European history which includes World War II and the Holocaust. In Syria we mainly learned Arab and Ottoman history. So it is no surprise that I did not know anything about the Holocaust until I moved to the U.S. at the age 14.

[LC]: What was your relationship to your Judaism while living in Syria?

[EH]: My great grandparents, who had the last name Sued (before changing it to Halabi after leaving Aleppo for Damascus), come from a well-known Rabbinic family. I grew up in a less religious but certainly traditional home where we kept Shabbat and holidays. Even though I attended a French Catholic school during the day, I had a rabbi who came to my house and taught me basic Hebrew reading, prayers, some *tehillim*, and *ta'amim* for my *Bar Mitzvah parasha*. That was the extent of my Jewish education.

In 1992, the majority of the community left after having been given permission to travel. When that happened, it was very hard for the synagogues to have minyanim with the existing number of Jews constantly diminishing. Coincidentally, this was the year I was Bar Mitzvah'ed. I remember the people from the nearby synagogue knocking on our door at 4am asking me to join them for minyan because they were one man short. It seemed like I always was number ten. I

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started going to synagogue every day for all three prayers and picked up the proper way to pronounce Hebrew. I was always intrigued by the Hebrew language. The roots of the words are similar to Arabic, but I did not understand it. It was not until I came to the U.S. and learned at the Yeshivah of Flatbush High School that I understood the meaning behind the words that we were saying. That is when I really started having a deep sense of appreciation of the Hebrew language and our Jewish roots. It opened up my eyes to a whole new world of Torah education and its importance for our survival as the Jewish People.

[LC]: You left Syria in 1993. How was this made possible?

[EH]: When we lived in Syria, we never thought we would ever leave. It was where we grew up and that is all that we knew. We trace our family roots back several generations in that country. So when the treaty happened in 1992, it was a shock to everyone. The Syrian community here in America was instrumental in getting us out and helping us establish a new life in Brooklyn. My uncle, Dr. Mayer Ballas, who came to the U.S. in the 70s, was the president of the Sephardic Bikur Holim (SBH). He was one of the most influential people in getting children into yeshivot so they don't end up in public schools. Along with other organizations, SBH helped secure funding for housing and finding jobs for the newcomers. The amount of help and support from the community (be it socially, emotionally, financially, etc) was tremendous and absolutely key to us adapting to the struggles of the new life.

[LC]: How did you leave?

[EH]: For some reason, I was the first in my family to get a travel visa. It happened to be during the summer of 1993 and I had just completed junior high school. My father wanted to give me a present for scoring in the 99th percentile in the Brevet National Exam which is a diploma awarded to students who are within the French cultural influence schools. He suggested taking me on vacation to the U.S. as a present. The plan was to spend the summer there and go back to Syria and start high school as we wait for the rest of the family to get their travel visas and then we'll all move together. However, when we got to the U.S., my uncle convinced my dad to leave me here and go back

to get the rest of the family when he could. And so he did. I never went back to Syria ever since. I never told my friends I wasn't coming back and didn't take any of my belongings with me. And just like that, I started a new life in a new place.

[LC]: What were your living conditions right after you arrived in the US?

[EH]: My aunt who had four children and pregnant was also a newcomer. She and her family lived in a two bedroom apartment on Avenue U. She agreed to host me until my parents moved to the U.S. My parents came a year and a half later. Needless to say, transitioning and adapting to my new life as a fourteen year old teenager was not easy. Attending an academically challenging high school that requires a dual curriculum while not knowing either English or Hebrew was exceptionally difficult. I was a stellar student in Syria, and here I was sitting in on lectures ten hours a day not understanding a single word of what's happening. Making friends was not easy either.

[LC]: How did you adjust and acclimate to life in the US?

[EH]: Yeshivah of Flatbush was amazing to me. They always made sure that I had the proper help to see me succeed. They believed in me even though they knew it would be a struggle in the beginning. I would not be where I am today without the help they have given me.

The first year was the most difficult, especially that my parents weren't here. I often felt lost and lonely. I am lucky that I am good with languages. I used to carry a huge dictionary with me wherever I go, and I would translate every single English and Hebrew word I see. I started watching the news and listening to music and to the Mets and Jets broadcast on WFAN to learn the proper pronunciation of words. My uncle, Dr. Ballas, would sit down and read with me the New York Times Op-Ed page every Sunday. Soon I started making friends. The next year, I made it to the honors class. It took a few years for me to feel confident. In my junior year, I ran for student government and won. That was a great moment for me.

I am an artist by nature. I love drawing, painting, and sculpting. I love working with my hands. I find in drawing

and painting a medium to express myself. So in high school, I started making art projects for the school like the yearbook cover and I participated in community and national art contests. In college, I minored in art and took many art courses that I really enjoyed. I wanted to choose a profession that fits my personality. In orthodontics, I found a profession where I get to work with my hands, express my artistic side, and make a difference in people's lives. I feel blessed to be an orthodontist.

[LC]: How did your experience shape who you are today?

[EH]: I truly believe that facing adversity and overcoming obstacles as a child helped shape who I am today. I became independent at a very young age. I learned to work hard and strive to be the best I could be. I implement the same principles now in my family life as a husband and a father, as well as in my professional life as an orthodontist. As I look back at my journey through childhood and young adult life, I cannot help but feel a great sense of gratitude to have had the experience that I did, and a sincere appreciation to all the people who helped me.

Eli graduated Yeshiva University and went on to earn his Doctorate from The University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine. He received his Post-Doctoral degree in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics at the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC. He currently works as an orthodontist in his private practice in Brooklyn, NY.

For more information, to participate in or to financially support this ongoing series please contact Lenore@Lenorecohen.com. So far the project has covered the stories of nine individuals representing six different countries. With adequate funding this series can be shared in venues across the US and inspire others to learn more about these important historical events.

Mrs. Cohen is a Brooklyn based artist and co-creator of the Silent Refugees project. Her proposal for an international group show on the same topic was recently invited to participate in the 2017 Jerusalem Biennale for Contemporary Jewish Art.

RARE EGYPTIAN MYSTERY NOVELS THAT I MAILED TO HANG WITH FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD. SOCCER BALLS MADE OURSELVES OUT OF CRUMPLED PAPER. NOT HAVING STRICTLY OR RUNNING WATER EIGHT HOURS EACH DAY. OUR APARTMENT WITH FOUR BALCONIES, OVERLOOKING THE RANCE TO THE JEWISH QUARTER. THE MOUNTAINS BEHIND HOUSE. ONE PINK BABY CRADLE WE USED FOR ALL THE . A SAFE WITH COINS MY GRANDFATHER COLLECTED FROM SOVIET UNION DURING WWI. A LARGE CLOSET OF JEWISH KS, NOW SITTING UNUSED ON THE SHELVES. JEWISH MENTARIES WRITTEN BY MY GREAT GRANDFATHER. BENCHES IN JAPANESE DESIGNS IN THE LIVING ROOM. SUNFLOWER PAPER IN MOM'S ROOM. THE CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP RE MY BROTHERS AND I LEARNED TO CARVE FIGURINES OF WOOD. THE BIKE I DECORATED AND RODE AROUND THE SE. MY SINGLE PAIR OF BLACK MARKET SNEAKERS FROM LEBANESE BORDER, WHICH I WORE AS I GREW UNTIL THE ES CAME OUT. MY WHOLE WARDROBE. OUR COMPUTER, FIRST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. MY CASSETTE PLAYER AND NCH AND ARABIC MUSIC COLLECTION. THE STONE BENCHES SHAGHOUR, THE SYNAGOGUE ON OUR STREET WHERE I RNED HAZZANUT AND WHERE THE CURRENT SYRIAN REVOLUTION RTED. THE COPPER DOOR DONATED IN MEMORY OF MY NDMOTHER AT JOBAR, THE SYNOGUGUE EAST OF DAMASCUS. FRIENDS FROM CATHOLIC SCHOOL, WHO I NEVER SAID

(past)

Eli's stamp collection from all over the Middle East. He left this behind when he immigrated and it's one of the few possessions his family later brought for him to the US. The text details some of the things that were abandoned in Syria.

ELECTED SECRETARY OF SENIOR COUNCIL IN HIGH SCHOOL AND GRADUATED WITH HONORS. THE SPEECH I GAVE AT GRADUATION ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE. MY BA FROM YESHIVA UNIVERSITY WITH A MINOR IN FINE ARTS, I LOVE DRAWING AND PAINTING AND WORKING WITH MY HANDS. FOUR YEARS OF DENTAL SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA WITH A SCHOLARSHIP. MY ORTHODONTICS DEGREE FROM THE CHILDREN'S NATIONAL MEDICAL CENTER IN DC. MY PRIVATE PRACTICE WHICH ORENE IN 2011. MARRIED IN 2010. TWO DAUGHTERS AND A BABY ON THE WAY. I ENJOY MY FAMILY MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE AND STOPPED BEING ATTACHED TO PHYSICAL OBJECTS AFTER MY EXPERIENCE. MY VOLUNTEER WORK WITH THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION SEPHARDIC BIKUR HOLIM. METALLICA AND PEARL JAM ALBUMS WHICH HELPED ME APPRECIATE AMERICAN MUSIC. MY MEMORY BOX OF BOOKS, NOTES AND MEMENTOS FROM HIGH SCHOOL. I LIKE TO SAVE SENTIMENTAL THINGS. MY POSITION AS THE HAZZAN AT KOL ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE. READING TEHILIM TO HELP ME THROUGH THE EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES OF WHAT I WENT THROUGH. FEELING GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE. DIRECTION AND FORTUITOUS TIMING OF THE EVENTS IN MY LIFE.

(current)

Eli in the Orthodontics office which he designed and owns. The text is an overview of his accomplishments and the life he built after leaving his home country.



FORGOTTEN GIANTS

RABBI ABRAHAM ANTEBI

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Rabbi Abraham Antebi רמב"א was born in Aleppo (Aram Soba), Syria, in 1765. He was a descendent of Jews expelled from Spain who settled in the city of En-Tab, now known as Antep, located in the south of Turkey. His great-great-grandfather, Hakham Rahamim (1554-1627), immigrated from En-Tab to Aleppo, and hence the origin of his last name Antebi.

In his youth he studied mainly with his father, Hakham Itzhaq Antebi, of the great sages of Aleppo. In 1817 he was appointed Rabbi and Superior Judge of all Aleppo, a position he held for more than 40 years.

Rabbi Antebi was a prolific author. His works deal mainly with *halakha* (Jewish law), *derushim* (speeches and sermons) and *musar* (Jewish ethics). He also composed several poems and songs of religious character. But no less than for his works, he was noted for his passionate dedication to the welfare of his community that in those years was in a very difficult situation.

In 1824 an earthquake devastated the city of Aleppo and about a thousand Jews died (in those days, the community did not exceed 10,000 people) and those who were saved, including the Rabbi, had to camp in makeshift tents outside the city and live there for 18 months. At that time Rabbi Antebi wrote his first book, which he called *Yosheb Ohalim*—“Seated in the Tents”. This book contains sermons on the weekly sections of the Tora in which it combines, in a very creative way, the halakhic analysis, the biblical stories and the *hagadic* narratives (stories and parables of the sages). In those makeshift tents, without his books, Rabbi Antebi wrote his work quoting all sources from his memory.

The main problem Rabbi Antebi faced as a community

leader was the general impoverishment of the community. Revenue fell, prices rose and the Ottoman Empire demanded more taxes. There are many stories about how the Rabbi dedicated all his efforts to supporting the needy. In his *musar* books *Ohel Yesharim* and *Hochma Umusar* he writes extensively about how each Jew is guarantor for his Yehudi brothers and should not ignore them in their times of trouble. He also wrote that one of the reasons for the bad economic situation of the Aleppo Jews was because people were only engaged in trade and had no professions. The Rabbi exhorted parents to provide their children with a profession and not be content

with just training them in trade.

“The Rabbi exhorted parents to provide their children with a profession and not be content...”

One of the Rabbi's most important books is

Mor Vahalot, questions and answers on innumerable cases that appeared in the community and required an authoritative rabbinical opinion.

Let's look at one of these questions (H.M. 2).

The custom of the Jewish courts in Aleppo was that the chief Rabbi of the city, then Rabbi Antebi, judged individually the various monetary conflicts, without being accompanied by two other judges (*dayanim*), which was the common practice of the other rabbinical judges.

The Rabbi was questioned for this procedure. It was not a legal problem, since according to the *halakha* the litigants can accept to be judged by a single *dayan*, but still there was an “ethical” problem. The famous rabbi Rabbi Shabetai Hakohen (the *Shakh*, Poland, seventeenth century, in HM 3, 10), based on the *Shulhan Arukh* and the Talmud of Jerusalem, wrote that although technically the rabbinical judge can judge for himself, it is not right that a judge would do so, unless he is a great expert in rabbinical jurisprudence. But it

MAQAM OF THE WEEK *Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com*

Dr. David M Betesh, DMD

On **Shabbat Hagadol**, which is the week before the Pesah festival, prayers are conducted in Maqam RAHAW (NAWAH), according to all Syrian sources. The usage of Maqam Rahaw is associated with this Shabbat, because

it is the maqam applied for the Passover Haggadah. HAZZANUT: Semehim: *Emunim Irkhu Shebah* (page 359). PIZMON SEFER TORAH: *Mi Yemallel* (page 361).

Continued from page22

does not end there. Rabbi Shakh goes on to say that no one today can be considered as a "great expert" as it was in the time of the Talmud. Since with the passing of the generations the knowledge of Tora has diminished. Therefore today no rabbi should judge individually. And many prominent rabbis adopted the Shakh's opinion.

At this point Rabbi Abraham enlightens us with his halakhic vision. Rabbi Antebi disagreed with the vision of the Shakh. These are some of his words:

Contrary [to what Rabbi Shakh said], it is more common to find an expert in our generations than in the generations of the Talmud, since the whole expertise [of the Talmud sages] was based on memory and oral transmission. In those times to be an expert was not very common. The same is not true in our

generation, because all [the law] is already written in the books and [the Sages] did not leave any great or small matter without recording it. Therefore, if a rabbinical judge knows how to legally analyze [the case at hand] and he is familiar with the books of the posqim (halakhic lawmakers), there is no doubt that he can be considered a "great expert" in law.

Rabbi Abraham Antebi died in Aleppo in 1858 at the age of 93, and is remembered to this day as one of Aleppo's greatest luminaries.



Rabbi Bitton is the Rabbi of Ohel David U'shlomo.

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SEPHARDIC CUSTOMS

MISHAROTAM: WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

Pesah is nearly upon us. We are all busy shopping, cleaning, cooking for the holiday which celebrates and commemorates many themes, including freedom from tyranny and the birth of our nation. On the first two nights of Pesah we read the Haggadah and we symbolically reenact the exodus with the recitation of “MISHAROTAM”.

What’s “Misharotam” you ask? It occurs right after the fourth step in the Haggadah entitled *Yahass*. The head of the household splits the middle massah into two pieces, a smaller one that is replaced between the two whole massot and a larger piece that is wrapped in a towel and saved to eat for the *afiqomin*. At that point, before continuing with *Ha Lahma Anya*, each person at the table holds this wrapped massah in their right hand over their left shoulder and says “*Misharotam Seroorot BeSimlotam Al Shikhmam Oobné Yisrael Asoo Kidbar Moshéh*”, after which there are a couple of questions and answers. In some communities not all present do this, rather only the head of the household does this, in other communities each person walks around the table while saying it.

As beautiful as this custom is, I have always been troubled and confused by a glaring problem that most seem to have glossed over. The Misharotam statement we recite is the combination of the latter half of one *pesooq* and the following half of the next *pesooq*. Here are the two *pesooqim* from Shemot 12:34 and 35, in which we read the bolded section only.

וַיֵּשָׂא הָעָם אֶת-בִּצְקוֹ, טָרֶם יִחְמֹץ; מִשְׁאֲרֵתָם צָרְרֹת בְּשִׁמְלֹתָם,
עַל-שִׁכְמָם

וּבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ, כְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה; וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ, מִמִּצְרַיִם, כְּלֵי-כֶסֶף
וּכְלֵי זָהָב, וּשְׁמֹלֹת

(34) *The people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. (35) The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing.*



Hakham Yisshaq Alfieh

Something is clearly wrong, because these two verses seemingly have nothing to do with each other. By us saying “their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders, The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding”, we are confusing the punctuation of the *pesooqim* and reciting a statement that is unintelligible.

For years I searched for an explanation to this dilemma without success. However, recently I am thrilled to say I just discovered an answer in the writings of Hakham Yisshaq Alfieh (Aleppo 1878 – Jerusalem 1955). In his *Siah Yisshaq* volume 1 (Jerusalem 1923), Hakham Yisshaq Alfieh approaches the issue by presenting a number of questions.

1. Why does the Torah need to say *Misharotam Seroorot...* (their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon

their shoulders) if it already said *Vayisa Ha'am Et Bessego* (the people took their dough)?

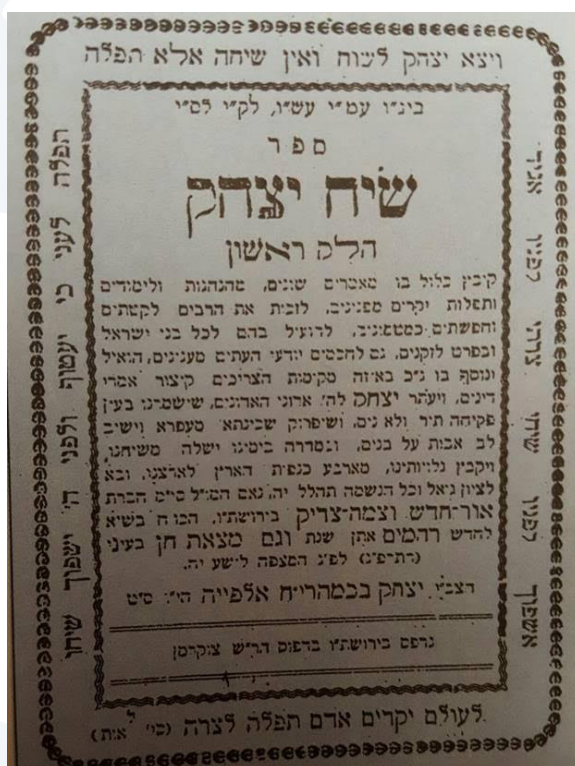
2. What difference does it make if they carried the kneading bowls on their shoulders, in their hands, on their donkeys, or in their vessels?
3. Why should it matter to us if they were wrapped or not?
4. Why mention wrapped in cloaks at all?
5. Why does the following *pasooq* say "The Children of Israel did the bidding of Moses and they borrowed..... which has no connection and it is also unclear if that has anything to do with what they borrowed?
6. If in fact Moses' bidding was to borrow, then shouldn't the *pasooq* have said: "The Children of Israel borrowed from the Egyptians; and they did as Moses said"; as is the format throughout the entire Torah, which always mentions the action, then, that it was in accordance with the command?
7. Moreover, the Torah never says *Bené Yisrael 'Asoo Kidbar Moshéh* except for this one instance. The rest of the Torah says "*VaYa'asoo KaAsher Sivah HaShem BeYad Moshéh*" or "*El Moshéh*", to show the command came from the Almighty and not from Moshéh himself. This is especially troubling knowing that in Shemot 11:2, Hashem specifically told Moshéh to tell the nation to borrow from the Egyptians. So why does our verse not mention, as God commanded?
8. Lastly, if we wish to say that the bidding of Moses has

to do with the dough in the previous verse, where can we find such a command from him in the text?

As I continued to read Hakham Yisshaq Alfiéh's analysis I was shocked to see that he suddenly stopped questioning the *pesuqim* and instead quoted just as many *Halakhot* from *Shoolhan Arokh* on *Hilkhot Pesah*.

The *Halakhot* are as follows:

1. 459:1 = Do not knead the dough in a sunny place, and on a cloudy day you cannot knead under any cloud cover because of the sun behind the clouds. {The *Eshel Abraham* comments that if you spread a cloth material above you, you can knead the dough}
2. 459:2 = The dough should not be left alone without being worked even one moment, and as long as it is being kneaded, even the entire day, it does not become *hamess*. If it was left without being worked for the period it takes to walk 1 mile it is then *hamess*.
3. 459:4 (*Mooram*) = One must be careful with the vessel in which the dough is kneaded; to be sure that vessel does not have any nooks or crannies.
4. 466:5 = Dew is like water in that it can cause a dough to become *hamess*. *Mooram* adds that human perspiration does not cause leavening.
5. 462:1 = Pure fruit juice without water does not allow the dough to turn into *hamess*.
6. 462:2 = Fruit juice with water hastens the leavening process.
7. 462:4 = Other beverages are considered like fruit juice.



Title page of Siah Yisshaq

8. 453:7 = When moving bags of flour from the mill, it is forbidden to place them on an animal that does not have a saddle separating the bag from the animals back. {The *Ba-er Heteb* comments, because the flour heats up from the animal's perspiration.}

Initially I could not imagine where the *Hakham* was going to go with these random *halakhot* and why he felt it necessary to specifically mention each of them after asking so many questions about the *pesooqim*. Then I realized his genius. He was using them to answer the questions, by tying biblical exegesis with *halakhah*, *minhag*, and Jewish thought.

Like the laws of the Pesah sacrifice, *Moshéh Rabbenoo* taught *Bené Yisrael* all the laws of Massah and *Hamess*. The *pasooq* is written as a testimony to these laws and the people's positive approach to fulfilling all the laws. The *pasooq* begins "The people took their dough before it was leavened"; meaning the dough was still *kasher* for baking *massot*. If you were to ask how did they carry their dough? Was it by donkey, or cow, or by hand, the *pasooq* tells you, their kneading bowls. They placed the dough in those bowls and that's how they transported it. [The *RaSHBa*"M explains that *Misharotam* are the bowls in which the dough was placed, as in *Debarim* 28:5, *Barookh Tanakha OoMishartekha*, Blessed should be your basket and your kneading bowl.]. Now you may ask, maybe these kneading bowls were not completely straight and smooth and may have had some crevices. Even if these bowls were without fault the dough was still susceptible to becoming *hamess* by being exposed to the cloud that covered the nation by day, the fire that protected the nation by night, as well as the moisture from the always present dew. That being the case how could the dough still be *kasher*? The *pasooq* tells us "*Seroorot BeSimlotam*" "wrapped in their cloaks". Yes, the entire dough was covered with material, on the bottom and sides to avoid the nooks and crannies of the bowl and on top to protect it from the clouds, fire, and dew that can all cause the dough to become *hamess*.

Wonderful, now we understand it was protected in every which way possible but there is still another problem. The people were trekking from Egypt into the desert for a distance far greater than a mile, which, according to *halakhah* would be a sufficient amount of time to turn the dough into *hamess*. Therefore the *pasooq* says "*Al Shikhmam*" "Upon their shoulders". Why is this so important to us? Because as we

know when a person walks, the entire body moves and anything carried on the shoulder moves as well. The pack of dough on the shoulder is now in constant motion and even if a person walked the entire day the dough would constantly roll around and never have a chance to rise or become *hamess*. This is why the *pasooq* found it essential to give us so many details that at first glance seemed completely unnecessary.

Looking back at the *pasooq* and its details and all the *halakhot*, why then were the bowls even necessary? They could have just wrapped the dough in material and carried it on their shoulders. The reason for that was because the dough was already kneaded with water, and if they carried them directly on their shoulders we are concerned about their perspiration. Although we know that human perspiration cannot turn it into *hamess*, that's only if it's by itself, but if mixed with water, the law is like fruit juice mixed with water, which hastens the leavening process, (even within a distance of less than a mile).

Finally we see that *Bené Yisrael* did everything to the exact letter of the law, that is the reason for the next *pasooq* which says: "*Oobné Yisrael 'Asoo Kidbar Moshéh*" "The Israelites had done Moses' bidding". To tell us they followed not only *Torah Shebikhtab* (The Written Law) but *Torah SheBa'al Peh* (The Oral Law) as well, which is also called *Torat Moshéh*. We know there are laws called *Halakhah LeMoshéh MeSinai*; these are the laws of the oral Torah that Moshéh taught the nation. These laws are called Moshéh's laws even though they also came from HaShem.

This, *Hakham Yisshaq Alfiéh* concludes is the reason all Jews throughout the world, carry the *massah* on their shoulders and say *MISHAROTAM SEROUROT BESIMLOTAM 'AL SHIKHMAM OUBNÉ YISRAEL 'ASOO KIDBAR MOSHEH*, to proclaim that our forefathers upheld all the laws as taught to them by Moshéh, and we in turn will always do the same.



Mr. Joseph Mosseri is a community member who is well known and highly regarded for his expertise in the areas of Sephardic laws and customs, *hakhamim*, history, books, and *hazzanut*.



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WOMEN'S LEARNING SCHEDULE

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	SHABBAT
11:00am - 12:30pm MRS. VIVIEN HIDARY <i>Location: Mikdash Eliyahu</i> <i>400 Avenue U</i> <i>Analysis of Parashat Hashabua</i>	11:00am - 12:00pm MRS. ANNIE SAVDIE <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Niddah - From Torah to Today</i>	10:30am - 11:45am RABBI NAFTALI BESSER <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Themes and Ideas of the Parasha</i>	Minha Time MRS. VIVIEN HIDARY <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Parashat Hashabua</i>
	11:15am - 12:15pm MRS. FRIEDA CATTAN <i>(February only)</i> <i>Location: Mikdash Eliyahu</i> <i>400 Avenue U</i> <i>Jewish History Second Temple Period</i>		Minha Time MRS. ILANA ALOUF <i>Location: Hochma U'Mussar</i> <i>718 Avenue S</i> <i>Parashat Hashabua</i>
12:45pm - 1:45pm MRS. MARGARET BENHAMU <i>Location: Mikdash Eliyahu</i> <i>400 Avenue U</i> <i>Texts of the Hagim: Megillat Esther/ Haggadah/ Megillat Ruth</i>	12:15pm - 1:15pm RABBI RICKY HIDARY/ MRS. ESTHER HIDARY <i>(alternate weeks)</i> <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Reading the Torah Philosophically</i>	12:00pm - 1:00pm MRS. EMILY LABATON <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Jewish History - Confrontation with the Greeks</i>	
	1:30pm - 2:30pm MRS. ILANA ALOUF <i>Location: Beth Torah</i> <i>1061 Ocean Parkway</i> <i>Shir Hashirim-The Relationship Bet. God & Israel Throughout History</i>	1:00pm - 2:00pm RABBI RAYMOND HARARI <i>Location: Mikdash Eliyahu</i> <i>400 Avenue U</i> <i>Insights into the Weekly Parasha</i>	
8:00pm - 9:00pm RABBI AVI HARARI <i>Location: Shaare Shalom</i> <i>2021 Avenue S</i> <i>Sefer Shemuel</i> <i>Young Adult Women</i>	7:00pm - 8:00pm RABBI MOSES HABER <i>Location: Bnei Yitzhak</i> <i>730 Avenue S</i> <i>Jewish Thought and Jewish Values</i> <i>Young Adult Women</i>		
	8:15pm - 9:15pm MRS. AURA SUTTON <i>Location: Hochma U'Mussar</i> <i>718 Avenue S</i> <i>Tefilot of Shabbat and Holidays</i>		

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