

QOL HA'QAHAL קול הקהל



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DEDICATED BY NANCY & GABY KHEZRIE AND LIZA & HYMIE SHAMAH
IN HONOR OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME
FOR THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT OF THE COMMUNITY



*Dedicated by Nancy & Gaby Khezrie and Liza & Hymie Shamah
In honor of those individuals who volunteer their time
for the educational benefit of the community*

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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.

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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

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

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THE TOWER OF BABEL – A TALE OF TOLERANCE

Rabbi Joseph Beyda

Towards the end of *Parashat Noah*, there is a nine verse segment that is as cryptic as it is famous. Due in part to its simple style, the Tower of Babel narrative is one that has captured the imagination of readers of the Bible for generations.

Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar. And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.” The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, and the Lord said, “If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach.

Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another’s speech.” Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (*Beresheet* 11:1-9 [NJPS Translation])

“We must go to great lengths to see the special qualities in each and every individual person.”

Upon closer inspection, however, the reader notices that the simple style of the text gives rise to a number of questions:

- Once we know that the people spoke the same language, what is meant by the “same words”?
- Why does the Torah point out the materials the people utilized to build the tower – bricks and bitumen?
- What did the people hope to accomplish with their tower?
- What about the tower that disturbs God?
- Why does God respond with this particular course of action?

Various opinions in the *Midrash* and in traditional commentaries on the Bible put forth a number of details that are not expressly supported by the text: the tower contained an idol, the people were rebelling against God, and the people feared another flood. These details make the people seem either evil, foolish, or both. In response, God seems to take their “threat” seriously. His mixture of language is a punishment to prevent this threat to His greatness. Although these interpretations help fill in some of the gaps in the narrative, it is difficult to accept that the Bible would leave out such essential details. It is even more difficult to accept that God could be threatened and somewhat frightening to see God as vindictive. Perhaps there can be a different approach.

The opening statement, “the same language, the same words” highlights the key detail to understanding the narrative. Having a common language facilitated communication, but also led to like-mindedness – one way of doing things. Not only did they speak the same language, but they were saying the same things – thinking uniformly. This is alluded to by their choice of building materials: all *bricks* are the same, as opposed to stones which are unique. Their fear does not seem to be of a flood or of God – they don’t even mention His name. Instead, it seems they fear the loss of what they hold dear: their sameness. By embarking on a common project in which uniformity was the centerpiece (as evidenced by the emphasis on the bricks), the people sought to stick together and stay the same.



Lucas van Valckenborch, *The Tower of Babel*, 1594, Louvre Museum, Paris.

This was unacceptable to God. God's creation is incredibly diverse; human schemes to diminish this diversity countered the purpose of His creation. Rather than punish the people, God corrects the situation by scattering the people all over the earth. If we pay close attention to the text, we will notice the scattering takes place before the different languages. God's plan is to ensure different languages, scattering the people is the manner in which he accomplishes it. In this view, God does not punish the people nor does he respond to irrational fears or practices. Instead, he acts as the loving steward of His creation. He is witnessing the human tendency to uniformity and seeks to correct it.

In a generation where behemoths such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and others wield enormous influence in the way we act and think, we must beware of the perils of uniformity that mankind has struggled with since the time of *Migdal Babel*. In our Community, in particular, we must likewise protect diversity with great care. A tight-knit group such as ours that is centralized in one place and fears dispersion must be careful not to subvert the natural diversity *Hashem* has created in each of us. As the *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 4:1) teaches, "God is different than a king of flesh and blood. When a king of flesh and blood mints coins out of one mold, all coins are the same. Not so, the Holy One Blessed be He; all humans descend from Adam, yet no two are the same!" We must go to great lengths to see the special qualities in each and every individual person. This includes being tolerant of others that do not act or think exactly as I would. It also means standing up for the right of others to serve *Hashem* in ways appropriate for them. Read in this way, the events in the valley of Shinar are not merely a recounting of an important historic event, but a cautionary tale that has as much importance and relevance today as when it was written.

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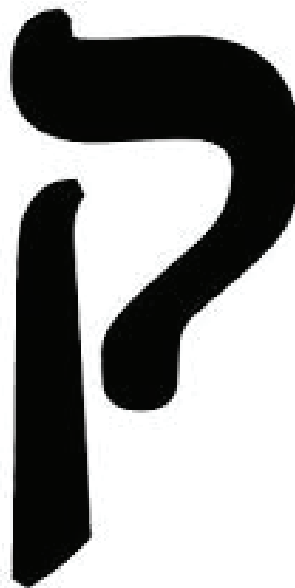
QUESTION: WHY IS THE WORD "QOL" IN "QOL HA'QAHAL" WRITTEN WITH A "Q" RATHER THAN A "K"?

Answered by Dr. Izak Faiena

The history of transliteration of Hebrew using Roman letters began during the Greek and Roman periods, and has since been adapted to other languages such as English. The process of transliteration, as opposed to transcription, is to represent the letters and sounds of a certain word in another alphabet. Hebrew-English transliteration has many variations with no accepted standard even among scholars given the varied nuances of pronunciation among different regions. The most commonly used style by the Society of Biblical Literature attempts to accurately depict the Hebrew letters so as to differentiate the sounds of all the letters (*[b]et* vs. *[v]et*; *[h]eh* vs *[h]et*). As *Saadia Gaon* teaches (*Book*

of Elegance of the Language of the Hebrews), there are no two letters in the Hebrew alphabet that have similar sounds (even in the case of *sin* and *samekh*, although the true pronunciation has been lost). In our case, accurate transliteration is important to differentiate the meaning of the word – "Qol" (קול) meaning "voice" versus "Kol" (כול) meaning "all."

Dr. Izak Faiena is a Graduate of Yeshiva University and Albert Einstein College of Medicine, currently training in urology and urologic oncology Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.





Sephardic History

RABBI ISAAC CARDOSO (1608-1687)

by Rabbi Yosef Bitton



The March 1944 eruption of Mount Vesuvius, by Jack Reinhardt, B-24 tailgunner in the USAAF during WWII

Rabbi Isaac Cardoso was a Jewish physician, philosopher and polemic writer. He was born as Fernando Cardoso into a *converso* (a.k.a “marrano” or “crypto-jewish”) family in Trancoso, Portugal, in 1604. His family, as many other Jewish families in Portugal, kept Jewish observance secretly for many generations.

Fernando spent his youth in Valladolid, Spain. He studied medicine, philosophy, and natural sciences at the prestigious university of Salamanca, Spain. He excelled in his medical practice and in 1632 he became the chief physician of Madrid. In Madrid he published an article on Mt. Vesuvius, analyzing the causes of earthquakes. He also composed a funeral poem (elegy) for the famous Spanish poet Lope de Vega and a treatise on the uses of cold water, dedicated to King Philip IV of Spain. Fernando Cardoso left Spain and settled in Venice where he embraced publicly Judaism. In Venice he changed his name to “Isaac.” After a short stay in Venice he settled in Verona, where he remained until his death, highly honored by Jews and Christians.

Aside from the works already mentioned, Cardoso published a comprehensive treatise on cosmogony, physics, medicine, philosophy, theology, and natural sciences, printed at Venice in 1673 under the title *Philosophia*

Libera in Septem Libros Distributa.

He wrote his most famous Jewish book in Spanish, *Las Excelencias y Calumnias de los Hebreos*, printed in 1679 at Amsterdam. In the first ten chapters of this long book he describes the “*excelencias*” (distinguishing features) of the Jews, their selection by God, their separation from all other peoples by special laws, their compassion for the sufferings of others, their philanthropy, chastity, faith, etc.; and in next ten chapters he refutes the “*calumnias*” (calumnies) brought against them; that Jews worship false gods, that they have a tail, smell badly, are hard and unfeeling toward other peoples, have corrupted the Scriptures, blaspheme holy images and the host, kill Christian children to use their blood for ritual purposes, etc.

This book was submitted in 1679 to Rabbi Shemuel Abohab in Venice. Rabbi Abohab praised the book and thanked Rabbi Cardoso for his splendid work. A brief text from the introduction:

“El pueblo de Ysrael, al mismo passo amado de Dios que perseguido de los hombres, ha dos mil años desde el tiempo de Nebuhadnezzar que anda esparzido en las naciones....de unas maltratado, de otras herido, y de todas despreciado, sin que haya monarquía o reyno que no haya desembainado contra el la espada...”

Translation¹: “The people of Israel, at the same time loved by God and persecuted by men, has been two thousand years, from the times of Nebuhadnezzar, scattered among the nations.... abused by some, wounded by others, and despised by all, there is no monarchy or kingdom that has not drawn its sword against him”

Those who can understand classic Spanish can read now *Las Excelencias y Calumnias de los Hebreos*, directly from the original source, thanks to Hebrewbooks. (See: www.hebrewbooks.org)

¹Translation by Rabbi Yosef Bitton

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“He excelled in his medical practice and in 1632 he became the chief physician of Madrid. In Madrid he published an article on Mt. Vesuvius, analyzing the causes of earthquakes.”



Guest Articles

THE POWER OF DIALOGUE

by Mrs. Vivien Hidary

During the entire narrative of the flood Noah does not utter a single sound. An ark built, an entire civilization destroyed, and not a peep. A safe landing and disembarking, followed by a rainbow covenant, and still nothing. When Noah finally does speak it is at the end of his story to curse his grandson Canaan.

Noah had been the hope for a brighter future. “Zeh Yenahmenu...” As a *Saddik Tamim*, he had so much promise, but his generation filled the land with *hamas* – corruption and immorality. The only way to cleanse the earth was to turn the world into a virtual *mikveh*. After an entire solar year, the world was once again habitable. In Beresheet 8:15-16, God again addresses Noah:

טו: וַיִּדְבֹּר אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-נֹחַ לֵאמֹר טז: מִן-הַתֵּבָה--אַתָּה, וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ וְנָשֵׁי-בְנֶיךָ אִתְּךָ

“And God spoke to Noah: “Go forth from the Ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you.”

Anyone who has spent even a short amount of time in cramped quarters would find it odd that Noah needs to be told to leave the ark. We would imagine Noah taking the first possible opportunity to venture out. Possible explanations could be that Noah’s hesitance was driven by fear, or that perhaps he was waiting for instruction from God. But an interesting fact might shed some light. This is the very first time since creation that we encounter the word *Va’YDaber*, comprised of the root דבר.

Throughout the account of creation, God spoke and the world came to be. Every utterance was delivered with the same form of speech, *Va’Yomer*, from the root אמר. By the time Noah arrives on the scene, everything that had been shaped by expressions of אמר was in danger of extinction.

Defining אמר (a-m-r):

I’d like to suggest that אמר is speech in monologue form. It can refer to the formulation of concepts in one’s mind before they are spoken. The way one would speak to themselves. Akin to a one- way conversation, the first אמר was “And God said (אמר): Let there be light.” Much like an announcement, אמר utterances do not expect a verbal response. It is talking to, as opposed to speaking with.

Before killing his brother it says of Cain (Beresheet 4:8):

ח: וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו; וַיְהִי בְהִיטָתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה, וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ”

“And Cain said to Hevel his brother, and it was when they were in the field that Cain rose up and killed his brother Hevel”

The text does not record what Cain said. The reader is left wondering if anything was said at all. Sadly, a lack of communication led to murder. By Noah’s generation, “*Va’Tiemaleh ha’aress hamas*” the land was filled with *hamas*. אמר statements do not warrant a reply, and so they curb interaction, the cornerstone of relationships. Looking back at all that was said before the deluge, the world could not have continued on monologue alone. Humans require give-and-take conversations to form connections. Words trapped in a vacuum can only resonate but not integrate.

Defining דבר (d-b-r):

דבר is a collaboration, a partnership. The context of the first *Va’YDaber*, is “*Va’YDaber E-lohim el Noah...Seh min Ha’Tebah* (Go out from the ark).” With this new word, דבר, God wanted to introduce a new conversational technique. Instead of the אמר system, where



View of Mt. Ararat, from Igdir, Turkey

Noah was merely a loyal subject, **דבר** would foster a two-way relationship of mutual understanding. To build a new world together, God sought to bring out what was inside Noah's ark, and eventually, what was inside his mind. God was extending an invitation for the internal to come along with the external.

Noah remained silent. This form of dialogue unfortunately was never mastered by Noah. As a result his post flood legacy was a severed relationship with Ham, who fathered Cush, begetting Nimrod, Babel and Azzah – all nationalities that without **דבר**, must resort to violence and are incapable of negotiating or achieving peace.

The next attempt...

The generation that followed Noah tried building a tower to the heavens. They were unsuccessful because they attempted to become unified without allowing for independent points of view.

א: "וַיְהִי כָל-הָאָרֶץ, שָׁפָה אֶחָת, וּדְבָרִים, אֶחָדִים"

"And all of the land was of one language, and uniform words."

Their lack of individuality did not lead to harmony as they had hoped, rather, it led to their being dispersed. In search of a communist society, they lost their distinct identities. No **דבר** verbs in this story, only **אמר**, and so the tower became known as Babel.

God specifically disciplined them with a linguistic challenge, spreading them out with different languages, in order to foster a world that is unified, not uniform. To speak the language of another nationality, we weigh and measure how to articulate our ideas, considering how they will be interpreted. We introspect on how to clearly frame what we want to say, so our audience can understand. Imagining how they will respond, requires the sophistication of going inside the mind of the other. Seeing things from the other's viewpoint gives the perspective needed to dialogue.

"Ultimately, for harmony to exist between God and man, and also between man and his fellow, we need to master the art of communication."

Mastering the Art of Speech

It isn't until Abraham has his name changed, signifying the recognition of his destiny, that we have our first human speaking using *d-b-r*. In his plea to spare Sodom, Abraham takes the strong stance of questioning the way God governs the world. He wants to understand how God thinks, what motivates His actions. "It is sacrilege...to bring death upon the righteous together with the evil...Shall the Judge of the world not do justice?" God hears, and agrees to save the city if there are 50 righteous people. Abraham continues in 18:27:

כז: "וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם, וַיֹּאמֶר: הִנֵּה-נָא הוֹאֵלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי, וְאַנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר"

"Abraham answered saying, I had desired to speak (d-b-r) with my Master and I am only dust and ashes."

Abraham is finally able to dialogue with God when he understands that although he may be dust and ashes, he has the right to negotiate with God. He realizes that God has been yearning for Man to inquire, waiting for this relationship that celebrates reciprocity of speech. Asking questions and investing time getting to know others creates a bond. When we strike up a conversation with a total stranger, they are no longer strange. Finding common ground is a cornerstone for dialogue. In contrast to Noah who did not utter a single sound, Abraham ultimately speaks on behalf of the world's citizens and advocates for them, because of his genuine interest in people. His care for humanity awards him the title of "*Ab Hamon Goyim*", the Father of Many Nations.

Ultimately, for harmony to exist between God and man, and also between man and his fellow, we need to master the art of communication. When "That which comes from the heart, goes into the heart," **דבר** is achieved. As children of Abraham we too can utilize the Power of Dialogue to challenge and be challenged, to hear and be heard, to understand and be understood. Proper use of this gift of speech can rid the world of evil, terror and violence, and inaugurate the glory of peace on earth.

Mrs. Vivien Hidary has been teaching in the Brooklyn Sephardic community for 25 years. Mrs. Hidary lectures at the annual Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Yemei Iyun and gives weekly classes at Congregation Beth Torah.

LEKH-LEKHA: GO FORTH FROM YOUR LAND

AN EDUCATIONAL MESSAGE FOR ALL JEWS AND FOR ALL TIME¹

Prof. Moshe Kaveh

God commands Abraham: “Go forth from your land, from your birthplace and from your father’s home to the land that I will show you.” The fact that God must **command** Abraham to leave his land and birthplace, as well as his father’s home, can teach us an important lesson: our land, our birthplace and our parents’ home constitute, for each of us, a natural and proper environment, an environment that provides us with our basic education and with our value system. Any departure from that environment can threaten the integrity of our value system. In order to help Abraham deal effectively with that threat, God accompanies His commandment with a promise: “I will turn you into a great nation, I will bless you and bring glory to your name, and your very presence will be considered a blessing in the eyes of all.”

The message we can learn from the first verse of this week’s Torah Portion is that, without God’s promise, being away from the Land of Israel can lead to become estranged from the spiritual foundations acquired with great effort in “your father’s home.” The concept behind the commandment “Go forth” – namely, the danger inherent in one’s departure from the Holy Land – has eternal validity for all generations.

During the present era, we are witnessing an increasing trend towards assimilation that threatens the very future of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Motivated by the very best of intentions, many Jews, who have performed the act of “Go forth” in order to enjoy the benefits of the blessing bestowed on Abraham (“I will turn you into a great nation, I will bless you and bring glory to your name”) have had to confront the inevitable result: ultimately, when you “go forth from your land [and] from your birthplace”, you distance yourself “from your father’s home”. The children of those who have left

the shores of the Land of Israel have abandoned the legacy of Abraham and have become assimilated Jews. The reason for this phenomenon is the fact that not every Jew has the same moral level that Abraham had. In fact, as the Bible attests, even Abraham himself was afraid to depart from the Land of Israel and only did so because he was commanded by God: “Abraham went forth in accordance with what God told him” (Gen. xii:4). And, immediately following his departure, he had to contend with trials that posed the threat of distancing him from the values of “your father’s home”.

Abraham’s wife, Sarah, is taken to Pharaoh’s court and her husband introduces her as his sister. In order to save his own life, he is compelled to lie and he therefore instructs her: “Tell them that you are my sister, so that I may prosper because of you and so that I may remain alive thanks to you”. Had he stayed in his homeland, he would never have had to resort to such means. It is only thanks to God’s intervention – “God caused Pharaoh and the members of his court great afflictions because Sarah had wrongfully been taken from her husband” (Beresheet 12:17) – Abraham does not falter. From Abraham’s experiences, we can learn the following: a Jew wanting to perform the act of “Go forth” without first receiving the same promise of a safe journey with which God blessed Abraham will be faced with a maze of complex trials, some of which may, in fact, be insurmountable. This possibility of exposure to insurmountable tasks is the basic factor behind the process of assimilation.

Whereas the immigrants to the various lands of the Diaspora managed to preserve what they had learned in their “father’s home”, the children of these same immigrants were in quite a different situation, because the paternal home of the children

“The success of any educational institution is put to the test only if the students of that institution, even after graduating, continue to act in accordance with what their teachers conveyed to them”



was located in neither their own land nor their own birthplace and because a paternal home on alien soil lacks the spiritual substance to immunize the children to withstand the temptations of the surrounding culture. The difficult situation we are witnessing today – namely, the abandonment of Judaism’s values by a significant segment of the Jewish people – will be a source of pain for generations to come.

There is yet another lesson to be learned from this week’s Torah portion. Even when a Jew living in the Diaspora seems to have succeeded in preserving the values of Judaism, there is no guarantee that the children or grandchildren of that same Jew will do the same. Short-term achievements in the spiritual realm do not hold the promise of long-term achievements in that realm. Abraham’s example teaches us that point: he manages to retain his values beyond the boundaries of the Holy Land and is promised by God: “you will be a blessing for all the families of this earth” (12:3). Wherever he turns, Abraham brings with him his basic values of religious belief and morality, as we can see in the way he solves the major economic-commercial problem of his era: “While the Canaanites and Perizites were still resident in the Land, a dispute arose between the shepherds of Abraham’s flocks and the shepherds of Lot’s flocks” (13:7). We might well ask ourselves why does the Bible draw our attention to the fact that the the Canaanites and Perizites are still resident in the Holy Land? As we can learn from the Bible, the society in which Abraham finds himself lives by the moral standards of the Canaanites and Perizites, and these standards are vastly inferior to those observed by Abraham. Today, the world of business propagates a value system according to which survival is possible only through the hostile acquisition of our competitors. If Abraham had acted the way business operates in the twentieth century, he would have gained the control of the entire area and then would have leased a portion of the land to his principal commercial rival, Lot. Instead, Abraham turns to Lot with the request, “Let there be no strife between the two of us...”, and declares: “You can choose whatever portion of the land that stretches out before you; let us part as friends. If you want the land on the left side, I shall take the land on the

right; however, if you want the land on the right side, I shall take the land on the left”. Ultimately, “Lot chose the Jordan plain.” In other words, to obtain peace within his extended family, Abraham gives in and allows his commercial rival to select a choice piece of real estate - a portion of land “blessed with abundant water resources”. The high moral standards adhered to by Abraham are certainly not those of the Canaanite and Perizite inhabitants of the Holy Land.

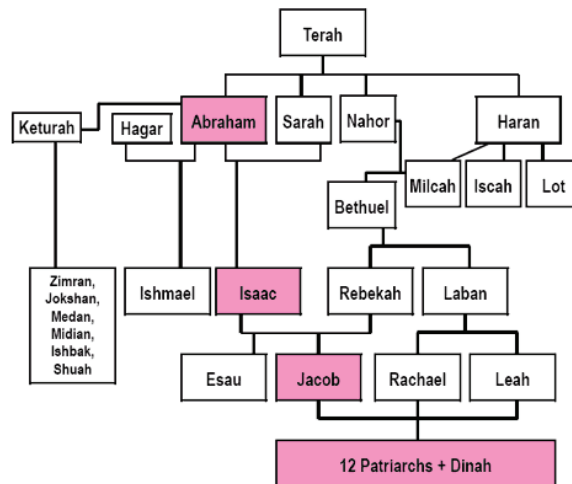
When Lot is taken prisoner of war and when his property is confiscated by an alliance of four evil insurgent kings, Abraham declares war on the alliance and, in doing so, he sanctifies the name of God, as we learn from the words of the king of Salem, Malkitzedek, who blesses our patriarch: “Abram has been truly blessed by God, the Supreme Lord, who has created heaven and

earth”. Here again we can observe Abraham’s morality in action. When he willingly declines to take any part in what was looted during the war (because he feels the loot does not belong to him), Abraham utters the famous statement, “I shall take nothing from you – not one thread, not one shoelace.” Instead of emulating the culture of his surroundings, Abraham acts in accordance with a new moral standard, which is totally alien to the five kings he has helped to defend.

As we can see from the story of our first patriarch, the blessings that God bestowed upon him (“you will be a blessing for all the families of this earth”) enabled Abraham to exercise his religious and moral values. Nonetheless, what kind of education does Abraham provide for his son, Isaac? Abraham teaches Isaac how to avoid the trials and tribulations brought on when one performs the act of “Go forth”. In line with what he has learned from Abraham, Isaac never leaves the Holy Land. Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, on the other hand, does depart from the Land of Canaan and takes up residence in Egypt, where the Jewish people become a “mighty nation”. That emigration is also the beginning of our first exile, whose bitter lessons have, regrettably, been learned much too slowly in the course of Jewish history.

Our ancient sages permitted journeys beyond the boundar-

Abraham's Family Tree



“Short-term achievements in the spiritual realm do not hold the promise of long-term achievements in that realm”

ies of the Holy Land only if the journey was of short duration and was intended to meet practical needs. Thanks to this license, we may travel overseas today in order to participate in international conferences or in training programs, and to go on sabbatical leave. All of these activities can be linked to the blessing bestowed by God on Abraham: "I will bless you and bring glory to your name". In contrast, those who translate into reality the words "Go forth from your land, from your birthplace" on a permanent basis face the danger that their own children or grandchildren will abandon the heritage of "your father's home."

In conclusion, there is yet another element contained in the command "Go forth", and this element can be found in every educational institution. The initiator of the "Daily Page of Talmud" (*Hadaf Hayomi*), Rabbi Shapira of blessed memory, inscribed beside the entrance to the Lublin Yeshiva the verse "Go forth, my children, and listen to my words, and I will teach you the fear of God" (Psalms 34:12). When asked to explain the meaning of this inscription, he replied that, while they attend an educational institution, the members of the younger generation certainly obey the command, "listen to my words"; however, the success of any educational institution

is put to the test only if the students of that institution, even after graduating, continue to act in accordance with what their teachers conveyed to them. Thus, the emphasis, Rabbi Shapira continued, is on "Go forth, my children": if, even after they have "gone forth," they still "listen to my words," the educational institution they attended has truly done a good job.

This is the educational message behind the phrase, "Go forth": you should go forth only if you are taking with you the heritage of "your father's home."

In light of the above, we should direct the holy work of educating our students such that, even after they have "gone forth" from the university, even after they have received their degree, they will continue to spread the concept of the inter-meshing of Torah and science in their own professional and personal lives.

¹This article is from the Bar Ilan Website, <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/lekh/lech3.html>.

Prof. Moshe Kaveh is the President of Bar-Ilan University and a Professor of Physics.

MAQAM OF THE WEEK

Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com

by David Betesh DDS

On Shabbat Noah (Genesis 6:9-11:32)

Prayers are conducted in *Maqam Sigah* (or specifically, *Maqam Iraq*) according to most sources. *Sigah* is familiar to most, because it is the *maqam* that Syrian Jews use for the Torah Readings. This *maqam* is usually applied when there is a mention of building something. In this case, we may be referring to the building of the *Tebah* (ark), an altar, or the Tower of *Babel*. The usage of *Maqam Iraq* may be due to the association of the Flood and the Tower of *Babel* with the Iraq region. In addition, we are introduced to Abram, a native of the Iraqi city, Ur. Some sources indicate to apply *Maqam Bayat* for *Shabbat Noah* possibly due to the proximity of *Rosh Hodesh*. The Damascus custom for this Shabbat is *Maqam Nawah*.

Hazzanut:

Qaddish: *Yonah Yequsha* (page 437), *Semehim*: *Eshtabeah Bithilot* (*Baqashot*, page 31), *Naqdishakh*: *Asis El Bakh* (page 441).

Mishmara:

Noah, *Joshua* 12-19, *Psalms* 12-20, *Mishnah Kinim*

On Shabbat Lekh Lekha (Genesis 12:1-17:27)

Prayers are conducted in *Maqam Saba* ('*Sabi*' means 'baby boy' in Arabic), according to all Aleppo sources. *Saba* is the *maqam* used to symbolize the covenant ('*Berit*'). This *maqam* also portrays the emotion of pain and crying, just like the baby cries at the *Berit Milah* (circumcision). In this parasha, Abraham performs the *Berit Milah* covenant.

Hazzanut:

Berit Milah tunes: *Semehim*: *YiGodal Elohim Hai* for *Berit Milah*, *Mimisrayim*: *Mah Tob Mah Na'im* (page 411), *Naqdishakh*: *Atah Ahubi* (page 410)

Pizmon Sefer Torah:

Ahallel VeAgilah (page 409). Damascus sources indicate to apply *Maqam Sigah-Iraq* ('*Si-kah*' means 'third').

Aliyot

The Sixth *Aliyah* about *Malki-Sedeq* ends "*Ma'asser Mikol*" (14:20), and the *Samoukh Aliyah* ends with "*Oumelakhim Mimmekha Yesseou*" (17:6).

Mishmara

Lekh Lekha, *Joshua* 20-end, *Psalms* 21-34, *Mishnah Ma'aserot* and *Ma'aser Sheni*

BIRKAT KOHANIM: REMOVING SHOES AND WASHING HANDS

Mr. Morris Arking

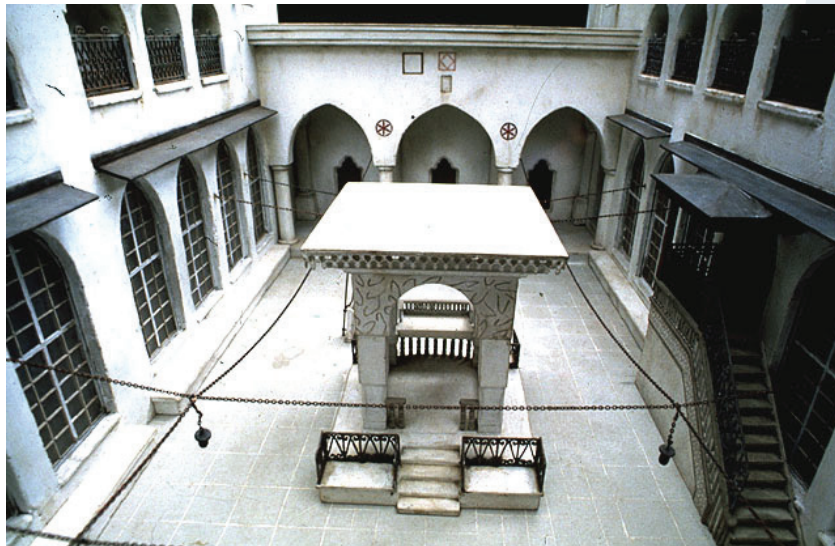
Removing Shoes

In *Shulhan 'Arukh Orach Haim 128:5 Maran Rabbi Yosef Caro* (1488 – 1575) writes that *Kohanim* should not ascend the platform (to make *Kohanim*) with their shoes on. Rabbi Abraham Ades in his book *Derekh Eress* (published 1990) writes that in *Halab*, there were *Kohanim* that made *Birkat Kohanim* while wearing their shoes since they did not ascend a platform (*Dukhan*) to make the *Berakhah*. Hakham Yis'haq Tawil (born ca. 1930 Aleppo), son of former Chief Rabbi of *Halab* Hakham Mose' Tawil A"H (1896-1976), also confirmed that this was the custom in *Halab* not to remove one's shoes. This is based on the opinion that interprets *Maran* as only requiring *Kohanim* to remove their shoes before they make *Birkat Kohanim* if they ascend a platform. This opinion is quoted by Rabbi Obadyah Yosef in *Yehave Da'at* (*Heleq Bet*) in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua' Pera'ha HaKohen (*Vayikra Yehoshua* published 1882 Izmir) and Rabbi Ya'aqob Moshe Toledano (1880-1960). The practice is also quoted in the *Responsa Yen HaTob* of the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Yis'haq Nessim (1896-1981). Furthermore, Hakham Barukh Ben Haim A"H (1921-2005) attested to this custom in a recorded interview in 1964/5. It is also reported that Hakham Matloub 'Abadi A"H (1889-1970) further explained that the *Kohanim* are required to remove their shoes if they ascend a platform that is at least three *Tefachim* (10 inches) above floor level. But if the platform is less than ten inches above floor level, they may wear their shoes when making the *Berakhah*.

Washing Hands

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* (*Orach Haim 128*) brings a difference of opinion between the *Posqim* ("legal authorities") regarding the requirement for *Kohanim* to wash their hands before making *Birkat Kohanim*. According to the *Tosafot* (12th-14th centuries), the *Kohanim* are required to wash their hands immediately prior to making *Birkat Kohanim*, even though they made *Netilat*

Yadayim when they woke up in the morning. However, according to *HaRambam* (1135-1204), the *Netilat Yadayim* that is made upon waking up in the morning, that is valid for reciting *Qeriat Shema* and the *'Amidah*, is also valid for making *Birkat Kohanim*, provided that the *Kohen* is not aware of any impurity of his hands since he washed in the morning. Therefore, according to *HaRambam*, the *Kohanim* are not required to wash their hands again before making *Birkat Kohanim*. The *Bet Yosef* also quotes Rabbi Aharon Ben Ya'aqob HaKohen in his book *Orhot Hayyim* (ca. 14th century), who quotes *Rabbenu Abraham Ben HaRambam* (1186-1237): "*Halakhah L'Ma'aseh Lifne Abba Mori Z"l V'Zulato M'More HaTorah, SheKol Kohen Ha'Omed BiTfilah Yigash L'Birkat Kohanim V'Somekh 'Al Netilat Yadav LiQriat Sh'ma V'LiTfilah.*"



The Great Synagogue in Aleppo

the subsequent generation of *Maran*, by Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra (Popularly known as the *Radbaz* 1479-1573) and Rabbi Ya'aqob Castro (died 1610). Rabbi Hayim Benveniste (1603-1673) in *K'nesset HaG'dolah* quotes *HaRambam's* opinion as well, and the *Ya'abess* (Rabbi Ya'aqob Emden 1697-1776) ruled in accordance with this ruling. Similarly, the *Magen Abraham* (Rabbi Abraham Gombiner 1635-1682) described it as the custom in some places. Therefore, those communities where the *Kohanim* do not wash their hands again prior to *Birkat Kohanim*, are not required to change their custom, since it is a custom that is well-supported *Halakhically*.

Mr. Morris Arking is a Hazzan and Qoreh in the Brooklyn community. He is a noted expert on Sephardic law and customs.

LET THEM EAT MEAT

By Rabbi David M. Tawil

In Perashat Beresheet, God creates Man on the sixth day, and immediately instructs man where he is to derive his sustenance. Being that Man is created from the ground, he is permitted to only eat from the fruits of the Earth, as the verse states, "הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב... וראת כל העץ אשר בו פרי" - *"Behold I have given to you all the vegetation...and any tree which produces fruit, they shall be for you for consumption"*. However, in Perashat Noah, immediately after Noah and his family exit the Tebah, God permits human being to consume animals as well, with a restriction or two on the side. God even references his original permission, and extends it to the flesh of animals, as the verse states, "כל רמש... אשר הוא חי לכם יהיה לאכלה כירק עשב נתתי לכם את כל" - *"Any creatures which are alive they shall be for you for consumption, just like the vegetation, I have given you all of these"*. What changed? What happened between the creation of man and the conclusion of the flood that brings God to allow the consumption of animal fresh by humans?

If we look at the timeline of events as explained by R' Shmuel Riggio in his "Perush Yashar on the Torah", we get a clearer understanding of the world's shift during this time. The main cause of the world's destruction is a result of the sin of Adam and Havah, eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. (עץ הדעת טוב ורע). While the flood seems to be brought from God as a result of Noah's generation's corruption, in reality God planned to destroy the world immediately after Adam's sin, as the verse states at the end of Perashat Beresheet, "ויאמר ה' אמתה את האדם אשר בראתי מעל פני האדמה מאדם עד בהמה עד רמש" - *"God said to himself, 'I shall destroy Man which I have created from the face of the Earth, from man to animal to insect to birds of the sky, for I regret having made them'"*. It is only because of Noah's righteousness and God's mercy to not exact the punishment right away that the flood is prolonged. Our Rabbis understand this as well and therefore state regarding the flood, "לא נחתם גזר דינם אלא על הגזל" - *"The decree [of the flood] was not sealed except because of stealing"*. We can infer that the decree was set because of something else but exacted by God specifically then because of the acts of Noah's generation.

The fact that the flood is really a result of Adam's sin is

significant, for it points us to the fact that Adam's sin and the subsequent flood is what changes the relationship between all the creatures of the world towards God and each other. Riggio points out (see Beresheet 3:17 ד"ה ארורה) that Adam's punishment, while seemingly a curse on the land (unlike Havah's and the snake's punishments which are directly hurting their bodies), is in reality a clear show that Adam's level is significantly reduced after his sin, and is represented in the reduction of the production of the land. The same way Adam brought about evil into the world by succumbing to his desires, so to the land will no longer be guaranteed to produce good fruits, but will also bring out thorns. The same way Adam must now work the land in order to have it produce, so to man must work extra hard to instill fear and knowledge of God, something which was easily attained by Adam prior to his sin. The symbolisms can go on and on.

"When we reflect upon the deep meaning of the misvot, we will see that they fill our lives with sanctity, spirituality, and meaning."

What is clear is that Man's relationship with the earth changes and as such his relationship with the animal world changes as well. Prior to Adam's sin, he understood the essence of the creations and therefore is given the task by God of naming each animal. After the sin, the animals now run wild and become sexually corrupt themselves, as our Rabbis teach us in the verse, "כי השחית כל" - *"For all creatures destroyed their way upon the land"*. (See Rashi Beresheet 6:12) With the step down of man there is a "step up" for animals, since Adam's sin lowered him to that status, as he succumbed to his desires like an animal.

God recognizes that man can't be on the same level as animal, for the world was created specifically for man to recognize his creator. Therefore, upon the restart of the world God grants permission for man to once again have dominance over the animal kingdom by allowing man to consume animal flesh. From the connection of the verses we see this is clearly the idea behind God's allowance for eating meat; In Beresheet 9:2 God tells Noah, "...ומוראכם וחית הארץ יהיה על כל חית הארץ" - *"And your fear will be upon all the creatures of the land"*; the next verse then permits man to eat meat, a clear show that the allowance for eating meat is to have man exact his dominance over the animal kingdom.

This being said, we must still ask why must man dominate

over animal? Why does God both at the creation of the world and upon the restart of the world assert that man must rule over the animal world? It is because man must always understand that intellectually he is above the animals, for he can choose whether to succumb to his desires. Man must make the right choices in life to get closer to God which will always be the case when man avoids his desires and focuses on spirituality. At the same time man is physical and therefore can't live without physical sustenance. This is the challenge of man, to sustain himself while avoiding desire and temptation. This is why both by Adam and Noah when he is informed how he will sustain himself it always comes with a restriction, by Adam to not eat from the forbidden tree and for Noah to not eat the limbs of live animals.

Perhaps with this idea we can better understand our sacrificial nature of worshiping the event of sin. When a man slaughters an animal it is a reminder that he must rule of animal and not engage in animalistic acts, such as the one he did when he sinned. In the new relationship man has post the sin of Adam, it is imperative that he understand this message and the ability to eat meat accomplishes this. Perhaps this can also explain why the ultimate happiness for man is through eating meat, for the greatest notion man can understand is that he is created with intellect and free will, above the animal world.

Rabbi David Tawil is a student at the Sephardic rabbinical college and is the rabbi of the bnei Yitzhak youth program.

PARASHAT NOAH: PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Rabbi Nathan Dweck

"The consequences of excessive and underage drinking affect virtually all college campuses, college communities, and college students, whether they choose to drink or not¹." We are all well aware of the danger of drinking wine, and in the Torah we are first made aware of this danger in *Parashat Noah*. Noah, after sacrificing to Hashem, began his exit from the Ark by planting a vineyard. Indeed, Noah was supposed to be "the relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which Hashem placed under a curse" (Beresheet 5:29). But after planting this vineyard, Noah became drunk from this wine. The result: he became naked in his tent! His son, Ham, saw his father's nakedness, and told his two brothers – who immediately covered their father.

When Noah found out about what his son Ham did to him, he cursed the family of Ham. Noah was supposed to be a **relief from the curse** on the land, but his action of drinking wine from the land **resulted in a curse** on his own family!

In the Talmud (*Babli Berakhot* 40a), R. Meir is of the opinion that "The [forbidden] tree from which Adam ate was a vine, for nothing else but wine brings lamentation to man (יין מביא יללה לעולם)." Based on this opinion, some Sages elsewhere in the Talmud say that Noah should have learned from Adam, whose transgression was caused by wine. From this story and from *Hazal's* words, we see that wine itself is of a negative nature.

However, how are we to reconcile this opinion with other verses in the Tanakh and with other Talmudic statements? The Psalmist states in Psalm 104: "And wine cheers the hearts of men" (v. 15); in our time when there is no Temple, there is no happiness rather with wine (*Babli Pesachim* 109a); and in every *Qiddush* and *Se'udat Misvah*, we are asked to use wine to sanctify the moment.



This seeming contradiction can be resolved only if we understand that we must treat this like any other physical pleasure. God placed material pleasures in this world for us to use and enjoy, but each has the potential to be beneficial or detrimental. It depends on what care we take of it. Wine is not inherently bad – it even gladdens the heart. However, when man uses it irresponsibly, becoming drunk and unaware, wine can become evil. In Noah's case, his lack of control over his wine led to a promiscuous act. And so why did the Torah narrate this story? To make us aware of the temptation and to teach us to not repeat the same mistake – so **PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY**.

¹<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/StatsSummaries/snapshot.aspx>

Rabbi Nathan Dweck is an assistant rabbi at Sephardic Synagogue and the Executive Director of Tebah Educational Services.

OBSERVATIONS OF AN OBSERVANT OPHTHALMOLOGIST

Dr. Morris A. Shamah

In 1969, a very precise and intelligent law student approached me in a rather confused state of mind. He had just studied the proofs for the existence of God as presented by Maimonides in the Guide of the Perplexed. These proofs were disappointing to him, as they said little to his practical twentieth-century Western mind. Did I read them, he asked. Yes, I answered, but they also said little that resonated with my way of thinking. At least all but one (the proof from design) lacked the punch that one expects from such "proofs."

Both of us were young and saw ourselves as scientific, accepting only what was clearly proven to us. My confession allowed him to ask, rather sheepishly, that if I found the proofs generally so meaningless, why was I an observant and practicing Jew.

My answer surprised even me: "I believe because I just completed as part of my ophthalmology residency training a full-time six-month course in the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the eye." He eyed me at first with a skeptical tilt, but I explained.

The eye is one of the most beautiful creations that I know. It is a wonder and a marvel, dwarfing even our most sophisticated human inventions. You would probably agree with the above, but with the in-depth study that I had just completed, I found that this sensory organ was indeed most awe-inspiring. I saw that every part of its anatomy and function were nothing short of astounding—and this even though we know but few of its inner secrets.

Basics: the eye is a one-inch sphere that is bombarded with electromagnetic light rays from a radiant object. The cornea and lens focus the image, which is then projected on the retina where it is converted into an electrical signal and this electrical wave is transmitted a few inches to the occiput, the rear of the brain. We then "see" an object in all its beauty, with the color, perspective, depth, relationship to other sights and a lot more. Other parts of a brain then incorporate this into our past memories and give this electromagnetic signal a full world of relationships. Sounds easy! Well it is not.

Every step in the process, and there are many steps, screams loudly of the work of a Creator. Please follow closely as we explore just a small sample of some of the wonders of the eye and see how they attest to the glory of the Almighty Creator.

First, the external anatomy: the eye is protected on five sides by a bony pocket in the skull. These bones are in turn surrounded in many areas by air-filled sinus cavities. Further, the eye sits in a cushioning bed of soft fat, a shock absorber. A bony protruding front rim protects the front of the eye from large projectiles.

"If one looks through the microscope, studies and observes, one becomes overwhelmed and convinced that the Proof from Design is indeed correct. There was a Creator."

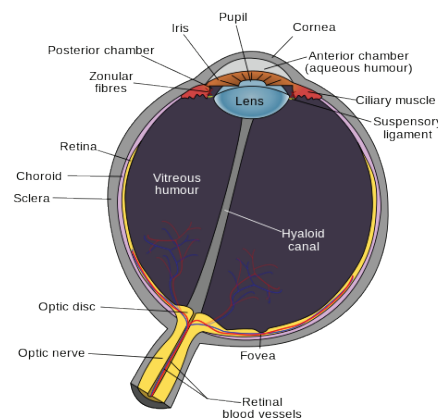
The front surface of the eye is indeed exposed, but the complicated eyelid protects it. You take this lid for granted. Do not, for even small lid problems can cause major ocular problems. The lid has multiple muscles and tendons as well as a full moistening and draining lacrimal system. In the lids are several types of glands that secrete the many components of the tears. Brushes on the lids, the lashes, function to avoid excess light and foreign bodies. The tear drainage systems with its glands, drainage, nerves, arteries, even the chemistry of the tears are all a shocking wonder.

In addition, the tears are not just a layer of water. Several sets of glands produce a highly complex thin layer. In this later are found antibodies and electrolytes. One can indeed spend a lifetime just studying the chemistry of the tears.

Do not think that the tears afford just an added bit of comfort. Not at all. Very many people are actually blinded by tear deficiencies.

And I can go on and on. The eye muscles, the miracle of the cornea, the very complex fluids inside the eye, the amazing lens, the miraculous retina, optic nerve and the visual components of the brain. The six muscles around each eye that are in constant coordination with each other. The biochemical, immunologic, and regenerating systems, the color and depth perception abilities, dark adaptation and so very much more. The sub-cellular components, the enzymes, proteins and nucleic acids, the electrical systems and the anti-microbial systems.

Each of these components has been researched *ad infinitum*. Book after book is available on every micro component of the



eye. Moreover, every day I read of a new discovery, a new enzyme, new cellular components, and new genetic controls. *Ma rabu maasekha Hashem*. How awesome are your creations, God.

There are those who peer into deepest space to see the glories of creation. But I find that we do not need a Hubbell Telescope to see God's creation, rather, a microscope will do just fine. There is a whole world in each of us that can serve as witness to Creation. *Lo Bashamayim Hi*, it is not in heaven.

But wait, what silliness is this? How many science teachers have we had who did everything that they could, either openly or by innuendo, to convince us that religion, or more specifically, that the whole God concept is primitive nonsense? How many times have we read that the concept of Intelligent Design is just plain wrong, that the theory of evolution can prove it all, and I mean all of it. How many of us get cold sweats when we read a Times article "proving" that our most basic religious concepts are silly? How many high school and college students fall into obsessive doubt, even depression, when they study evolution and learn that the Torah is wrong in describing Creation, that the whole thing is but a myth?

Yes, the study of evolution, both macro and micro, anatomic and physiologic, cellular and sub cellular can argue quite convincingly that it all just came about by itself. No God, no Creator, all just spontaneous development over fourteen billion years.

Nevertheless, the message that I am conveying is that if one looks through the microscope, studies and observes, one becomes overwhelmed and convinced that the Proof from Design is indeed correct. There was a Creator. Many scholarly books have been written, some by evolutionary scientists, that stress that science "proves" that there is a God. We should not be on the defensive. Science is really the clergyman's best ally.

However, you complain, "science is just not Jewish." After all, we know all about dinosaurs and evolution, a non-geocentric universe, and concept after concept that disagrees with our talmudic and rabbinic literature.

I say, "NO." Science is not religious or irreligious, not Jewish, not Buddhist, no. Science describes. And from careful observation, it allows for accurate prediction. It can measure the speed of an electron, what effect penicillin has on a bacterium, or how my anatomy compares to that of a monkey. But as far as the why of nature, science has no way of knowing if God guided the evolution and development of the universe over the billions of years,

or if human's evolution was spontaneous, by random chance. It is for you and me to look at the world, to study in depth both the astronomical universe and the sub-microscopic particle and after unprejudiced thought to decide if we think that this all just came about. And for me, with the bits of knowledge that I have, particularly from my ophthalmic studies, the answer is heavily on the side of a planned and guided Creation.

In traditional Jewish circles one often hears adherents complaining that many of our modern findings contradict the science of the Torah, of the Talmud, and of the rabbis of the past, some of them who were outstanding scientists in their times. But I say that if you believe these sages who had no microscopes and no telescopes, no spectrophotometers and no cyclotrons, if you believe that if they were here today and had our knowledge, that they would still accept that the sun circles the earth, and that the world is less than 6,000 years old, then you insult these intellectuals to the core. No, I think that if Hazal were here today they would rejoice over our new knowledge of the Almighty's handiwork. They would of course correct what they wrote in error about Nature. Maimonides writes: "And what is the way that one comes to love and to be in awe of Him? At the time that the individual studies

His amazing creations and His large creatures he will at once apprehend from them His wisdom, which is unappraisable and endless-immediately he loves and extols and praises and craves a great craving to know the great Almighty (MT HYT 2:2).

Imagine if our sages of old, if Maimonides, the Talmudic rabbis, even the rabbis of the last century, could experience our world today. How very appreciative they would be of today's scientific discoveries. They would write and modify their philosophies utilizing our new knowledge.

As we know, national prophecy ceased before the second Temple was destroyed. But I wonder if it really did; I wonder if the exponential growth of the knowledge of nature that has come about in the past decades is not in fact a new form of prophecy. Are these recent discoveries of the last years really God's prophesying to us an additional canon, a canon of His blueprints, a canon that aids us to more love and revere Him?

Go to an operating room, witness an ophthalmic surgery; you would be stunned to see what man hath wrought. Instruments, chemicals, computers-all were unknown but a few years ago yet today are our basic surgical tools. To me these are not just human discoveries and inventions; to me these speak of the presence of God in an ascending spiral toward His showing us His being, if not essence.

"There is a whole world in each of us that can serve as witness to Creation. Lo Bashamayim Hi, it is not in heaven."



Israel Spotlight

INTERVIEW WITH ADELE CHABOT; AUTHOR OF *THE BEST SECRET REVEALED*, TARGUM PRESS (2013)

Who is this book written for?

This book is written primarily for teenage girls and boys interested in spending a year in Israel and for their parents. It is also written for any person that wants to strengthen their connection to God or the Land of Israel.

Why did you write this book?

I wrote this book because when seminary and yeshiva alumni are asked about their year in Israel, the alumni have trouble putting their experience into words. Future students need more than just the word “amazing” to help them make an informed decision and enter the year with realistic expectations. The stories in this book are all the words alumni struggle to find.

How long did it take you to write this book?

Five years. I started it my year in Israel. While I was there, I sent very detailed emails home about my day-to-day activities so friends and family back home in America could benefit from what I was learning and seeing every day. I then went through all of my emails and turned them into the short stories of the book.

The book is divided into 4 parts... What are they and what is your favorite part?

The four basic components that make up a year in Israel: Everyday life, Shabbatot, Trips and Holidays. My favorite part would have to be the Shabbatot section. Getting the opportunity to spend Shabbat in a different city almost every single weekend, and the chance to see the country from the perspective of people who lived there was incredible.

This is a book of true stories. Which story is your favorite one?

Meeting two young guys on a bus one Saturday night as I headed to Jerusalem, and discussed the end of the world with them is

definitely an experience that sticks out in my mind and has made a lasting impression.

Lying down on the ground one Friday night and counting shooting stars in the night sky of Caesaria is a close second.

Is your perspective unique?

I do not think my perspective is unique as there are many other people who share similar feelings and experiences. What I do find unique is my struggle to get to Israel and the tenfold appreciation I had for the year as a result. I did not take even one minute for granted.

List for us the five most important things that you got out of your year in Israel.

- Love of God and His Torah
- Admiration for the nation of Israel
- Connectedness to the Land of Israel
- Excitement for life and the world
- Meaningful and lasting friendships

Is this book all about yeshiva? What if I want to go to Israel but not learn in a yeshiva?

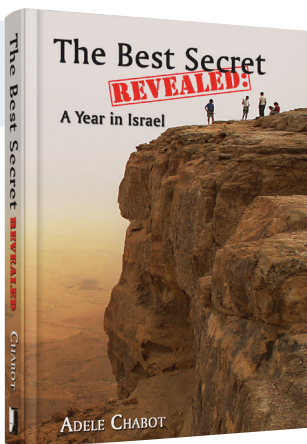
There are exactly 2 stories in this book that deal with life that is only unique to yeshiva students. The other 40 in the book can apply to everyone.

*Which kind of high school student would you say **SHOULD NOT** go to Israel for a year abroad?*

A teen that is going to Israel solely to party and get away, and is not interested in personal growth **SHOULD NOT** go to Israel.

What about the danger?

There are strict security programs in place in Israel. I was well protected anywhere I went and did not feel any sense of uneasiness or danger.





Community Focus

HOW BROOKLYN SEPHARDIC TEENS HELPED ISRAELIS UNDER ATTACK

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“We were supposed to leave early because of the war, but none of us wanted to go.”

A critical part of leadership is learning to adapt on short notice when needs change unexpectedly. For 40 rising high school seniors in the Israel Leadership and Development (ILead) program, a division of the Sephardic Community Alliance in Brooklyn, their 30-day trip to Israel this summer proved to be an enormous test.

When the Gaza war broke out, instead of heading home to the United States, the teens demonstrated their nimble ability to shift gears in 48 hours, raising \$40,000 and helping to bring 50 families from the South to the North for much needed R & R.

ILead, supported by UJA-Federation of New York, works to develop leadership skills for teens, who begin the program with an experiential learning trip to Israel. The teens left for Israel this summer and were busy being immersed in team-building activities like mountain climbing, pitching tents, and working the land when the Gaza conflict started.



“We were supposed to leave early because of the war, but none of us wanted to go,” said Merle Cohen, a teen on the trip. “We made videos and sent pictures to share with our parents, and told them we’re in Rosh Hanikrah, the North, we’re safe, we’re switching around the schedule so we’re not in harm’s way.”

The teens convinced their parents to allow the trip to continue. But that wasn’t the only step that showed the teens’ determination and conviction.

Before they left for Israel, the teens raised \$4,000 through a raffle intended for a tzedakah project to build a playground in the South. But when it was no longer possible for the teens

to visit the South, they decided to bring the South to them—within 48 hours of their decision to stay in Israel, the teens had raised an additional \$36,000 from family and friends back home to provide a calm and fun-filled respite for families who were under rocket attack.

“We wanted to show we cared about them,” Cohen explained. “We separated into committees, including fundraising, logistics, and communications. I was in the communications group, and after several people researched who I should call and got contact numbers, I spoke to mayors for five different Israeli towns and the Board of Education to find families who could join us. I explained where the families would stay, kashrut [how they would observe Jewish dietary laws], and transportation.”

The ILead teens created a respite experience for 80 people from the South. During the three-day getaway, the teens organized a carnival for the children, karaoke for the adults, and a Shabbat dinner.

“You could see how stressed the families were, and it was amazing to be able to offer some relief for them,” Cohen said.

Connected to a Sense of Purpose

Richard Chalmé, director of ILead, noted that being able to react and think on your feet are crucial leadership skills. “The group clearly did that with their plans, and their chesed work also connected them to a higher level of purpose because they were helping Jews they had never met before.”

After providing respite for the families, the teens continued to Jerusalem, where they visited the Adas Synagogue, the City of David, and the Knesset.

"I've learned the power of teamwork and that I need people to help me, and I can't do everything alone," said Cohen. "And on the flip side, I've learned that there are some things I can do for myself. I'm more confident in meeting people. And I feel a stronger connection to Israel and keep up with the

news. "

Now back in Brooklyn, the teens in ILead are continuing their fundraising efforts to help people in the South of Israel get back on their feet. And ILead is poised to help the teens continue to develop their leadership skills into the future.

...AN OBSERVANT OPHTHALMOLOGIST *Continued from page 16*

We can now do angiograms of the eye's finest vessels, and we can open the eye and correct these vessels. We can use a concentrated light beam, a laser to repair retinal problems without opening the eye. We can even thread a catheter in from an artery in the groin and guide it into the finest brain vessels and when in the desired vessel, we can cause a clot or we can expand the vessel-all without ever opening the skull. Indeed a few years ago, I was involved in such a case and I must say that I never felt God's presence as I did during the course of that patient's cure.

Yes, humans have done wonders, but it is Almighty God that has guided them, given them the abilities and aided them in seeing the presence of the Creator. Open up the books of science if you really want to see Ma'asch Beresheet.

Dr. Morris A. Shamah is a practicing general ophthalmologist with a subspecialty in glaucoma. He and his wife Linda chaired the Sephardic Archives Project.

INTERVIEW WITH ADELE CHABOT *continued from page 17*

How often did you communicate with your friends and family who were back in the States?

Almost every day.

Did you meet kids from different states/countries?

Of course. The girls that learned in my school were from different states and countries as well as the many people I met walking through the streets of Israel.

Do you have to know how to speak Hebrew to spend a year in Israel?

Absolutely not. You can easily live day to day without speaking a single word of Hebrew. Most of the signs in Israel are written in both Hebrew in English and most of the people there speak English as well.

What are the holidays like away from your family?

Holidays away from my family were tough. If I ever got homesick, I tried to focus heavily on the moment and the experience I was going through, and not what could have been happening if my family was there.

How do you think you changed after the experience?

After my year in Israel, my love of God was greater. Naturally, this had a positive impact on every aspect of my life. I was a more confident and independent person. I loved the world and the people in it. My relationships with others became deeper and more meaningful. Knowing myself more, I was ready to take on any challenge that came my way.

Do you think the "year in Israel" has changed over the past decades?

Definitely. Improved technology and new methods of communication have made leaving home easier than ever. Now, with all of the teens choosing to spend a year abroad in Israel, companies and organizations have sprung up aimed at helping them have a better year.

Adele Chabot is the Author of The Best Secret Revealed, Targum Press (2013) and a current teacher in Barkai Yeshivah



Shabbat-Table Talks

LEKH LEKHA

By Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Becoming Independent and Valuing Tradition

From the time that we come out of our mother's womb and the umbilical cord is cut, we are in an ever-progressing process of becoming independent. During the first months of our lives, we are dependent on our parents for our nourishment, protection and even our mobility. As we grow older, we gradually become independent, no longer requiring the help of our parents to walk or to get dressed and fed. These steps towards independence are necessary for healthy actualization of the person. However, the process does not stop there. Independence is a driving force throughout our lives. Yet, what about the many valuable things done by those who preceded us? Must everything be rejected in the name of "independence?" How should we chart the course between independence and tradition? How should the drive towards independence be channeled into a constructive force? These questions can be discussed this Shabbat when we consider the life of our first Patriarch, Abraham.



Text: Beresheet 12:1-5 (Schocken Bible)

"Hashem said to Abram: Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make a great nation of you and will give you blessing and will make your name great. And be a blessing! I will bless those who bless you, he who curses you I will damn. All the clans of the earth will find blessing through you!

Abram went, as Hashem had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was five years and seventy years old when he went out of Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, all their property that they had gained, and the persons, whom they had acquired in Haran, and they went out to go to the land of Canaan and they came to the land of Canaan."

Analysis

In last week's perasha, we have already read how Abram's father Terah, took Abram out of Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan. Yet, Terah did not successfully reach Canaan, settling in Haran, on the way to Canaan. Hashem commanded Abram to leave the comfort of his father's home and familiar surroundings to journey to "the land the Hashem will show him." Seventy-five year old Abram heeded Hashem's word and went to the land of Canaan.

Discussion

How do you think Abram felt when he left his home? (Let the children describe the difficulty of such a move.) Was it easier because Terah, Abram's father, served other gods (according to Josh. 24:2)? (Although this made it easier, it is still a difficult

thing to do. Ramban explained that the Torah expressed the difficulty by using three terms, “your land,” “your birthplace” and “your father’s house,” instead of just the last, which would have sufficed.) Why didn’t Abram just stay? (Because then he wouldn’t have been Abram, the man who listens to Hashem’s command to do what he needed to do.)

What might make leaving a comfortable situation difficult? (Uncertainty creates anxiety. We like to be in situations with which we are familiar. Living in the place you have always lived and following a well-known pattern of behavior, we know what to expect and how to deal with what will occur.) If that is the case, then why leave at all? (Sometimes we must leave in order to do what is right. At other times, it becomes apparent that we cannot stay. For example, children usually leave home when they get married. This allows the new couple to develop their life together without too much “parental advice.” Although “parental advice” is good, some things are best worked out by the couple alone.)

Abram does not leave his father’s home in “search of himself,” but he leaves it because Hashem commands him. What does that mean for our own lives?

Describe your own “leaving” of your parents’ home and why you decided to leave.

Leaving does not only or necessarily mean physical departure. Going on your own could be developing an approach to life that differs from that of your family. Although, as parents we might be hesitant to tell our children this, when we consider our own lives, we must admit that we have developed in ways that are different than our families in some areas. Even in the things that we do in a similar way as our parents did, we have come to an independent evaluation and acceptance of their approach. Children who are encouraged to achieve a healthy, mature, and reflective independence, will not feel the need to break away with a rebellious, immature rejection of everything that was done in the home.

Remember, Abram did not leave his father’s home until well past his teenage years (he was actually seventy-five, but that does not mean that our children should wait that long!). Also, note that Abram does not leave his father’s home in “search of himself,” but he leaves it because Hashem commands him. What does that mean for our own lives? Do we have to wait for Hashem to command us to leave? (Translating this into our own lives might mean that we must think about what Hashem wants us to do; we must think about Hashem and about ourselves and the talents and abilities that Hashem has given us. After this reflection, a direction could become clear to us. If this has happened to you, describe this to your children.)

What about the Torah and *misvot*? What about our traditions? Must we break away from them? (*Has veshalom* [God forbid]. What we should do is reflect upon the traditions in order to gain an understanding of what they mean to us. The Torah is very broad and there are many legitimate ways of incorporating the Torah’s beauty, wisdom, and insight into our lives. All these ways are not the same, yet there are fundamental practices and beliefs that we should infuse with meaning.)

The *misvot* are Hashem’s commandments to our people. When we reflect upon the deep meaning of the *misvot*, we will see that they fill our lives with sanctity, spirituality, and meaning. At that point, decide to accept them, even though our parents and grandparents came to the same decision. This then becomes our independent decision.

Hashem’s commandment to Abraham to leave his father’s home ends with the commandment to “be a blessing.” When we follow our patriarch’s lead and follow the word of Hashem in the Torah and in the way He has blessed us, we are sure to “be a blessing” as well; a blessing to our society as we allow it to enjoy the special qualities that Hashem has given us to bring to them.

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

Reprinted with permission from Rabbi Ralph Tawil’s Shabbat-Table Talks (Tebah, 2013), pp. 11-14



SPEAK OUT NOW AGAINST BLATANT ANTI-SEMITISM AT THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN OPERA

An open letter from COPMA: Citizens Opposed to Propaganda Masquerading as Art

Dear Friends,

In recent weeks we have witnessed a surge in anti-Semitism around the world in response to Israel's efforts to defend itself against an aggressor who is sworn to its destruction. This anti-Semitism, hiding behind a facade of anti-Zionism, is unparalleled since Nazi Germany. Most of the more egregious incidents have occurred abroad, but there is one particularly blatant example of anti-Semitism here in the U.S. that should not be ignored.

"There is one particularly blatant example of anti-Semitism here in the U.S. that should not be ignored."

The Metropolitan Opera, despite vigorous opposition from many parts of the Jewish Community, is forging ahead with its plans to present the opera, "The Death of Klinghoffer," during its Fall 2014 season. After a campaign of letter writing, demonstrations, and articles in the Jewish press, the Met has refused to remove the opera from its schedule, offering only to "compromise" by cancelling its worldwide HD simulcast programs, but not the production at the Metropolitan Opera House itself. This opera presents the takeover of the cruise ship Achille Lauro in 1985 by Palestinian terrorists, and their murder of 69 year old, wheel-chair bound Leon Klinghoffer, as justified, not only by Palestinian grievances against Israel, but also by the alleged evil and exploitative actions of Jews against others around the world. The terrorists are humanized and presented as freedom fighters, who have been forced by Jewish and Zionist oppression to take extreme actions.

In the opera's libretto, there are passages that defame the Jews as a people. For example, the principal terrorist says, "Wherever poor men are gathered, they can find Jews getting fat. You know how to cheat the simple, exploit the virgin, pollute where you have exploited, defame those you cheated, and break your own law with idolatry." At one stage, the terrorist leader says to Klinghoffer, "America is one big Jew."

The opening scene honors terrorists. It is set against a backdrop of graffiti on a wall proclaiming "Warsaw 1943, Bethlehem 2005," implying a moral equivalence between the acts of the Nazis and current day Jews.

The Palestinians sing, "We are soldiers fighting a war. We are not criminals and we are not vandals but men of ideals." Many in the artistic world and in the mainstream press (e.g. the NYTimes and The New Yorker) have failed to see this opera as anti-Semitic. They have defended it as "dialogue" on a difficult subject or on the basis of artistic freedom.

Many people ask, "What can I do as one individual" to stem the growing tide of anti-Semitic sentiment around the world? **One simple and concrete step that you can take is to call or email Peter Gelb, director of the Metropolitan Opera. Tell him in your own words that you oppose the Met's production of this anti-Semitic opera, and urge him to cancel its appearance at this venerable institution.** You won't be alone. In addition to thousands of individuals protesting this production, prestigious institutions are already abandoning the Met's anti-Semitic Klinghoffer production. The Guggenheim Museum, which had scheduled as part of its "works and progress" series an event that would have included Metropolitan Opera performers performing excerpts from the "Klinghoffer" opera, has just announced a cancellation of its production.

We urge you to let your voice be heard now. Time is of the essence if we are to stop the production from going forward this season.

Phone Peter Gelb at: 212-799-3100, extension 2891

Email Peter Gelb at: pgelb@metopera.org

Please share this email with your friends and associates who are concerned about the rise in anti-Semitism.

Thank you.

Robert G. Samet, Chairman, Mark H. Lazerson, Vice-Chairman, Carol Greenwald, PhD, Treasurer, Barbara Leber, PhD, Secretary, Jeffrey Ward, General Counsel

<http://www.COPMA.net> contact: info@copma.net



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