

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 44: Tu Bishbat
Shabbat Shira

IN MEMORY OF LEON BEN REGINE TAWIL



In Memory of Leon Ben Regine Tawil

The SCA is dedicated to uniting our affiliate organizations based on our shared values in an effort to give our young people the tools needed to successfully perpetuate our way of life in the post-modern era.

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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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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I want to commend Qol Ha-Qahal for addressing the needs of religious students on college campuses in its recent issue (Hanukkah edition, p. 28-29). The OU's JLIC program, referenced in the article, continues to provide vital programs for young men and women at 20 colleges across the U.S. (and another 4 in Canada).

Many students from the Sephardic community benefit from our work, at schools such as Brooklyn College and NYU, as well as many others in the New York area and beyond.

The challenges that students confront on campus,

discussed by Rabbi Berman in the article, are real, and urgent. At the same time, we believe that college can be (and should be) a time of religious growth, just as it is a time for intellectual and emotional development.

We invite you to learn about our work at www.oujlic.org, and how we help students navigate through their college years.

Sincerely,

Alan Goldman
Yeshivah of Flatbush HS alumnus
Director of Development, OU-JLIC
goldmana@ou.org

ONE YEAR ARAYAT FOR
MEYER MICKEY KAIREY
WILL BE ON
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017
AT MAGEN DAVID 67TH STREET

Tehillim: 2:45 - 5:10PM
Minhah and Arbit: 5:10 - 5:40PM
Speeches: 5:40 - 6:15PM



TU BISHBAT: HISTORY AND CUSTOMS

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

Tu Bishbat (ט"ו בשבט) is a minor Jewish holiday celebrating the New Year of the Trees. It is one of the four *Rashe Shanah* ("New Years") mentioned in the Mishnah. Tu Bishbat marks *Rosh HaShanah La'ilanot* (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 (שבט). 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.

(Shemitah) and for Jubilee Years (Yobel) for planting and for vegetables. On the first of Shebat is the New Year for Trees, according to Bet Shammai, but according to Bet Hillel it is on the fifteenth.

We follow the opinion of Bet Hillel and observe the fifteenth of Shebat as the New Year for Trees. Even so the Mishnah does not state anything festive about this day nor does it mention any particular celebrations or observances associated with this day. It is very probable that this day took on a more special meaning when the Nation of Israel was exiled from its land after the destruction of the Second Bet HaMiqdash around 68 CE. After many years living outside of Israel this day added another connection between the people and the land that their ancestors were thrown out from. That connection was manifested

"... 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 tithe of the animals, but according to Ribbi Eliezer and Ribbi Shimon it is on the first of Tishri. On the first of Tishri is the New Year for the years and for Sabbatical Years

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 *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 Hagadah would be recited on the night of Pesah.

These *Meqoubalim* 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

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worlds, or levels. Classifying fruits that are eaten on Tu Bishbat into these separate categories helped to symbolize these symbolic levels.

The four worlds are:

1. *Asiyah*: "action" --- our world, the lowest level,
2. *Yessirah*: "formation" --- the second lowest level,
3. *Beriah*: "creation" --- next to highest level, and
4. *Assilut*: "emanation" --- highest and purest level.

There are no fruits that could represent the highest level but there are fruits for each of the other 3 levels and it is preferable to have 10 fruits for each level, corresponding to the 10 Sefirot.

Group number 1 is all fruit. *Beriah*. Holiness at this level needs no protection. (Some of the fruits included in this group are not actually considered totally edible by most people, such as apples; small seeds are ignored in the symbolism.)

The 10 items are:

1. Grapes or Raisins
2. Figs
3. Apples
4. Etrog (Citron)
5. Kumquat
6. Pear
7. Quince
8. Mulberry
9. *Trilobed Sorbus*
10. Carob

Group 2 consist of outer fruit with a large center pit. *Yessirah*. These fruits are edible on the outside, but have pits on the inside, such as peaches. The edible portion symbolizes holiness. At this level, holiness can be left exposed, but its inner core, its "heart," must still be protected.

The 10 items are:

1. Olive
2. Date
3. Cherry (Must be sweet)
4. Jujube
5. Peach
6. Plum or Prune
7. Apricot
8. Sour Morello Cherry
9. Hawthorn Berry
10. Loquat



Group 3 have an outer peel and inner fruit. *Asiyah*. These fruits all have an inedible outer shell, such as nuts. The edible part of the fruit represents holiness. In our world, holiness is hidden and we have to seek it out. The fragile holiness has to be protected within our world.

The 10 items are:

1. Pomegranate
2. Walnut
3. Almond
4. Chestnut
5. Hazelnut
6. Acorn
7. Coconut
8. Pine nuts
9. Pistachio
10. another nut like Pecan, Brazil, Macadamia; or Banana.

There have been Sephardic Jews in every country over the last 350 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.

Among Sephardim in different countries this holiday was given nick names like:

Hamishosar, El Khabat, Eid El Shjar, Tafqi' El Sajar, Frutas, etc..

It was very common for special bags to be made for friends and neighbors, and especially children and fill them with all types of dried fruits and nuts.

In old Jerusalem where the majority of the Jews once spoke Ladino, trays of fruit were sent as gifts like *Mishloah Manot*. These were known as *Platiko*. Special bags of fruit known as *Frutas Bolsas* were distributed and kids would compare what they got and trade favorites with each other. These same customs existed in many other countries as well but without the Ladino names.

Many people would just try and have as many fruits as possible just to praise God and share this bounty with relatives and friends. Others would take this opportunity to study the laws of *Berakhot* and teach them to all those who celebrated with them.

In Aleppo Syria there was a special folkloric Judeo-Arabic song for this holiday whose tune is still popular today even though most people have forgotten the happy words. Another custom associated with Tu Bishbat in Halab was the reading of the *Aseret HaDiberot* with the translation (*Sharh*) of Se'adyah Gaon. This was done on Tu Bishbat in preparation of Perashat Yitro and the giving of the Ten Commandments which is always the Shabbat after Tu Bishbat.

Tu Bishbat is a happy day on which no *Tahanunim* are said it is a day that reconnects us with the Land of Israel and there is a new custom (over 100 years old) to plant trees in Israel on this day. The tradition of planting trees started in 1890 when the teacher and writer Zeev Yabetz went out with his students in a school in Zikhron Yaaqob for a festive planting. This initiative was adopted in 1908 by the Israeli Teachers trade union and later on by the Land Development Authority (Haqeren Haqayemet LeYisrael, also called the Jewish National Fund). Many Jews throughout the world call Israel on this day and make donations to plant trees and

forests through out Israel on this New Year of Trees.

Rabbi Shelomo Yosef Zevin (1888-1978) writes that it seems that Sephardic Jews are much more scrupulous in partaking of numerous fruit and rejoicing on this holiday. They learn in their Yeshivot on this holiday and they do their utmost to taste from every variety of fruit in the market. They read various *pesouqim* before and after each fruit and they sing *pizmonim*.

This was not just done in the Yeshivot as Rabbi Zevin mentioned, this was done by every person at home as well

as mentioned in great detail by Hakham Haim Palacchi (1788-1868). Hakham Haim Palacchi tells us in his *Mo'ed Lekol Hai* that each member of the family would play a special role by being the first to partake in one of the 7 species of produce of Israel as per *pesouqim* in Tehillim and Shir HaShirim.

All these Hakhamim, Rabbis, Educators, and Leaders were all on the same path, never losing the connection of 'Am Yisrael with Eress Yisrael. It was always a strong feeling and this yearly celebration came to strengthen it. Not only must we not lose our heritage and traditions, but we must strengthen the bonds of each generation to our ancestral home that Hashem has so lovingly given back to us.

Tu Bishbat is that holiday, in the cold bleakness of winter that warms our hearts, revives our souls, and causes us to rejoice, knowing we can never despair because Israel will always be our home, the one and only land that flows with milk and honey.

Tizku Leshanim Rabot Ne'imot VeTobot!

Mr. Mosseri is a noted expert on Sephardic customs. He welcomes all comments and feedback.



HALABI TU BISHBAT SONG

Transcribed and Transliterated by Joseph Mosseri

1. *Ishoo Khabar Ya Rijal, Leileh 'Anna 'Eid El Sjar, Wishoo Khabar Ya Rafool, Jai L'anna 'Eid El Fool.*
2. *Welamma Jaboo El Sehoon, Tibhalaqet El 'Oyoon, Daqn To'od Wedaqa T'qoom, Wedaqa Tikanas Ard Eldar.*
3. *Welamma Jaboo Sahn Elsliqah, Wijdideh Mah Hee 'Atiqah, Biddah Shweyet Dibs Mriqah, Wehashooqtein Yekoonoo Kbar.*
4. *Welamma Jaboo El Qatayif, Bilsamn Wel'asil Tayif, Ishbak Ya Rijal Khayif, Mo Kil Leileh 'Eid ElSjar.*
5. *Welamma Jaboo Sahn El Bortoqal ElTrabils, Min Rihto Hafet Nifsee, Welama Hatoo 'Ala kirsi, Fahet Rihto Bi-Ard El Dar.*
6. *Welamma Jaboo El Kishmesh, Wahed Yihfen Wewahed Yikmesh, Sar ElKhatyar Yid 'Amesh, Ma Khaloolo Shi Min 'Eid Elsjar.*
7. *Welamma Jaboo El 'Araq, Wahed Jan Wemash Talaq, Welamma Hassa Ansabaq, Min Farahto Be'eid Elsajr.*
8. *WeYa Mara Afarshi Eldar, Qoomee indahlee Liljar, Ishbak Khayif Ya Rijal, Mo Kil Leileh 'Eid Elsjar.*



FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE RESPONSE OF THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

Submitted by Mr. Daniel Harari in honor of Presidents Day

At the hour of 12 O'clock, noon, the service in memory of the lamented President of the United States (ABRAHAM LINCOLN) was solemnly performed by the officiating minister, THE REV. S. MORAIS

After he had recited the usual ritual service of the day. The following Preamble and Resolutions, passes at a special meeting of the trustees of the Congregation, were read—

"Whereas, The President of the United States having fallen by the hands of a traitorous assassin, on the night of the 14th inst., therefore

"Resolved, That this Congregation, in common with the whole American nation, mourn the loss of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, one of its best and purest Presidents, who, like our own lawgiver, Moses, brought a nation to the verge of the haven of peace, and like him was not allowed to participate in its consummation.

"Resolved, That the Synagogue be draped in mourning for the space of thirty days, and that these Resolutions be published, and entered on the records of the Congregation.

"On motion, adjourned.

L.J. LEBERMAN, President.
A.HART, Secretary pro tem.

PRAYER

Omnipotent God! not for our sake, nor for our sake, but for that of Thy infinite mercy, be with us in our woeful calamity. We dare not rely upon man's strength, which

continually faileth, for "man withereth like grass, he fleeth like a shadow, and we see him no more." But upon thine arm do we lean, for that which supporteth the whole universe, will also be our stay. Oh, guide us with Thy wisdom, and show us, amid the gloom wherein we are inshrouded, the haven of our national deliverance. Grant, O Lord, that a twofold portion of the lovely spirit with which was endowed the illustrious dead we lament, may rest upon his successor. He supremely needs it. He needs his unflinching rectitude, his generous instinct, his forgiving disposition, his noble forbearance, and discretion to an infinite degree, in order that he may complete the blessed work marked out by our sainted President.

Sovereign Creator! open wide the portals of eternal bliss, and let the righteous Abraham of the Western World enter. Remember his suffering for the sake of principles, and let it be a propitiation for the sins for the people he so dearly loved and so faithfully served, May he ever sit at Thy right hand imparadised in the contemplation of Thy divine Essence. Grant, that from the highest heavens, he may soon behold our unalloyed joy, when the pavilion of peace shall again spread its folds over us, and an indissoluble bond of brotherhood unite together all the inhabitants of this country. And to the beloved relict of one so good, to the bereaved sons and disconsolate household, speak, O Lord, of the unending delights he now enjoys in the land of life. It will infuse into their hearts fortitude and resignation. The voice of religion and the grateful expressions of a reconstructed nation will then be a solace to their minds and a soothing balm to their souls. We now offer supplications unto Thee, for Thy servant, the Secretary of State, stricken by the hand of a traitor. "May he not die, but live and declare to posterity the works of the Lord." And may all our powers, our energies and endeavors be devoted to benefit mankind, in accordance with Thy will, and that of the lamented Executive of the American nation. Amen.



ב"ה יום חמשת עשר תמוז

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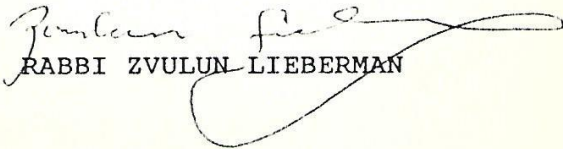
TO THE CONGREGANTS OF BETH TORAH
DEAR FRIENDS

AFTER BEING ASKED SEVERAL TIMES REGARDING THE CUSTOMS OF OUR COMMUNITY CONCERNING BIRKHAT KOHANIM (THE PRIESTLY BLESSING), I HEREWITH SUBMIT MY ANSWER AS REGARDS THE CUSTOM OR OUR COMMUNITY. IT IS THE PRACTICE IN ISRAEL FOR A KOHEN TO REMOVE HIS SHOES AND WASH HIS HANDS. THIS PROCEDURE WAS INTRODUCED BY RABBI YOCHANAN BEN ZAKAI AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE. HIS REASON WAS THAT WHEREAS THE KOHANIM ASCENDED THE PLATFORM (DUKHAN), THEY WERE STANDING ON AN ELEVATED PLATFORM WHICH WAS VISABLE TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. SHOULD A SHOE LACE BREAK THE KOHEN MIGHT BEND DOWN CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO FULFILL THIS MISVA BECAUSE HE WAS DISQUALIFIED AND POSUL-THEREFORE SHOES WERE REMOVED AND THE KOHANIM WASHED THEIR HANDS.

REGARDING THIS MATTER, MANY GREAT RABBINICAL AUTHORITIES HAVE ALREADY RECORDED THEIR RESPONSA STATING THAT IF THE KOHANIM DO NOT USE A PLATFORM THEIR MAY PRONOUNCE THE PRIESTLY BLESSING WITHOUT REMOVING THEIR SHOES OR WASHING THEIR HANDS. I REFER TO RABBI ELIYAHU HAZAN THE AB BETH HADIN OF ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT IN HIS RESPONSA TAALUMOT LEB VOL. 3, RABBI YAAKOB MOSHE TOLEDANO IN HIS RESPONSA YAM HAGADOL CHAP. 6, AND RABBI OBADYA YOSEF IN HIS REPONSA YEHAVEH DAAT VOL. 2 CHAP. 13.

AS CONCERNS OUR OWN CONGREGATION PERMIT ME TO ADD THE FOLLOWING: WHEREAS ALREADY FROM PREVIOUS GENERATIONS, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF TORAH GIANTS WE HAVE FOLLOWED THE PROCEDURE OF NOT ASCENDING THE PLATFORM AND THEREFORE NOT REMOVING OUR SHOES OR WASHING OUR HANDS. HOW CAN WE POSSIBLY CAST DOUBTS UPON A PRACTICE WHICH HAS BEEN A LEGITIMATE MINHAG HAMAKOM GROUNDED AND BASED UPON VALUED RESPONSA? A MINHAG HAMAKOM (A LOCAL CUSTOM) SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED, NOR SHOULD WE HAVE DIFFERENT PRACTICES IN THE SAME CONGREGATION WHICH WOULD ONLY LEAD TO STRIFE AND CONFRONTATION. SHALOM IS GREAT FOR ALL PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS CONCLUDE WITH THE WORD SHALOM. HASHEM OZ LEAMO YITEN HASHEM YIBAREKH ET AMO BASHALOM

WITH ALL MY PERSONAL BLESSINGS,


RABBI ZVULUN LIEBERMAN



SEPHARDIC CUSTOMS

WHY DO SOME KOHANIM RECITE BIRKAT KOHANIM WITH THEIR SHOES ON?

Mr. Morris Arking

In *Masekhet Sota* (40a) the Gemara stated that Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakai prohibited Kohanim from ascending the platform with their shoes. The Gemara asks if the reason for the prohibition is the honor of the congregation. Rashi explained that it is not respectful for the congregation to see their muddy shoes. However Rab Ashe' answered that the reason is that if their shoe laces are untied that they may leave the platform to tie them. Then some might suspect that they left the platform because they are not valid Kohanim (the son of a divorcee etc). Rashi explained that they will go tie their shoe because it is unbecoming for his shoe to be untied in front of people, and the people would chide him because it doesn't look nice.

HaRambam (*Hilkhot Tefilah* 14:6) ruled that Kohanim may not ascend the platform with their shoes on, rather they stand barefoot. Maran (*Shulhan 'Arukh* 128:5) also wrote that Kohanim may not ascend the platform with their shoes on however he wrote that it is permissible with their socks.

The later authorities addressed the question of whether the Kohanim are still required to remove their shoes if they bless without ascending a platform. Since the reasons provided in the Gemara for removing shoes only apply to a Kohen who ascended a platform, making his shoes visible to the congregation, several authorities wrote that the requirement does not apply to those that bless without ascending the platform. The muddy shoes or the untied shoe lace would only be visible if the Kohen ascended the platform. If his untied shoe was not noticeable, he would not feel compelled to tie it before blessing the nation. These authorities include R. Yehoshua' Perahyah HaKohen (19th century Salonika) in his *VaYiqra Yehoshua'* (*Hilkhot Nesiat Kapayim* 1), R. Yaaqob Moshe Toledano (1880-1960) in his responsa *Yam HaGadol* (OH:6), and former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yisshaq Nissim (1896-1981) in his responsa *Yen HaTob* (37). They also cite the fact that the Gemara specified

"ascend the platform" in the requirement, as opposed to the common term for *Birkat Kohanim* of "*Lisa Et Kapehem*" (raising their hands), or to bless the nation. And that HaRambam and Maran both used that same language. Similarly, R Yisshaq Palaji (19th century Turkey) in his *Y'fe L'Leb* (OH 128:29) wrote that the requirement of removing shoes only applies to Kohanim who ascend a platform.

R. Yisshaq Nissim mentioned that in his times in Baghdad and Egypt there were Kohanim who did not ascend the platform and therefore did not remove their shoes to recite *Birkat Kohanim*. And this was also the custom in Halab (see *Derekh Eress* pgs. 212-213). This custom continued in the Syrian community in New York as attested to by Hakham Barukh Ben Haim in a recorded interview (1964/1965). It is also reported that Hakham Matloub 'Abadi explained that Kohanim are only 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 10 inches above floor level the Kohanim may ascend without removing their shoes.

So, the custom in those middle-eastern communities of reciting *Birkat Kohanim* without removing shoes, is legitimate, if the Kohanim do not ascend a platform. This is based on both the reasons provided for the requirement in the Gemara as well as the language used for the requirement in the Gemara and the Halakhic authorities. This custom was approved by several later authorities and was the accepted practice in various middle-eastern communities including Halab. The custom has also continued in New York with the approval of their leading Rabbis.

Mr. Arking is a noted expert on Sephardic Customs and teaches regularly.



SHABBAT SHIRA

LIFE'S JOURNEY

Rabbi Avi Harari

The ultimate goal of all conscientious students of the Torah is to “find themselves” between the lines of the text. At times this mission proves frustrating, particularly when this straightforward task of personally relating to the laws and narratives of the Torah emerges as a daunting mission.

I have long had difficulty finding personal meaning in many of the events described in *Parashat Beshalah*. *Am Yisrael's* exit from Egypt, the splitting of the sea and their subsequent song all seem distant from our generally quaint lives. The awe-invoking and inspirational nature of these events notwithstanding, how can we find applicable lessons to our ordinary lives in the extraordinary experiences of *yessiat Misrayim*?

Let us start at the very beginning of the journey:

וַיְהִי בִשְׁלַח פְּרֹעֶה אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא נָחַם אֱלֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים
כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים כֹּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלִּחְמָה וְשָׁבוּ
מִצְרָיִמָּה.

And it happened when Pharaoh sent the people off that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines though it was close, for God thought, “lest the people regret



only the next generation would merit entrance into the Land of Israel. And yet, I am convinced that God’s fateful decision to lead *Am Yisrael* on that long and circuitous path through the desert was still the right one.

Ha-Rambam (*Moreh Nevukhim* 3:32) termed the decision to avoid the “way of the land of the Philistines” as “*matarah sheniyah*,” or the “secondary purpose.” He explained that although God’s primary purpose for leading *Am Yisrael* out of Egypt was in order to bring them into the Land of Israel,

“... how can we find applicable lessons to our ordinary lives in the extraordinary experiences of *yessiat Misrayim*?”

when they see battle and go back to Egypt.” (Shemot 13:17)

Looking back at God’s decision to direct the nation through the desert along the “long route” seemingly reveals a royal mistake. Forty years of complaining, infighting and rebellions lay ahead of this group. The generation that left Egypt was destined to wither away along this journey, and

He knew that its effective fulfillment was only possible by means of an indirect route. Enduring the physical and psychological pains and stresses of more than two hundred years of servitude, *Am Yisrael* was in no position to wage wars against other nations, nor to establish and structure an independently ruled country. No, the direct approach

of a *matarah rishonah* was not an option for this nation. The hardships of the desert and its associated trials and tribulations were necessary to mature this nation to the point that they could conceivably attain individual success in the future.

The vast majority of *missvot ha-Torah* are classified by ha-Rambam as “*matarot sheniyot*,” or “secondary purposed.” While the primary function of our existence is to comprehend God’s essence and ways, it is inconceivable for us to attain that goal in a direct manner. Our human desires and tendencies stunt our growth, leaving the connection between us and the Almighty at a seemingly unbridgeable distance. It is our characteristically human inclinations that hold us back from reaching the intellectual heights that we are in fact capable of reaching. The *missvot* are thus geared to help us transcend our self-limited thought system and enter into an intellectual realm far beyond the confines of our physicality. By means of their proper fulfillment, the *missvot* become our spiritual “maturity agents,” straightening our crooked character traits and clearing the blur of our philosophical confusion. In other words, the *missvot*’s role is to prepare us for proper comprehension of the ways of God – the *matarah rishonah*.

The exodus from Egypt thus emerges as a paradigm for our spiritual lives. The indirect journey planned by God corresponds to His planned path of *missvot*. Each takes into account the reality of an unideal situation while setting forth a purposefully indirect path.

Our description of life as a journey along the singular path of *matarah sheniyah*, however, fails to recognize the unique moments of clarity we inevitably encounter during its course. While they may be few and far between,

each of us can locate several moments in time when we identified with *Am Yisrael*’s exclamation of “This is my God!” (Shemot 15:2). Careful attention to the subsequent events in the narrative may now reveal that this facet of life, as well, lay hidden in God’s chartered plan for the nation’s journey.



Red Sea coast, Egypt

The Torah cryptically described the experience at Marah, the first stop of the nation upon their departure from Egypt, by stating:

שָׁם שָׂם לּוֹ חֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט
וּשָׁם נִסָּהוּ.

*There He established for
[the nation] a decree
and an ordinance,
and there He tested it.
(15:25)*

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 56b) records the tradition that the “ordinance” mentioned in this *pasuk* refers to Shabbat and civil law. The Hakhamim explained that God first informed us of these *missvot* in Marah. Ha-Rambam (ibid.) wrote that Shabbat represents our primary purpose (*matarah rishonah*) in life, explaining that the proper observance of its laws necessarily leads to a greater appreciation of God’s essence and ways.

Parashat Beshalah’s subversive diagram of the primary and secondary purposes of our spiritual life is thus complete. While the majority of our practice is directed by the *matarah sheniyah* which was modeled by our indirect forty-year journey, we still yearn for and cherish those rare and enlightening moments of *matarah rishonah*, as modeled by the Shabbat of Marah.

*Rabbi Harari is the Rabbi of Congregation
Shaare Shalom.*

THE OMISSION OF ISRAEL'S RESCUE IN THE SONG AT THE SEA¹

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

The omission of any mention of Israel's rescue in the Song at the Sea (Exod. 15:1-18) requires explanation. It appears inadequate to say that Israel was excluded because the focus is on God's doings and the honor that is due Him. Particularly after verse 8, which constitutes a profuse description of God's preparing the sea for human crossing, we are informed of the enemy's energetic pursuit (אֹיֵב אֶרְדֵּף אֲשִׁיג, "The enemy said, 'I will pursue...'" without so much as a hint at Israel's crossing. Who is the enemy pursuing? Although the song is not an epic narrative that can be understood from within itself but requires the attached prose account, the absence of a statement referring to Israel's crossing is eminently conspicuous; even, at first sight, astonishing.

M. D. Cassuto (1883-1951, Florence) suggests that explicit mention of Israel's rescue was omitted so that the depiction of Hashem's victory could serve a dual purpose. Besides its function on the plane of human history on behalf of the Israelites vis-à-vis the Egyptians, it could also be applied on the prehistoric cosmic plane of Near Eastern mythology, in which the sea god and other presumed divine beings were in a battle against other gods.² As the Israelites were subject to such mythological influences in ancient times, the Torah here, as the prophets do in various places, establishes Hashem's absolute dominion over the sea, the depths, and all creatures. In this respect, the song's duality would be similar to that in Isaiah's call to Hashem, when he refers to His mighty ancient victories over the primeval monsters and the sea, followed by invoking His transformation of the

sea into a path for the redeemed. The prophet cries out: "Awake, awake...O arm of the Lord! Awake as in days of old...It was you that hacked Rahab in pieces, that pierced the Dragon (*Tannin*)...that dried up the Sea, the waters of the great deep; That made the abysses of the Sea a road the redeemed might walk" (Isa. 51:9-10, NJPS).

However, this does not appear to adequately answer the question of why Israel's crossing was totally omitted. Hashem's absolute triumph over the sea and primeval beings could have been incorporated in the poem while Israel's crossing could have been referred to, similar to the Isaiah passage above (and elsewhere in Tanakh) that incorporates both the human element and the cosmic one.



M. D. Cassuto

Perhaps the explanation is that when celebrating God's miraculous rescue and reflecting upon His awesome intervention, Moshe and Israel were imbued with such an overwhelming degree of humility that they could only utter His acclaim. They could not place themselves in the role of the rescued. It is as if to say: Who are we to be the recipients of such colossal divine doings? In the poetic dimension

they chose to allow their role to be assumed, passed over in respectful silence. Their gratitude may be understood as taking the form of pure praise. Together with the song's omission of specific mention of any human being, this appears to be in keeping with God's goal of fostering a disposition of humility in His nation, a key element in its fulfilling its mission to bring His blessing to the world.

¹ Reprinted with permission from "Parashat Beshallah Part II" of Rabbi Shamah's book, *Recalling the Covenant* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2015), pp. 334-335.

² On Genesis 1:21, M. D. Cassuto and others explain that the reason tanninim were singled out was to combat the idolatrous beliefs current at the time of the Torah-giving, as Near Eastern mythology attributed divinity to these sea monsters. Thus, Genesis 1 states specifically that God created the tanninim, and following that precedent, Psalm 104 emphasizes the point regarding the Leviathan. (See *Recalling the Covenant* p. 14.)

Rabbi Shamah is the head rabbi of Sephardic Synagogue.

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SEPHARDIC RABBIS

RABBI SHEMUEL LANIADO

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Rabbi Shemuel Laniado belonged to an ancient and prestigious family that descended from Spain. His paternal grandfather, who bore the same name, escaped from Spain at the time of the expulsion of 1492. After a long journey, full of dangers, he reached the city of Adrianople (nowadays Edirne) in Turkey. From Adrianople the Laniado family moved to Aleppo (Aram Soba), which had a significant Jewish local population. To these local Jews were being added more and more Jews who came as refugees from Spain. We have an interesting testimony of a famous Spanish traveler, Captain Domingo de Toral (1598-1640), who wrote in his memoirs "Relation of the life of Captain Domingo de Toral y Valdés" that visited Aleppo in the year 1634 and that to his surprise, he found there "more than 800 families of Jews who spoke Castilian (Spanish)".

Rabbi Shemuel Laniado was born in Aleppo, around 1530. His father was Rabbi Abraham Laniado who was already known in Aleppo as a great Tora scholar and religious leader.

In 1537 the family of Rabbi Shemuel emigrated to Yerushalayim, but the situation of the Yehudim who were there at the time was very difficult. From Yerushalayim they arrived at Safed, where a very prestigious rabbinic community had been established, under the leadership of the famous Rabbi Ya'aqob Berab. It was in this privileged setting where Rabbi Laniado flourished. He studied with the best teachers including Maran Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the

Shulhan Arukh. According to his own account he was able to learn from Rabbi Moshe Cordobero, a great Qabbalist, philosopher, and the head of the Portuguese Yeshiva of Safed. In Safed, Rabbi Laniado also studied with other giants of Tora and Qabbala such as Rabbi Moshe Alshekh haQadosh and Rabbi Hayim Vital, the famous disciple of the Ari haQadosh.



Keli Hemda, by Rabbi Shemuel Laniado

Around the year 1570 the Jews of Aleppo sent a letter to Rabbi Yosef Caro asking him to send them a Rabbi who could serve in the congregation. They needed a rabbi who understands the local Jews and also the Spanish immigrants. And that has enough knowledge to be respected by both sides. Rabbi Yosef Caro did not hesitate and wrote to them that he would send them **איש אשר כמוני** "A man just like me". What he meant was that he would send a rabbi of "his own stature," which gives us a sense of the greatness and prestige of Rabbi Laniado, who became by the recommendation of Maran the chief rabbi of the Aleppo Jewish community.

Rabbi Laniado wrote numerous books, all of them Bible commentaries. Many of these books were never published and still remain in manuscripts.

There are three published books of Rabbi Laniado: the most famous one is called *Keli Hemda*, which is a commentary on the Five Books of the Tora. Here is an example of his commentary on the *pasuq* in Vayiqra

18:19, “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am HaShem.”

Two things are explained here. First, that all souls are “part” of God [as to their origin], and since the soul of a man and the soul of his neighbor surged both from the same Celestial Throne, therefore “to love your neighbor as yourself” means literally, that he is like you. Since I, God, am the one who created your soul and the soul of your neighbor, he is like you [in the same way that there is a “brotherhood of blood”, from a spiritual point of view human beings form a “brotherhood of soul”]. And, secondly, “I am HaShem,” if your love for your neighbor resembles the love you have for yourself, ... your love for your neighbor will then be considered as a reflection of your love for Me. As if I, God, would have received your love”

Another of his books is *Keli Yaqar*, this is a commentary on the first prophetic books (Yehoshua, Shofetim, Shemuel, Melakhim). And finally, the book *Keli Paz*, a commentary on the book of Yesha’yahu.

Many wonder why his books, those published and those that were not published (*Keli Gola*, *Kelim miKelim shonim*, etc.), are all called “Keli ...” which means “vessel”

or “barrels”. Rabbinical authors generally choose titles for their books that relate to their names, but in the case of Rabbi Laniado, a very special event justified calling them “*Keli*” (and that he himself became known as “*ba’al hakelim*”). While on a boat, during his journey to Syria, Rabbi Laniado befriended a merchant who carried several barrels of salted fish. The merchant, unexpectedly, died during the voyage. The captain of the ship offered to sell the fish and Rabbi Laniado bought them. Once in Aleppo, when he opened the barrels he discovered that beneath the fish the merchant had hidden a great quantity of pearls and precious stones. Thus, when he arrived in the community of Aleppo, rather than needing the support of the Community he was able to support himself and assist many of his needy brothers.

Rabbi Laniado died in 1610 (there are those who say: 1605) and his son, Abraham as well as many of his descendants were distinguished rabbis in the community of Aleppo, Syria.

Rabbi Bitton is the Author of Forgotten Giants (Gefen Publishing House, 2017).

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Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman

CHAPTER 7: Life and Scholarship in Aleppo

In general the way of life was traditional until the middle of the 19th century when modernization brought various changes. From 1800 to the beginning of World War I (1914), Jews were not only craftsmen or local traders but were also involved in international commerce. Aleppine merchants who had relied on the caravan trade were driven to adapt to new conditions.

With the opening of the Suez Canal and the diverting of trade via sea to the Far East, some Jews relocated to Egypt. (As a matter of fact, the majority of today's Egyptian Jews are really transplanted Aleppans.) Others opened offices in Manchester, England, with the object of selling manufactured textiles in the Levant.

Differences between the Syrian (and Sefardic in general) approach to study vis-à-vis Ashkenazic Jews were that the latter studied only the Torah in school and not the Prophets and Writings (Ketubim) and stressed Talmudic hair-splitting, which the former studied the Bible in its entirety more extensively and the Talmud more straightforwardly. The characteristic of Halebi learning was *'iyun halebi* (Halebi deliberation or concentration), which meant that thorough reading of the text received more weight. Halebi rabbis believed that Sefardic superiority in learning lay in their more thorough knowledge of the texts.

The Alliance Israelite Universelle founded a boys' school in Aleppo in 1869 and a girls' school there in 1889. Later as

the Alliance became more secularistic and the rabbis were influenced by ultra-Orthodox Ashkenaziim in Jerusalem, they became hostile to the Alliance.

Aleppo was noted for its many rabbinical scholars. Beginning in the 16th century the works of Aleppo's rabbis were published by the Jewish presses of Constantinople, Salonica, Venice and Livorno. The *Mahzor Aram Soba* was printed in Venice in 1527, not too long after Guttenberg's invention of moveable type. Somewhat later Aleppo's *Hakham Bashi* (Chief Rabbi) Abraham Laniado published in Venice in 1603. Among the outstanding works sent to large centers for publication were Hakham Yehuda Kassin's *Mahane Yehuda* and Hakham Shelomo Laniado's *Bet Dino Shel Shelomo*, both about 1775. Other notable examples are *Qehillat Moshe* and *Debar Moshe*, works of Rabbi Moshe Sutton.

Rabbi Josiah Pinto's "More Precious than Silver," Rabbi Abraham Antebi's *Ohel Yesharim*, Rabbi Moshe Rosa's *Zikhron Tob*, Rabbi Yosef Menashe's *Kennesiya Leshem Shamayim* and Rabbi Yishaq Shrem's *Musar HaHokhma*.



Mahzor Aram Soba

Mr. Goldman is a retired Chemical Engineer who is a member of Congregations Beth Torah and Kol Israel. From 1978 through 2002 he was the Editor of the Beth Torah Bulletin. He was Secretary of Beth Torah from 1980 through 2005 and is still the Editor of the Beth Torah Calendar.

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

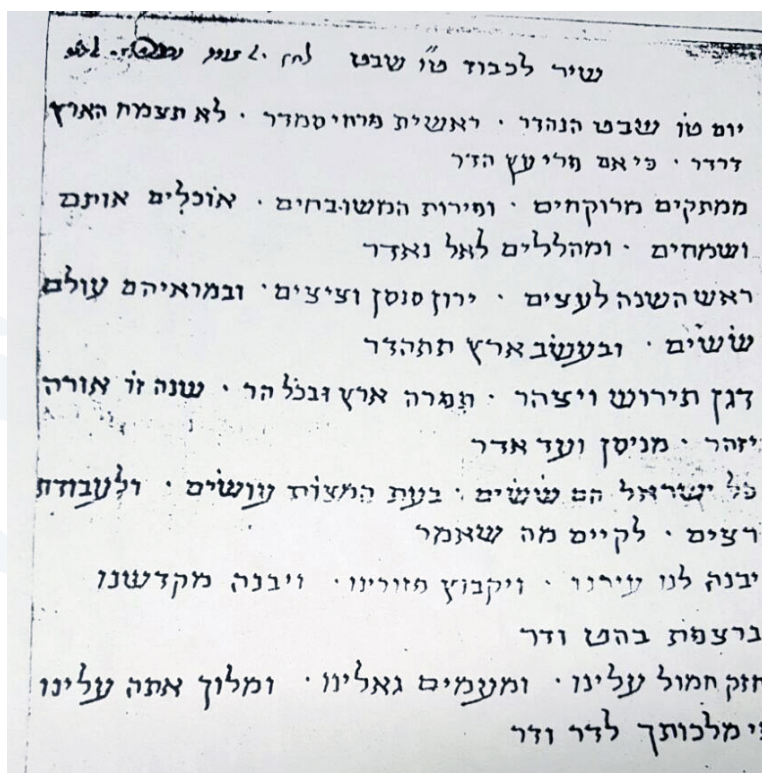
Dr. David M Betesh, DMD

On **Shabbat Beshalah** (Exodus 13:17- 17:16), we read the Song of the Sea (*Shirat Hayam*). According to SUHV (Red Pizmonim Book) and ALL Syrian sources, Maqam AJAM, known for its happy tunes, is most appropriate to express our joy, as God delivers us from Egypt. This is one of only three weeks of the year that AJAM is applied. As far as the word 'Ajam,' which is Arabic for 'foreigner,' the Israelites considered themselves foreigners when living in Egypt. HAZZANUT: *Shirat Hayam* in Zemirot recited in unison. Semehim: *Yah El Gadol VeNe'edar* (Tu Bishbat; 397). PIZMON SEFER TORAH: *Rahum Ata* (216).

לט"ו בשבט

סימן יעקב

יא מרה אפרשי אל דאר	יה אל גדול ונאדר.
מלך במרומים דר.	לבוש תפארת הדר.
מתוך עמו לא נעדר:	עשה עולם בששי.
ונח בשבת קדשי.	ובו תתענג נפשי.
בלי עצב ובלי מר:	קול רנה וקול שמחה.
ביום שבת מנוחה.	יהיה לנו סליחה.
וכל-עון יכפר:	ביום שבת תתקדש.
דבורך יהיה קדש.	למקטרג תגרש.
פיהו מאתמול סגר:	ברא שבת לדורות.
נחת רוח לבקיות.	דגים ומיני פירות.
ויין המשמר:	רצה נא במנוחתך.
ביום זה הוא שמחתך.	בו תוספת נשמתך.
תאיר כאור השחר:	



Song in honor of Tu Bishbat written by Hakham Mordekhai Maslaton



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 Hashbua</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 Hashbua</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 Hashbua</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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