

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 25: Vayishlah-Vayeshev

DEDICATED IN HONOR OF RABBI JOSEPH M MIZRACHI
FOR HIS DEVOTION TO THE EDUCATION OF OUR YOUTH



*Dedicated in honor of Rabbi Joseph M Mizrachi
for his devotion to the education of our youth*

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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, lay members, students and institutions.

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Cover Image: Joseph Sold by His Brothers, illustration published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company

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Perashat Vayeshev

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY: UNDERSTANDING JACOB

Mr. Victor E. Didia

Having experienced the effects of the Esau Jacob sibling rivalry, and having heard of the Yishmael Isaac rivalry, our forefather Jacob seemingly disregards, or even stokes, such a rivalry among Joseph and his half brothers. If true, why did he do so, and did he err? We will be examining the following text from *Bereshit* 37:1-4 and 10-13:

א וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.

1 And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

ב אֵלֶּה תִּלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן-שִׁבְעֵ-עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת-אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נָעַר אֶת-בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת-בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל-אֲבִיהֶם.

2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren, being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father.

ג וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו כִּי-בֶן-זָקְנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כִּתְנֵת פָּסִים.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors.

ד וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי-אֶתוֹ אֶהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכֻלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

...

ו וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אֶחָיו וַיַּגִּיעַר-בוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוּם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתָּ הַבּוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי וְאֶחָיְךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָךְ אֶרְצָה.

10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down to thee to the earth?"

יא וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת-הַדָּבָר.

11 And his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying in mind.

יב וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לְרֹעוֹת אֶת-צֹאן אֲבִיהֶם בְּשֶׁכֶם.

12 And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

יג וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אֶחָיְךָ רָעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנְנִי.

13 And Israel said unto Joseph: "Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send thee unto them." And he said to him: "Here am I."

Before offering this writer's interpretation, the following observations and questions should be considered:

1. Why does the Torah in verse 1 highlight that the land of Canaan is the land of his father's sojournings, a fact known to the reader?

What does the phrase, "אלה תלדות יעקב" ("these are the generations of Jacob" v. 2) signify, especially, since it is followed by mention only of Joseph, and the births of all the brothers were recorded previously? I"

2. What is the reason the Torah reports, "ויבא יוסף את" ("and Joseph brought evil report of them" v. 2)? Is the Torah just informing us that Joseph was a talebearer and gratuitous gossiper?
3. What is the significance of the sudden shift in

appellation in verses 3 and 13 from “יעקב” (“Jacob”) to “ישראל” (“Yisrael”)?

4. Yisrael loved Yosef because “בן זקנים הוא לו” (“he was the son of his old age” v. 3). What does this phrase mean, and, is not the word, “לו,” literally “to him” or “for him,” superfluous?

Transgenerational Link

Chapter 37 of *Parashat Vayeshev* is replete with more than forty references to family relationships, recounted in the Torah’s narrative as well as in the dialogues of Jacob and Joseph. These multiple references alert the reader that a family relationship is at stake here.

The *Parashah* opens by linking Jacob to his father (the previous generation), stating that Jacob dwelt in “ארץ מגורי אביו” (“the land of his father’s sojournings”), and then identifying his “תלדות”, literally, “descendants” or “generations”, as being Joseph (the future generation). Yet, Joseph was neither Jacob’s only child nor his youngest – so towards what insight is the Torah guiding the reader? The Torah may use the phrase “אלה תלדות” (“these are the generations”) to introduce a list of biological offspring, or, oftentimes, to introduce a series of events leading up to the realization of some ultimate purpose, as in “אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם” (“these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created” *Bereshit* 2:4), where the subsequent verses describe the onset of civilization on the planet earth; or, “ואלה תולדות יצחק” (“these are the generations of Isaac” *Bereshit* 25:19), which is followed by a brief description of Ribkah’s prophesy and the birth of Jacob and Esau, and an expansive narration of their rivalry to acquire Isaac’s blessing to actualize the destiny of Isaac as the spiritual heir of Abraham.

In telling us that Jacob settled in the land of his father, the Torah is hinting that his residence in Canaan was part of the process of realizing the ultimate purpose of his father’s being, namely, to bring forth a family that would evolve into the greater nation of “ישראל” (“Yisrael”). Hence, we are told (in

verse 3) that Yisrael loved Joseph of all his sons, precisely because this love of Joseph of all the other sons, was related directly to the development of the nation of Yisrael, a nation worthy of God’s promises to Jacob, his father, and his grandfather. After all, it was to achieve this purpose that Isaac was preferred over Yishmael, and Jacob over Esau.

The Spiritual and Emotional Bond

Joseph understood that his father’s national aspirations could not be galvanized so long as his ten half brothers do not rise above their petty internecine rivalry. Accordingly, Joseph felt obliged to inform his father of the “ugly words” exchanged among the half brothers, in the hope that the rift could be repaired. The Torah records that “Israel loved Joseph” (verse 3) immediately following the statement (verse 2) that “Joseph brought evil report” in order to establish a causal connection between the two. (As Rabbi Ezra Labaton ע”ה, often pointed out, the letter “ו” “*vav*,” attached to the beginning of a word serves several purposes, one being, to connote causality.)

“Yisrael loved Joseph of all his sons, precisely because this love of Joseph of all the other sons, was related directly to the development of the nation of Yisrael.”

Joseph readily accedes to Jacob’s request that he seek out “שלום אחיד” “the peacefulness of your brothers” (verse 14), even though his brothers “לא יכלו דברו לשלום” “could not even speak peaceably to him,” as we are told in verse 4. Joseph does so because he was dedicated to

the realization of Jacob’s goal of establishing a nation, for which peace and harmony among the brothers was a prerequisite.

Our Rabbis have difficulty defining the term “בן זקנים” – does it refer to the child born in Jacob’s older years (indeed, *Binyamin* was born later), or to the precocious child who possessed wisdom and insight into Jacob’s soul? *Parashiyot Vayeshev* through *Vayhi* support the latter view, as we see Joseph demonstrating captivating wisdom, psychological insight, and astute political vision, which he consistently attributes to God. It was Joseph, of all the sons, who was sensitive to his father’s spiritual quest, and who engaged his father about it, engendering this resonant harmony with Jacob. Hence Yisrael loved him.

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This understanding of “*ben zekounim*” is buttressed by the fact that the phrase appears only this one time in Tanach. However, in *Parashat Vayigash* (44:20), when Yehudah refers to Jacob’s truly youngest son, *Binyamin*, he calls him “*yeled zekounim*.” The word, “*yeled*,” denotes a biological child, whereas the word, “*בן*” probably connotes “possessing,” as when it precedes a person’s age, as in verse 2.

As further support for the thesis that Jacob and Joseph had a unique spiritual bond, we see in *Parashat Vayese* that upon Joseph’s birth, Jacob decides to leave Haran to go back home (30:25). Jacob knew that his sojourn in Haran would be temporary – to marry and raise the family, this was his *raison d’être*. The birth of Joseph by his beloved wife, Rachel, was the singular event signaling the onset of the next phase of Jacob’s mission of nation building – settling in the land promised to his fathers. Furthermore, we see common emotional characteristics in Jacob and Joseph. Firstly, Jacob had a dream as he embarked upon his journey to Haran. Joseph had two dreams preceding his forced journey to Egypt. These three dreams foretell the destiny of Jacob. Secondly, Jacob cries upon meeting persons at critical junctures in the fulfillment of his destiny. He cries when he encounters Rachel upon entering Haran, and when he encounters Esau upon entering Canaan. Joseph cries when he encounters his brothers – when he reveals his true identity to them, and when he is reunited with Jacob. Lastly, Jacob beseeches Joseph to bury him in the Promised Land. Similarly, Joseph instructs his brothers and the children of Israel, that upon their exodus from Egypt, they carry his bones with them.

The Torah records Jacob’s reaction to the retelling of

Joseph’s second dream in verse 10. Jacob expresses a feigned anger, reminiscent linguistically to the outrage expressed by the brothers, intended to assuage the brothers’ resentment of Joseph. However, in verse 11, the Torah juxtaposes the brothers’ feelings to Jacob’s – the brothers were jealous and resentful, but his father reserved decision, perhaps anticipating fulfillment of the dream.

Jacob made for Joseph a multicolored tunic, different from those he had fashioned for the brothers. Was the difference between the tunics justification for the brothers’ jealousy and resentment of Joseph? Obviously not. Joseph merited special recognition from his father.

Conclusion

Throughout his life, Jacob lived and struggled tenaciously in the pursuit of a destiny promised by God. He could not accept the presumed fact of Joseph’s death. He would not be consoled (37:35) because he knew that Joseph was the only one who could effectuate God’s promises. Hence, Joseph’s death was simply not possible.

The Torah’s account of these events reflects no criticism of Jacob. Jacob purposefully acknowledged and encouraged Joseph’s visionary talent, believing that nurturing it would abet the fulfillment of the promises Hashem had made to him, his father and grandfather. And that’s what happened.

Jacob understood the inevitability of sibling rivalry within a family, but understood, as well, that forging the enterprise of the Nation of Israel was paramount. It was a matter of destiny.



Joseph's Coat 1853 by Horace Vernet

Mr. Didia is a community member who practices law.

SHABBAT-TABLE TALKS: PERASHAT VAYESHEV

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Giving Rebuke Graciously Without Embarrassing, Hurting, or Insulting

In a relationship, there are times when we must give rebuke. This occurs when our friend or relative has done something that is wrong or that bothers us. Giving some thought about the best way to do this can spare grief and also be more effective.

Background: The story of Yehuda and Tamar is a complex one. It contains elements that can lead to lively discussions. Let us focus on the value above. This occurs at the end of the story. Ask your children if they have learned the story of Yehuda and Tamar. If they have, let them tell the story. If not, tell the most important parts of the story.

Ya'aqob's son Yehuda had three sons. The oldest, Er, married a woman named Tamar. But he died without having any children. When that sad thing happens, the living brother must marry the wife of the dead brother, in order to have children for him. The second brother, Onan did not like the idea that his son would belong to his dead brother. He made sure that Tamar would not get pregnant. He also died without having any children.

Yehuda was afraid to let his third son, Shela, marry Tamar. He was afraid that he would also die. Tamar was stuck. She could not marry anyone else, and she did not have children. She decided on a desperate plan. When Yehuda's wife died, Tamar disguised herself so that Yehuda would not recognize her. Yehuda did not recognize her and he slept with her. Tamar asked Yehuda to give her his seal, cord and staff—things that identified Yehuda.

Three months later, everyone knew that Tamar was pregnant, but they did not know who the father was. When a woman became pregnant when she was not allowed to, the punishment was very serious. Let's read the verses that describe what happened next.

Text: Beresheet 38:24-26 (NJPS)

About three months later, Yehuda was told, "Your

daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot (for younger children say—has done a very bad thing); in fact she has gotten pregnant by harlotry (because of what she did)." "Bring her out," said Yehuda, "and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?" Yehuda recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shela." And he was not intimate with her again.

Analysis: Notice how Tamar informed Yehuda that he was the father of her baby. She did not say it openly. Rather, she showed him the proof of the things in a way that would make him agree. She also waited until she was being brought out to be burned. Even under such tension, she did not reproach Yehuda in a way that was embarrassing. She merely allowed him to draw the conclusion from the evidence. She also trusted that he would be honest enough to admit his mistake. Her life was staked on these decisions! She thought about this plan to the last detail. She was interested in making Yehuda live up to his obligations to his dead sons. Tamar eventually brought him to this realization by her actions. Tamar was not burned. She gave birth to twins, one of whom is the ancestor of King David (and of the Mashiah). Her brave actions merited such a reward.

Discussion: Tamar was very careful when she told Yehuda that he was wrong. She did not do it in a way that would embarrass him. She let him understand his mistake, and he was able to admit it.

What are some ways that we can tell someone when they have done something wrong to us or hurt our feelings?

One thing to do is to describe what happened as objectively as possible. Then describe how that affected you. For example, if your brother said something that made you feel bad instead of saying something to make him feel bad and getting into a big fight, remind him of what he said to you and then describe how you felt about that. "Joey, when you said I was little, it hurt my feelings." "Sammy, you said

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Perashat Vayishlah

VAYISHLAH

Rabbi Joseph Dweck

“And Yaakov was left alone — and a man wrestled with him until the coming up of dawn...when he saw that he could not prevail against him...he said to him ‘What is your name? And he said Yaakov. Then he said: Not as Yaakov shall your name be uttered, but rather as Yisrael for you have fought with G-d and men and have prevailed.’ (32:25-26,28-29)

“Never throughout history has a man who lived a life of ease left a name worth remembering.”

— Theodore Roosevelt

This week our parasha showcases a historic struggle. During the journey that Yaakov makes with his family on his way back home to Canaan, he finds himself left alone one evening. No sooner are we told of his solitude, do we read that he is engaged in a brawl throughout the night with a mysterious, some say divine, aggressor. Yaakov struggles until daybreak with this ‘man’. As he beats him at dawn, and the aggressor prepares to retreat in defeat, he bestows upon Yaakov a new name, *Yisrael*, later to be endorsed by G-d¹. He is called *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל) because of his struggles, “you have struggled (שָׁרִית) with G-d and men and have prevailed”.

Yaakov’s successful struggle literally became the defining act of his life and the tenor for the development of his progeny. A nation of his descendants would emerge from the crucible of slavery, and *Yisrael* would go on to struggle through an epic three-thousand year saga of challenge and adversity while showing no dimming of its vibrant spirit. Just as our forefather did, we emerge from strife with intrepid resolve.

The name *Yisrael*, however, does not highlight the success of the fight, but the fight itself and the readiness to take on all manner of challenge, be it divine or mortal, in order to survive and thrive. There is something, though, about the primal fight of Yaakov that is unique. The Torah makes a point of telling us that Yaakov was alone just before he began

wrestling with the adversary. There are those who see that his struggle was an internal and personal conflict, and the “man” that he fought was a powerful and aggressive element of his own psyche. There are many ways to look at and understand the struggle of Yaakov Abinu, but the idea that it was a personal struggle that manifested itself externally — as if it were with a different person — is intriguing.

We all have facets to our personalities that do not fall in line with each other. There are drives that urge us to do and think certain things that run counter to the part of our selves that aims at our highest goals and aspirations. Yaakov and his descendants often, almost endemically, saw the dissonance that emerged from our inner dualities as an ongoing personal battle for perfected selfhood and integrity. It is a lone struggle, fought for our own sake, that no one can fight for us. There are battles we win, and battles we lose, but we are always at a point of tension between the push of our drives and the motivation of our potential, perfected selves.

There is something sacred in the struggle itself. Even when we lose a battle, our lives are elevated because we care enough to fight. To acknowledge that we harbour streaks within us that run counter to our ultimate goals, and to commit to facing them and wrestling with them, is in large part what being *Yisrael* is about. Before we capitulate to drives like lust, greed, power and arrogance, that serve little more than to efface a faithful and upstanding identity, we rise to the duel with the name of *Yisrael* on our shields and fight to achieve virtuous lives. To commit to this struggle is to believe that there is a life and identity that is worth fighting for. At the heart of our nation is the belief that the struggle is worth it, and that win or lose, the holy, human glory lies in the fight itself.

Shabbat Shalom

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

¹ 35:9-10 “G-d said to him, Yaakov is your name, Yaakov shall your name be called no more, for your name shall be Yisrael! And he called his name Yisrael.”

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Insights on Shabbat

LISTEN, HOMER, IT'S SHABBAT!

Rabbi Yaakov Bitton

Bart is writing lines on the chalkboard as a punishment. When the school bell rings, he leaves in a hurry and skateboards out the doors. Meanwhile, as the end-of-shift whistle blows in the Springfield power plant, Homer immediately takes off his mask and drops the tongs to leave work. Lisa comes home from saxophone practice and Marge and Maggie from grocery-shopping. They all converge at the same time in their family home and rush to take their spot on the family couch. Very famously, the opening scene for every episode of *The Simpsons* shows how a satirical modern American family can only find unity sitting on a sofa in front of a TV. Instead of talking to each other, they sit silently, letting their minds absorb all the information coming from that curious luminous box. Back in January 1990, when Matt Groening very successfully captured the reality of modern society, the one biggest threat to family interaction seemed to be the TV. Today, we are inundated with devices that constantly demand our attention and focus. It's become nearly impossible to have an old-fashioned family dinner where the people around the table are more important than the iPhones and other devices we all have. The TV is the least of our distractions, and sitting together as a family to watch a movie would actually be considered progress!

We are constantly synched to the world at large; so it would seem that we are constantly letting the world talk to us. But are we? Does listening to what the world has to say 24/7—whether through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp—make us expert listeners? Are we enhancing our communication skills in any significant way? Do the average 5.5 hours (!) an American adult spends every day watching video content make him or her more perceptive? Unfortunately, we are not better listeners than we were fifty years ago. You know why? When we stare at our gadgets' screens or concentrate on the sound of our headphones, we

are not **listening** to a communicated message; rather, we are **consuming** content. An iPad showing me in a video what happened to Tom Brady and the deflated footballs is not really inviting me to have a dialogue with it. This is why, I call that “consuming” and not “listening.” What I want to do is show how Jewish tradition does make us better listeners. Our most powerful weapon: Shabbat! And, in a culture where we substitute listening in favor of consuming, Shabbat is more relevant than ever.

The universe, the Torah tells us, is a book (*Bereshit* 5:1). Its author: God. Scribes *write* with ink, composers *write* with music, an artist may *write* with a masterpiece painting, and programmers *write* with code. God *writes* by creating. He speaks by creating. Every sub-particle, every galaxy, every cell in our bodies, and the universe as a whole, are part of God's language. They are a divine invitation to dialogue.

We spend most of the time, most days, expressing ourselves. In many forms. In fact, we enjoy it most when we are the only ones who do all the talking. We love telling the world what to be and how to be. It feels pretty good to have things obey our whims and wills. We all are back-seat drivers in one way or another; with respect to everything. If we don't like something, we go and change it (this also is a form of talking). If the lights are off, we turn them on. If an egg is raw, we cook it. If the M&Ms® have too many red pieces, we clean them up. As back-seat drivers, we also sometimes actually tell our friends how to drive, but more importantly, we tend to also tell them how to be, what to be, what to do, and what not to do. We love to tell others what is right and what is wrong, who is right and who is wrong, who is cool and who is not. Even God! We often tell God what we want and what we don't, and what we feel is and isn't just. We impose upon God our own standards. (For example, if someone did as I asked, it would make me feel good and I

“Today, we are inundated with devices that constantly demand our attention and focus.”

would then want to do what they ask; then, why, oh why, God, do I not get what I asked of you even though I did what you asked?) Instinctively, we are not necessarily interested in dialogues. We would love it if reality, God, our friends, the universe, just obeyed while we told them what to be, how to be, and what to do.

Don't get me wrong. Expressing ourselves, our individuality, is essential in Judaism. And yet the Torah is sufficiently sophisticated that it has a perfect training program. On the one hand, we express ourselves constantly. It is part of our nature, and many of the *misvot* (like Tefillah) call upon us to express ourselves. But we also have *misvot* reining this impulse in. For instance, we are asked to listen with the very clear admonition three times a day "*Shema*!" (listen!). Significantly, the tradition is to then cover our eyes as if to say we are intent on listening with our full attention. What results is a beautiful dialogue between God and us. And the most powerful tool in the Torah's arsenal for training us to be good listeners is the Shabbat.

You see, once every seven days, on Shabbat, we stop. We stop, so we can listen. That we don't do *melakhot* means we do not transform. We stop telling nature how we would like it to be transformed. If a potato is raw, we let it be: we don't cook it. If a seed is aboveground, we don't plant it. If a tree is rooted, we do not uproot it. If a piece of wood is cold, we do not ignite it. By refraining from *melakhot*, we free up our listening capacity. We are able to now open our minds to the message of creation. What does it mean to me that this flower, which I am letting be and not transforming, was created by God? What can I apply to my life from the fact that this fire, which I am not extinguishing, has a form of energy brought about by combustion? Shabbat is, first and foremost, *zekher lema'ase bereshit* — a celebration to the fact that the world was created by God. It is our show of respect for our Creator by refraining, once every seven days, from altering in certain ways the world that He created.

Interestingly, it turns out that there is another meaningful side effect to refraining from *melakhot*. Because we are not busy trying to tell the physical world how to be (this includes manipulating electronic light and electronic information and so electric gadgets are left aside), we actually have time

to be with our families. And unlike the weekday dinner where everyone around the table is there mostly physically but with their attention elsewhere, Shabbat invites us to actually pay attention to each other. To listen. To share. To have dialogues. This side effect is no accident. That many of the ordinances of Shabbat revolve around the meals (*qiddush*, *hamosi*, Shabbat candles, *havdala*) doesn't hurt. The entire experience is conducive to listening, to being with our families and getting to know each other a bit better (and we all know how we can each know the other infinitely, no matter how much we feel we already do).

Keeping the Shabbat makes us better people. We are better people for honoring our Creator and agreeing to stop and listen to what He has to tell us, and because the Shabbat experience makes us better listeners with respect to other persons. Today, as a side effect, it also is a respite from media consumption; an island in the ocean of the illusory urgencies of our day-to-day where more important things, like family, is the center of our attention. If The Simpsons followed the Torah, they would still be rushing home on a Friday afternoon. Like in the animated sitcom, each person in the family would also be coming from a different place, from doing something entirely different than the others. But

the convergence, the meeting, happens not at the sofa facing a TV but rather at a table facing each other. Once a week, we stop talking; we stop, and we listen. God has lots to tell us,

the Torah has a lot to tell us, this created world has lots to tell us, and each one around the Shabbat table has lots and lots to tell us.

Stop, and listen.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Bitton received his semikha from Yeshiva University, where he also obtained a B.Sc. in finance, an M.A. in Talmud and a law degree from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. He currently practices as a hedge funds lawyer at Kleinberg, Kaplan, Wolff & Cohen, P.C.





Community Spotlight

THE ARAM SOBA ORCHESTRA

Mr. Maury Blanco

The Aram Soba Orchestra was founded by Maury and Josh Blanco in 2014 with the goal of reviving the songs of our Community in a form that appeals to the contemporary listener. The orchestra focuses on preserving the pizmonim of *Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah*, particularly those written to the *adwar* (explained below) of Egypt and Syria.

The History

The rich musical heritage of our Community serves as a cornerstone of our culture. Historically, Aleppo was a central point, a crossroads, in the Middle East, and thus served as a hub for music to thrive. For centuries, our Community has prided itself with its refined taste and appreciation for music. Secular Arabic songs impassioned the hearts of the Jewish community. Rather than dissuading it, the hakhamim of Aleppo recognized the beauty of the music and instead, encouraged its application to various aspects of Jewish life. They embraced the music itself, albeit with words of holiness and inspiration. In the analogy of Hakham Yaaqob Kassin a"h, they removed the outer, unholy shell, and preserved the inner kernel of beauty, uplifting it to one of sanctity. This served as the basis for the flourishing of pizmonim.

The pizmon, a Jewish poem set to secular music, thrived as an art and form of expression for all lifecycle and religious events. In the 19th century, a musical renaissance referred to as "*Al-Nahda*," took place in the Arab world, which brought about an equally notable renaissance in the Jewish world. The Arabic form of music called "*dawr*" gained tremendous prominence across the Middle East. The *dawr* (pl. *adwar*), is a complex musical composition that begins with an ornate, set melody that gives

way to a structured yet improvised back and forth between the singer and choir. The most notable composers and performers of *adwar* were from Egypt, and their performance quickly spread throughout the Levant. Aleppo's coffee houses became havens for the performance and popularization of *adwar*. The Jewish community developed a great affinity for the *dawr*, and naturally, the hakhamim composed a large repertoire of pizmonim to these complex melodies. Some of the most famous of such pizmonim are: *מגן אל צורי, אשר אני, בבית נאווה, יחיש מבשר, לעם חביב, אסיר ביוקשי*.

Perhaps the most notable pizmon composer of the 19th century was Hakham Refael Antebi Ades Tabboush (1854-1918). Tabboush wrote hundreds of pizmonim to various Arabic musical forms and most notably, *adwar*. His second



Hakham Refael Antebi Ades Tabboush

book of pizmonim, *Shir Ushbaha* was first published in 1905 and it included his own works plus those of hakhamim that preceded him. His famed student, Hakham Moshe Ashear continued the legacy of pizmon composition in Syria and America, publishing his own book *Hallel Vezimrah* in 1926. In America, the two works were combined into one, containing the better-known songs of both. This work, *Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah*, is commonly known today as "The Red Book."

While *Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah* continues to serve as the primary pizmon book of our Community, its use has dwindled in Syrian communities outside of Brooklyn. Additionally, even within our own Community in Brooklyn, only a very small percentage of the songs in the book are commonly sung. The songs that our grandfathers, and their grandfathers took so much joy and pride in singing, have fallen by the wayside to be replaced by fewer, simpler, and less traditional songs.

Since there is particular difficulty in properly learning the *adwar* pizmonim due to their complexity, it has become a virtually lost art in the community of its own inception. Furthermore, while some original Arabic records of these *adwar* exist, the quality of these century old recordings is far from tolerable to the modern ear. Whereas our great grandparents thirsted for every note sung on a primitive 1905 Sheikh Yousef El Manyalawi record, the average contemporary listener cannot even relate to it. While the *adwar* of Mohammad Othman and Abdo El Hamouli echoed in the streets of our Community every Saturday night in Aleppo and New York, nowadays they are neither performed nor known by most. The modern Western world is a far cry from the old civilization of the Middle East our ancestors left decades ago.

The Project

The Aram Soba Orchestra studies these *adwar* from the recorded versions that exist in the Arab world. The respective pizmonim are then applied based on the available recordings of hazzanim in the Judeo-Syrian world. Tremendous efforts are made to preserve these songs in full authenticity, to such an extent that every syllable uttered in the Arabic version must be paralleled by the Hebrew. These arrangements are then released in full orchestration and high quality sound for the benefit of the Community at large. Rather than listening to a difficult pizmon from an old tape of a hazzan singing by himself, one can enjoy a full group of musicians and hazzanim accurately performing the piece. This enables the listener to develop an affinity for the music, without necessarily sitting down to study it. Once a love for the music is re-embedded in the hearts of the audience, the adaptation and performance of this art is

simply osmosis.

The orchestra is made up of full string, percussion, and vocal sections. Instruments include: *oud*, *qanoun*, *nay*, *riq*, *darbakke*, *bendir*, an upright bass, an eight piece violin section, a full choir, and a singer. The choir is made up of an array of hazzanim that have graciously invested their talents in the project: Menahem Mustacci, Yisrael HaLevi, Hayim Eliyahu,

Emanuel Shalom, Ouriel Smia, Ouriel Suliman, Moshe Mustacci, David Saliah, Yonatan Saliah, and Shalom Arieli. Musical arrangements and singing are by Maury and Josh Blanco. The orchestra has released three recordings in the last year, and continues to

expand its repertoire. The current available songs are: בבית שאל לזנוחך, נאווה, ידידי יה נפשי

“For centuries, our Community has prided itself with its refined taste and appreciation for music.”

The response to the project has been overwhelming from the Community at large and hazzanim around the globe. In particular, hazzanim from the great Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem have taken involvement and interest in the project. Additionally, the orchestra was presented on Israeli radio by the esteemed hazzan Moshe Habbousha.



Maury and Josh Blanco

In an effort to contribute to the preservation of pizmonim from *Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah*, the Aram Soba Orchestra takes this humble step in a colossal pursuit. May this project assist in bringing the songs of old to the ears and lips of the new. In the merit of our ancestors, may the praises of *Shir Ushbaha Hallel Vezimrah* continue to be sung in their full grandeur, Amen.

To listen to the Aram Soba Orchestra, search “The Aram Soba Orchestra” channel on YouTube.

To inquire about sponsorship opportunities, please contact: AramSobaOrchestra@gmail.com.



Student Corner

THE IRONY OF RELIEF MISSIONS

Mr. Hayeem Rudy

In May, when I told my friends and family that I would be volunteering in a Mumbai slum as a Gabriel Project Mumbai Fellow, the reactions that I got bordered on reverence and sympathy. Reverence, because I was doing something adventurous, going into the “wild”, so to speak, in India – a place they perceived of as being “third-world” and markedly primitive compared to our refined, modern life in New York City. Sympathy because it seemed to many that I was foregoing the long-awaited summer vacation between the completion of my college years and the beginning of my medical school career. These reactions influenced my perspective in the weeks leading up to my experience in India. Yet now, several weeks after coming back from Mumbai, what stands out most profoundly in my memory are not the jarring scenes of poverty that I was fervently warned would rattle my emotional health in Mumbai (though they were very impactful), nor is it a sense of fulfillment and contribution that I was often praised for when I described what I would be doing as a volunteer in India. Instead, the pieces of the mission that are closest to my heart are those in which I was the observer, the learner, the one who benefitted.

The experiences that stand out in my memory were those that arose from an observation of the common, rather than from the sensational, emotionally-charged moments. For example, one came on a tired Sunday morning after our first two weeks in the slums. Having just celebrated our “settling in” in India with a night out on the town, we were quite tired as we moseyed into the JDC [Joint Distribution Committee] headquarters to spend time with a group of kids from slums in Mumbai (not the one in which we volunteered). After brief introductions and a slew of morning activities, the kids were asked to line up for lunch. It is worth mentioning that many of these children eat one meal per day, and so I expected them to be ravenous and unorganized in this lunch process. To my surprise, the kids lined up in an orderly way and all was well except for the fact that one of the younger

kids did not have a space in the line. This young one was a ball of sympathy, he peered haplessly out at the line with large, naïve eyes and a pair of matchstick legs jutting out awkwardly from his oversized shorts. I made to insert him into the line between two older boys, when one of them grabbed the little one and gently guided him forward in the line. The children in sequence followed suit, pushing the little one all the way to the front of the line, with the last child placing his hands on the young one’s shoulders in a display of responsibility and caring. I was blown away by the collective sense of responsibility that I witnessed from these young, hungry children.

A similar sense of communal responsibility was also evident in our classroom when the older kids who had a better grasp of English would lovingly demonstrate support for the younger kids in the class who struggled with our lessons. One particular instance of this that stands out in my memory was during an exercise in class in which we asked our students to draw a picture of their family members and label them in English. As the students concentrated on their paintings, a shy seven-year-old girl named Parvin tugged on my sleeve and indicated that she wanted to know the English words to label her family members. Hearing this question in Hindi, an older boy named Rahim leapt up from his drawing across the tin-walled classroom and yelled at the top of his lungs “Hayeem Teacher, No!” and started to communicate emphatically with Parvin in Hindi. I looked up inquisitively at our translator, David, expressing my concern of Rahim’s sudden reaction: “He is afraid that she would not learn it the right way if you give her the answer, Hayeem Sir.” I looked back down to see Rahim and Parvin lying on the ground, stomach-down and giggling, now drawing the word “sister” together above Parvin’s stick figure family.

These experiences highlight to me the irony of my trip, which is that I went to India looking to teach, but that I left India with the feeling that I came away with more than

I was able to contribute. I think that they also shed light on the common misconception regarding poverty, which is that those who live it, live - in some sense - a reduced form of existence. At least in relation to the Kalwa slums in Mumbai, my experiences highlight to me the quality of relativity in matters of luxury, and serves as evidence that supports the Jewish idea that “one who is rich is he who is happy with what he has” [m. ‘Abot 4:1] My time in the Kalwa slums was remarkable primarily because of the spirit of its people – a quality that I believe would have been impressionable to me and most other people even in a vacuum that eliminated the circumstance of poverty from the equation. I will be forever grateful to my friends in Mumbai who helped me develop this hopeful perspective that I now turn to, to inform my dealings with people both rich and poor in my everyday life.

If you are interested in learning more about this volunteering program, please feel free to email Hayeem at hayeemrudy@gmail.com, or visit www.gabrielprojectmumbai.org.



Hayeem with Parvin (left) and Susma (right) - two bright young girls that take part in the classes offered by GPM in the Kalwa slums.



Students in a tin-walled class in the Kalwa slums happily display free hand soap that was distributed to them by the local humanitarian group Sundara.



Sephardic History

NEVER FORGET OUR NOBLE HERITAGE

NUNCA OLVIDES MUESTRA HISTORIA DESTINGUIDA

נונכה אולבידיס מואיסטרה איסטוריה דיסטיוגידה

Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman

CHAPTER 11: Fall of the Omayyads

Eliezer (formerly Bodo the priest) was becoming very influential and he lobbied Abd ar-Rahman II to force the Christians in Cordova to convert to either Islam or Judaism on the threat of death. In 847 the Christians of Muslim Spain contacted the French emperor Charles the Bald (the successor to King Louis the Pious) and demanded that Eliezer be stopped from this activity. He apparently was. This conflict resulted in two kinds of Christians. There were those who accepted conditions as they existed. They fit into the life of the Muslim country. They learned the Arabic language and customs. They did everything but give up the Christian religion. Then there were the zealots. The zealots were led by Eulogius, Spera-in-Deo, and Paulus Alvaro who preached that Christianity was superior to the Muslim religion and that Christians should not grovel before the Muslims. They should instead seek martyrdom by reviling the memory of Muhammad. Abd ar-Rahman II died in 852 succeeded by his son Muhammad I (852-856).

Muhammad I was influenced greatly by the Muslim theologians in his kingdom and as a result he took a stronger position against the Christians. He was determined to crush the Christian zealots and mystics and ordered the

leaders imprisoned. While the Jews of his kingdom were in good favor, whenever the Caliph clamped down on the Christians, the Jews would also suffer. Whenever Muhammad I became angry at the Christians he would dismiss them from the positions they held. He would have to do the same to the Jews because they too were non-Muslims.



Generally speaking, the king was favorably disposed towards the Jews. The Jews consistently tied their destiny to the ruling monarchs and therefore they were appreciated by the royal courts. The objective of the Omayyads was to bring the non-Muslims into their fold. They thought they could accomplish this best by being tolerant and moderate in their behavior towards them. The fear by the Muslims

of a Christian conspiracy made it difficult for the Muslims to take the Christians into their confidence and trust them. There was an improvement in Christian/ Muslim relations when a group of moderate Christians took control of the Church in Cordova.

There were two factions of Christians. There were those under the leadership of the priest Abbot Samson who was a fanatic. There was another group under the leadership of Hostegesis, a much more liberal Catholic. Samson was anti-Muslim and Hostegesis was pro-Muslim. Hostegesis

formed a Catholic Council made of Catholics, Muslims, and Jews who were supportive of the Muslim government.

They had their first formal meeting in Cordova in 863. While there was a major effort internally to reconcile the different religious groups, there was constant pressure from the outside for a full Christian takeover. From the beginning of Muhammad I's rule, the local Christians and the *muwalladun* (Muslims of Spanish origin) consisting of peasants, townspeople, farmers, landowners, laborers, and people of all classes, were involved

in various rebellions. These rebellions were supported by the Christian kingdom of Asturias. The Asturian kings involved were Ramiro I (842-850), Ordone I (850-866), and Alfonso III "El Magnifico" (866-910). Control of Toledo went back and forth until 873 when the citizens of Toledo recognized Muslim rule and control. This occurred

while Muhammad I was the Omayyad ruler.



Córdoba, Spain

Muhammad I had great wealth and strength but his constant conflicts and battles with the Christians took a toll on him and his kingdom. He began to lose territory. The *muwalladun* were in a way like the *marranos*, Jews who had converted to Christianity but whose hearts remained in Judaism. The *muwalladun* converted to Islam but in their hearts they remained Christians. Umar b. Hafsun was such a *muwalladun*.

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

MAQAM OF THE WEEK

www.pizmonim.com

On **Shabbat Vayishlah** (the eighth *perasha* of the Torah; Genesis 32:4-36:43), maqam SABA is applied to the prayers, because Esau's army (Hebrew: SABA) approaches Jacob. Another explanation for SABA is because the people of Shekhem are tricked into circumcisions (and SABA is the maqam for circumcisions). Many sources disagree with the above selection and indicate to apply maqam SIGAH-IRAQ instead. An explanation for the usage of maqam SIGAH-IRAQ (maqam used for building structures for the tabernacle) is due to Jacob building altars at Beit El and Shekhem. Maqam SIGAH will be familiar to most, because it is utilized for reading the Torah.

In addition to the above, some sources cite maqam BAYAT.

On **Shabbat Vayesheb** (Genesis 37:1-40:23), prayers are conducted in maqam NAHWAND. This maqam is applied when a *perasha* deals with episodes of conflict, such as the conflict between Joseph and his brothers this week. Most older sources indicate to apply maqam RAHAW. HAZZANUT (H. Moshe Ashear): *Shav'at: LeNeri VeOri* (page 207); *Mimisrayim: Yassa Limlokh* (page 363); *Pizmon Sefer Torah: Odekha El Tobot Gamalta* (in honor of Hanukkah; page 372).

(Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com)



Community Publication

TIQQUN BIRKAT ABRAHAM

ברכת אברהם

Mr. Hymie Shamah

On Shabbat morning, why doesn't the reader of the Torah stop reading in the same place where my humash says the Aliyah should end?

Be'ezrat Hashem, our community will complete the world's first and only printed and published Halabi Tiqqun LeQoreem in the coming year. We have recorded where each traditional Halabi Aliyah begins and ends along with the unique subtleties our traditional Torah reading contained for hundreds of years. There is no known book in existence that contains this information. Our new Tiqqun will insure the continuance of our traditions for generations to come. The process was lengthy and tedious, taking many more hours and years of work than originally planned.

Deciphering the actual stops was the first challenge. Since there isn't an existing authoritative source on the matter, we had to begin by compiling information from various

different trusted sources in our community and from Halabi communities around the world. *Hakham* David Tawil, *Baal Qoreh* Morris Ashear and *Mesader* Harvey Shomer had compiled the "stops" of several authoritative sources from around the world, forming an early "first draft" for us to work with. We then looked at manuscripts of *Hakham* Isaac Chehebar of Argentina, *Hakham* Jacob Kassin, *Hakham* Ezra Mishanieh, and others. Astonishingly, but for very few conflicts, their personal notes were practically identical. Later, we obtained

the stops of *Hakham* Ezra Shayo of Qnis Ades in Jerusalem from Mr. Joey Harari, as well as the popular stops of *Hakham* Baruch Ben Haim, and again, thankfully, many times the

sources all matched. When they did not the majority rule was applied. We learned that with the exception of *Maftir*, the Halabi Shabbat stops **almost always differ** with the popular stops recorded in currently printed Humasheem, more so than we expected.

"This book will insure the continuance of this tradition."

Source/Code	Rabbi Jacob Kassin	Rabbi Ezra Mishaniye	Rabbi Ezra Mishaniye/Tawi	Rabbi Isaac Shehebar/Ashe	Rabbi Isaac Shehebar/Moss	Rabbi Yom Tob Yedid/Zarif	Halabi Unknown Source	Rabbi Ezra Shayo	Rabbi Baruch Ben-Haim
Beresheet	C1	C2	C3	C4	*C5	C6	C7	C8	C9
Oleh	Aliyah	begin	thru	begin	thru	begin	thru	begin	thru
1	Cohen	1:1	1:5	1:1	1:5	1:1	1:5	1:1	1:5
2	Levi	1:6	1:8	1:6	1:8	1:6	1:8	1:6	1:8
3	Yisrael	1:9	1:13	1:9	1:13	1:9	1:13	1:9	1:13
4		1:14	1:19	1:14	1:19	1:14	1:19	1:14	1:19
5		1:20	1:23	1:20	1:23	1:20	1:23	1:20	1:23
6			1:24	1:31					
7		1:24	2:03	2:01	2:03	1:24	2:03	1:24	2:03
8		2:04	2:11	2:04	2:11		2:04	2:11	2:04
9		2:12	2:14	2:12	2:14	2:04	2:14	2:21	2:12
10		2:15	2:18	2:15	2:18	2:15		4:22	6:08
11		2:19	2:22	2:19	2:22			6:05	6:08
12		2:23	3:21	2:23	3:21				2:23
13		3:22	4:03	3:22	4:03				3:22
14		4:04	4:16	4:04	4:16				4:04
15		4:17	4:21	4:17	4:21				4:17
16		4:22	5:31	4:22	5:32				4:23
17		5:32	6:08	6:01	6:08				5:01
18	Maftir	6:05	6:08	6:05	6:08				6:05

Example of our source chart

In 2010, with encouragement from Rabbi Azancot and guidance from Rabbi Ely Matalon, the Beth Torah community began the Tiqqun Qoreem Journal Project. We committed ourselves to an overwhelmingly complex process, the creation of a new Tiqqun, reflecting our customary readings, complete with all of our uniquely Halabi nuances. The fundraising efforts were not difficult, as many generous people from our community and Halabi communities around the world understood the need to memorialize the particularities of our readings. Our Tiqqun; Birkat Abraham, has been dedicated in honor of Barbara and Abe Franco, a fitting dedication by their children and grandchildren. With the funds pledged, a much more difficult process began.

Mr. David Catton of the Sephardic Heritage Foundation, the leading publisher in our community, which has put out such seminal works as the Kol Yaakov Siddur and Shalom Yerushalim Mahzor, was brought in to partner with Beth Torah on execution and distribution. Mr. Catton's insight and experience was critical to our success. With painstaking effort, his typographers planned the layout and added our Halabi stops to the Torah text and eventually to a tiqqun-layout text. When their process was complete, we had, for the first time, a draft text of the authentic Halabi stops.

Rabbi Michael Schrem circulated portions of this document to over 30 community Qoreem to review. Our text was intricately compared to the most authoritative Torah version available today, the Keter Yerushalim, which itself was derived from the Keter Aram Soba, our storied and celebrated Aleppo Codex. The notes and comments of many of our community's master readers were now considered. We then met with dozens

of our Rabbis for endorsement. Mr. Mickey Kairey, who devoted his life to teaching proper qeriah to countless of our young men, was extremely excited about the project. We had obtained the broad support we hoped for.

Now we faced with an entirely new dilemma; do we follow the historic Halabi tradition of qeriah or default to the more widely accepted diqduq? The "*Mahboosé Rule*" was of great challenge. Our readers have been apparently defying the laws of diqduq for over one thousand years. How could we possibly alter *mesorah* on this level?

“Manuscripts of Hakham Isaac Chehebar of Argentina, Hakham Jacob Kassin, Hakham Ezra Mishaniehh, and others were compared”

In 2011 crates of documents were found in Afghanistan, along the legendary Silk Road that traversed Asia and passed through Aleppo. Among hundreds of documents were previously unknown writings of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882-942 CE). Rabbi Saadia, in his day, was considered the leading linguistic expert of the Hebrew language. These newfound documents are said to contain reference to the community of Aram Soba, noted as possibly the most authoritative preservationists of the Masoretic text, specifically validating our tradition and diction. As the world awaits the scientific analysis of this find, we concluded that our Tiqqun would remain *Halabi Tahor* to preserve those practices. Other innovations were added, fonts were selected, computer scans were run, and we were well on our way to print publication.

With our direction clear and our text complete our expert group began the unfathomable task of the final edit. Mr. Morris Arking, Mr. Edward Azrak, Mr. David Catton, Mr. Joseph Mosseri and Rabbi Michael Schrem have spent the



Professor Hagga Ben-Shammai displaying one of the Afghan Genizah documents

Continued on page 20

<p><i>Tiqqun side font size and word placement is identical to Torah side</i></p>	<p><i>Chapter and verse clearly indicated in the dividing center column</i></p>
<p>בראשית א בראשית</p>	
<p>א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוֹ וָבֹהוּ וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרֻזָּזת עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרֻזָּזת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי אוֹר וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהי עֶרֶב וַיְהי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:</p>	<p>א: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוֹ וָבֹהוּ וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרֻזָּזת עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרֻזָּזת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי אוֹר: וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהי עֶרֶב וַיְהי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:</p>
<p><i>Multiple widths of various letters created in the font to best emulate actual Torah</i></p>	<p><i>Embolded Sheva Nah</i></p>
<p><i>Inverted triangle symbol indicates Fancy Long Tarha</i></p>	
<p>ב בראשית א-ב בראשית</p>	
<p>וַאֲתָּ כְּרִמְשׁ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב וַאֲתָּ כְּרִמְשׁ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב</p>	
<p><i>Bold Qamas indicates a Qamas Qatan, the sound of a Holam; the sound of an "o" as in "core"</i></p>	
<p>וַיְהי כִּי יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב וַיְהי כִּי יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב וַיְהי כִּי יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב וַיְהי כִּי יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֶהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב</p>	
<p><i>Sidebars and footnotes indicate special readings and aliyot stops for Special readings; Rosh Hodesh, Holidays, Fast days and portions read in low tones</i></p>	



past three years immersed in this process. You can find them most Sunday nights, in the Beth Torah Midrash, engulfed in this work.

Every word, letter, *dagesh* and *maqaph* was scrutinized. Every *ta'am* and *niqud* was double and triple checked as it became clear how difficult the process would be. The text became dynamic. For example, if an errant *ma-a-meed* needed to shift from the second letter of a word to the third, this might unintentionally affect the placement of the head of a *lamed* in the line of text below. Each correction set off a chain reaction in the text.

There are over 300,000 letters on each of the Torah and Tiqqun sides of our book. With *nequdot* and *ta'ameem*, there are well over one million characters in the text. To date we have made 3,000 corrections, which is an extraordinary less-than-.03% rate of error. Presidential elections and touchdowns have been called with less accuracy. But that is not enough. Our goal is to be error free. At this time we are proud to report that Seferim Beresheet, Vayiqrah and Bemidbar are complete. Sefer Shemot is in final review before typesetting and Sefer Debarim's final review is slated for completion this year.

We would like to thank the community for their patience and support of this project and those individuals mentioned above, and many others, who have so generously given of their time for this valuable project. With the help of *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*, we expect to finish and present this project to the community in the near future, adding to our libraries of historic and holy culture.

Mr. Shamah is the President of the Sephardic Community Alliance.



Continued from page 7

...SHABBAT TABLE TALKS”

that I messed up the room. I don't think that I was the only one to do it.”

Instead of reacting to the hurt by hurting back, try to bring the person to an understanding of what happened and how it affected you.

Of course, the best way to teach this practice is that the parents use it amongst themselves. On occasion, our spouses do things that get us upset. Instead of attaching a demeaning label or hurtful comment, describe how that behavior affects you. For example, say: “When we are going out together and have an appointment to meet another couple I feel very pressured to be punctual. I get nervous because I feel it is respectful to be punctual. This can often affect my attitude the whole evening. I am sure that you do not want me to feel this way.”

This idea can be applied to the way parents speak to their children. Instead of being critical or insulting about a child's messy room, for example, one might simply state the facts. “Dirty clothes go in the hamper.” “Books belong on the shelves.” “I see shoes in the den.” You could even use one word reminders—“toys.” This method conveys the information without being critical. It avoids all the emotions that come with an insult or a perceived slight or put-down. It gets the hearer to deal with the situation and not with the relationship.

We must be aware of the whole situation when we give rebuke. Is the person receiving the rebuke going to be embarrassed by getting the rebuke in the presence of other people (guests, sibling, friends, etc.)?

Thinking about ways to give rebuke that are not embarrassing or hurtful not only makes the rebuke more effective, but it displays an attitude of respect and dignity towards people—even if they are your children.

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



Sephardic Rabbis

TO UNITE, NOT TO DIVIDE: RAV UZIEL'S BIG SEPHARDIC IDEAS¹

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Rav Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953) was a visionary rabbinic leader, a strong promoter of Jewish unity, and the 20th century's most authentic embodiment of the classic Sephardic rabbinic tradition. His leadership was characterized, on the one hand, by a burning desire to abolish divisions between Jews, yet at the same time he was committed to promoting Sephardic Judaism. How did he reconcile these seemingly conflicting agendas?

As the *Haham Bashi* (Ottoman-appointed Chief Rabbi) of Jaffa-Tel Aviv (1911-1939), and then as the *Rishon L'Zion* of the pre-state *Yishuv* (1939-1947) and of the State of Israel (1948-1953), Rav

Uziel was officially the "Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel". But despite holding an official title and position that seems to have ethnic and particularistic overtones, Rav Uziel was an outspoken proponent of Jewish unity. He passionately sought to abolish the traditional ethnic divisions amongst Jews, especially in Israel. His push for Jewish unity was persistent and thorough, and he articulated his vision of Jewish unity in many forums, including public addresses, written position papers and halakhic

rulings. From his earliest moments as a young rabbinic leader, all the way through to his famous "Spiritual Will to the Jewish People" written a few weeks before his death in 1953, Rav Uziel advocated Jewish unity as an ideal position.

If Rav Uziel so actively sought Jewish unity as an ideal, then what was his understanding of his own particular title and role as a Sephardic Chief Rabbi? What was Rav Uziel's definition of Sephardic Judaism within the context of a Jewish community

"Rav Uziel was an outspoken proponent of Jewish unity."

that, in his own view, should no longer express these ethnic divisions?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to begin in 1911 when, upon being appointed *Haham Bashi* of Jaffa, Rav Uziel articulated a grand vision of unity for the Jewish people:

"It is my tremendous desire to unify all of the divisions that the diaspora tore us into, the separate communities of Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Temanim (Yemenites), etc. This should not be a difficult task, for unity is in our nature and our national character as

a people. These divisions amongst us are not natural. The particular linguistic and communal divisions that exist amongst us were created due to our dispersion throughout the diaspora. As we now return to our natural homeland, there is absolutely no reason to continue living by these communal and linguistic divisions imported from the diaspora. Instead, we will be one unified community. Should I succeed in helping to quickly realize and fulfill this unity amongst us, great will be my merit."

This was Rav Uziel's "I have a dream" speech. Fully aware of the 1900 year history in which Jews lived as separate and distinct communities throughout the diaspora — with different rabbis, customs, languages, prayer rituals and halakhic rulings dividing them — Rav Uziel nonetheless believes that unifying the Jewish people "should not be a difficult task" because the divisions born in the diaspora are alien to the essence of the Jewish people. He does not consider his desire to abolish the diaspora's divisions into Sephardim and Ashkenazim to be a new or radical idea but a return to our true nature. He declares that unity "is in our national character," and by becoming "one unified community" we are returning to our original

¹ This essay previously appeared in the Summer/Autumn, 2015, issue of *The Sephardi Report* (<http://www.thesephardi.report/>).

essence as a people.

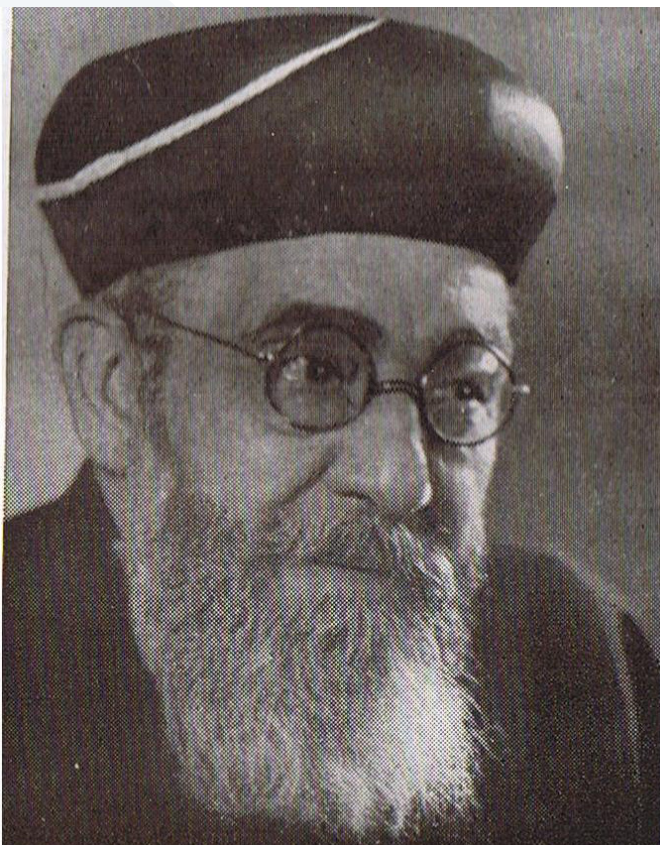
The most remarkable part of this speech is the context in which it was delivered — an acceptance speech upon becoming the *Haham Bashi* of Jaffa. As he accepted a title and position traditionally associated with the Sephardic community in the Land of Israel, Rav Uziel boldly declares that, as Haham Bashi, he will serve the entire community and work tirelessly to abolish the divisions amongst all Jews. Rav Uziel does not see his position as a Sephardic rabbi in the narrowly ethnic sense, rather as a potentially unifying force within the Jewish world. This being the case, what, if anything, did being a “Sephardic Rabbi” mean to Rav Uziel?

In 1930, at a gathering celebrating his 50th birthday, Rav Uziel addressed the apparent contradiction between preaching unity while maintaining Sephardic Judaism. Responding to the several friends who spoke his praises that night, Rav Uziel began by re-affirming his passion for Jewish unity:

“In his address tonight, my friend and colleague Rabbi Fishman touched upon the Sephardic and Ashkenazic elements within me. I have already expressed on many occasions that I do not relate to any distinctions or separations between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. It is not the countries of Spain (Sepharad) or Germany (Ashkenaz) that gave us great Torah scholars, rather the Torah itself—

regardless of locale—that has inspired generation after generation of Torah learning.

To my childhood friend, the honorable author A. Elmaliach, I say: I love the concept of unity for our people, and my goal is to see the elimination of the unnatural divisions amongst us that were created by the diaspora. I absolutely hate divisiveness, and I sharply condemn and reject all divisiveness masked as religion.”



Former Chief Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel

These words bear a striking resemblance to the vision Rav Uziel articulated in his inaugural address as *Haham Bashi* of Jaffa in 1911. Except this time, in addition to his well-known love for Jewish unity, Rav Uziel added some personal reflections on Sephardic Judaism:

“However, hand in hand with my love for unity, I want to draw the distinction between unity and self-belittlement. It is my goal to see unity amongst us in the field of work and [my emphasis] in the field of literary creations. Therefore, may it come to pass, that from the descendants of the great rabbis from Spain, once again will emerge Poskim (halakhic decisors) and Darshanim (homiletical preachers), Hokrim (philosophers) and Meshorerim (poets), Parshanim (Biblical commentators) and Mekubalim (mystics/kabbalists). This is my goal, and this is my prayer. It is from this ideological worldview that I lent a hand to strengthen the World Federation of Sephardim, but from the very first moment, I told them that their most important mission lies in the areas of culture and Torah. More than once, I asked to create, under their umbrella, a Beit Midrash L'Rabbanim (a Rabbinical School), because I believe that Torah and higher intellectual education are the foundations for peace and unity amongst us.”

In a bold expression of his own identity, mission and purpose as a Sephardic rabbi, Rav Uziel articulates an intellectual definition of Sephardic Judaism. He distinguishes between “unity and self-belittlement” in order to ensure that unity does not suppress the voices of his own Sephardic rabbinic forebears. Rav Uziel’s goal of unity would not come at the expense of his own classic

Continued on page 22

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Sephardic tradition. Rather than abolish Sephardic Judaism, he sought to redefine its purpose within the larger context and goal of national revival and Jewish unity.

In Rav Uziel's broad vision, Sephardic Judaism would no longer reflect an ethnic definition but instead would offer an intellectual-spiritual framework for the entire Jewish people. To this end, Rav Uziel envisioned the establishment of a Sephardic Beit Midrash that would revive the unique curriculum that characterized the yeshivot and academies in Spain and, in turn, produce a new generation of Sephardic-style but universally Jewish, "Poskim (halakhic decisors) and Darshanim (homiletical preachers), Hokrim (philosophers) and Meshorerim (poets), Parshanim (Biblical commentators) and Mekubalim (mystics/kabbalists)." This would be a "Sephardic" Beit Midrash thanks to its approach to Torah study, not because of the ethnic background of its students.

All Jews, irrespective of their ethnic origins, would be able to study in such an academy, and its rabbinical graduates would serve the entire Jewish community. Rav Uziel believed that the uniquely Sephardic approach that was developed in Golden Age Andalusia, where yeshivot seamlessly merged Talmudic scholarship, practical Halakhic decision-making, philosophical inquiry, poetic creativity, Torah interpretation and mystical speculation, all under one roof, could serve as an exemplary model and unifying force for the Jewish people. Far from being

mutually exclusive, Rav Uziel believed that Jewish unity and the Sephardic intellectual tradition are complementary. He specifically wanted to open a Sephardic Beit Midrash, because he believed that its broad worldview would benefit the entire Jewish people and serve as a foundation, "for peace and unity amongst us."

In an address to a Sephardic convention in 1939, Rav Uziel expressed why the term "Sephardic" was, indeed, so honorable:

"To be Sephardic is honorable primarily because of the type of Torah study, philosophical research and poetry that came from our midst."

The honor of Sephardic Judaism



*Volume 1 of Rabbi Uziel's Responsa
Mishpete Uziel*

derives from the intellectual-spiritual tradition that, historically speaking, developed in the Sephardi world but that is open, in principle, to all Jews.

Following his election as *Rishon*

L'Zion in 1939, Rav Uziel further explored the issue of what type of yeshivot and *Batei Midrash* would be opened in the Zionist *Yishuv*. In a lengthy article tracing the historical development of yeshivot and *Batei Midrash*, Rav Uziel articulates some of the key historical differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazic yeshivot. This is yet another expression of his unique understanding of Sephardic Judaism:

"Yeshivot were divided into two centers of learning, known by their general name of Sefarad (Spain) and Ashkenaz (Germany). This division does not only reflect a geographic divide, rather it primarily reflects a difference in curriculum and methodology.

The Sephardic Geonim (scholars) engaged in Talmudic study and composed many works of Talmudic interpretation, but the primary purpose of these works was to clearly explain Talmudic sections in depth, to link these sections to other relevant sections within the Talmud, with the ultimate goal of arriving at practical halakhic decisions. This is different than the yeshivot of France and Ashkenaz, who limited their scope of Talmudic study to analysis of the text.

Furthermore, the Sephardic rabbis widened the spectrum of the yeshiva curriculum to include philosophical inquiry, as well as a wide range of sciences and general knowledge that they studied from non-Torah literature. The rabbis of France and Ashkenaz fenced themselves into the exclusive world of Talmud and Midrash, fearing that the penetration of external knowledge would create

theological confusion amongst its students. For this reason, they feared the study of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*."

Needless to say, Rav Uziel studied, and wrote about, the *Guide for the Perplexed*.

In 1940, Rav Uziel realized his dream and opened the yeshiva *Sha'arei Zion* in Jerusalem. The curriculum reflected the broad-based Sephardic program he envisioned, and in keeping with the non-ethnic character of the institution, the student body was comprised of Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike. In fact (and perhaps to make his point), the Rosh Yeshiva appointed to preside over the Sephardic curriculum in *Sha'arei Zion* was Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, a young Ashkenazi rabbinic scholar. Also known as the *Tzitz Eliezer* (the name of his multi-volume responsa on Jewish law), Rav Waldenberg held particular expertise in both Ashkenazi and Sephardi rabbinical literature. This, along with his broad interest in medical issues and his tendency towards practical halakhic rulings, made Rav Waldenberg an ideal reflection of Rav Uziel's vision for the yeshiva.

For slightly over a decade, *Shaarei Zion* succeeded in educating a unique cadre of rabbis who served in Jewish communities all over the world. These rabbis – Ashkenazim and Sephardim -- distinguished themselves as leaders whose leadership and teachings reflected Rav Uziel's newly re-defined

Sephardi worldview that was taught in the yeshiva's daily curriculum.

In 1955, *Sha'arei Zion* unfortunately closed its doors. What led to its closure? In 1951, Rav Waldenberg accepted a prestigious appointment as a dayan (rabbinical judge) in Tel Aviv.

"...donned in the traditional embroidered robe and turban of a Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Rav Uziel proudly proclaimed: "my sacred mission is to unite, not to divide."

Two years later, after a long battle with diabetes, Rav Uziel passed away. Although the yeshiva desperately



Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

tried to survive for another few years, the loss of its visionary, and of the Rosh Yeshiva he selected, marked the demise of *Sha'arei Zion*. Its closure not only marked the end of an institution, but of Rav Uziel's vision for a yeshiva with a broad definition of "Torah

study." Future yeshivot in Israel, including self-defined "Sephardi yeshivot," adopted the "strictly Talmud" curriculum of the classic Lithuanian yeshivot.

In a rapidly changing Jewish world where ethnic differences take a back seat to fierce ideological divisions, Rav Uziel's teachings offer a refreshing approach to Jewish communal life. As a Chief Rabbi who worked tirelessly for Jewish unity, and whose teachings and way of life mirrored those of the Sephardic "*Poskim, Darshanim, Hokrim, Meshorerim, Parshanim and Mekubalim*"

that he sought to revive, Rav Uziel represents a rabbinic ideal in which Jewish unity and Sephardic Judaism are not mutually exclusive.

This unique blend of unity and Sephardic Judaism came together in symbolic fashion during Rav Uziel's inaugural speech as *Rishon L'Zion* in 1939. Speaking his characteristically poetic Hebrew and fully donned in the traditional embroidered robe and turban of a Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Rav Uziel proudly proclaimed: "my sacred mission is to unite, not to divide."

Rabbi Bouskila is the Director of the Sephardic Educational Center (SEC), an international organization with its own historic campus in the Old City of Jerusalem. Rabbi Bouskila's programs with the SEC educate and enlighten students, rabbis and community leaders about the importance of Classic Sephardic Judaism for today's Jewish world.



Israel Spotlight

SEPHARDIC ISRAEL COMMITTEE

Ms. Millie Marcus

It all started with a text. "If you care about Israel, come to Beth Torah at 10:00am on Sunday Morning." I forwarded to a few friends and didn't expect much. I saw the word Israel and figured it would be cool. To my surprise, when I walked in there were at least 15 people sitting around a table on the third floor with notepads in front of them. To be honest, I can't even remember what we spoke about. All I remember from our first meeting was being impressed that so many college students and young professionals woke up early on a Sunday morning to talk about Israel. As time went on I grew to understand that our group's goal was to bring Israel awareness to our community and to help people feel more connected to our homeland.

Over the past year, the Sephardic Israel Committee (SIC) has organized a number of successful events. For example we hosted a screening of a film called "Crossing the Line" at Magen David Manhattan which had a great turnout. The film addressed cases of adversity that Zionist college students had encountered which had gone too far. I cannot tell you how many people approached me and our other committee members asking us how they can make a difference. We gave out pamphlets with facts about Israel so that college students can be equipped with some knowledge if a debate were

ever to arise in what we like to call, "the real world."

Having events like this exposes our community's young adults to real life issues. It was definitely a wake up call for many. This was one small step that our group took to become a resource for community members to be involved in the dialogue.

Since then, we have had a few other events including a Yom Haatzmaut Art Battle, Yom Yerushlyim speakers, Ambassador Danny Dannon and an Art Botique to support Israel's economy.

Just a few weeks ago, we were fortunate to have committee member Rena Nasar bring it Neil Lazarus to

speak at Safra Synagogue about being strategic with our advocacy approaches. Lazarus is a Jewish education and communications consultant. He has served as a consultant for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "It was a great event because we were able to gain a different perspective on how to deal with Anti-Israel situations. He taught us "how to take control of the situation as opposed to taking the emotional route," remarked attendee Grace Mizrahi. The SCA has

been making efforts to provide educational tools for anyone and everyone interested.



*Israel Advocacy Workshop Sponsored by the SCA
at Edmond J. Safra Synagogue in Manhattan*



Congregation Beth Torah Art Boutique for Israel

Now brewing in our weekly meetings is the hot topic of having a trip after finals time. I was so impressed when I heard that there was a London/Israel Leadership trip happening in May that I decided that there was no way I would not be involved. Two of my fellow committee members, Victor Dweck and Michelle Catton took it upon themselves to find a way for our age group to branch out and see other Jewish communities in the world, compare them to ours, and see how we can bring back our experiences in order to enhance our community. I'm sure I don't just speak for myself when I say that the measures that young adults have been taking to make differences are reassurance of a bright future for our next generation.

I am so proud to be a part of a community whose



An audience learns about the dangers of BDS on campus

young adults can recognize the demands and troubles facing us, and take action accordingly. The passionate efforts of our group, and the heart that each individual puts into it, I know that we can accomplish so much more in the future.

If you would like to become involved with the SIC, please contact our current president, Mr. Irving Safdieh irv.safdieh@gmail.com. Volunteer and dedication opportunities are available.



The Jazz band entertains at the Art Boutique for Israel

Ms. Marcus studied in Israel after high school and is currently studying in Brooklyn college to become a physical therapist. She completed an Israeli advocacy internship with Hasbara and the David Project and is currently the Brooklyn College Campus president of the Israel club and member of the Sephardic Israel Committee.



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