

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 48: Yom Yerushalayim / Shabuot
IN LOVING MEMORY OF FREDDIE J TAWIL



In Loving Memory of Freddie J 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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YOM YERUSHALAYIM

JERUSALEM AT 50

Rabbi Joseph Mizrachi

On a quiet, early morning in 1981, I walked down Jaffa road toward Jerusalem's Old City with Rabbi Ezra Shayo. It was the morning of Shabu'ot where we would soon see tens of thousands of Jews coming to pray at dawn after spending the whole night learning Torah. The scene was unforgettable. People streamed down to the Western Wall and there were *minyaneem* all the way up the staircases on both sides of the back perimeter.

What I remember most of that morning was not the prayers or the experience of seeing 100,000 people, festive and united in sprit; that was beautiful – it was the short walk from the Rabbi's house to the Jaffa gate.

He began to describe the euphoria that all of Israel felt just after the Six Day War. Six days in June of 1967 that would forever alter a country, a people and of course, a city. Pointing and talking, he showed me the points on the ramparts where Jordanian soldiers would take “pop” shots at the Jewish residents of Western Jerusalem during the nineteen years that they occupied Eastern Jerusalem. He put his hands into the pock marks in the stone on buildings where small arms fire had left their indelible mark. We walked along the beautifully landscaped path that leads up to the Jaffa Gate and the Rabbi recalled the bodies of dead Jordanian soldiers that littered the very same path twenty three years earlier.

The days leading up to the 1967 war were terrifying for Israelis. Gammal Abdel Nasser, in his thundering voice was broadcasting his threats for all the world to hear. All Jews were afraid, but the Jews in Israel specifically were in grave danger. Both Americans and Israelis, who were old enough, have expressed to me that they feared for the worst; this might be the end of Israel.

In under a week the tables turned. Israel had preemptively struck and dealt a terrible blow to her adversaries; one that Nasser would never recover from. Israel emerged as a recognized, regional power. Jews all over the world felt a pride and a new national, Jewish spirit was an international fact. No matter what your persuasion, or brand of Judaism – you were proud in late June of 1967. As a Jew you felt a national pride that had not existed since perhaps the Maccabees or the Bar Kokhba revolt against imperial Rome. It was unmistakable; we were back!

The political, social and religious ramifications of the war are debated today in editorial columns, college campuses and scholarly books.

The change was real and immediate, impactful, as well as far reaching.

What did the Six Day war do to us as a people? What did the reunification of Jerusalem of our capital do to our collective psyche?

The Zionist political movement had many aims and many differing visions. The founding fathers of the movement were diverse, Alkalai, Kalischer, Herzl, Hess, Zangwill, Mohilever, Nordau etc. They came from religious, Maskilic, secular and socialist backgrounds. There were Sepharadeem, Ashkenazeem, Poles, Germans, Russians, Ottoman subjects etc. They did, however, have several unifying, underlying themes and one of those was “Normalcy.” When and if was it possible to make the Jewish people feel “Normal.” When could we experience life as other people of the world do? When could we stop worrying existentially every breathing, waking moment? Would the world ever accept us as an established “Fact”?!

After the Six Day War, Israel had something that she did not have prior to the war: a capital. Although Jerusalem was technically the capital before the war, it was a bizarre thing to have your capital city in a town that was cut in half. It is noteworthy that Jordan did not have its capital in East Jerusalem! It was special to Israel and not necessarily to its neighbors. The reunification of our divided and pined after city had brought almost 2,000 years of mourning to an abrupt halt. How did we as Jews now deal with having the City of King David back in our hands?! It was dumbfounding and to this day leaves us struggling for the answer. Do we change our prayers? Our mourning? Our ritual observances? How do we reflect this marked change? It is still an unanswered dilemma; a debate among Jews and a divider.

There was however, an unmistakable outcome: we finally had a unified capital city. We were experiencing something very, very “Normal”. No one had ever denied that Amsterdam was Dutch or that Munich was German or that Bombay was Indian; the world did deny (and continues to deny) the fact that Jerusalem is Jewish. Jerusalem at 50 years hence looks a lot different than it did in 1967. The city has experienced an unprecedented expansion. The new roads, neighborhoods, parks, transportation, museums, theaters restaurants and so

on – speak of a new vitality. Jerusalem stone remains in the building code; the pale limestone is everywhere, but

there is very real progress. The Jewish state has left an indelible mark on the ancient city.

This past August I was sitting in the San Simon Park in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Katamon. It was the last day of summer vacation and the park was filled with young families picnicking, teens flirting, and kids kicking soccer balls, a puppet show, and people leisurely strolling. This park was the scene of a fierce battle in Israel’s War of Independence; today it is a picnic ground. There was something so simple and so beautiful in that quiet afternoon – it was at one time the fulfilment of propesies and a “Normal” afternoon.

The 1967 war was a victory for a nation that was on the eve of destruction. The ensuing years have been anything but quiet but

they have been building up to the unshakeable fact that Israel and its eternal, unified capital are, with God’s help, here to stay.



Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem



Rabbi Mizrachi is the co-founder of Barkai Yeshivah. He currently leads the Beth Torah Father-Son minyan and teaches Judaic studies in Yeshivha of Flatbush.

THE HERO WHO SAVED THE LIVES OF HIS FRIENDS THE LIFE OF NOAM APTER ז"ל – דרכיו דרכי נועם

Rabbi Nathan Dweck

“How is it that a 22-year old gives of his life to save the lives of his friends?”

This was the question that Noam Apter's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Yossi and Pirchia Apter, were asked following Noam's heroic death. On December 27th 2002, Friday night of Shabbat Perashat Shemot, about 70 students at Yeshivat Otniel were gathered in the dining room for their usual Shabbat meal. Four students— among them נועם אפטר, Noam Apter—were busy in the kitchen as that night's volunteers to serve the Shabbat meal. Suddenly, terrorists burst into the kitchen. Noam had the chance to run out of the room and save himself, but he made a different choice: Lock the door to the kitchen, himself inside, blocking the terrorists from entering the dining room. He was shot by the terrorists, but the terrorists couldn't enter the dining room because they couldn't open the door that Noam locked. Eventually, the terrorists were killed by the Israeli Army.

Noam Apter's last act was a brave one, one that exemplified the type of person Noam Apter was in his lifetime. He cared about others, and had a deep love for his fellow Jews and for the Land of Israel. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Yossi and Pirchia Apter of the Israeli town of Shilo, say that they consider their son's heroic death “a natural extension of the way he lived.”

doors in order to save the lives of others.

First and foremost, his father said, Noam was a giver. He volunteered in בית הגללים, a place that hosted the physically disabled one Shabbat per month, to give some freedom to this children's parents. For a year, Noam was a mentor there. This meant that he “fed them, showered them, dressed them... This is really a high level of giving.” And although he was the one who gave to them, Noam had wrote in one of his articles, that when he gave to others, he felt that he got a lot from what he gave. In this home for the disabled, he received not less than what he gave.

This characteristic of Noam as a giver reminds one of Ruth the Moabite, who gave of herself to be part of the Jewish nation. Her mother-in-law was in a desperate position, returning back to Israel with nothing at all. Ruth, seeing this, declared: “Wherever you will go, I will go.” She sacrificed her life in Moab, where she could easily had stayed (as Orpah did), and she chose the harder route by clinging to her mother-in-law and to the Jewish nation with a huge act of hesed.

Secondly, Noam, said his father, was involved in kiruv, bringing in the less religious into the ideas and values of Judaism. He “took to his heart the situation of the Israeli community...He took a mission for himself to teach the

*“...they consider their son's heroic death
‘a natural extension of the way he lived.’”*

A few months ago in December 2016, fourteen years after Noam's death, Mr. and Mrs. Apter came to address the Middle School Students at Barkai Yeshivah about the death and life of their son Noam.¹ (Noam's brother, Rav David Apter, is currently a Judaic Studies teacher at Barkai. He recently addressed the students at Barkai on Yom Hazikaron about Noam ז"ל.) Noam's father, Yossi, described Noam's life before his death to explain to others his heroic act-- his choice to quickly lock the connecting

society in Israel that doesn't know what Shabbat is, what are the Haggim, to teach them—in a very special way—what the holidays mean...” So he prepared papers and flyers, thousands of pieces, and he stood at the bus station and just gave out these papers about the Holidays all around the country. In one the papers, he wrote about Hanukkah. Here is a sample of what he wrote (first and last line):

הנרות חנוכה מסמלים יותר מכל את האש היהודית, אותה נסו דור
אחר דור לכבות

¹ Mr. Apter also spoke at Congregation Beth Torah and at Avenue N Sephardic Congregation.

The candles of Hanukkah symbolize more than anything else the Jewish fire, that generation after generation, the nations try to extinguish

שנוזה שידליקו הנרות גם בלבנו יכניסו בנו שמחה ותקוה ויאיר את דרכנו

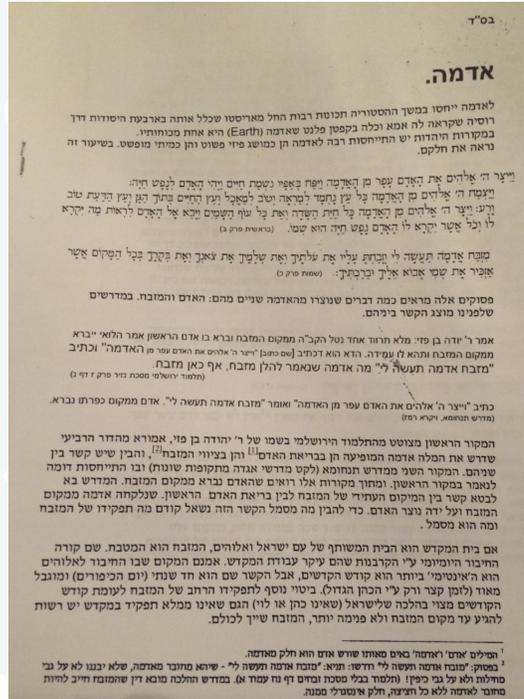
That we should merit that the Nerot Hanukkah will light in our hearts and they will place in each of us happiness & hope, and will enlighten our paths

This characteristic of Noam—his love, his אהבה, for all Jews in Israel, and his love for the Torah—is befitting for both Yom Yerushalayim and for Hag Shabuot. Fifty years after the State of Israel’s capture of the city of Jerusalem, we must always remember those who sacrificed their lives for the State of Israel. Noam gave to others in his nation while he was alive, and gave of himself to save others at his death—protecting fellow Jews from the act of terrorists who want nothing else but to wipe us off the map. And thousands of years after the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai, Noam showed us how Torah is not only for oneself, but one should also impact others in keeping the Torah.

His mother, Mrs. Pirchia Apter told a story when he was in eighth grade where Noam stood up to his other friends who, when thinking of ideas for the graduation sweatshirt, thought of putting the names of the graduates in gravestones. Noam wouldn’t join his friends on this idea. It showed how

brave he was- since at this age, the social relationship is important for a teenager. And eventually, they changed their minds. In the army as well, Noam stood up for what he believed in- but in a pleasant manner. Noam was able to convince his commander to not drive on Shabbat for personal reasons. And the non-religious members of the army listened to him: because it was important and dear to Noam, it was something important to them as well.

What was Noam’s first thought in the morning, asked his mother? “How can he help others- איך לעזור לזולת, איך.” In closing, she recalled how her husband had mentioned when addressing the Kahal at Beth Torah that נועם was like a מנוע (an engine, an anagram of his name). He was like an engine that pushes us to think about our life, to do our best to help each other. Their ultimate message to the students at Barkai: Heroism is not only with death, it’s in our lives as well.



A sample of a page from the collection of pieces that Noam wrote, compiled after his death. This collection was titled

נעם אפטר הי"ד - לקט מפרי עטו

“This characteristic of Noam as a giver reminds one of Ruth the Moabite, who gave of herself to be part of the Jewish nation.”

Mr. Apter listed the 10 topics that Noam planned to write about, as they found in his writings after his death. He suggested continuing the legacy of Noam by learning about and personifying these ideas/values:

- (1) Dreams (2) Thinking Positive (3) Integrity (4) Ethical Sugyot in the Talmud: (a) Not Delaying Salaries (b) Interest (c) Bribery (d) Animal cruelty (e) Laws of Neighbors (5) Love (6) Listening Carefully (7) Modesty (8) Partnership (9) Land (10) Human Rights.

נועם Noam z”l exemplified the meaning of his name- (דרכיו דרכי נועם) (pleasant), as “all of his ways were pleasant” May Noam’s memory be blessed – יהי זכרו של נועם ברוך



Rabbi Nathan Dweck is a Judaic Studies Teacher at Barkai Yeshivah and the Executive Director of Tebah Educational Services.



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

THE SILENT REFUGEES: PART THREE

Mrs. Lenore Mizrachi-Cohen

This series highlights the histories and present day stories of Jewish communities of Islamic countries. Taken from interviews conducted by Lenore Mizrachi-Cohen and Raquel Mizrachi as part of their photographic series of the same name. The presentation of these interviews is made possible by a grant provided by the SCA.

For this latest installment, we turn to Lebanon. Most Jews of this country lived in Beirut. The population included a mix of native Lebanese and emigres from Italy, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Iran. The 1926 Constitution of Lebanon guaranteed freedom of religion and provided each of 16 recognized religious groups, including Jews, the right to manage its own civil matters. Some major community institutions include the Maghen Abraham Synagogue (1926), the renewed Talmud-Torah Selim Tarrab community school (1927), and welfare services like the Biquir-Holim, Ozer-Dalim, and Mattan-Basseter societies.

them of treason.² The Lebanese Civil War, a multi-sided conflict that lasted from 1975-1990, resulted in an estimated 120,000 fatalities³ and an exodus of almost one million people from Lebanon.⁴ The Jewish community at that time numbered close to 4,500 people and today is completely disbanded. Through an interview conducted with Mrs. Lea Srour, a current Brooklyn resident who fled in 1976 with her family, we can gain a sense of what this tumultuous time was like for the Jews of Lebanon.

Lenore Mizrachi-Cohen (LMC): Tell us about your life in Lebanon before the civil war.

Lea Srour (LS): There are definitely idyllic memories from this time, I was younger than ten. My grandfather was a rabbi and the hazzan of our synagogue, called Eddy. My husband used to go to Magen Avraham, the main synagogue which was recently restored. The children used to go to school each morning at 8 to help the caretaker

“... we only took two suitcases for the entire family, mostly packed with clothes.”

The people of Beirut prided themselves on their open, multicultural society and put a heavy focus on higher education.¹ Anti-Zionist demonstrations began in 1947 and 1948 but initially didn't harm the Lebanese Jews. As the Arab-Israeli conflict continued, hostility toward the Jews intensified. The main synagogue in Beirut was bombed in the early 1950s. Most Lebanese Jews had Zionist views and looked favorably at the creation of Israel, but were reluctant to get involved in politics or speak about Israel, lest their Arab neighbors accuse

ring a giant bell that started the day. On Sundays, many families would go to a sort of bakery with a large stone oven. My grandfather took us; he'd give us a big tray with sections for zaatar and oil, cheese, and olives, and the bakery supplied dough. We loved making our own pastries (*Manush'e*) and bringing them home with us for breakfast.

² "Lebanese Jews in New York: Longing for Home". *Al-Akhbar English*. April 16, 2012.

³ UN Human Rights Council. "IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251 OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL," 23 November 2006, p.18.

⁴ "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War" By Daniel Byman, Kenneth Michael Pollack, Page. 139

¹ Attested to in multiple first person interviews included in *Magic Carpet: Aleppo in Flatbush*, By Joe Sutton

In summertime, we used to travel. Beirut is very hot, so we had a house in the mountains near Aley. The adults would play cards, the kids would run around, spending hours finding pine nuts in the surrounding forests. I loved to read and had at least 100 books that I had to leave behind, along with most of our family memories. I know my mother regrets not taking any mementos with her. But we only took two suitcases for the entire family, mostly packed with clothes.

After the 1967 war with Israel, about half the Jewish population worried about rising tensions with their Muslim neighbors and left. There was a lot of animosity as well between the Muslim and Christian populations of Lebanon, and many Jews felt that there was no future for them in the country.

When my mother gave birth to my brother, we had clothes picked out for a Brit Milah party. But we never wore them; by then the mohel, who lived in Turkey, refused to travel to Lebanon. My brother's Milah was delayed until we got to Israel.

LMC: How did the onset of the war affect the Jews specifically?

LS: The first time we heard about it was January of 1975. We would hear about very dangerous bombings

born in Syria, you were not Lebanese. If you left Lebanon - you couldn't come back. We didn't have passports. My father was the only one who had a passport in the whole family, an Iranian one that he bought.

LMC: What was life like then, as you tried to secure a means of escape?

LS: People couldn't work. You couldn't get anywhere. There were snipers, or bombs, or killing in the streets. You lived off of what you had. We stayed home for about 12 months. No schooling, that's for sure, you couldn't even go down to the street to buy anything. If you wanted something you would order it and they would bring it to you. It was tough. Once, I went to my cousin's house to play. There was a major incident that day and we lost all forms of communication. I stayed with my cousins for a week without my parents knowing where I was.

After we left our neighborhood, we stayed a short time with my grandparents. There were so many bombs being dropped, you couldn't stay in rooms with windows. So you had to sleep and eat in the hallway. All the windows had no glass. When there was almost no food left, we had to beg the soldiers to give us some bread. Thank God, we were finally able to secure a car and get out of there. Two days after we left, a bomb fell on my mother's room and destroyed it. Everything that was in that room was

“In my family, we’re very proud of who we are and where we came from, and we do our best to pass that on to the next generation.”

and shootings, the city and country were at war with themselves. Constant bombing, constant killing. It was horrible. Horrible. They fought each other in the streets. Muslim neighborhoods tended to be more violent and unsafe, and so we had to leave our house for a Christian neighborhood. Nobody had problems with the Jews specifically, we just needed to move to a safer area. The Christians were more tolerant of Jews. Many people began trying to leave Lebanon to take their families out of harm's way, we were refugees of war. However, this wasn't so easy to do because most Jews in Lebanon were originally Syrian. We didn't have any papers. If you were

gone. My mother had a lot of things in that room; family memories, papers... We were very lucky.

LMC: How did you finally escape?

LS: We all moved to a little hotel. For about a year, at least 30-40 families lived in it, and all they did was try to kind of get some money, and try to leave. The airport would be frequently closed, with no flights going out. We still had no papers. We also had to try not to appear suspicious. When the government sees a lot of Jews leave,

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

they assume you're a spy, or you're doing something for Israel. We were able to somehow secure a boat, a cargo vessel meant for transporting cows. We had to drive three hours to reach it from Beirut and were stopped many times along the way by militia asking questions. By the time we got to the port, the ship had left. We were too late.

So we had to find some other way to go. We were about 20 Jewish families trying to escape together. We found some sort of disgusting hovel to stay in and subsisted on pickled truffle oil we'd thought to bring from home. Just that and bread. We had to stay there for about a week until we could figure out how to bribe the right person to get us out of there. We found a little ferry, with benches on the bottom, and smuggled 40 people in the hold to Cypress. It took 12 hours in the cover of night to arrive, and we were actually stopped by the Israelis en route. We couldn't tell them anything because we were down on the bottom, and whoever dealt with them was the crew. We had to stay in Cypress for another few weeks before we could book a flight to Israel.

LMC: What was the adjustment in Israel like after that?

LS: Some family who'd left earlier were waiting in Israel, so that helped. We moved around a bit. I started 6th grade. At the beginning, when I came, they said "Oh my God, she's Arab." Kids didn't know that there were Jewish Arabs. When I was old enough, I entered the army and worked in intelligence. I did a lot of work with Arabic, it felt good to make a contribution with something that you could uniquely do. They needed Arabic speakers badly.

I feel that if you go to a country, you have to adapt to them. They don't have to adapt to you. Other people will tell you "No, we're refugees, you have to help us..." I don't believe in that. With all that we went through, I don't dwell on the past.

So in terms of learning the language, this was very easy, because I wanted it. Within six months, you have to be able to speak the language, because this is it, this is your country. Same thing in America. I came here when I was

married already at 21 years old. I insisted on studying the language and I soon learned English. In Lebanon, since kindergarten, you're taught three languages in school. Speaking French, Hebrew and Arabic from a young age probably helped make learning new languages easier.

LMC: How has this affected your relationships with family and to your culture?

LS: My family are spread all over the world now. It's not easy. But we're still very connected to each other, and I to my past in Lebanon. I love the language, I read Arabic, follow the news. I mean, I know exactly what's going on over there. I love my past. It's not like that for everyone. I have a cousin who, the minute she set foot in Israel, denied that she'd ever been in Lebanon, denied the language, will not hear it, will not speak it. Hates everything about it. I mean, that's her experience. But to me, it's exactly the opposite. This is who I am. I love it, I'm not ashamed of it. Much of that also depends on how you left. We ran away. Maybe because there was no closure for me, I'm still attached to my past. Some people reacted this way, some people reacted the other way. In my family, we're very proud of who we are and where we came from, and we do our best to pass that on to the next generation.

Lea lives in Brooklyn with her husband, children and grandchildren. She worked in the early 90's to help settle new refugees from Syria into the community, providing translating services and support through NAYANA. She says that she's learned through her experiences to be flexible, put less importance on physical objects, and focus more on people. She currently does volunteer work at Eishel Shabbat, an organization dedicated to feeding hundreds of needy families in the community.

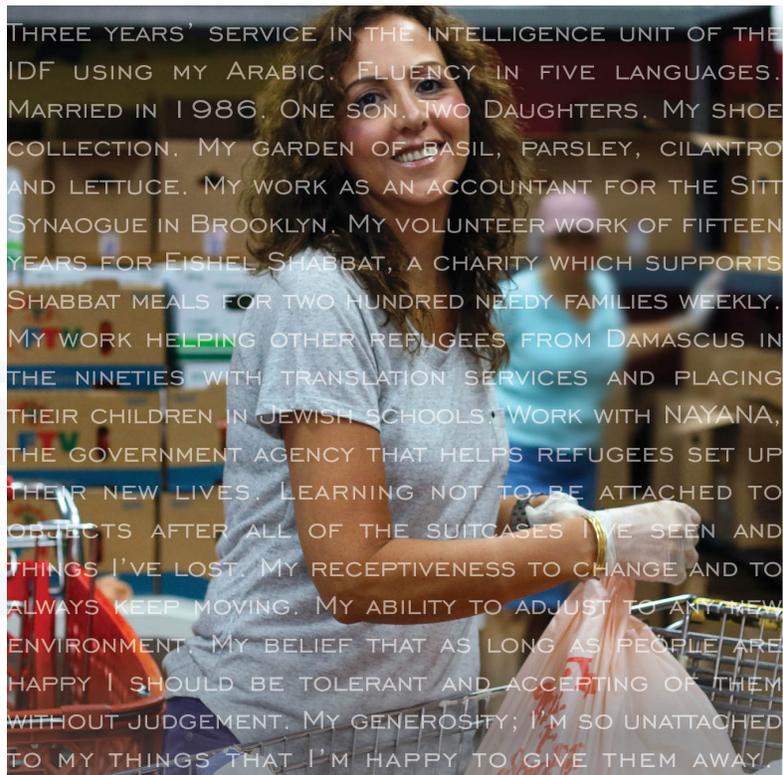


Mrs. Cohen is a Brooklyn based artist and producer of *Homelands*, a group show about this topic which will travel internationally this year. View her work at www.LenoreCohen.com. To support this project and help bring it to venues around the world, please contact lenore@lenorecohen.com.



GRANDMA'S ROSES, GARDENIAS, AND JASMINE ON THE BALCONY THAT SHE CARED FOR DAILY. JARS OF PICKLED ARTICHOKE, LEMON, EGGPLANT BEET AND TRUFFLES. THE BEDROOM MY BROTHER AND I SHARED WITH MY GRANDPARENTS. A STORY, A CUCUMBER AND AN ORANGE BEFORE BED EACH NIGHT. ONE HUNDRED BOOKS THAT DIDN'T FIT IN THE TWO SUITCASES WE BROUGHT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY. THE RED AND BLUE CHECKED SKIRTS WITH RUFFLE TRIM THAT MOM SEWED FOR MY SISTER AND I. I ONLY GOT TO WEAR MINE TWICE. GRANDPA'S LONG TARBUSH, A BIG RED FEZ THAT HE WORE ALWAYS AND HAD TO TOSS IN THE OCEAN EN ROUTE TO CYPRUS. SIX BLUE FRUIT SALAD BOWLS WITH SILVER ON THE BOTTOM FOR SERVING COMPANY. THE RED CARPET WE ROLLED DOWN THE HALLWAY FOR PARTIES TWICE A YEAR. ONE BLUE AND WHITE DRESSER. NAVY AND WHITE CHECKERED BEDSHEETS. A WINDOW ONTO THE BALCONY THAT I REACHED OUT OF TO SNEAK PICKLES AT NIGHT. THE JAR OF TRUFFLES WE LIVED ON WHILE WAITING FOR OUR ESCAPE BOAT. A RED VOLKSWAGEN MOM USED TO DRIVE HERSELF TO THE HOSPITAL IN DURING THE WAR TO GIVE BIRTH. DRESSES WE NEVER WORE INTENDED FOR THE BRIT MILAH THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN WHEN THE MOHEL WOULDNT COME TO LEBANON. THE MOUNTAINS IN ALEY, WHERE WE VISITED IN SUMMER. THE EDDY SYNAGOGUE WHERE MY FATHER WAS RABBI AND HAZZAN. THE ALLIANCE SCHOOL WITH THE BIG GREEN DOOR AND PULL CORD BELL. MAN' OUSHE, PITA WITH TOPPINGS, THAT WE ATE DAILY FOR BREAKFAST. BAKING PASTRIES WITH GRANDPA ON SUNDAYS TO BRING HOME TO THE FAMILY. MOM'S BEDROOM, DESTROYED BY A BOMB ALONG WITH ALL OF OUR PHOTOS AND MEMENTOS.

Lea, Lebanon: Most of the family's belongings were destroyed in the war or left behind when the family escaped with only two suitcases between them. In this photo, Lea holds a necklace she received as a child, one of the only things she brought with her. On top of this, the list details things and places left behind.



THREE YEARS' SERVICE IN THE INTELLIGENCE UNIT OF THE IDF USING MY ARABIC. FLUENCY IN FIVE LANGUAGES. MARRIED IN 1986. ONE SON. TWO DAUGHTERS. MY SHOE COLLECTION. MY GARDEN OF BASIL, PARSLEY, CILANTRO AND LETTUCE. MY WORK AS AN ACCOUNTANT FOR THE SITT SYNAOGUE IN BROOKLYN. MY VOLUNTEER WORK OF FIFTEEN YEARS FOR EISHEL SHABBAT, A CHARITY WHICH SUPPORTS SHABBAT MEALS FOR TWO HUNDRED NEEDY FAMILIES WEEKLY. MY WORK HELPING OTHER REFUGEES FROM DAMASCUS IN THE NINETIES WITH TRANSLATION SERVICES AND PLACING THEIR CHILDREN IN JEWISH SCHOOLS. WORK WITH NAYANA, THE GOVERNMENT AGENCY THAT HELPS REFUGEES SET UP THEIR NEW LIVES. LEARNING NOT TO BE ATTACHED TO OBJECTS AFTER ALL OF THE SUITCASES I'VE SEEN AND THINGS I'VE LOST. MY RECEPTIVENESS TO CHANGE AND TO ALWAYS KEEP MOVING. MY ABILITY TO ADJUST TO ANY NEW ENVIRONMENT. MY BELIEF THAT AS LONG AS PEOPLE ARE HAPPY I SHOULD BE TOLERANT AND ACCEPTING OF THEM WITHOUT JUDGEMENT. MY GENEROSITY; I'M SO UNATTACHED TO MY THINGS THAT I'M HAPPY TO GIVE THEM AWAY.

Lea, Brooklyn: Lea pictured at Eishel Shabbat, where she volunteers weekly. The list details accomplishments and parts of her life which Lea says her experiences taught her to value above objects.



SHABUOT

THE CONTINUATION OF REVELATION

Rabbi Meyer Laniado

What would you expect the continuation of the Torah to be after the awesome experience, the revelation, at *Har Sinai*? Would you expect a series of instructions about how to maintain and possibly increase that level of spirituality? Laws about prayer, sacrifice, building a temple? Surprisingly, we find a series of civil and criminal laws, the first of which concerns the care of the lowest class of our society, the *ebed ibri*, the Jewish bondsman.

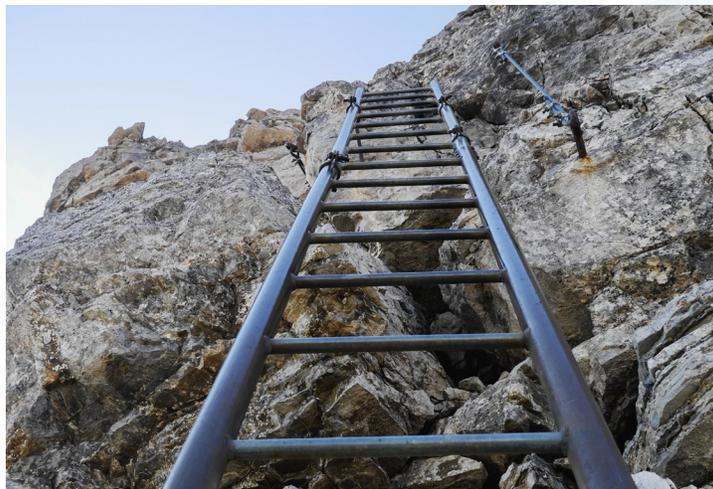
The *ebed ibri* is someone who stole, possibly to feed his family, and now must work in servitude to repay his debt. You might imagine that this *ebed ibri* would not be given special rights and privileges. Yet, one of the first terms of our *berit* is that even if the *ebed ibri* is ill for a large portion of his contract, you are responsible for his bills, and cannot dock his pay for the time he was ill. In the seventh year he goes “free,” free as in *hinam*; he does not owe you anything and his debts are cleared from his contract.¹

There is one more situation of an *ebed ibri*. This is when one sells himself into servitude, which is only permissible under very specific circumstances. An individual can only become an *ebed ibri* if he has absolutely nothing, no food, or even a change of clothing. In such a situation, the Torah allows him to enter into an *ebed ibri* agreement.² This is an avenue of rehabilitation. This individual is given a home, food, and shelter among a well-established family who can act as a role model.

¹ *Mishne Torah Hilkhos Abadim 2:12*

² *Mishne Torah Hilkhos Abadim 1:1*

We must treat our servants like brothers, with dignity and respect, as stated in Debarim: “When your Jewish brother will be sold to you.”³ One cannot ask this servant to do meaningless or demoralizing labor; he must be treated as one with rights, as it says: “Do not have him perform servile tasks.”⁴ We are concerned about this man’s self-image and dignity.



Furthermore, you are obligated to care for the servant similar to the way you provide for yourself and your own family, as Rambam states:

The master should not eat bread made from fine flour while the servant eats bread from coarse flour. The master should not drink aged wine while the servant drinks fresh wine. The master

should not sleep on cushions while the servant sleeps on straw.⁵

This point is so important and is one our Hakhamim wanted us to understand well. That is why Yirmeyahu 34:8 was chosen as the *haftara* for Perashat Mishpatim. There, Benei Yisrael decide to do *teshuba*, and the one thing they choose to fix is: “That every man set free his bondsman and his bondwoman, the Jew, and the Jewess...”

In Yirmeyahu, Benei Yisrael were instructed to free their Israelite servants who had worked for them for more

³ *Debarim 15:12*

⁴ *Vayiqra 25:39*

⁵ *Mishne Torah Hilkhos Abadim 1:9*

than seven years. They were oppressing the downtrodden and those who had difficulty in their lives. That was a breach of the *berit's* first term, which clearly states that on the seventh year the ebed must be set free. The message is that our fellow man should be taken care of, not only our friends and those who share similar circles of interest, wealth, and class, but those who lack the means and ability to take care of themselves. It is our obligation to help them get back on their feet. Note that the ebed is not allowed to remain as a servant. The goal is to enable him to eventually be self-sufficient. The master must give the servant a gift when setting him free. This is a *misva deoraita* as it states in Debarim: "Provide him generously from your flocks, your threshing floor and your wine cellar."⁶ This is a severance package aiming to ensure that the servant will have the means to start his own life. Not only does he leave servitude without debt, he leaves with a net gain of gifts to help him become his own man.

To be a person or a nation of God is to ensure the welfare of every member of our society. *Abraham Abinu*, our paradigm of a man of God, stood up in defense of people he had no connection with in order to protect them from a possible injustice. God wanted Abraham to express this trait and therefore told him about His plans so that his future nation would follow the path of God to do justice and righteousness, *sedaqa umishpat*.⁷ We find this message throughout the Torah, Nebiim, and Ketubim. In Hoshea, we are told: "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings."⁸ God does not want appeasing gifts, rather proper societal behavior incorporating His traits of compassion and mercy.

Our *Har Sinai* experience can be likened to a climb up the ladder to God, similar to the *malakhim* in Ya'aqob's dream who went up the ladder.⁹ These *malakhim*, like us, then came down the ladder to walk in God's way on earth.

⁶ Debarim 15:13-14 and Mishne Torah Hilkhos Abadim 3:13-14

⁷ Beresheit 18:19

⁸ Hoshea 6:6

⁹ Beresheit 28:12



That is the meaning of the *misva* "vehalakhta bidrakhav," to walk in God's ways.¹⁰ The path of God is one where a person interacts with others with mercy, patience, and kindness. To know God and have a relationship with Him is to be imbued with His traits.

Knowledge of God is meant to lead to a society where there is no longer predator and prey, where the unprotected live comfortably without fear of oppression, and the unfortunate are lifted up. Imagine a world filled with this kind of knowledge of God. This is the world that we envision. This is what prophets, like Yeshayahu, prophesied about.

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.¹¹

The revelation at *Har Sinai*, the pinnacle of our spiritual experience, is meant to help us create a better society, to ensure that the oppressed and downtrodden are protected and taken care of. Our spiritual experience of God is for us to learn His ways, live by them, become a model nation, and have the rest of the world follow suit.

Moadim leSimha



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¹⁰ Debarim 28:9 and Mishne Torah Hilkhos Deot 1:5

¹¹ Yeshayahu 11:6-9

THE GOAL OF THE MISSVOT: HOW SHOULD WE RELATE TO THEM?

Rabbi Albert Setton

People's conception of missvot are often expressed in one of two ways. The first view maintains that the missvot are a vehicle through which we can elicit blessings from Hashem. We cannot know the reasons for how this works because the missvot are what Hashem wants to receive. In exchange for us benefitting him, he grants us our wants. This leads to the popular formulation of people 'bargaining' with God: "Hashem I will do this for you if you do this for me". While the reason for these missvot is not clear, the performance of these strange actions is guaranteed to open up a channel through which to receive Hashem's blessings. In a sense, this view maintains the missvot are what Hashem 'needs' from humanity and he rewards them accordingly for their efforts. A person with this view will tend to value the missvot when times are difficult in his life. When times are good and he has no need for divine blessings, these odd commandments can be put aside.

The second and perhaps popular view reverses the

assured of its benefit to me.

The perception of missvot serving humanity is not a new phenomenon. People have always attempted to utilize religion as a means to a self serving end. Hashem had to destroy the Bet Hamikdash to educate the Jewish Nation that one cannot 'buy off' or appease Hashem with sacrifices and prayers devoid of true emotion to Hashem. Our times manifestation of self serving religion reveals itself in people's constant search for quick spiritual fixes, mostly through segulot and blessings. While they might not be problematic unto themselves (that requires a whole different discussion), people oftentimes focus on the segulah to the detriment of performance of actual missvot. I am always fascinated how people come to synagogue Saturday night to participate in Hatarat Nedarim (which does have tremendous halachic significance) but yet missed praying Minha and Arbit with a minyan and potentially have not said Keriat Shema, which is a biblical commandment. Unfortunately, the missvot that

"... the missvot serve to foster a connection between human beings and Hashem!"

formula. The missvot are commanded by Hashem to uplift humanity as a whole. This approach views the missvot as serving to elevate our physical lives. Proponents of this message will explain how kashrut and berit milah promote health and wellness. Shabbat and Shemitta enable us to rest and recharge. It will often be promoted in religious terms, perhaps a statement as: "only Hashem could have known how beneficial this really is, as its only been discovered recently by scientists!" This variation is similar to the view mentioned in the previous paragraph, as the end goal is to benefit humanity. They merely differ in how the missvot serve humanity (the missvot elicit blessing from Hashem, or the missvot are the reward themselves). According to this reasoning I can and should attempt to find logical reasoning in these missvot as they are based off physical needs of humans. The more I can understand the purpose of each missvah I will become

do not have special promises of reward are often disregarded in favor of special actions that 'promise' to benefit a person.

There exist obvious shortcomings to both of these approaches. The first line of thinking presupposes that Hashem has wants or needs, implying that he is not in a state of perfection, and humanity can create that perfection for him. The Torah is quite explicit in its rejection of this approach. It states repeatedly that Hashem is perfect and has no need for us, nor can we bribe or 'buy' him. Rather it is humanity that has need of the Perfect Being.

The failure of the second opinion lies in its elevation of the physical world and by maintaining that the purpose of creation is for humanity to benefit as much as possible from this physical world. If so, God's actions seem absurd. On one

hand, he commands and directs us missvot to help maximize our enjoyment of life, but yet creates sickness, disease, natural disasters and all sorts of evil that befall man. Would it not suffice for God to remove these evils instead of adjoining us to veer away from man-made ills via the missvot? This utilitarian theory of the missvot is also not borne out by the text of the Torah itself, which always seems to preach about some form of connection of Hashem as to why to perform the missvot as opposed to the physical benefits of the missvot (specifically in the missvot of Milah, kashrut, shemittah, and shabbat!).

The most simple method to utilize in attempting to understand the missvot should be to look at the word of Hashem in the Torah. We should analyze the way Hashem, the very giver of the missvot, actually portrays them. While this sounds quite obvious, it is often overlooked. It requires the ability to listen as opposed to voicing our own opinions; this task often proves to be quite difficult.

Analyze the following *pessukim* for a moment:

1. Vayikra 11:44-45 (re Kashrut)

מד כי אני יי, אלקיכם, והתקדשתם והייתם קדשים, כי קדוש אני; ולא תטמאו את-נפשתיכם, בכל-השרץ הרמש על-הארץ.

44 For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am holy; neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of swarming thing that moveth upon the earth.

מה כי אני יי, המעלה אתכם מארץ מצרים, להיות לכם, לאלקים; והייתם קדשים, כי קדוש אני.

45 For I am the LORD that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

2. Vayikra 19:1-2

ב דבר אל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל, ואמרת אליהם--קדשים תהיו: כי קדוש, אני יי אלקיכם..

2 Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: Ye shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.

ג איש אמו ואביו תיראו, ואת-שבתתי תשמרו: אני יי אלקיכם.

3 Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and ye shall keep My sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

3. Vayikra 20:26 (after recording forbidden relations)

כו והייתם לי קדשים, כי קדוש אני יי; ואבדל אתכם מן-העמים, להיות לי.

26 And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I the LORD am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples, that ye should be Mine.

4. Devarim 26:16-19

טז היום הנה, יי אלקיך מצוין לעשות את-החקים האלה--ואת-המשפטים; ושמרת ועשית אותם, בכל-לבבך ובכל-נפשך.

16 This day the LORD thy God commandeth thee to do these statutes and ordinances; thou shalt therefore observe and do them with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.

יז את-יי האמרת, היום: להיות לך לאלקים וללכת בדרכיו, ולשמר חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטי--ולשמע בקלו.

17 Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and that thou wouldest walk in His ways, and keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His ordinances, and hearken unto His voice.

יח ויי האמירך היום, להיות לו לעם סגלה, באשר, דבר-לך; ולשמר, כל-מצותיו.

18 And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be His own treasure, as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all His commandments;

יט ולתתך עליון, על כל-הגוים אשר עשה, לתהלה, ולשם ולתפארת; ולהיתך עם-קדש ליי אלקיך, באשר דבר. {פ}

19 and to make thee high above all nations that He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in glory; and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the LORD thy God, as He hath spoken. {P}

It seems obvious from the above *pessukim* that the missvot serve **to foster a connection between human beings and Hashem!** More than any natural or spiritual reward, the missvot enable physical humans to engage with a spiritual God. Keep in mind that the worlds of man and

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God are separate- לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם! There needs to be a bridge between the two worlds in order for man and God to meet. The missvot serve as that bridge to allow man to encounter God.

If the missvot are our bridge to Hashem, it stands to reason that they uplift us from normal human behavior to enable us to climb unto another plane. Through our performance of the missvot we manage to elevate ourselves to a higher level of existence, one that we call 'Kedusha'. Once we become 'kadosh' through the missvot, we automatically connect to Hashem, a being of pure kedusha. Vayikra 19 (Parashat Kedoshim) is essentially a list of actions through which to obtain kedusha, and therefore connect to Hashem.

The missvot elevate us to a level of 'kedusha' through two ways. Some missvot demand that we emulate the behaviors of Hashem himself and attempt to embody the character traits he is described with in the Torah. The Rambam dedicates the entire hilchot De'ot to discuss this concept. Other missvot regulate our physical behaviors in order to keep us focused on divine pursuits. Even the missvot that we associate with civil and social regulations connect us to Hashem- the Rabbis teach us that Hashem is present amongst judges dealing with minor financial disputes!

Our Rabbis always understood that the main purpose of the Torah was to connect the people to Hashem. That is why we celebrate the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot- It is in truth a celebration of our special relationship with Hashem (as a simple reading of Shemot 19 will demonstrate). The association we have with Shavuot is one of a bride and groom getting married. Indeed, Rabbi Israel Najara (16th century Sefat) wrote a ketubah (marriage contract) to be read on shavuot-Hashem as the groom and the Jewish People as the bride!

The ideas in this article can be elaborated on in a much more expansive manner. I would recommend further reading of an article by Rabbi Ben-Sion Uziel (Sephardic Rishon Le-Sion until 1953) found in his work "Hegyonai Uziel" pages 47-69 as he expands greatly upon the ideas presented here. It is my hope that this article helps reshape our understanding of the missvot, and enables us to perform them with more joy and excitement, once we realize the true value of the missvot as the bridge to connect us to our Father in Heaven.



Rabbi Setton is on the editorial board of Qol Ha-Qahal and currently teaches in Hillel Yeshiva and Magen David of West Deal

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SCA PROGRAM

SCA YOM HASHOAH PROGRAM WITH MRS. SABINA GREEN

Mrs. Margaret Benhamu and Mrs. Mollie Haber

The SCA Women's Learning Program was honored to have Holocaust survivor, Mrs. Sabina Green, speak at the Yom Hashoah program on April 24, 2017. Over 60 women filled Mikdash Eliyahu, 400 Avenue U, to hear Sabina tell her story.

The program began with an introduction by Mrs. Margaret Benhamu. Margaret discussed the idea that as Sephardic Jews whose community emigrated to America before WWI, it is often difficult to relate to the survivors as our own. But Jewish people are taught to feel more than empathy for the suffering of our Nation. During Pesah we are taught to see ourselves as if we ourselves left Mizrayim. When we hear a survivor's story, we must also see and feel as if it was our own story.

Sabina Green was born to a middle class family in the small town of Ulanow, Poland in 1922. She attended Bais Yaakov of Ulanow. In 1939, Ulanow was occupied by Germany and the harassment and anti-Jewish actions began. In 1942, Sukkot time, 33 people, including her uncle were killed in the street. As she watched him die, he told her he prayed for her to survive. It is in part because of this blessing, she says, that she survived. Seeing what was going on, her father acquired

false papers, listing her and her family as Christians. Because of a mistake with the papers, only Sabina was able to leave. Afraid to leave on her own, her brother introduced her to a man named Bernard, who also had false papers. Together they left Ulanow. Her story continues with what it was like to live as a Christian in Stry, with the constant fear of being identified as Jew.

In 1944 Stry was liberated. She married Bernard and in 1957 moved to Israel. In 1960 she moved to the United States, settling in Brooklyn. Both her and her husband worked and raised 2 children and have 2 grandchildren.

After telling her story, Sabina answered questions from the audience. Many of us were enamored by her sense of humor, positive attitude and strength. We are grateful for Sabina's willingness to tell her story all these years later, helping give us a small insight into what times and conditions were like during the Holocaust. And in sharing with us the everlasting impact the holocaust, those who died in it, and those who lived through it will have on our Nation forever.

To see the full video of Sabina Green, please go to the SCA website, www.scaupdates.org.





SEPHARDIC CUSTOMS

QIDDUSH ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF SHABU'OT

Mr. Morris Arking

There are some communities that have the custom to wait until nightfall before making Qiddush on the first night of Shabu'ot. The reasoning for this practice is in order to wait until the last day of the 'Omer is completely over before beginning the holiday of Shabu'ot. The Torah commanded us to count seven complete weeks, and the seventh week becomes complete when the final day of the count is completely over.

We first find this custom recorded by Rabbi Abraham HaLevy Horowitz (16th century Poland) in his book *'Emeq B'rakhah*. He wrote the following:

I received (a tradition) from my teacher the Gaon MaHaRaSh from Lublin (16th century Poland) who received an oral tradition from the Gaon Rabbi Ya'aqob Pollack (15th century Poland), may his memory be blessed, not to recite Qiddush on the first night of Shabu'ot until after the stars come out...and do not answer me from the fact that we pray 'Arbit before sunset (on the first night of Shabu'ot) as that is no indication, since the Talmud (Berakhot 27b) reported that Rab prayed ('Arbit) of Shabbat on 'Ereb Shabbat and R YOSHIAH prayed ('Arbit) of Mossae' Shabbat on Shabbat, and do not ask with regards to the Qiddush that the Hazzan recites in the Synagogue, since that is only for the guests and it does not look like he is detracting from the seven complete weeks, like it would when each individual would recite Qiddush for himself before sunset.

This custom was quoted by some later authorities including the *Magen Abraham*, the *Ture' Zahav* and the *P'ri Hadash*.

What was the custom of Halab with regards to Qiddush

on the first night of Shabu'ot? Rabbi Efrayim Laniado (died 1805) who was the Chief Rabbi of Halab (the last in a direct line of Laniado Chief Rabbis of Halab dating back to the 16th century) from 1794-1805 wrote the following in his book *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim*:

I see this by the Rabbi Mas'at Binyamin (16th century Poland)...on the first night of the holiday of Shabu'ot we wait to make Qiddush until it's actually night because if we make Qiddush before night, a little bit of the 49th day of the counting will be missing...

And regarding this quotation Rabbi Laniado stated:

And even though his words make sense, that the weeks must be complete, in any case we do not find this in the Gemara or Rishonim that they prohibited this (making Qiddush early) except only on the night of Pesah that the Gemara said: "And a person should not eat until it is dark," and this was ruled by the Tur Orah Hayyim Siman 472, and Maran, and the Rosh and the Terumat HaDeshen that discussed this, examine the Bet Yosef there, and they did not require waiting, only on the night of Pesah, and if this that you also have to wait on Shabu'ot until dark, since the Gemara and Posqim discussed this regarding the night of Pesah, and they excluded other Yamim Tobim and Shabbatot, that you do not have to wait until dark, they would not have refrained from informing us that also on the night of Shabu'ot, that you have to wait until dark, but rather surely on the night of Shabu'ot you do not have to wait until dark.

Rabbi Laniado then went on to show that the Tosafot and the Rosh in Menahot explain "*temimot*" as counting before dark on the first night of the 'Omer, not as waiting

until after dark on the first night of Shabu'ot. He explains that this might be because it's preferable to add Qodesh to Hol and make Qiddush early, rather than to wait until after dark for "temimot," or because the holiday begins at sunset regardless and waiting for Qiddush has no relevance to "temimot." And because the Tosafot (and Maran) allow counting after sunset, it is not necessary to wait until nightfall for Qiddush, since it is already "temimot" after sunset. Likewise, "temimot" is also MiD'Rabbanan in our times and therefore it is not necessary to wait until nightfall. Therefore, Rabbi Laniado concludes: "Regarding the law, the true law is that it is not necessary to wait for Qiddush on the night of Shabu'ot until dark, not like the Rabbi Mas'at Binyamin, and this is simple."

From here we see that a custom that originated in Poland in the 15th century, first became known in Halab in 1800, and was rejected Halakhically by the Chief Rabbi at that time. However, there are Sephardic Rabbis that included this custom in their writings. Rabbi Laniado also found it in the *Shiyyere' Knesset HaG'dolah* (17th century Turkey). It is found in the *P'ri Hadash* (17th century Italy and Jerusalem), the *Shulhan Gaboha* (18th century Greece) and even in the *Bet HaBehirah* by Rabbi Abraham Hamway (Rabbi Hamway does not describe it as the custom of Halab as he does when he records customs from his birthplace). Rabbi Hayyim Palaji (19th century Turkey) brings both the custom of waiting and the opinion of the Ya'BeSS (18th century Germany) who was very lenient with this. The custom to wait is also found in the *Ben Ish Hai* and in the *Kaf HaHayyim* (Sofer).

Hakham 'Obadyah Yosef raises two problems with this

custom in *Yehaveh Da'at* (6:30). Firstly, the *'Emeq B'rakhah* noted that it was customary to pray 'Arbit early, and only to wait for Qiddush, based on the Gemara in Berakhot (27b). However according to that same *sugya* you can also recite Qiddush early. Secondly the Gemara never taught the law of waiting for Qiddush on the first night of Shabu'ot from the *pasuq* of "temimot tihiyena," and it's a known Halakhic principle that we can not derive laws from *pesuqim* on our own. A law can only be derived from a *pasuq* by the Gemara or Midr'she' Halakhah. Still, in all, Hakham 'Obadyah concluded that it's proper to wait until nightfall to make Qiddush when it does not cause undue hardship.



It is reported that when Hakham Matloub 'Abadi A"H was asked about making Qiddush early on the first night of Shabu'ot, his response was that since we do not find this stringency in Maran or HaRambam that we don't have to be concerned with it, and that we may make Qiddush early. It is also known that Hakham Barukh A"H and Hakahm Yom Tob Yedid A"H, the former Chief Rabbi of Halab would always pray early and make Qiddush early on the first night of Shabu'ot. So, although

the custom of waiting until nightfall to make Qiddush was recorded by several Sephardic Rabbis, the custom of Halab is based on the rulings of Maran and HaRambam that do not require one to wait until nightfall to make Qiddush on the first night of Shabu'ot.



Mr. Arking teaches Halakhot and Minhagim in Brooklyn, NY.

TIQOON L'EL SHABOO'OT

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

There is a custom to stay up on the 1st night of Shaboo'ot and be involved in Torah until dawn. This custom seems to be based upon the Zohar (Perashat Emor 98a) which states that the original pious ones would not sleep this night, and they toiled in Torah. The Zohar (introduction page 8a) also says that all those who adhere to the *Tiqoon* this night and rejoice with it are blessed by God.

The rabbis explain and give the reason for this custom based upon the Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabba* 1:12) which states, that when *Bené Yisrael* were to receive the Torah, they were all sleeping and God had to awaken them with noise and thunder. Therefore we stay up studying this night to make amends for our forefathers and to show how anxiously we anticipate receiving the Torah. On the other hand, Ibn Ezra on Shemot 19:11 says all of Yisrael stayed awake all night in anticipation of receiving the Torah, and we as their descendants memorialize their actions by staying up all night as well.

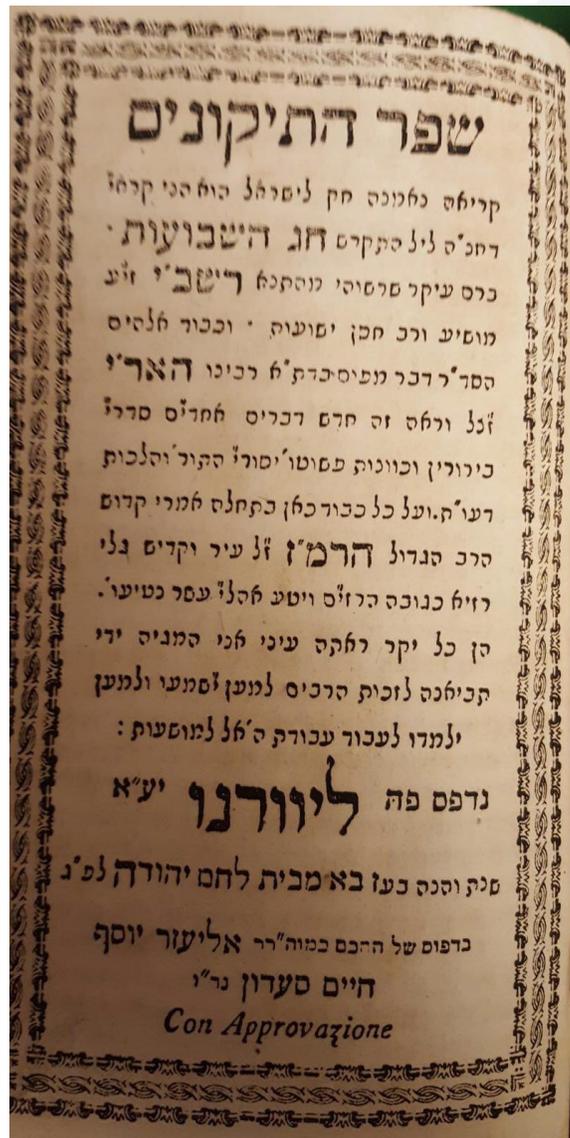
The custom among the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa is to study and read the *Tiqoon* as printed in the *Qerie Mo'ed* and not to just stay up and read whatever you want. The reading was established by the AR"l (1534-1572) and we read the *pesooqim* from the beginning and end of each perashah as well as from the *Nebiim* and *Ketoozim*, etc. (See the HID"l in his *Leb David* chapter 31) In the generation after the AR"l, Rabbi Efraim Panssieri (a contemporary of Rabbi Haim Vital,

student of the Ari) instituted the reading of the "IDDERA RABBA" from the Zohar as well. All of our *Hakhamim* in the last 400+ years followed this reading without veering from the practice. They could have studied Gemara or *Posqim* but chose to follow the reading as established and laid down

by those who said to stay up and read. If we are going to stay up and read, we should follow what was instituted as the custom and not just do our own thing. Even though this custom is not mentioned by RaMBaM, it is nonetheless adhered to by the Yemenite communities. They stay up and read the same Bible portions as we do but instead of reading Zohar afterwards they read Mishnah, something that our *Hakhamim* have taught us not to do. Moreover this custom is only for men and not for women (see *Sod Yesharim* chapter 9 by Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad), as it is tied into the counting of the 'omer which is done by men and not by women.

In recent years there seems to be a collective amnesia or a strong push to rewrite history, among certain segments of the community, especially those of the Yeshivish mindset. In fact, they claim that "It's a known fact that Hakham Ezra Attié, the 1st Rosh Yeshibah of Porat Yosef stayed up all night learning Gemara."

Well over the course of over a decade, I did my own homework and decided to get information from the famous Porat Yosef graduating class of 1947 and this is what I discovered.



1805 Livorno edition cover page of the *Shaboo'ot Qerie Mo'ed*

- a. Hakham Obadiah Yosef in *Yehaveh Da'at* volume 3 has a *responsa* and he is all pro the *Tiqoon* but he says that *Yeshibah* students who wish to study Gemara have sources upon which to rely. Hakham Obadiah Yosef read the *Tiqoon* and when he was done he studied other things.
- b. I clearly remember Hakham Baruch BenHaim reading the *Tiqoon* all night in Shaare Zion.
- c. I spoke with Rabbi Yosef Shaayo about what he recalled from his father (his father was Hakham Ezra Shaayo and was also one of the Rabbis of Porat Yosef) and he said my father read the *Tiqoon* and I never heard of Hakham Ezra or any of our rabbis doing differently. It would make no sense for Hakham Ezra Attié to go against the *minhag* whose entire basis is the Zohar, AR"l, MaHaRH"OO, & HID"A, and without whom we probably wouldn't be up learning all night.
- d. Hakham Haim David HaLevy, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, in his *'Aseh Lekha Rab* volume 5, has a *responsa* and he says that the reading is based upon the words of the Zohar and therefore we stay up and read the *Tiqoon* as prescribed by the Zohar.
- e. A number of years back, I was fortunate enough to call Hakham David Chelouche, Chief Rabbi of Netanya, and he said the following. "Who is talking about MY RABBI? Did this person ever study with My Rabbi? I was practically born in Porat Yosef; Hakham Ezra taught me the bulk of my Torah. He wasn't just the Rosh Yeshibah, he was my Rabbi, and I studied under him and together with him day and night for 20 years.

Hakham Ezra never said abandon the *Tiqoon* and study Gemara. We all read the *Tiqoon*. In fact, reading and studying the *Tiqoon* is much harder than any Gemara. Maybe that's why today's students run away from the *Miqra* (Bible), because it is too difficult for them to understand. Our *Miqra* is the basis for our entire religion; it is the source of our language. It must be studied and understood in order to grasp the true meaning of *Torah Shebikhtab* and *Torah Shebe'al Peh*!! Whoever said *Mori VeRibi* did not read the *Tiqoon*

but only Gemara? This is an utter and total lie! If someone finished the *Tiqoon* early enough and wants to study Gemara that's fine, but to place it before the *Tiqoon* we never heard of that.

- f. I checked with informants from Panama and they have testified that Hakham Sion Levi had always read the *Tiqoon* with the qahal all night.
- g. Rabbis, students and friends have also attested that Hakham Ben Sion Aba Shaul, always read the *Tiqoon* on the night of Shaboo'ot and did not deviate from it.

So there you have it, 7 great Rabbis, all of blessed memory, who were together for so many years under the direct guidance of Hakham Ezra Attié. Would they all be reading the *Tiqoon* if it went against the custom of their main rabbi and teacher?!

PORATYOSEF

"Hakham Ezra Attié was the 1st Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef"

This is a common misconception because he had that position for 45 years and taught hundreds. The truth is Porat Yosef first opened its doors in 1923 and the position of Rosh Yeshibah was first offered to Hakham Matloub Abadi, but he turned it down and did not take the position.

The first Rosh Yeshibah was Rabbi Refael Shelomo Laniado who unfortunately died two years later in 1925. That is when Hakham Ezra Attié became Rosh Yeshibah, a post he held until his passing in 1970. Between 1970 and the present, Porat Yosef has opened numerous locations within Jerusalem, each one having its own Rosh Yeshibah.

It's interesting to note that Hakham Matloub and Hakham Ezra both lived from 1887-1970. Early on, Hakham Matloub taught Hakham Ezra. Hakham Ezra Attié referred to Hakham Matloub as *Mori veRibi*.

TEFILLAH

If staying up all night is going to take away from your concentration of Tefillat Shahrit then you should not stay up. The proper frame of mind, thought and concentration

during prayers is much more important. The custom to stay up and study Torah is also very important, but only if you can do it without it impinging on your prayers. Rabbi ShemTob Gaguine in his *Keter ShemTob* on Shaboo'ot brings a very interesting incident that occurred with him when he was a *dayan* in Cairo (circa 1918) and he praises the London Sepharadim who read a little at the beginning of the night then go home to sleep and wake up refreshed for Tefillah.

CONCLUSION

I don't expect many of you to be thrilled with what I have written. Our customs-*minhagim*, are not always the most popular especially when they are not ingrained in us from birth or if they are not in synch with what many consider modern and enlightened. All I am saying is to do what our great *Hakhamaim* did, read selected verses of the *Tanakh*, read a big chunk of *Zohar* and read a listing of all 613 *misvot*. I know It is not what you want to hear. You want to hear that you can attend classes and lectures on all different topics and study whatever you want that connects you with the Torah. I understand that, but the purpose of my writings is for the words of our Sephardic *Hakhamim* to resonate with us and our descendants. Be they from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon,

Morocco, Iraq, *Eress Yisrael*, Turkey, Etc.... The way I see it is our *halakhot* and *minhagim* are being eradicated only because people in general are not familiar with our great *Hakhamim*, their Torah, and their *mesorah*. I want to keep it alive. Please help me to do that. If, God Forbid, you saw your grandfather on the floor about to be trodden upon would you leave him there? Would you also step on him? Or would you do everything in your power to help him up, set him straight, brush him off, and allow him to stand proud? If we turn our backs upon our *masoret* and embrace someone else's, this is "*Mossi La'az 'Al HaRishonim*" (slandering our ancestors). As Shelomo HaMelekh said in *Mishlé* (1:8), "*Shema' Beni Moosar Abikha VeAl Titosh Torat Imekha*", "My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother"!!!!.



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

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SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE

is proud to invite the community to a special

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Tuesday May 23rd



Minha & Festive Arbit @7:30PM

Multimedia Lecture @8:00PM

**“From Ben-Gurion’s Namesake
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Stories in Celebration of Jerusalem”**

Rabbi Ricky Hidary

Light Dinner @ 9:00PM

Music by the Victor Esses Ensemble



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

BEING PRO-ISRAEL ON CAMPUS

Ms. Renee Shemesh

Anti-Semitism has been on the rise on CUNY campuses and it is important to understand that as students attending CUNY colleges, we have a voice. This is a very important concept. We need to share our opinions and stand up for what we believe is right. Can you get involved on campus?

As a first step, I recommend checking out your Hillel and pro-Israel clubs on campus. From personal experiences, I was a bit hesitant at first to get involved. I knew nothing about activism and did not know that anti-Semitism was noticeable and active on campus until I personally experienced it.

One morning I was in class and a professor of mine shared his views on and his experiences in "Palestine" and I froze. I did not know how to respond to that kind of statement. Coincidentally, later in the day I had happened to be walking through campus and met the Israel fellow from Hillel. We bonded so well that she brought me into Hillel. Since then it has only been a positive experience for me. I was exposed to a lot of interesting conferences, ranging from networking to Israel advocacy. Hillel has great opportunities and programs for students looking to get involved with pro-Israel activism

and topics regarding Judaism.



Community Members show their Support for Israel in Washington Square Park

Our main goal should be to make sure we are engaging in pro-Israel activity. As students, it is important to create close relationships with our classmates on our campus and network with them to support each other. By networking, we can also teach each other in an informal way, as friends, to spark interest on important issues. We need to become informed students so that when the time comes, we can answer the difficult questions and discuss Israel in general. I recommend students get involved in the conferences that are provided for college students and take advantage of them. As community members, we have the ability to inspire change within. Let's be the ones to inspire others to make a change.



Ms. Shemesh is a Magen David Yeshivah graduate and current student at the Zicklin School of Business. Ms. Shemesh recently created a petition which received over 8,000 signatures to keep radical anti-Israel speakers from speaking at a CUNY graduation.

Jerusalem Day יום ירושלים

Jerusalem: Where Heaven Meets Earth discussion with Rabbi Mimoun Miller

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SHABBAT TABLE TALKS

PERASHAT EMOR: SEFIRAT HA'OMER

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Working Gradually, Keeping the End in Mind, and Developing New Ends.

Great tasks and complex tasks can only be accomplished by breaking them down into small steps and by proceeding one step at a time. The greatest Olympic runner began as a toddler teetering through his first steps. Our lives are filled with opportunities. Some of them are dismissed as impossible

for all time in all your settlements, throughout all your ages...

The Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall bring an offering by fire to the Lord.

“... tasks that appear impossible become possible when you break them down into small steps.”

dreams. Yet, when we take that “impossible dream” and start to speak about the steps we have to take to realize that the first steps do not seem so hard. Breaking the “impossible dream” into possible steps toward that dream allow us to get that much closer to achieving it. When we achieve our once “impossible dream,” it is time to realize that that dream was just a first step toward another, broader vision of how to improve the world. These are some lessons that can be gleaned from the presentation of the calendar of festivals presented in this week’s perasha and by our sages’ understanding of them.

Text: Vayiqra 23:15-21, 23-24

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation—the day after the Sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord... On that same day, you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a sacred occasion for you; you shall not work at you occupations. This is a law

Analysis:

These verses are taken from the Torah’s calendar of festivals that occurs in this week’s perasha. To understand the importance and deep meaning of these festivals for Judaism, we must recall the rabbinic understanding of these festivals. First, what the Torah calls “the day after the Sabbath” is understood by our sages as the day following the first *yom tob* (festival day) of Pesah, the day we left slavery in Egypt. The fifty days, known as *Sefirat Ha’omer* conclude with the Shabu’ot festival, which is “the festival of the giving of our Torah” (a quote from our prayers). The last festival mentioned above is celebrated as the New Year—Rosh Hashanah.

Immediately following the Exodus from Egypt and freedom from slavery, Israel started the “count-up” to receiving the Torah. Why the counting? This was not a mere counting of the days, but a process of spiritual growth. The slave, whose major concerns had been to survive, had to turn himself into a person who could

experience divine revelation. The way our sages express it: Israel had to ascend from the depths of impurity (*tum'ah*) to the summit of sanctity. This process could only be accomplished in stages. Likewise, tasks that appear impossible become possible when you break them down into small steps.

Discussion:

What do we do for 49 days between Pesah and Shabu'ot? (Count the Omer. Begin with an easy question to get participation.)

What do these two holidays, Pesah and Shabu'ot, commemorate? Why do you think Hashem didn't give the Torah right away when they left Egypt? (Perhaps it took them time to cross the sea, and to arrive at Mount Sinai. According to the analysis above, the Children of Israel were not spiritually ready to receive the Torah yet.)

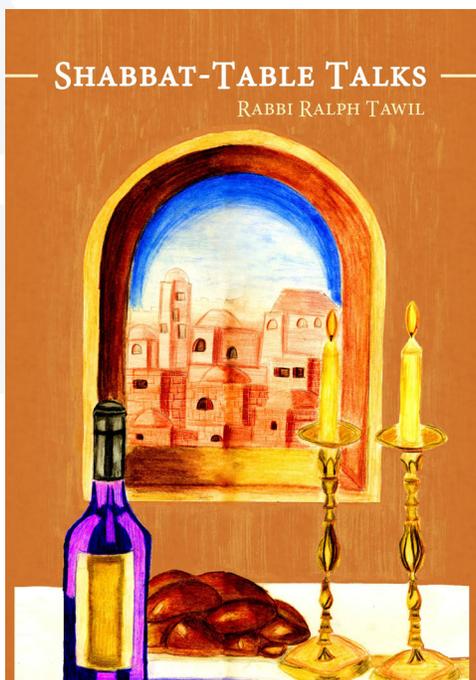
The counting of the Omer is like going up a ladder that has 49 rungs. Bene Yisrael had to climb that ladder step by step, until they were ready to receive the Torah. (Emphasize the "step by step" aspect of this climb. For younger children to visualize this more clearly speak about standing in your driveway and wanting to get to the roof of the garage. Can you jump there in one step? Obviously not. What can you use to get up there? The ladder breaks down the big jumps into small steps. But when you finish climbing you are at the top!)

When you improve yourself every day, after some time you have come a long way. This can also be applied to learning Torah. Learn a little bit every day, and soon you will have accomplished a lot.

It is the custom during the shabbatot between Pesah and Shabu'ot to learn *Pirqe Abot*. This work focuses on improving yourself and acquiring proper attitudes towards

many things. We learn one chapter each week, and try to live the ideas contained in *Pirqe Abot*. By the time we reach Shabu'ot we not only finished an important Torah work, we have also grown spiritually. (There are many editions of *Pirqe Abot* available. Visit your local Jewish bookstore and get a copy.)

Applications: Give some examples of tasks that were difficult for you that you accomplished by taking one step at a time. (Getting married, building you business, getting your degree, buying your house, finishing a book or *massekhet* of Talmud, playing an instrument, etc.)



What tasks appear impossible for your children? Encourage your children to think about the tasks that face them. Some of these tasks appear impossible to them, but are very doable once they are broken down into their steps. For example, older children might be concerned about their ability to find a spouse, support a family, start a career, etc. Discuss with them the small steps that could be taken towards those goals. Younger children could be concerned about writing a term paper, learning to shoot foul shots, and studying for tests. Show them how to do it by breaking the task into small steps.

Additional discussion:

After *Sefirat Ha'omer* culminates in Shabu'ot, the Torah speaks of the holiday of the first day of the seventh month, which we celebrate as Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. This teaches us (in the context of the above discussion) that after achieving your goals, we set new ones to achieve.



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



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| July 5 - August 17 | | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY |
|--|-------------------|--|---|---|
| Joseph S. Jemal Synagogue Annex 75 Hathaway Avenue, Deal | 11:00am - 12:00pm | Mrs. Vivien Hidary 7/10, 7/17, 7/31, 8/7, 8/14 <i>Women in Tanakh</i> Mrs. Miriam Tawil 7/24 | Rabbi Ikey Tawil 7/18, 7/25 <i>Halakhot Shabbat</i> Mrs. Vicky Harari 8/8, 8/15 | Mrs. Freda Braha 7/5, 7/12, 7/19 <i>Positive Parenting</i> Rabbi Joseph Dweck starting 7/26 |
| | 12:00 - 12:15pm | LUNCH | | |
| | 12:15pm - 1:15pm | Mrs. Esther Hidary <i>Topics in Jewish Thought</i> | Rabbi Naftali Besser <i>Staying Inspired</i> | Mrs. Emily Labaton <i>Selected chapters in Navi</i> |
| Edmond J. Safra Synagogue Main 75 Hathaway Avenue, Deal | 6:30pm - 7:30pm | Rabbi Nathan Dweck (6th-8th grade girls) <i>Pirke Abot</i> | Mrs. Rayna Cohen (6th-8th grade girls) <i>Jewish Wisdom and Adolescence</i> | Mrs. Michelle Gindi (6th-8th grade girls) Mrs. Doris Cohen (6th-8th grade girls) |
| | 7:00pm - 8:00pm | Rabbi Ikey Tawil (high school / college girls) <i>Unlocking the secrets of the weekly parasha</i> | 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm Rabbi Naftali Besser (high school / college girls) <i>Navigating Life</i> | Rabbi Richard Tobias (high school / college girls) <i>Halacha and the 21st Century: You Make the Call</i> |
| | 8:00pm - 9:00pm | Rabbi Ricky Hidary (high school / college girls) <i>Jewish Ethics</i> | Mrs. Miriam Tawil (high school / college girls) <i>Jewish Philosophy</i> | Rabbi Avi Harari (high school / college girls) |
| Annex | 8:30pm - 10:00pm | | | Rabbi Joseph Dweck (open class) starting July 25 |

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