

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA-QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 56: Shabbat Zakhor / Purim

IN LOVING MEMORY OF RONNY WEINISCH A"H

BY HIS WIFE ALBERTA, BARBARA AND MARTY WAINGORT,
PAULETTE AND HYMIE AZAR, EILEEN AND EDDIE SHALAM



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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.

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.

SCA VALUES

COMMITMENT TO HALAKHA
RESPECT AND TOLERANCE
INTERACTION WITH SOCIETY
GROWTH THROUGH EDUCATION
TORAH AND HIGHER EDUCATION
LEARNING AND EARNING
MEDINAT YISRAEL

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In loving memory of Ronny Weinisch A"H
By His wife Alberta, Barbara and Marty Waingort,
Paulette and Hymie Azar, Eileen and Eddie Shalam

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SCA SPOTLIGHT

INTERVIEW WITH OUTGOING PRESIDENT MR. HYMIE SHAMAH

After four years as President of the Sephardic Community Alliance (SCA) Mr. Hymie Shamah will be passing the position to Mr. Joey Shamah. Below is a short interview of Mr. Shamah as he reflects upon four years.

Qol Ha-Qahal (QQ): Why did you originally get involved with the SCA?

Hymie Shamah (HS): I was President of Beth Torah at the time, where we have been seeing tremendous growth and success. Beth Torah's Principles inspired the SCA Declaration of Values at its formation 10 years ago. When Morris Bailey approached me at that time to get involved with the SCA, I saw an opportunity and a challenge to project the Principles of Beth Torah and the values they represent on a broader communal scale.

QQ: What was the most rewarding part of working with the SCA?

HS: Nothing can top attracting 600 young adults and young professionals to a Torah lecture or hosting the thousands of people who attend our Tisha b'Ab program. Except perhaps seeing that tens of thousands watch and read our content. Beyond that, on a personal level, it has been a great honor to work with our dedicated community Rabbis and teachers. These fine people are often under-appreciated and overworked. Their success is absolutely critical and prefigures the continued success of our community.

QQ: What developments are you most pleased with?

HS: I am pleased that we have developed as an organization committed to education and community-building. Our goal is inclusivity, where unity supersedes uniformity. While our values demand a commitment to Halakha, we project respect and tolerance and maintain that the narrow degree of separation between the intracommunity perspectives is easily overshadowed by the benefits of cohesion.

QQ: Why is focusing on the youth so important?

HS: The newest and toughest challenges seem to always face the young. Every generation will say that the challenges confronting their youth are unprecedented. We reprinted an article written by Isaac Shalom declaring yeshiva education as the only answer for the disengagement of our youth. 70+ years later, the challenges of our internet-

enabled, campus-corrupted culture seem daunting. We need to promote honest, intelligent and spiritually-gratifying answers to the same age-old questions each generation will struggle with.

QQ: How do you see the SCA's role evolving in the next 4 years?

HS: Our new President, Joey A. Shamah, and his new board have a vision laser-focused on helping our affiliates and our rabbis accomplish their most difficult tasks. As



Mr. Hymie Shamah

the organization matures to be a facilitator and enabler, we'll see more events and programs "Powered by the SCA." I am confident Joey's leadership will usher in a new level

HS: I have accepted a position on the Board of Trustees, joining a remarkable group of dedicated community leaders. I will also act as Treasurer for the Executive

"We need to promote honest, intelligent and spiritually-gratifying answers"

of cooperation between our organizations and the further strengthening and empowering of our mission-critical Rabbinic leadership. Joey will also add a dimension of technological advance -- Decisions we will be data-driven and our programming platform will be technologically advanced.

QQ: How will you be involved with the SCA moving forward?

Committee during the transition. These new boards are loaded with bright, engaged community conscience individuals. Their energy is contagious. With the support of our community, I look forward to helping them actualize their goals.

The SCA wishes to thank Mr. Shamah for his countless hours of dedication and hard work on behalf of the community. Hazaq U'barukh.

The SCA would like to welcome

MR. JOEY A. SHAMAH

the new president and wish him
the utmost success in his new position



GETTING DRUNK ON PURIM?

Rabbi Harold Sutton

There are those who say that it is a *misvah* to get drunk on Purim. The purpose of this article is to objectively look at some of the sources in Rabbinic literature that discuss this topic in order to evaluate whether or not this is truly the *halakhah*.

The Gemara in *Massekhet Megillah* (7b) says: **אמר רבא: "מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי;"** Raba said: a person is obligated "libsume" on Purim until he does not know the difference between (the phrases) "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessed be Mordechai." The Gemara continues: Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made Purim together and they "Ibsum." Rabbah got up and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira. The next day he prayed for him and brought him back to life. The following year, Raba again invited Rabbi Zeira who responded, "not every year will miracles occur!"

quotes the story of Raba as an invalidation of Raba's statement by showing the consequences of such behavior. Accordingly, Raba's statement about the need to get drunk on Purim is not the *Halakhah*. Many Rishonim, including the Ba'al HaMeor, The Meiri, and the Ran follow the approach of Rabbenu Ephraim. Maimonides, however, seems to disagree with Rabbenu Ephraim, recording the statement of Raba as *Halakhah*, mandating that on Purim one must "drink wine until he sleeps from drunkenness." (הלכות מגילה ב"ט"ו). Because Maimonides (along with the Rif, Rosh and Tur) viewed Raba's statement as the *Halakhah*, Maran quotes the statement of Raba as *Halakhah* in *Shulhan Arukh* (O"R 695:2).

It would seem that all of these great Halakhic authorities disagree with Rabbenu Ephraim and demand that we get drunk on Purim. However, Maimonides makes a statement

"Raba's statement about the need to get drunk on Purim is not the Halakhah."

First, we must point out that the word **"איסבום"**, which is used in both passages, generally does not mean to get drunk, but rather to enjoy. The Aramaic word for "to get drunk," is **לרוי** as used by the Targum many times; see Genesis 9:21). Nevertheless, Rashi, probably due to the context in which the statement is made and in connection with the story which follows, interprets the word **ליסומי** in our Gemara as **להשתכר** – to get drunk with wine (Rashi must go out of his way to explain this precisely because it is not the simple meaning of the term). Regardless of how or why Rashi arrived at this interpretation, Rashi's interpretation seems to indicate that there is some command to drink wine on Purim to the point of intoxication.

There are two schools of thought as to how to interpret the statement of Raba and the subsequent story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira. Rabbenu Ephraim believes that the Talmud

in **הלכות דעות (הג:)** which seems to contradict this position. He writes, "Anyone who gets drunk is disgusting and loses his wisdom; if he does so in front of common people, he has desecrated G-d's name." Maimonides considered becoming drunk such a vice that in some cases it can constitute a **חילול ה'** – a desecration of G-d's name! In light of the fact that Maimonides classified **חילול ה'** amongst the most severe sins man can commit (see **הלכות תשובה**), it does not make sense that Maimonides would allow even a potential **חילול ה'** simply for the purposes of enjoying Purim. If we pay close attention to the words of Maimonides, the answer to our apparent contradiction becomes clear: "drink wine until he sleeps from drunkenness."

Many commentaries believe that one fulfills the obligation of not knowing the difference between "Cursed be Haman and Blessed be Mordechai" through sleeping. The RaM"A

brings this opinion in the name of the Maharil in his notes on the *Shulhan Arukh*. The *Mishnah Berurah* comments on this, “And that is what is worthy to do.” In addition, the Maharil, in his Responsa (56) claims that the whole idea of drinking on Purim is merely a suggestion but not mandatory; one fulfills the commandment by having a festive meal even if he does not drink at all. We can guess that the basis for his opinion is the use of the word לבסומי, as we have already discussed.

Our Rabbi have provided other explanations of the statement “until one does not know the difference between Cursed be Haman and Blessed be Mordekhai.” The *Sefer HaMeorot* suggested that the Gemara was either exaggerating or that its intent was for us to drink, but stop short of reaching the level of intoxication wherein one loses his senses. He concludes that “there is no sin more severe [than drunkenness] since it may lead to many other severe transgressions including sexual immorality, idolatry, and murder.” The Aggudah explains Raba’s statement as alluding to a level of intoxication where one may not understand that the numerology of the Hebrew letters ברוך מרדכי is equal to that of the letters ארור המן. This clearly does not demand such a high level of intoxication as, unfortunately, many in our generation are unable to understand this numerology even while fully sober. The *פרי חדש* suggests that even if one assumes that the passage from the Gemara be taken literally, this would only apply to earlier generations whose holiness was unquestioned. In our

generation, however, in order to fulfill the *Misvah*, one should merely drink slightly more wine than is accustomed to on an ordinary day. The משנה ברורה, כף חיים, and the קיצור שולחן ערוך all follow this approach.

In conclusion, we must keep in mind that Purim is a time of many Misvot. Many Poskim hold that these Misvot require special concentration (כוונה), which intoxication would undoubtedly inhibit. The great Gaon of our generation, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, writes that if by drinking, one would disrespect even one Rabbinic Commandment, such as saying the prayers of מנחה or ערבית within their proper time frame or with adequate כוונה (even more so ברכת המזון or obligations towards one’s fellow man) it is forbidden for him to get drunk on Purim. The *Mishnah Berurah* echoes this point, explaining that the happiness of Purim should be the happiness of a מצוה and not a frivolous happiness in which people decide to “let loose” once a year.



Rabbi Sutton is the Rosh Yeshivah of Magen David High School.



“THAT YOU MAY RECOUNT IN THE HEARING OF YOUR SONS AND OF YOUR SONS' SONS”

Professor Nathan Aviezer

What is a miracle? It is widely thought that a miracle is a supernatural event, a deviation from the laws of nature. The laws of nature determine the working of the physical world in “normal” times, but occasionally, in special circumstances, the Holy One, blessed be He, decides to depart temporarily from the laws of nature, and then a miraculous event transpires. Here we shall argue that this prevailing view is not consonant with what is written in the Bible. To illustrate our point we shall discuss a famous miracle.

The “miracle of Purim” is the miracle that saved the Jews from Haman’s wicked edicts, as described in the Megillah. The Megillah recounts how Esther took advantage of her position as queen in order to bring the wicked Haman down from greatness and abrogate the murderous edicts he had decreed against the Jews. Are there any events in the Megillah that can be called supernatural? Was Esther’s exceptional beauty something supernatural? Was there anything supernatural in the king, who knew nothing of her Jewishness, choosing her as queen?

precisely at the moment that it did. That is the miracle of Purim.

The Talmud writes: “Rabbi Isaac said: A blessing is found only in what is obscured from the eye.”¹ Divine providence takes place in a manner “obscured from the eye,” that is, according to the **laws of nature**. Miracles take place and difficulties are resolved, but it all happens “obscured from the eye.”

The miracles described in the Bible that **indeed** involved a departure from the laws of nature all occurred in private, without witnesses other than those individuals involved in the miraculous event. For example, take the famous miracles wrought by the prophet Elisha. One of them, the miracle of the oil, took place when the prophet came to the aid of a widow in distress. The destitute widow turned to the prophet and asked him to save her from her creditors, who sought to sell her two sons into slavery because she was unable to meet her debts.² When Elisha heard that the woman had nothing in her house save for one jug of oil, he instructed her to borrow from

“...all the events described in the Book of Esther took place according to the laws of nature. So what do we mean when we refer to the ‘miracle of Purim’?”

Chapter 6 of the Megillah describes the course of events beginning with the king having a sleepless night. Is there anything supernatural about a king not being able to sleep? Is that not something that happens to all of us at times? When the king cannot fall asleep, he asks to be read to from the chronicles of his kingdom. Is there anything supernatural about that? It is patently clear that **all the events described in the Book of Esther took place according to the laws of nature**. So what do we mean when we refer to the “miracle of Purim”?

The miracle lies in the **timing**, not the **nature**, of the events. The Jews were delivered from Haman because each of the events described in the Book of Esther took place

her neighbors as many empty vessels as possible, and to fill them with oil from the jug in her possession. The widow did as the prophet bade her, and miraculously all the vessels that she gathered were filled with the oil that she poured from her single jug. She sold the vast quantity of oil and managed to pay all her debts and save her sons from the threat of enslavement.

The main point for our discussion what Elisha instructed the widow to do **before** she began pouring the oil: “Then go in and shut the door behind you and your children.”³ This strange instruction assured that **no one** would be present at

¹ Bava Metzia 42a.

² II Kings 4:1-7.

³ II Kings 4:4.

the miracle save for the widow herself and her sons who were helping her. Everything was “obscured from the eye.”

Another point deserves mention: why was the miracle wrought with oil, of all things? Why did Elisha make the woman go to the trouble of borrowing vessels from her neighbors, of pouring vessel after vessel of oil, and then going out to sell the oil? Why did he not miraculously provide her with coins of silver and gold, for example? The answer is that the widow had in her possession a certain amount of oil, and the fact that she was selling oil did not appear to those around her as miraculous. But had the poor widow suddenly appeared with coins of silver and gold in her hands, the miracle would have been **glaringly evident**.

Other miracles in the Bible could be similarly analyzed, but the principle is clear: the objective of divine miracles is to achieve a certain result and not to impress an audience with wondrous tricks. Therefore the Bible keeps the supernatural aspects of its miracles as covert as possible. However, aside from the hidden miracle, “obscured from the eye,” there is another type of miracle. Sometimes **the very objective** of the miracle is to display it for all to see, the entire purpose being to show publicly the Lord’s greatness and might. In such cases, the **public component** of the miracle is of supreme importance.

The most famous public miracle is without doubt Elijah’s contending with the prophets of Baal. Elijah wished to prove to the Israelites that Baal is nothing but a powerless pagan god, whereas the Holy One, blessed be He, the G-d of Israel, is omnipotent. To that end he proposed a public confrontation between himself and the prophets of Baal, in which a bull would be placed on a pile of wood as a burnt offering but no fire would be kindled. Each side would call on its god to bring about a miracle and cause fire to come down from heaven to kindle the wood and thus burn the offering. The Bible describes in great detail how Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal over the inefficacy of their gods in bringing down fire.⁴ When Elijah’s turn came to appeal to his G-d, he prayed silently to the Holy One, blessed be He, and was answered by a most impressive miracle that convinced all those present of the greatness and might of the G-d of Israel. The object of this miracle was to show the Israelites how vain and worthless it was to run after Baal, and to achieve this purpose great importance attached to the publicness of the miracle.

⁴ 1 Kings 18:19-39.

Another example of a public miracle is provided by the Ten Plagues brought upon the Egyptians on the eve of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. What was the objective of the Ten Plagues, concluded in this week’s reading, *Parashat Bo*? This dramatic series of miracles was not wrought in order to destroy or punish the Egyptian people, for one plague would have sufficed to that end; rather, as stated in the Torah, the aim was:

1. “**in order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world...in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world,**”⁵
2. “**and that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons’ sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them.**”⁶

In these words the Torah explains that the Ten Plagues were intended to glorify the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the eyes of the Israelites and of the entire world. In order to achieve this end the miracles of the plagues are not hidden, rather publicly displayed.

According to Maimonides, believing that miracles occur is one of the tenets of faith in G-d.⁷ Rabbi Moshe Feinstein emphasizes⁸ the human beings are obliged to do their best and not rely on miracles, however G-d is always watching over His world through hidden miracles, both through general and individual divine providence.

Translated by Rachel Rowen



Prof. Nathan Aviezer is on the emeritus of the Department of Physics at Bar Ilan University and author of the books, *In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science* and *Fossils and Faith: Understanding Torah and Science*. He is a former SCA scholar in residence.

⁵ Ex. 9:14-16.

⁶ Ex. 10:2.

⁷ *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:25.

⁸ *Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayyim, Part II, resp. 111.*

ARE ESTHER AND MORDECHAI BURIED IN THIS IRANIAN TOMB?

Mr. Jason Guberman

The purported burial site of Purim's Persian queen was a pilgrimage site for Iran's Jews.

According to the biblical book named after her, Esther was a beautiful young Jewish woman who caught the eye of the Persian King Ahasuerus, became queen, and with the assistance of her cousin Mordecai, saved Jews throughout the Persian Empire from annihilation. Every year, on the holiday of Purim, Jews around the world celebrate this miraculous salvation by reading the Book of Esther, dressing in costumes, and eating delicacies.

Iranian Jews similarly mark the holiday, but for centuries have also made a pilgrimage throughout the year, but especially on Purim to a shrine in the city of Hamadan where, according to tradition, Esther and Mordecai are buried. The origins and contents of this shrine are cloaked in legend and mystery.

Hamadan, known in antiquity as Ecbatana, is in the Kurdish region of Iran. Mount Alvand, which overlooks the city proper, hosted the summer residence of Persian royalty of the Achaemenid Empire (the period when the Purim story is believed to have happened). Tradition has it that Esther and Mordecai — after spending their final years at the royal resort — were buried in the city, next to one another, with a shrine constructed over their graves.

While the original shrine's date of construction is unknown, its date of destruction, at the hands of Mongol invaders, purportedly occurred in the 14th century. Historian Ernst Herzfeld contends that the current structure may actually belong to Shushan Dokht, the Jewish queen of

King Yazdagerd I (ca. 399-420 CE), who is credited with securing permission for Jews to live in Hamadan.

Herzfeld dates the current structure to 1602 CE, partly on account of its traditional Persian architectural style (known as Emamzadeh), which was ubiquitous amongst the shrines of Muslim religious leaders built in that era. In most cases, these buildings include an entry hall and a main square hall with a domed ceiling that surrounds the sarcophagus (stone coffin).



The tomb of Mordechai and Esther

Earliest Reports

For centuries, Iranian Jews, Muslims, and Christians, particularly women praying for fertility, venerated the modest brick shrine. The first detailed accounts in the historical record are from Christian tourists in the 1800s and early 1900s. These records, which include outstanding illustrations, descriptions,

and even photographs, were recently digitized—and provide a rare glimpse into the condition of the shrine in the past and the particular observances once held there.

One 19th-century visitor describes a marble plaque on the interior dome walls claiming that the structure was dedicated in the year 714 CE by “the two benevolent brothers Elias and Samuel, sons of Ismail Kachan.” Other visitors describe rooms covered in pilgrims’ graffiti in various languages as well as darkened by candle smoke; a stork’s nest sitting atop the shrine’s dome; and a prayer area within that was designed to enable worshippers to face the tombs and Jerusalem at same time.

They also recount that notes in Hebrew script were

placed near the tombs, similar to how Jewish worshippers often tuck prayer notes into the stones of Jerusalem's Western Wall. For Iranian Jews, who could reach Jerusalem only with great difficulty, the shrine served as a stand-in place at which to pray and weep.

Renovation

Until the 1970s, the shrine was hidden away in a crowded part of Hamadan, surrounded by houses, and accessible only through a narrow dirt alley. But in 1971, in honor of a national celebration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy, the Iranian Jewish Society commissioned architect Yassi (Elias) Gabbay to undertake a renovation.

Houses around the tomb were purchased and demolished, making the shrine accessible from the main street via a bridge Gabbay constructed over the new courtyard and a partially-underground synagogue chapel he also built, to complete the shrine complex. The subterranean chapel has a skylight in the shape of a Star of David that can be seen in Google Earth,

chamber also houses a cabinet with a 300-year-old Torah scroll.

The Contemporary Shrine

Today, Esther's Tomb has lost some of its former splendor. Iranian authorities, for example, have removed an ornamented gate Gabbay had erected along the sidewalk using a geometric motif common in many mosques. The problem? Part of the classic motif forms a Jewish star — a fact regime officials apparently considered intolerable (unlike the fence, the Star of David skylight is not visible from street level). Gabbay himself lives in exile, having fled after the Islamic Revolution and restarted his architectural practice in Los Angeles, though he dreams of returning to see the site he transformed.

The question of whether the shrine actually marks the resting place of Esther and her uncle remains unanswered, and is perhaps unanswerable. But one 19th-century Christian pilgrim offered her own insight on the effectual

“Tradition has it that Esther and Mordecai — after spending their final years at the royal resort — were buried in the city, next to one another, with a shrine constructed over their graves.”

quite possible making the Islamic Republic in Iran home to the only Jewish star visible from space.

The renovation did not significantly alter the shrine itself, or the grave stones cluttering the plaza outside the old shrine. (Some prominent local Jews had in the past secured burial plots outside the shrine, which they considered holier than plots in the main Jewish cemetery in Hamadan.)

One of the old structure's remarkable features that Gabbay preserved is its front door, a massive piece of granite with a hidden lock. Less than four feet high, the stunted doorframe forces visitors to bow as they enter, in deference to the site's holy occupants.

An outer chamber holds tombs of famous rabbis and provides access by means of an archway to the interior chamber. The interior chamber features Hebrew writing along the walls and holds two carved sarcophagi, supposedly marking the burial spots of Esther and Mordecai. This

significance of the tomb and the 2,700-year-old Persian Jewish community that guards it:

“Beside the tomb of Esther the lowly race she saved have kept loving watch through all the weary ages. More wonderful than any ancient monument are these Jews themselves, lineal descendants, in blood and faith, of the tribes of Israel, and the only vestige of the truly olden time which entirely defies decay and dissolution.”

This article is dedicated to Sylvia Guberman ZT”L, a woman of valor in the spirit of Esther.



Mr. Guberman is the Executive Director of the American Sephardi Federation



COMMUNITY EVENTS

PARENT ENRICHMENT SERIES: 10 COMMANDMENTS IN 10 MONTHS

Elana Salem and Nazira Chabbott

We send our children to school hoping that they receive the best education possible. We advise, teach, (our children would nag) and explain the importance for learning and self-improvement...but other than words, we as parents need to model a good example for these beliefs. The confines of a busy week make this an even more difficult task. Barkai Yeshivah invites you to reconnect with your inner self which will undoubtedly translate into a stronger family relationship.

Under the guidance of Barkai's Rav Yeshivah, Rabbi Moses Haber, the Parent Education committee introduces the Parent Enrichment series. "An important element of success of the student body is that parents partner with educators," Rabbi Haber explains. In doing so, it is important for parents to constantly continue their education in a variety of ways.

The program centers around Rabbi Haber's weekly Torah class, which is the mainstay of the program. Parents explore the Ten Commandments as archetypes of behaviors that Hashem wants us to inculcate into our everyday lives. We discuss how the seemingly ancient commandments are relevant now more than ever. Special guest speakers are featured once a month to share valuable insights that tie into the conversation of Rabbi Haber's classes. Featured guest speakers have included Vicky Harari, Rachel Dweck, Nachliel Selavan and TAG Senior Advisor Alex Paskie.

Vicky Harari's parenting classes focus on topics of fostering a sense of safety for our children and helping ourselves so we can help our children. Effective parenting is a mix of being kind and firm, speaking clearly and being direct, which allows children to be more receptive. Being on the same page with your children is knowing where a child is developmentally and setting expectations accordingly. Mrs. Harari's knowledge and experience of parenting is unparalleled.

"So often in our week, we run on auto-pilot. Mrs. Harari's classes remind us to take time out to connect with the kids."

~ Wendy Kraiem

Barkai parent and licensed hypnotist Rachel Dweck, conducted a CALM workshop - Conquering Anxiety and Living Mindfully. "An anxious parent = a tense home environment = an anxious child." This class taught parents that the stability of the family starts with you. Rachel's fun and quick techniques were easy to learn and great to keep oneself in a positive state, despite the stresses we face daily. These techniques could easily be taught to the children to help them as well.

"Rachel Dweck's techniques really helped me combat stressful situations and now I'm using them to assist my children in keeping calm and relaxed during aggravating conditions."

~ Rachel Novick

On a cultural note, community members joined together for a Tanakh tour of the Metropolitan Museum of Art given by Director of Torah InterMedia Nachliel Selavan. They explored the Ancient Near Eastern galleries, to learn about the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, as they related to the

“An important element of success of the student body is that parents partner with educators...”

Kingdoms of Yisrael and Yehudah. They focused on the setting of those civilizations in Mesopotamia, the Urban Revolution and how it impacted the development of writing, cylinder seals and building dedications. Through the various artifacts, the attendees came to appreciate the vastness of the Assyrian Empire, the impact it had on the Kingdom of Israel and the Ten Lost Tribes, and finally - the choices made by people towards the end of the First Bet HaMikdash and how they affected the fate of the Jews.

The Tech Talk on how to use computers at home and at school was an essential for today's parents. Led by TAG Senior Advisor Alex Paskie, Head of School Ahuva Halberstam, and Lower School Assistant Principal Sharon Esses, the talk explored benefits and disadvantages to technology our children use on a daily basis and how to make sure they explore the tech world safely. TAG of Flatbush is a valuable community resource focused on spreading awareness on technology and creating a safe online experience for families. Sharon shared a few of the best programs available to enhance student learning, while Ahuva emphasized the role of parents in navigating a digital environment, and the importance of having time and space carved out of our daily routines that are tech free.

time out of our 'busy mom' role to help with our personal growth.” Stephanie Sakkal

Barkai stresses the importance of the parent-school relationship and the value of continuing one's education. Speaking to your children should go beyond the scope of 'how was your day? and did you finish your homework?' Being mentally present, intellectually informed, spiritually awakened, and computer savvy is key. There are many ways for parents to connect with their kids, the most basic being through education.

In less time than it takes to check your texts, emails, WhatsApp, Facebook and take a selfie-you can be the example you'd like to set. Barkai is making a community wide effort and invites everyone to take part in preserving the past and illuminating the future for our children by attending this very special program series.

Thanks to all those who contributed to our program and thanks to all those who attended. We look forward to another great semester of learning together!

The Parent Enrichment series takes place in Barkai Yeshivah on Tuesdays at 11:00am.

“I walked away with a better understanding of how to properly incorporate technology into my life and the effects it has on me and my kids. It is so important that we take time out of our 'busy mom' role to help with our personal growth.”
~Stephanie Sakkal

“I walked away with a better understanding of how to properly incorporate technology into my life and the effects it has on me and my kids. It is so important that we take

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE AND SYNAGOGUE AT FIFTY

Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary

Steve Jobs loved to quote Wayne Gretzky saying “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been.” The Rabbis formulated the same idea centuries ago when they said, “איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד - Who is wise? He who sees what the future will bring.” But more than simply having insight and vision, great leaders also have the courage and confidence to take action. They solve problems before anyone even realizes there was a need, and build towards a future that others still cannot even imagine.

Blessed is the generation that has a truly wise Hakham in its midst. When I was in college, Rabbi Moshe Shamah offered me advice about several of the most important life decisions I was then considering. I was not ready to appreciate his wisdom at the time, but over the next years, everything that he recommended and predicted ended up turning into reality. He knew what was best for me and set forth the trajectory of my life way before I could foresee those possibilities.

Many other people have similar stories in their personal interactions with Rabbi Shamah. Moreover, his visionary leadership extends not only to individuals and families – but to the community as a whole. That is fundamentally what Sephardic Institute and Synagogue are all about.

Rabbi Shamah opened Sephardic Institute fifty years ago as a yeshiva for advanced Torah study. The goal was to train future community rabbis, teachers, and leaders. Sephardic

Institute also sought to research and recover more of the depth of the Torah’s original teachings that are relevant today to pave a way towards future growth of Judaism that could confront challenges of assimilation in the Diaspora, and the new promises of the State of Israel. A number of the rabbis throughout the community today developed from that learning program.



Rabbi Moshe Shamah

In 1973 a most pressing concern became the need for a community high school. Rabbi Shamah, assisted by Rabbi Sam Kassin and Rabbi Ronald Barry, responded to the need and devoted themselves to establishing Sephardic High School. In its twenty years, it created a generation of committed community members and leaders. In Chief Rabbi Shaul Kassin’s words, “Sephardic High School saved the community.”

When that torch was passed off to Magen David High School, Sephardic Institute turned to other pressing needs. Rabbi Barry spearheaded the drive to

build perhaps the most halakhically acceptable urban *erub* in the world. For the past fifteen years, tens of thousands of community members of all ages, the elderly, and the infirmed, have enhanced their joy and spirit of Shabbat like never before due to the *erub*.

The Frieda Kassin Mikveh on Kings Highway, which was built and continues to be operated by Sephardic, provides a dignified, hassle-free, and uplifting experience for over one

thousand women every month.

When Carvel on the corner of Kings Highway and East 3rd Street closed, Sephardic Institute bought the land for its future growth but later sold it to Ahi Ezer when they felt it was an ideal location for their senior center. Despite the appreciation in value, Rabbi Shamah considered them as community partners and insisted it be sold to them without profit despite significant appreciation in value. The same is true for the land upon which Congregation Bnei Yishak is built. The synagogues in Allenhurst, Elberon, and Mikdash Eliyahu all trace their roots back to Sephardic.

Fifteen years ago, inspired by Sephardic Institute, I was pleased to have the opportunity to lead in the establishment and running of Merkaz Moreshet Yisrael. We have provided special community-wide classes, public lectures, and college accredited courses. For several years, we spearheaded a Yom Haasmaut event in the Sephardic Community Center that brought together thirteen congregations to celebrate together. Merkaz continues to run www.teachtorah.org, which hosts hundreds of lesson plans for high school Tanakh teachers. These curricula are being used by dozens of teachers in schools around the world to raise the level of Jewish education everywhere. We completed lessons for Megilat Esther last year, Melakhim Alef last month, and are currently working on Melakhim Bet.

The website pizmonim.org was another offshoot of Sephardic Institute and Merkaz Moreshet Yisrael, which continues to host the site. David M. Betesh DMD has gathered a storehouse of the entirety of our liturgical tradition - pizmonim, taamim, maqamat by our community

Hazzanim including a studio recording of the entire Torah by our Hazan Abe Zami. The site has received nearly 450,000 visitors since it has opened and is an essential resource for students throughout the community and the world.

Tebah Educational Services, another amazing success, also began in Sephardic under the leadership of Morris and Rabbi Nathan Dweck. It has published over 20 works and its edition of Rabbi Shamah's Halakhic Guide of the Holidays have been distributed to 65 Jewish organizations.

Above all this stands Rabbi Shamah's crowning achievement – *Recalling the Covenant*. Every page offers a goldmine of newly uncovered insights and solutions to textual, philosophical, and moral questions. It is a trustworthy

guide for any intelligent and sensitive reader to appreciate the inspiration and continuing relevance of the Torah. Professor Yaakov Elman recently told me that this is the single most significant contribution to Jewish scholarship in our generation.

The programs and achievements of our synagogue over the past decades are too numerous to list except to note that we are also a thriving congregation providing pastoral care, classes and minyanim every

day. Our youth minyan is a pioneer in teaching children maqam, pizmonim and reading the Torah each week. Our Hayil minyan has had instance success with our young professionals. We are at the cutting edge in realizing the often untapped potential in our talented youth and other synagogues look to our minyanim as models for how to succeed.

You might say that Sephardic is to the community what

Continued on page 16

Join us as we celebrate the
Jubilee Anniversary of
SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE
with a gala dinner on
APRIL 19, 2018

Continued from page 15

the Apple iPhone was to flip phones. Think about where this community would have been without Sephardic Institute and Synagogue's activities over the past 50 years. Now think about what the next 5, 10 and 50 years can bring as we continue to educate and inspire. We will not rest on past achievements because there is so much more to do. Right now, members of this synagogue together with our partners are working on solutions to the agunah problem, improving education in our yeshivot, and helping to solve the tuition crisis. We are thinking deeply about engaging millennials, developing future educators and leaders, and increasing our own spiritual and communal commitments. We should all feel proud to be part of this congregation under the leadership of our Hakham, Rabbi Moshe Shamah.

It is therefore my pleasure to invite the entire community to join us as we celebrate the Jubilee Anniversary of Sephardic Synagogue with a gala dinner on April 19, 2018. We are now kicking off a major fundraising campaign that will culminate in a dinner journal. With these funds we will be able to continue the legacy that Rabbi Shamah and Rabbi Barry have created. We have plans to completely renovate the basement, to refurbish the lobby, the staircases

and the outdoor façade, and also to add a fourth floor to accommodate a high school minyan and other activities. We ask you for your generous support so that we can expand and beautify not only our physical building but also to build upon our original mission with an advanced learning program, a fellowship program, and many other initiatives to deliver an elevated level of services to our wonderful kahal as well as to the Jewish community at large.

At Sephardic we don't just play defense; we are focused not only on where the puck is now – we are tracking where it is going so that, together with your support, we can meet new challenges and realize a vision of growth and success for the future.



Rabbi Dr. Hidary is an associate Rabbi at the Sephardic Synagogue.

Check out the SCA Website and Social Media:

WWW.SCAUPDATES.ORG



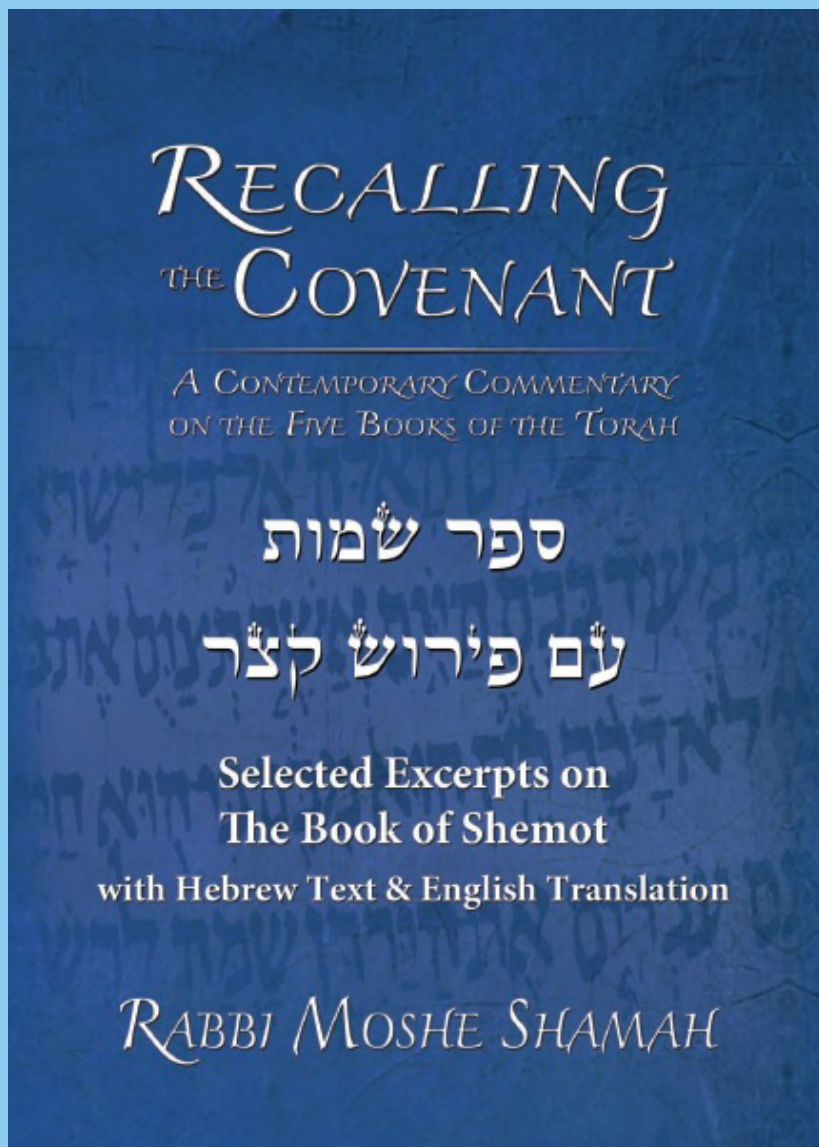
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RECALLING THE COVENANT: HUMASH SHEMOT

Tebah Educational Services is excited to announce the recent publication of *Recalling the Covenant: Humash Shemot (Synagogue Edition)*. This Humash, which includes the Torah readings and *haftarot* with English translation, is comprised of excerpts from Rabbi Moshe Shamah's *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary Commentary on the Five Books of the Torah* (Ktav, 2015). Some of the rabbi's comments were modified to fit the nature of the publication. Commentary from the classical *mefarshim*, including Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, etc., were included where deemed necessary.

Rabbi Shamah's commentary, *Recalling the Covenant*, was the result of an extensive study of the traditional interpretations of the Torah, together with analysis of modern research related to the numerous subjects discussed. It is a close and careful reading of the Five Books of the Torah according to their plain sense (*peshat*). *Peshat* in this case includes meaningful acknowledgement of intertextual associations, explanations of what appear to be intentional quirks in wording or syntax, as well as employment of other literary techniques.

We would like to personally thank Eddie Mishaan for all the countless hours he spent towards making this project a reality.



The Humash can be seen in various community synagogues.
Anyone who wants copies either for their Synagogue
or to purchase a personal copy/copies (\$20/copy), can contact:

Rabbi Nathan Dweck
Executive Director
Tebah Educational Services
nathan@tebah.org

HOMELANDS ART SHOW MAKES AN IMPACT

Mrs. Lenore Mizrahi-Cohen

Every two years, during October and November, a unique art festival takes place in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Biennale is the world's only showcase of contemporary Jewish art. People from all over the world participate and come to see the shows, attend performances and lectures, and engage with the full spectrum of Jewish ideas through the arts. During this year's Biennale, the Sephardic community participated by contributing a show called "Homelands".

"Homelands" represented the work of 14 different artists, each using their work to reflect on the watershed moment of the displacement of their communities of origin. Artists hailed from the US, Israel and Australia, and represented 6 different communities of Jews from Islamic lands. The effort was supported largely by the SCA, JIMENA and the ASF, all three groups dedicated to the preservation and celebration of Sephardic/Mizrahi heritage and culture.

The show opened to great acclaim on October 15th, along with 25 other shows participating in the festival. The opening event drew a crowd of over 400 attendees, who were not only impressed with the scope and level of professionalism shown in the artwork, but in many cases were also gratified to see this subject matter represented and given it's due as part of the wider conversation about contemporary Jewish issues. When the Jews of Islamic lands were uprooted from their homes over the last century, what effect did this have on individuals? On the community and their culture as a whole? The artists of "Homelands" were uniquely poised to examine these questions, as they are all either displaced persons or their descendants. Israeli society has traditionally not shined a spotlight on these important issues, and this is beginning to shift as people realize what a large role these stories played in the shaping of modern Jewish History. Homelands contributed an important voice to this continuing dialogue.

Indeed, for many, these events are very much a part of living memory. There were many attendees who were

excited to see, for example, a painting by artist Camille Fox which depicted a wedding scene in front of the famed Eliyahu Hanabi synagogue in Alexandria, Egypt, where many of them were married themselves. Artist Shy Abady, whose family emigrated to Israel from Syria, highlighted the shared cultural history of Muslim and Jewish Arabs. His artwork "Racial Profiling" spoke to the way in which these two communities resemble each other physically, which leads to his frequently being stopped and questioned at airports due to his own appearance and family name. Another special highlight of the exhibition was the catalog, which features the work of each participating artist as well as several essays contributed by leading professors and writers in this field. The essays as well explored the question of what it means to be a person living a dual cultural reality, and how their Middle Eastern heritage affects the way they see themselves in their new countries.

As part of the festival's week of closing events, a gallery talk was held at the show on November 10th. Attendees were interested to learn about the motivations of the artists, their drive to create the works in accordance with their childhood, tradition and the atmosphere at home. Through a lecture given by the show's curator, Meirav Balas, they learned about the framework of the exhibition, the unique point of view of first, second, third generation of Jews that left their homeland, and how this was reflected in the artworks. Neta Elkayam, Lida Sharet Massad and Shy Abady, three participating artists, each spoke about their home and family, and what made them research their family history, to start asking these questions. They highlighted especially the disconnect felt by their generation, about what's left for them from this homeland after their predecessors worked so hard to break from the past. Abady emphasized the positive aspects of the relationship between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East and the importance of the Arabic language, shared for generations by Arabs and Mizrahi Jews.

"Homelands" was covered by several major news outlets like Al Monitor, which is distributed throughout

Arabic speaking countries, and I24, a news station which broadcasts in Israel and the US. Now that the Biennale has come to a close, we are proud to say that the show has made an impact on viewers around the world. We are likewise proud to have supported the careers of many community artists as they continue on their journeys of reflecting on these questions and raising awareness about their importance to the arc of Jewish history and contemporary reality.

Mrs. Cohen is a Brooklyn based artist as well as the creator and producer of Homelands. She would particularly like to thank the many individuals in the Syrian community who supported Homelands and helped make it a reality. She is currently engaged in several projects using Arabic calligraphy, Jewish history and the Bible; view her work and the Homelands catalog at www.LenoreCohen.com.



The Homelands reception gala in Jerusalem



JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

MAIMONIDES 13 PRINCIPLES: 6 & 7 PROPHECY AND MOSHE RABENU

Rabbi Harold Sutton, Mr. Murray Mizrahi

The Following series examines the 13 normative principles of Judaism formulated by Maimonides. The full text of all 13 principles can be found in Maimonides commentary to the Mishnah, in his introduction to the 10th chapter of Maskhet Sanhedrin-Perek Heleq, which discusses Olam Habah. This article will focus on the sixth and seventh principles- Prophecy and the unique prophecy of Moshe Rabenu.

1. The existence of the Creator
2. G-d's absolute and unparalleled unity
3. G-d's noncorporeality
4. G-d's eternity.
5. The exclusive worship of G-d
6. The existence of prophecy
7. The unique prophecy of Moses
8. The divine origin of the Torah
9. The immutability of the Torah & Mitzvot
10. Divine omniscience and providence
11. Reward and retribution
12. The Messiah and the messianic era
13. The Resurrection of the dead

The Sixth Principle: Prophecy

הנבואה. והוא שידע אדם, שזה מין האדם ימצא בהם בעלי טבעים ממידות מעולות מאוד ושלמות גדולה, ונפשותיהם נכונות עד שהן מקבלות צורת השכל אחד. כן ידבק אותו השכל האנושי בשכל הפועל, ונאצל ממנו עליו אצילות נכבד. ואלה הם הנביאים. וזו היא הנבואה וזו עניינה. וביאור יסוד זה על בוריו יאריך מאוד, ואין כוונתנו להביא מופת על כל יסוד מהם. וביאור מציאות השגתו, לפי שזה הוא כלל החכמה כולם. אבל אזכרה

דרך ספור בלבד. ומקראי התורה מעידים על נבואת נביאים הרבה:

Maimonides describes that certain people are born with different dispositions than others. One characteristic set can be the traits applicable to prophecy. By perfecting their understanding of the human mind (*Surat Hasekhel*) these individuals have the potential to adhere to a higher power (*Sekhel Hapoel*) and achieve what we call prophecy. Maimonides records that he was in the process of writing a lengthy book on this subject (see below), however this text is unfortunately not known to us today.

The Seventh Principle

נבואת משה רבנו ע"ה. והוא שנאמין כי הוא אביהם של כל הנביאים אשר היו מלפניו ואשר קמו מאחריו, כולם הם תחתיו במעלה. והוא היה הנבחר מכל מין האדם אשר השיג מידעתו יתברך יותר מכל מה שהשיג או ישיג שום אדם שנמצא או שימצא. וכי הוא עליו השלום הגיע התעלותו מן האנושות עד המעלה המלאכותית, ונכלל במעלת המלאכים, לא נשאר מסך שלא קרעו ונכנס ממנו. ולא מנעו מונע גופני, ולא נתערב לו שום חסרון בין רב למעט, ונתבטלו ממנו הכוחות הדמיונות והחושות וההשגות, ונבדל כוחו המתעורר המשתוקק, ונשאר שכל בלבד. ועל העניין הזה נאמר עליו שהיה מדבר עם השם יתברך בלא אמצעיות מן המלאכים.

רצוני היה לבאר זה העניין הנפלא, ולפתוח המנעול ממקראות התורה, ולפרש טעם פה אל פה וכל הפסוק בזולתו מעניינו, לולא שראיתי שאלה העניינים יצטרכו לראיות רבות מאוד, והיינו צריכים להצעות רבות והקדמות ומשלים, ושנבאר בתחילה מציאות המלאכים ושינוי מעלותיהן מן הבורא השם יתברך, ושנבאר הנפש וכל כוחותיה, ויתרחב העיגול עד שנדבר בצורות שזכרו הנביאים שראוי לבורא ולמלאכים. ויכנס בזה שיעור קומה ועניינו, ולא יספיק בעניין זה לבדו, ואפילו יהיה מקוצר בתכלית הקיצור, מאד דפים. ולפיכך אניה אותו למקומו: אם בספר הדרשות שייעדתי לחברו, או בספר הנבואה שאני מתעסק בו, או בספר שאחבר אותו בפירושי אלו היסודות.

ואחזור לכוונת זה היסוד השביעי, ואומר שנבואת משה רבנו ע"ה נבדלת

מנבואת כל הנביאים בארבעה דברים.

הראשון כי איזה נביא שהיה לא דיבר לו השם יתברך אלא על ידי אמצעי, ומשה בלא אמצעי שנאמר פה אל פה אדבר בו.

והעניין השני כי כל נביא לא תבוא לו הנבואה אלא כשהוא ישן, כמו שאמר במקומות "בחלום הלילה בחזיון לילה" ורבים מעניין זה, או ביום אחר שתיפול תרדמה על האדם בעניין שנתבטלו ממנו כל הרגשותיו, ונשאר מחשבתו פנויה כעניין חלום, ועניין זה נקרא "מחזה" ו"מראה", ועליו נאמר במראות אלוקים. ומשה יבוא עליו הדיבור ביום, והוא עומד בין שני הכרובים, כמו שיעידו השם יתברך "ונועדתי לך שם". ואמר השם יתברך "אם יהיה נביאכם וגו' לא כן עבדי משה פה אל פה אדבר בו" וגו'.

העניין השלישי כי הנביא כשתבוא אליו הנבואה, ואע"פ שהוא במראה וע"י מלאך, יחלשו כוחותיו ויתקלקל בניינו ויגיע לו מורא גדול מאוד, כמעט שתצא רוחו ממנו. כמו שאמר בדניאל, כשידבר גבריאל עמו במראה, אמר "ולא נשאר בי כח והודי נהפך עלי למשחית ולא עצרתי כח". ואומר "אני הייתי נרדם על פני ופני ארצה", ואומר במראה "נהפכו עלי צירי". ומשה ע"ה לא היה כן, אבל יבא אליו הדיבור ולא ישיגוהו רתת ורעדה בשום פנים, כמו שנאמר "ודבר ה' אל משה פנים אל פנים כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו", כלומר: כמו שלא יארע לאדם חרדה מדיבור חברו, כן היה הוא משה עליו השלום, לא היה חרד מן הדיבור, ואע"פ שהוא היה פנים בפנים. וזה לחוזק דבקותו בשכל כמו שזכרנו.

והעניין הרביעי כי כל הנביאים לא תנוח עליהם רוח הנבואה ברצונם, אלא ברצון השם יתברך, שיודיע לו הדבר בנבואה, ויעמוד עד שינבא או אחר ימים או אחר חודשים, או שלא יודיעו בשום פנים. וכבר היו מהם כיתות שהיו מכינין עצמן ומזככין מחשבותם, כמו שעשה אלישע, כמו שכתוב (מלכים ב ג) "ועתה קחו לי מגנן", ובאה לו הנבואה. ואינו מן ההכרחי שינבא בעת שיכווין לזה. ומשה רבנו ע"ה, בכל עת שירצה אומר (במדבר ט) "עמדו ואשמעה מה יצוה ה' לכם". ונאמר (ויקרא טז) "דבר אל אהרן אחיך ואל יבוא בכל עת אל הקודש", אמרו חז"ל "אהרן בכל יבוא, ואין משה בכל יבוא":

Already explaining that prophecy is a natural and real mechanism in the 7th principle, the 8th principle highlights the prophecy of Moshe Rabenu. Maimonides believed that Moses attained the highest level of prophecy and was unique for four reasons:

1. All of the other prophets communicated through an intermediary, but Moses spoke directly to the Creator.
2. Moses was the only one to receive prophecy while fully alert and awake. The other prophets only received their prophecy while dreaming or semi-

lucid state.

3. When receiving prophecy, the reaction was one of physical weakness, convulsions to the point of near death. This was not so with Moses as he was able to talk freely as a routine conversation.
4. Except for Moses, the other prophets needed to wait until the received prophecy. Moses was unique in this respect as well, in that he was able to prophesize and communicate on demand.



Monument of Maimonides in Córdoba

Reviewing the unique nature of Moshe Rabenu's Prophecy and that prophecy itself exists, Maimonides is able to move forward to his next principles which will be covered in a future article. In the next article we will review Maimonides' eighth and ninth principles; the divine in the series- origin of the Torah and eternal requirement of Mivvot.



SHABBAT ZAKHOR

SHABBAT TABLE TALKS: SHABBAT ZAKHOR¹

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Eradicating Evil

Real evil exists in the world, and it must be rooted out completely. Although this idea has become popular again during the war against terrorism, it has always been a part of the Torah. How can we eradicate evil? How do we define evil? Who does the defining? These are all questions that can confuse the application of this value. This lesson will explore some of these issues.

Background:

As a fulfillment of the Torah's commandment to "remember what Amaleq did to you" and in anticipation of Purim, we read one of the sections of the Torah where the Torah describes the battle against Amaleq. According to

Amaleq from under heaven. Do not forget!

Analysis:

Samuel the prophet defined the term "blotting out the memory of Amaleq" to mean: "Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1 Samuel 15:3). This stands as a most important commandment. The section begins with the commandment to "remember," and ends with the order "don't forget." Yet the value of eradicating evil and its connection to Perashat "Zakhor" (the opening Hebrew word of the above section) is somewhat difficult to teach. Of course, everyone agrees that we should eradicate evil. However, it is hard to understand the Torah's commandments to kill every man, woman and infant of

"The evil culture must be eradicated, either by destroying the people that hold fast to this culture of evil, or by having them change their beliefs and culture."

most Halakhic authorities, this is the only Torah reading of the year that is *de'oraita* (commanded by the Torah).

Text: Debarim 25:17-19 (NJPS)

Remember what Amaleq did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt—how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of

Amaleq. In the period of the war against terrorism that we are presently in, it is somewhat easier to understand it, but not completely. Rambam has mitigated the absoluteness of this law when it comes to practice. In addition, the Torah has limited the practical application of the law to only the nation of Amaleq. Our Rabbinic tradition has already decided that it is impossible, after the Assyrian empire's mixing up the various nations, to identify any one nation as Amaleq. Still the commandment stands and can be applied towards evil in general. Evil must be eradicated.

Discussion:

What did Amaleq do? (This nation attacked Bene Yisrael

¹ The following is reprinted from Rabbi Ralph Tawil's *Shabbat-Table Talks for Shabbat Zakhor*.

when they left Egypt. Amaleq attacked the stragglers—the weak and defenseless).

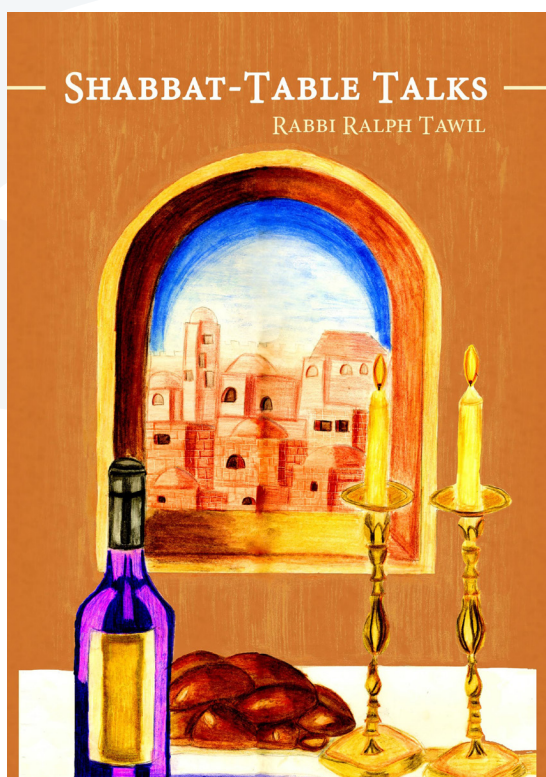
Why is that so bad? (The Torah describes Amaleq as “not fearing God” and as “attacking the stragglers.” These traits are destructive to society. Society is based on fearing God, and not attacking those that are weak. The honesty and integrity and the protection of the weak that define a God-fearing society are essential to have in a cohesive society. Amaleq’s behavior is destructive to society; therefore it must be eradicated.)

How can it be right to kill even Amaleq’s infants? After all, they are innocent? (This question must be addressed, even though there is hardly a very satisfactory answer for it. This is a seeming clash between our sense of right and wrong and the Torah’s commandment—at least, in the way that Samuel the prophet has defined it. What the Torah is teaching is that some nations are so evil, that every person who identifies with that nation must be destroyed. Perhaps, if anyone of that nation is left alive, the evil culture of that nation will resurface and create more problems in the future. We must be aware that the torah’s commandment of the total eradication of a nation only applies to the nation of Amaleq, which does not exist today.)

Rambam, when discussing the Torah laws pertaining to war, explained that the law of blotting out the memory of Amaleq only applies if they have not made peace with Bene Yisrael, and have not accepted upon themselves the seven Noahide laws. If they have, then Bene Yisrael is not to go to war against them. From this we could learn that if Amaleq accepted these conditions they have changed their basic culture and are no longer targets for annihilation. The evil culture must be eradicated, either by destroying the people that hold fast to this culture of evil, or by having them change their beliefs and culture. The seven Noahide laws contain

within them: respect for God (not to curse God) and the setting up of a legal justice system. An Amaleq nation that accepts these conditions is essentially not Amaleq culturally and therefore not slated for annihilation.

If the nation of Amaleq doesn’t exist today, how are we supposed to understand this misvah? (We could understand it as talking about eradicating all evil—not only by killing, but also by educating. Evil exists in the form of taking advantage of the weak, lying, cheating, and stealing. We must develop our society and educate it to the point where these practices are eliminated.)



Evil also exists today in the form of terrorism. Why is terrorism evil? (Because its victims are innocent and defenseless.) Terrorism and those who support it and incite towards it must be eradicated. Yielding to the terrorist’s demands is not the way to accomplish this. Giving in to the demands of terrorists invites more demands and further terrorism. Eradicating terrorism can only be done by an all-out war against terrorists until the people who remain renounce terrorism. It does not require killing of every person, but only those people who commit or support terrorism and those that incite terrorism.

We pray to Hashem that the United States will be successful in eradicating world-wide terrorism, so that we can work together peacefully towards resolving the many problems that face us.



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



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

A DIVINE TAP ON THE SHOULDER: BETWEEN YOSEPH AND ESTHER¹

Mr. Michael Franco

Have you ever read the Torah and thought, “How amazing it must have been to have God communicating through prophecy! But, you know, we don’t have any prophets today. How can God expect me to live a life of faith if he never talks to me?” Is this true? Is God utterly silent in a prophet-free age? Or does God actually communicate with us, even now? By this, I do not mean feeling inspired; I mean real, undeniable communication.

Most people are aware that *Megillat Esther* is the only book in *Tanakh* that lacks God’s direct involvement, even lacking a single mention of His name. Moreover, an article has been penned about the numerous intertextual links between the Yoseph saga and the epic of Esther, showing that the two stories are intimately intertwined. Therefore, rather than focus on these intertexts, it is of great importance to take a closer look at the Yoseph narrative. Once the reader has gained insight into the deeper message of that story, he/she will have learned the necessary tools to apply a similar message to the story of Esther.

The most basic thematic link between the story of Esther and that of Yoseph can be found in a comparison of specific key verses. In what is probably the most well-known speech in the entire *megillah*, we read the impassioned words of Mordekhai to Esther after learning of the new decree against the Jewish People:

אל-תדמי בנפשך, להמלט בית-המלך מכל-היהודים כי אם-החרש
תחרישי, בעת הזאת--רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר,
ואת בית-אביך תאבדו; ומי יודע--אם-לעת קזאת, הגעת למלכות

“Do not think to yourself that you will be able to escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish; and who knows whether you have not come to royal

estate for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13,14)

In a similar display of great personal *bitahon*, or personal trust in the Almighty, we read the poignant words of Yoseph Hassaddeeq after revealing his true identity to his brothers:

ועתה, לא-אתם שלחתם אתי הנה, כי, האלהים; וישמיני לָאֵב
לפרעה, ולאדון לכל-ביתו, ומשל, בכל-ארץ מצרים.

“So now it was not you that sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:8)

In both of these accounts, the reader gets the sense that both Mordekhai and Yoseph were completely sure that God is guiding the events of history. In order to fully fathom the source of this profound sense of God’s involvement, let us take a deeper look into the chronicle of Yoseph.

Whenever analyzing prophetic writing, especially in the Torah proper, it is of supreme importance to pay close attention to keywords and discrepancies in the text. In *Parashat Vayyiggash*, we read of the dreams of Pharaoh, which begin a series of fortuitous events that eventually culminate in the salvation of the children of Israel. However, a certain oddity arises at one point in the text.

When informing the reader of Yoseph being summoned and taken out of jail to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh, the text reads: וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֵהוּ מִן-הַבּוֹר, calling the jail a “pit.” However, a couple of chapters earlier, the text had stated: וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיְתִנֵּהוּ אֶל-בֵּית הַסֵּהר, calling the jail by a different name. Is this really significant? Can’t these just be synonyms? To the trained reader who is familiar with the text, this change could not be more significant. One is prompted, with this change, to immediately recall the event in which Yoseph was thrown by his brothers into a different pit -- in a place called Dotan. It’s almost as though the Torah

¹ Much of the forthcoming material is inspired by the work of Rabbi David Fohrman.

is *intentionally blurring the lines* between this part of the Yoseph saga and that earlier stage.

In order to know if we're onto something, there must be other textual details that connect between this stage of Yoseph's life and that earlier stage. Not only are there additional details, but they manifest in a chiastic, or ABC-CBA fashion:

	Yoseph's Ascent out of the Pit	Yoseph's Descent into the Pit	
G'	וַיֵּצֵאוּ מִן־הַבּוֹר	וַיִּשְׁלְכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבְּרָרָה	G
F'	וַיַּגְלֵחַ וַיַּחְלֵף שְׂמֻלְתָּיו	וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף אֶת־כְּתָנָתוֹ	F
E'	וַיָּבֹא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה	וַיְהִי, כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָחִיו	E
D'	וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם חֲלֻמֹּתַי	הִנֵּה חֲלֻמֹּתַי חֲלוֹם	D
C'	וַתַּרְעִינָה בָּאָחוּ	הָיָה רָעָה אֶת־אָחִיו בְּצֹאן	C
B'	בְּרִיאֹת בֶּשֶׂר וַיִּפֹּת תֹּאֵר	וַרְחֵל הָיְתָה יִפְת־תֹּאֵר וַיִּפֹּת מֶרְאָה	B
A'	וַרְקוֹת בֶּשֶׂר	וַעֲנִי לֹאֵה רַכּוֹת	A

In its great sophistication and wisdom, the Torah uses this literary device to show the reader the *complete reversal* occurring in the life of Yoseph. (F') After being taken out of the pit, Yoseph dons new royal clothes, (F) whereas he was stripped of his *כְּתָנֹת* (clothes of royalty, as seen in the story of Amnon and Tamar) before being tossed into the pit by his brothers. (E') The Torah uses the same words to describe Yoseph being summoned to Pharaoh, *who desperately wants Yoseph to hear his dreams*, (E) as it does to portray Yoseph leaving his father and greeting his brothers, *who did not want to hear his dreams at all*. (D') Next, we read that Pharaoh informs Yoseph *חֲלוֹם חֲלֻמֹּתַי*, (D) opposite Joseph's statement to his brothers *חֲלוֹם חֲלֻמֹּתַי*. This is especially amazing, as the *words themselves are inverted and thus chiastic*. (C') Further still, Pharaoh tells Yoseph of the healthy cows in his dream grazing, (C) using *almost identical language* that had described Joseph shepherding with his brothers (*בָּאָחוּ/אָחִיו*). (B') Next, the description of the healthy cows uses the *same adjective* (B) as was used to describe Rachel and Yoseph earlier in Genesis. Finally, (A') Pharaoh's depiction of the skinny cows uses (A) *a homophone that parallels the only description of Leah's appearance in the Torah*.

Now that we've seen all this, what can it all mean? In fact,

within this chiasm lies the key to understanding how Yoseph figured out the interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh. As he was going through the initial events after being taken out of the pit, he must have been thinking how incredibly and completely these occurrences were the reversal of the events that led up to his being thrown into the pit by his brothers. But the real insights began when he heard Pharaoh's description of the cows in his dream. (*Note that Yoseph and Pharaoh spoke in Egyptian, but the Torah utilizes this literary device to give us a glimpse into Yoseph's inner thoughts*). As noted, the fat cows symbolized the family of Rachel, while the skinny cows represented that of Leah. When Yoseph heard of the consumption of the former by the latter, the Torah wants us, the readers, to recall Jacob's statement upon seeing his son's cloak: *חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהּ*. Yoseph, like the cows, was gone without a trace: *וְלֹא נֹדַע בִּי*. *בָּאוּ אֶל־קָרְבָּנָה*. However, he realized that if indeed these were representative of the respective families, the numbers were off: *there should have been 2 fat and 6 skinny cows, not 7 and 7*. It was at that moment that Yoseph realized that there were indeed a 7 and 7 that related to Leah and Rachel -- the *amount of years his father worked for each of them!* He also gathered, from the second dream, that Egypt's agriculture was of central importance, especially for Pharaoh. He then recalled that he, too, had a dream about wheat. These were the keys to unlocking the dreams of Pharaoh.

Years later, when Yoseph's brothers reenter the scene, the text states, *וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמֹּת, אֲשֶׁר חָלֵם לָהֶם*, at which point he realized that he and his brothers had misunderstood his own dreams all this time. His first dream actually symbolized his brothers' financial dependence upon him, not his rulership over them. Likewise, his second dream did not mean that he was to rule over his family; as he learned from his other experiences interpreting, numbers signify years, and the 13 celestial bodies that bowed to him thus signified the amount of time until the entire known world would become dependent upon him.

With all of this in mind, what can we say about God speaking to us today? From the Yoseph saga, it seems that God still communicates with us, even without the medium of direct prophecy. It is just a matter of being attuned to unique patterns in our personal lives, experiences that only we can have.

When Mordekhai witnessed his stepdaughter arise to

Continued from page 25

royalty, precisely prior to a grave decree against the Jews, he must have realized this was no coincidence. The greatness of Mordekhai, like Yoseph, is that he had the courage not just to notice the hand of the Almighty in contemporary events, but to take decisive action, becoming a partner with God in guiding the events of history.

However, it is of great import to keep in mind that it was the impetuous act of the brothers of Yoseph jumping to conclusions about the meaning of their young brother's dreams that caused their entire problematic situation in the first place! Therefore, the Torah seems to be making a point of great subtlety and nuance: when we experience these 'taps on the shoulder' from the Almighty, rather than attempt to understand (or declare) the fullness of their meaning, simply take solace in the knowledge that in these daily struggles, we are not alone.

In 1905, a young Jewish man named Edward met another young man named Harry in downtown Missouri. In 1917 they reacquainted and went into business together. After some time, they each went their separate ways. Incredibly, Harry went on to become the president of the United States precisely when the Jewish People were reeling from the worst tragedy in their history and were on the verge of establishing a state of their very own. However, President Truman was becoming increasingly irritated by Zionist lobbyists, so he ordered that he would no longer meet with Zionist spokesmen. Knowing that he could not let the unique opportunity pass, Eddie

Jacobson took action. President Truman agreed to meet with Eddie due to their old friendship. When he arrived at the Oval Office, Eddie made an impassioned plea to his old buddy: "Your hero is Andrew Jackson. I have a hero too. He's the greatest Jew alive. I'm talking about Chaim Weizmann. He's an old man and very sick, and he has traveled thousands of miles to see you. And now you're putting him off. This isn't like you, Harry." President Truman was convinced; against the urging of all of his advisors, he met with Chaim Weizmann. After a few hours, the president was convinced yet again: he would have the United States become the first country to formally recognize the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.

The greatness of Yoseph, Esther, and Mordekhai is also the greatness of Eddie Jacobson. Let us all take a lesson from these incredible heroes, ancient and modern. Each and every one of us is called upon by God Himself, not just to hear His divine call, but to partner with Him in realizing our personal destinies, bringing the world towards greatness, one divine tap at a time.



Mr. Franco was the 2016 Brooklyn College Salutatorian. He plans on attending medical school after completing a year of study in Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Maale Adumim, Israel.



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SHABBAT TESSAVE AND ZAKHOR

For **Shabbat Tessave** (Exodus 27:20- 30:10), the morning prayers are conducted in Maqam SIGAH according to all Aleppo sources. The perasha opens with the commandment to take olive oil and kindle the eternal light (*Ner Tamid*). There is a connection between the Torah and light; as it states in Proverbs 6:23, "*Ki Ner Missvah VeTorah Ohr*." SIGAH relates to the Torah, because it is the maqam applied for the melody of chanting the Torah. HAZZANUT: Nishmat: *Yebiun Sefatai Shirah* (discusses the light of the Menora). This song is also appropriate for Shabbat Miqes (Shabbat Hanukka), and Shabbat Behaalotekha.

This year, Shabbat Tessave is also **Shabbat Zakhor**, the Shabbat prior to Purim. Coincidentally, SIGAH is also the maqam appropriate for Shabbat Zakhor (whether or not it falls on Shabbat Tessave). There are a number of explanations for this. A practical explanation to this is because the vast majority of the pizmonim for Purim are in this maqam. A secondary explanation of how SIGAH relates to Purim is because in the days of Mordekhai, the Jews repented and returned to the Torah (Talmud Shabbat 88a). In addition, when it says in Esther 8:16 that the Jews had "light", this is specifically alluding to the light of the Torah.

To commemorate this time, a very unique Hazzanut list, as documented by Hakham Moshe Ashear (1877-1940), has been traditionally used by the cantors of our community for the Shabbat morning prayers. Most, if not all, of these melodies can be found of www.pizmonim.com.

NISHMAT: Yebiun Sefatai Shira (SUHV, Red pizmonim book, page 472a)

SHAVAT ANIYIM: El Ose Neqama (page 462)

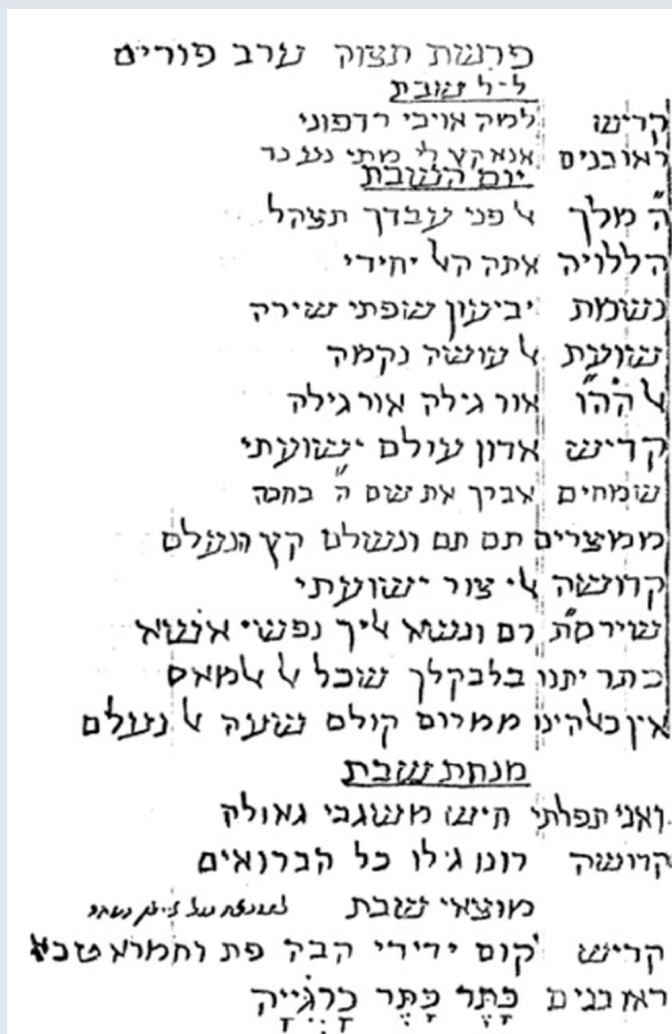
EL HAHODAOT: Or Gila (page 464)

QADDISH: Adon Olam Yeshuati (not in red book)

SEMEHIM: Abarekh Et Shem Hashem (page 459)

MIMISRAYIM: Tam Venishlam (page 465)

NAQDISHAKH: Eli Sur Yeshuati (page 460)



Handwritten Hazzanut notes of Hakham Moshe Ashear for Shabbat Zakhor 1939.



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Rabbi Alex Israel teaches at Yeshivat Eretz Hatzvi and at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies where he is Director of Community Education and the Summer Program. An active writer, he also contributes regularly to Yeshivat Har Etzion's Virtual Beit Midrash. Born and raised in London, Rabbi Israel made aliyah in 1991 and gained rabbinic ordination from the Israeli Chief Rabbinate following several years of study at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Rabbi Israel holds degrees from London School of Economics, London's Institute of Education, and Bar Ilan University.

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