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# קול הקהל



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IN HONOR OF LOUIS AND LORRAINE SHAMIE

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Editor in Chief: Murray J. Mizrachi

Editorial Board: Rabbi Nathan Dweck, Mr. Joseph Mosseri,

Rabbi Albert Setton, Rabbi Harold Sutton

Design: Nina Lubin, Lenore Cohen

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# SIMHAT TORAH

## ASSEMBLED AS ONE

Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary

On the night of Simhat Torah of October 14, 1663, Samuel Pepys, a member of the British Parliament, visited the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in London. This God-fearing Christian tried his best to understand the rituals he witnessed and recorded his reactions in his detailed diary entry:

After dinner my wife and I [went] to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles [*talitot*], and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things [Torah scrolls] stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press [*aron*] to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle.

Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burdens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing. And in the end they had a prayer for the King, which they pronounced his name in Portugall; but the prayer, like the rest, in Hebrew.

But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting,

and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.



Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, London

It is unfortunate for Pepys that he did not visit the synagogue on a typical Shabbat to experience a more decorous, dignified and solemn service that would be more pleasing to this genteel church-goer's sober sensibilities. But we are lucky that Pepys' reaction led him to record for posterity a first-hand outsider's account of what seems like an enthusiastic and spirited celebration. Hardly a "burden," Pepys correctly surmises that everyone vied for a turn to carry the Torah scroll. The participants' declaration of allegiance to the king and their appreciation for having been allowed readmission into England only seven years earlier, only enhanced their zeal in expressing their fervent joy and primary devotion to the Torah.

This report from over three centuries ago is only a culmination of an evolving ceremony that has its roots from over three millennia ago. Even before there was a day called Simhat Torah, the Torah connected Sukkot with a large public gathering for the Torah in the misvah of *hakhel*:

Every seventh year, the year set for remission, on Sukkot, when all Israel comes to appear before YHVH your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel. Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere YHVH your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. (Devarim 31:10-12)

Rambam (Hilkhot Hagigah 3:6) considers this public reading as a reenactment of the experience of Har Sinai. Centuries later, Ezra the Scribe similarly read the Torah to “the entire people assembled as one man” (Nehemiah 8:1), again resembling the giving of the Torah at Sinai. We can therefore appreciate the Gemara that traces our practice to read the Torah every Shabbat morning and holiday to Moshe and the Shabbat afternoon and weekday readings to Ezra (Yerushalmi Megilah 4:1, 75a). The Babylonian Talmud (Megilah 31b) elaborates that Ezra instituted for the blessings and curses at the end of Devarim to be read before Rosh Hashanah in order to encourage the listeners to repent. Synagogues in Babylonia would accordingly read the last *parasha* of the Torah every year on the ninth day of the holiday, the second day of Shemini Aseret (Megilah 31a). The Rabbis appropriately chose the culmination of Sukkot, the Holiday of Eight – the number representing the berit between God and His nation – to complete the entire Humash, an achievement that engendered even more reason to rejoice.

The Geonim record dancing while reciting *piyyutim* for the Torah on this day, which then became known as Simhat Torah. During the 16th century, a more elaborate ceremony with seven circumambulations (aka *hakafot*) and special prayers became widespread. Different communities have composed a variety of *piyyutim*, tunes, and dances to express their joy, but they all have in common an affirmation of our love and devotion to the Torah’s study and fulfillment.

*“... we should feel ourselves again at Har Sinai receiving the Torah, studying it anew, and incorporating its teaching within our families.”*

This celebration, however, was not always as universally observed as it is today. From the time of the Talmud until the middle ages, Jews in the land of Israel divided the Torah into over 150 sections (*sedarim*) and thus completed the Torah every three or three and one-half years. They therefore had no set date for commemorating its completion, which differed from one synagogue to the next. Even Jews from Israel who settled in other lands continued this practice, as reported by the eyewitness account of the famous traveler and chronicler Benjamin of Tudela (12th cent.) upon visiting Egypt:

Two large synagogues are there, one belonging to the land of Israel and one belonging to the men of the land of Babylon. The synagogue of the men of the land of Israel is called Kenisat-al-Schamiyyin, and the synagogue of the men of Babylon is called Kenisat-al-Irakiyyin. Their usage with regard to the portions and sections of the law is not alike; for the men of Babylon are accustomed to read a portion every week, as is done in Spain, and is our custom, and to finish the law each year; while the men of Palestine do not do so but divide each portion into three sections and finish the law at the end of three years. The two communities, however, have an established custom to unite and pray together on the day of the Rejoicing of the Law, and on the day of the Giving of the Law.

Even though the Jews from Israel did not complete the Torah on Shemini Aseret, they nevertheless did not refrain from celebrating, but rather joined their Babylonian brethren to commemorate and enjoy the festivities in the Kenisat al-Irakiyyin. (Anything for a candy bag!) Indeed, throughout Jewish history, despite the many differences in practice and interpretation that developed between Jews of different countries, sects, denominations, and schools, the one thing that kept our nation together was the centrality of the text of Tanakh. Even if their explanations of how to translate it into halakha varied, the text was shared and

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held sacred by all. For that reason, Jews of different stripes and even Jews who did not complete the Humash in their synagogues annually, still joined together in gratitude for having received the Torah as Israel's precious inheritance.

The sense of unity engendered by Simhat Torah is more relevant and important today than ever before. We can feel this in a moving description by Harold Fenton of dancing on Simhat Torah in the newly reunified Jerusalem in 1967, exactly 50 years ago this holiday:

We almost charged down in front of the Western Wall, and at our head, all our *Sifre Torah*. In the large clearing danced students, professors, laborers, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, *Hasidim*, and the nonreligious. The headgear included dark tribly hats, tembel hats, knitted skullcaps, large hombergs, American straw, and knitted handkerchiefs. There at the Kotel we were all religiously happy, all rejoicing and felt, as suggested by Rav Yosha Ber Brisk, that not only should we have been rejoicing with the Torah, but that the Torah was rejoicing with us.

Our movements of the men in the clearing were

mirrored by women and girls on the surrounds and the square before the Kotel. Further back, Arabs watched us and smiled, shouting to us a "*Shalom*" as we passed, but this time they knew it was our *simhah* – by right and not by condescension. There had been the capture of Jerusalem in war; at Simhat Torah its capture in peace with the Torah entering the Old City at the end of singing legions.

As we gather every Shabbat to read the parasha, we should feel ourselves again at Har Sinai receiving the Torah, studying it anew, and incorporating its teaching within our families. If we accomplish that throughout the year, we will have good reason to join together and circle the Torah in the footsteps of the Cairo Jews in 1150, the London Jews in 1663, the Israeli Jews in 1967, and contemporary Jews around the world "assembled as one man."



*Rabbi Dr. Hidary is an Associate Rabbi in Sephardic Synagogue and Professor at Stern College.*



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# SHEMINI 'ASSERET

## SHEMINI 'ASSERET IN THE TORAH

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

The first thing to realize is that there is no festival named “*Shemini 'Asseret*,” in the Tanakh. The festival that occurs on the day following the seventh day of “*hag hassukkot*” (Lit. The pilgrimage festival of Booths) is not named in the two places that the Torah speaks about it. It is referred to as an “*asseret*,” which is not really a name but a generic description of a kind of day (see below for more on the meaning of “*asseret*”).

The festival that immediately follows the *sukkot* festival is referred to in the talmudic tradition as “*yom tob aharon shel hag*” (the concluding holiday of the festival) or “*shemini shel hag*” (the eighth day of the festival) all this while asserting that “*shemini, regel bifne 'assmo hu*” (“the eighth day as a pilgrimage festival unto itself”). The reference to the festival in the liturgy varies. The Sephardic tradition refers to the day as “*yom shemini hag 'asseret*.” The Ashkenazic tradition refers to the day as “*yom hashemini hag ha'asseret*.”<sup>1</sup> There is another tradition (nusach sfard) that refers to the day as, “*shemini 'asseret hehag*” (the eighth day, the solemn gathering of the festival).

In short, “*Shemini 'Asseret*” as the name of the festival that immediately follows *Sukkot* is a very late development. The name, however, does come from the Tanakh, even though it is not used as a name of the festival. We will now examine the verses where the festival is mentioned.

### The “Festival Following Sukkot” in the Torah

Although there are five places in the Torah that refer to the festivals, only two of them are “complete,” Leviticus 23 and

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the phrase “*beyyom shemini hag asseret hazzeh*” that occurs in the Sephardic liturgy is somewhat ambiguous. One possible translation is, “the eighth day of the festival, a solemn gathering.” This translation reflects the attested rabbinic usage of *shemini shel hag* (or treating it as a kind of *semichut*, *shemini hag*). The punctuation of the phrase according to this translation would be *shemini hag, 'asseret*. An alternative translation, “eighth day, a festival of solemn gathering,” (punctuating, “*beyom shemini, hag 'asseret hazzeh*”), refers to the day as “a festival of solemn gathering,” a name that does not appear in the rabbinic writings regarding this day. This is the meaning of the festival’s name in the more common Ashkenazic tradition (the addition of the definite articles resolves the ambiguity).

Numbers 28-29 (the other places, Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 34:18-24 and Deuteronomy 16:1-18, lack “*Shemini 'Asseret*” as well as Yom Kippur and what we call “Rosh Hashanah”<sup>2</sup>).

At the end of a list of the “appointed times of Hashem, which you are to proclaim to them (as) proclamations of holiness” (*mo'ade hashem asher tiqre'u otam miqra'e qodesh*), Leviticus 23 writes:

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day after this seventh New-Moon: the pilgrimage festival of Huts (*hag hasukkot*), for seven days, to Hashem. On the first day (is) a proclamation of holiness, any kind of servile work you are not to do. For seven days you are to bring-near a fire-offering to Hashem; on the eighth day, a proclamation of holiness shall there be for you, you are to bring-near a fire-offering to Hashem—it is (a day of) Restraint (*asseret hee*)—any kind of servile work you are not to do. (Leviticus 23:33-36; SB)

The festival is characterized by a separate “fire-offering” and by a prohibition of doing “servile work.” It is referred to as the eighth day following *Sukkot* but is clearly not part of the *sukkot* festival, which lasts only seven days.<sup>3</sup>

Numbers chapters 28 and 29 is concerned with the details of the sacrificial offerings on every day of the year. It begins with the daily sacrificial offering, continues with the offering to be brought on Shabbat and the New Moon and then describes the offerings to be brought on each of the festivals. The list ends with the festival on the “fifteenth day of the seventh month”

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 16 does in fact have an “*asseret*,” but it is the seventh day of Pesah, and not the eighth day of *Sukkot*. Although, all of these three Torah portions refer to Pesah (or “*hag hammasot*,” “feast of the unleavened bread”) as lasting seven days, only Deuteronomy 16 refers to *Sukkot* as lasting seven days. As stated above, there is no reference to the eighth day in Deuteronomy 16.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the day is referred to as the “eighth day” should not cause us to think of it as necessarily connected to the *hag* in any other way than numerically. For example, Leviticus 8:33-36 prescribes a period of seven days of their inauguration into the *mishkan* service. It is followed by an “eighth day” which is of a clearly different character.

(Sukkot), describing the offerings to be made on each of the seven days of the festival, as each day has a different number of animals offered. From the second day on, each of the days is introduced with “Now on the second (third, fourth, fifth, etc.) day...” The description of the eighth day is:

On the eighth day (*shemini*): Restraint (*‘asseret*) there is to be for you, any-kind of servile work you are not to do! You are to bring-near an offering-up, a fire-offering of soothing savor for Hashem: one bull, one ram, lambs a year in age seven, wholly-sound, their grain-gift as well as their poured-offerings, for (each) bull, for (each) ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the regulation, and one hairy-one as a hattat-offering, aside from the regular offering-up, its grain-gift and its poured offering. (Numbers 29:35-38; SB)

Although this day is called the “eighth day” here, it is also distinguished from the preceding days. Not only by the fact that the introduction to the day begins with the words “on the eighth day” (*“bayom hashemini”*) as opposed to “Now on the second (third, fourth) day” (*“ubayom hasheni”*), but by the break in the downward progression of the bulls offered on each of the days of sukкот. On the first day there were to be 13 bulls offered. On each subsequent day one less bull was offered so that on the seventh day there were 7 bulls offered. On the eighth day there was only one bull offered. This break in the progression along with the designation “*asseret*” indicates that the festival is not connected to the seven day *sukkot* festival (the holiday is listed as a seven-day festival in Numbers 29:12).

Incidentally, it is from this Torah portion that the contemporary name of the festival derives. Ignoring the punctuation of the verse (which derives from the meaning), the words “*shemini*” and “*asseret*” are adjacent to one another.

### The Day Following Sukkot in Tanakh

There are three other places in Tanakh that refer to this day. Two of the sources give differing traditions concerning the same event, the inauguration festival of Solomon’s temple.

At the conclusion of the inauguration festival the Book of Kings relates:

So Solomon and all Israel with him—a great assemblage, [coming] from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt—observed the feast at that time before Hashem our God, seven days and again seven days, fourteen days in all. On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their homes, joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness that Hashem had shown to His servant David and His people Israel. (1 Kings 8:65; NJPS)

Although the timing of the two seven-day periods is not very clear, most of the commentators take them as referring to a seven-day inauguration festival that immediately preceded



The Feast of the Rejoicing of the Law at the Synagogue in Leghorn, Italy, 1850

*Sukkot* and seven days of Sukkot. Understanding the verse this way means that the people did not fast on Yom Kippur (as Rashi points out) and that they were sent home on the day following Sukkot, “*Shemini ‘Asseret.*”<sup>4</sup>

The account in 2 Chronicles is clearer:

At that time Solomon kept the Feast for seven days —all Israel with him — a great assemblage from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. On the eighth day they

held a solemn gathering (*‘asseret*). They observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the Feast seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he dismissed the people to their homes, rejoicing and in good spirits over the goodness that the Hashem had shown to David and Solomon and His people Israel. (2 Chronicles 7:8-9; NJPS)

Although the account does specify when the two festivals were celebrated, it also differs with regards to the “solemn gathering” celebrated on the eighth day. It is as if this account

<sup>4</sup> Traditional commentaries attempting to reconcile Shelomo’s practice with Jewish practice explain that prophets in Shelomo’s time made an emergency ruling to allow them to eat and celebrate on the “Day of Atonement.” They also explain that Shelomo took his leave of them on the eighth day but that they did not actually leave until after the eighth day.

Continued from page 9

is “correcting” the earlier 1 Kings account to bring it in line with the practice known to its author.

The third place where the festival on the eighth day is mentioned is in the book of Nehemiah. That source describes the celebration of the holiday of *Sukkot* that was done by those that returned to Zion in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra the Scribe.

The whole community that returned from captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths – the Israelites did not do so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day – and there was a very great rejoicing. He [Ezra] read from the scroll of the Teaching of God each day, from the first to the last day. They celebrated the festival seven days, and there was a solemn gathering on the eighth, as prescribed. (Nehemiah 8:17-18; NJPS)

### Meaning of “Asseret” in the Tanakh

The word that is consistently associated with this festival is the word “*asseret*.” The word means gathering (Jer. 9:1), specifically for the sake of prayer or sacrifice (2 Kings 10:20; Amos 5:21). Sometimes the gathering was for the sake of fasting as in Joel (1:14, 2:15), “Solemnize a fast, proclaim an assembly (*assarah*).” The prohibition of doing work on the *asseret* is found in Deuteronomy 16:8 where the seventh day of Pesah is called an *asseret*. The attribute of prohibition of work is also found concerning the day following Sukkot. The day following Sukkot is the one that most often is associated with the word “*asseret*” in the Tanakh.

### Significance of the Festival

The portions of the Torah that speak about this festival are silent as to its meaning. This silence has led to various rabbinic attempts to derive the festival’s meaning from the meaning of the word “*asseret*,” from scriptural hints and from the seasonal needs. The following passages from *Pesikta Derab Kahana* reflect the kinds of derivations that are commonly

made in the rabbinic literature and classical commentators.

Why were they restrained (“*ne’essru*” similar to the Hebrew word “*asseret*” –RT) for another day? To what can this be likened? To a king who had a festive day. His laborers and his children came to honor him. The matron told them since the king is happy make sure to ask for your needs. Since they did not understand she forced them to stay another day so that they can ask their needs from the king. This is the way the Torah hints to the children to ask for their needs. (By spelling the Hebrew word for water, *mayim*, through the minor variations in the list of sacrifices offered on Sukkot. –RT) Since they did not understand she restrained them another day –that is the eighth day.

“You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem; one bull, one ram...”—R. Pinhas son of Hama said: The seventy bulls that Israel would offer on the festival were for the seventy nations of the world that they should sit in serenity. (The sum of the bulls offered on the *sukkot* festival is seventy--the same number as the “nations of the world” as seen from the list of Noah’s descendants in Genesis chapter 10. –RT) The Holy one said: My children all the days of the festival you were busy with the guests lets me and you have one meal together, that “is one bull, one ram.”

The present-day celebration of Shemini 'Asseret includes a prayer for abundant rains, as this is the festival immediately preceding the beginning of the rainy season in Israel. (In addition, in Israel, *Shemini 'Asseret*, doubles as the day when the cycle of the annual Torah reading is completed, Simhat Torah.)



Rabbi Tawil is the author of *Shabbat-Table Talks* (Tebah Educational Services, 2014). He currently lives in Israel with his family.

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

Dr. David M Betesh, DMD

On **Shemini Asseret**, which is the eighth day of Sukkot, the prayers are conducted in Maqam SABA according to most sources (dissenting view: SIGAH). This is the maqam typically reserved for the Berit Milah (circumcision ceremony). An explanation for applying SABA on the eighth day of Sukkot (as well as Pesah) is because the number 8 is heavily associated with "Berit," the covenant. Despite the indirect association with the Berit Milah, absolutely no Berit Milah melodies are to be applied to the prayers on this holiday. PIZMON SEFER TORAH: Rokheb Abim (page 485); a pizmon about the rain.

On **Simhat Torah**, VeZot HaBerakha (Deuteronomy 33- 34) is read, and Maqam AJAM is applied to the prayers. AJAM is a happy maqam typically reserved for a Yom Tob holiday. On this holiday, we conclude the traditional annual Torah cycle and begin the next cycle immediately

with Sefer Bereshit, in order that there should never be an interruption from our Torah learning. PIZMON for Hatan Me'Onah is *El Ramah Yeminekha* (page 179). The pizmon, *Mipi El* (370), is most associated with this holiday. The Haqafot ceremony, to honor the Torah, is conducted numerous times throughout the day.

On **Shabbat Bereshit** (Genesis 1:1- 6:8), Maqam RAST is applied to the prayers, according to SUHV (Red Pizmonim Book), and at least 18 other Syrian sources. This maqam, defined as 'head' in Arabic, and considered the "father of the maqamat," is typically the first maqam used in any collection (*diwan*) of Arabic songs. This relates here, as Bereshit is the first Torah portion, or 'head,' of Genesis. Maqam RAST is also used each Shabbat at Minha services. HAZZANUT: Naqdishakh: *Hasdakh Qadam Al Kol Adam* (page 145).

## DIBRE SADIQIM: VEZOT HABERAKHA

Dr. David M Betesh, DMD

לעיני כל ישראל - Back to Start- Now that we are completing the entire Torah, the question is, where do we go from here? Based on Jewish tradition, there appears to be three routes forward. The first route, as indicated by the symbolic Haftara selection of Simhat Torah, is to continue with the remainder of the TaNaKh (תנ"ך); starting with the Book of Joshua, all the way through the Book of Nehemia. The second route is to continue the Torah through the lens of the ancient Jewish scholars with the study of Talmud. This link is hinted by the last letter of the Torah being a Lamed (ישראל), and the first letter of the Mishna (Berakhot 1:1) being the next letter, a

Mem (מאמתי). Finally, the third and most important route after reading Deuteronomy 34 is to quickly turn back to Genesis 1 on page 1, without interruption, and restart the entire Torah all over again. May we merit to repeat this sacred cycle year after year for all of time. Amen.



David M Betesh DMD is a graduate of Yeshiva of Flatbush and the founder of Sephardic Pizmonim Project.



# ISRAEL SPOTLIGHT

## ISRAEL: CHALLENGES & TRIUMPHS

Mrs. Miriam Tawil

Israel. The mere mention of the word evokes a multitude of thoughts feelings and convictions as well as a sense of nostalgia hopes and aspirations. It unites us with our ancestors in generations past; infuses deep meaning into our current existence and shapes our future as a people; the chosen people. It is a symbol of collective Jewry's beating heart as well as a real place to call home for half of our people.

Interestingly the world Israel, denoting the land of Israel, is never mentioned in Torah. Indeed the first time the Torah describes the land of Israel is when Avraham is commanded by G-d to leave his home and go “אל הארץ אשר אראך” to the land that I will show you

Yishak is subsequently told by G-d not to leave the land of Israel even to find relief from famine “גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עימך” live in this land and I will be with you.

When fleeing from his brother Esav, Yaakov fears leaving the land and is summarily reassured by G-d “והשיבותיך אל האדמה הזאת כי לא אעזבך” I will return you to this land and will not leave you.

Time and again the Torah records G-d's promise to the Avot and to Moshe that the land of Israel is the promised land and destined home of the Jewish nation.

Subsequent statements and rulings by Hazal throughout the generations underscore the supreme legal and religious significance of settling in the land of Israel, so much so that a man was restricted to leave Israel once settled there barring

specific circumstances while a woman stood the chance of losing her marital rights if she chose to leave. Indeed Israel is the only place where the whole corpus of the Torah could be fulfilled in its entirety as מצוות התלויות בארץ may only be fulfilled there.

As Rav Amital z"l explains generally a nation is formed due to its joint history, culture or land. In the case of Israel, the land was given to the Jewish people prior to their becoming a nation. The land was given at the same time that the nation was created in the patriarch Avraham. The Avot in turn were charged with the mission of creating a monotheistic nation which would recognize and live by the ideals of justice and righteousness. The land of Israel then was acquired even before the Jewish people dwelled there.

So too in 1948. While hundreds of states had been created since World War II only one was created for a people who had yet to arrive. Only 650,000

Jews lived in Israel when the State was announced compared to 6.5 million who live here today. Our history repeated itself in that the metaphysical nature of the land of Israel is such that it is was founded for the Jewish people who were yet dispersed throughout the world and who were in the process of coming home. Rav Amital goes on to describe the land of Israel as a gift to each and every Jew while the acceptance of that gift depends on the individual's willingness to receive it. Indeed every Jew is considered a citizen of Israel. It remains a destination for all



Jews worldwide even those very marginally affiliated with their Jewish identity.

In his seminal essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" (Yom Haasmaut 1956) Rav Soloveichik includes the UN vote to create the State of Israel as the first of the "6 knocks of the beloved," "From the point of view of international relations, no one will deny that the rebirth of the State of Israel, in a political sense, was an almost supernatural occurrence" as it constituted a rare event that East and West concurred during the Cold War era.

In light of the forgoing it is clear that the land of Israel holds an intrinsic place in our history, our laws and our national consciousness. And yet...the question we must ask ourselves remains: for what purpose? Is the ultimate goal to have all Jews living in Israel to acquire an important piece of real estate? Or is there perhaps a greater more lofty goal for the Jewish people to attain? Many pesukim in the Torah describe the ethical/moral mission of the Jewish people to be completed upon settling in their land.

*“ושמרתם את משמרתִי”*

*And you shall keep My covenant*

Indeed Avraham was chosen for this very purpose.

*“כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת אחריו ושמרו דרך ה לעשות צדקה ומשפט...”*

*“For I have known him because he commands his children and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord, to perform righteousness and justice.”*

So what Israel done in the last 70 years? Consider the following partial list of what this tiny country the size of New Jersey has accomplished in the areas of: agriculture – drip irrigation; solar energy; cherry tomatoes! defense - Iron Dome; Science & Medicine - ReWalk for paraplegics; discovery of quasicrystals and prediction of quarks; creation of the world’s smallest video camera; Pillcam; development of drugs for all kinds of diseases including Parkinson's disease and Multiple Sclerosis; The list goes on and is utterly astounding in light of the fact that all these feats have been accomplished by a people who rose from the ashes of the Holocaust and fought and continues to fight wars for its very existence. Indeed Israel the people has accomplished the unimaginable. And yet again...many challenges remain for

the Jewish nation on multiple levels. On the economic front poverty remains a critical issue as more than 1 in 5 Israelis lives in poverty which is the highest level of the developed world. Restitution for the thousands of Holocaust survivors in Israel is still in bureaucratic paralysis making the daily decision of whether to buy food or medicine a harrowing reality for 45,000 of them as individuals and for us as a nation...the chosen nation. Discrimination against various segments of the population remain while questions such as how to treat foreigners and the role of religion and state continue to beg answers. Additionally and unfortunately Israel is not immune to the maladies that have afflicted societies since time immemorial including divisiveness and corruption on even the highest levels. These issues of national concern don't allow for complacency and demand resolutions as they go to the very heart of who we are as a people and why we were privileged to return to the land of our forefathers; the land where even Moshe Rabbeinu was not privileged to enter.

Looking at Israel today one can't escape the feeling that the triumphs outweigh the challenges though this is no way exonerates us as a people from doing all that we can to fulfill our mission as the chosen nation. This includes living the most moral and upright lives to be an example to others

*“כי היא חכמתכם ובינתכם לעיני העמים”*

Personally speaking, living in Israel I see the words of the prophets coming true on a daily basis.

*“עוד ישובו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים...ורחובות העיר ימלאו ילדים וילדות משחקים ברחובותיה” - זכריה ח*

The Jewish people continue to strive and pray for the remaining prophecies to be fulfilled as well speedily in our day...

*“לכן הנגה ימים באים נאום ה ולא יאמר עוד חי ה אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים, כי אם חי ה אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ צפון ומכל הארצות אשר הדיחם שמה” - ירמיהו ט”ז*



*Mrs. Tawil is Founder & Director of Midreshet Eshel and lives in Jerusalem. Her son and daughter both serve in the Israel Defense Force.*



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## DO WHAT YOU LOVE FOR THOSE YOU LOVE

*Ms. Ellen Ades*

The first community members set foot in America over one hundred years ago. They were driven by their desire to make a better life for the ones they loved. Today, we remain driven by that same desire but the road map has changed. We have more needs, more competition, more mouths to feed, and more children to clothe and educate. Making ends meet is just not enough and in many cases even that is difficult.

Today, there is a need to bring awareness that a dual income family has become "the new normal". The working woman is now seen as the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. Two years ago, Propel was founded out of this growing obligation to our community. Propel is here to support women by unlocking their full potential. We add to their education and certify women in career courses that will not only generate income but will elevate who they are. Placing value on self-development and teaching community women to become lifelong learners will not only make them resilient; it will instill an additional layer of pride and self

esteem. This is priceless.

August 23rd marked a perfect summer night in which Board Member Marlene Mamiye graciously hosted and warmly welcomed guests into her beautiful home and to an "al fresco" dinner. Throughout the evening the purpose and goals of Propel were explained informing the crowd that life and career coaching are free as well as the cost of tuition enrollment when needed. The response from the guests towards the sensitivity and need of Propel's mission was very well received.

In explaining how Propel works, co-President Haim Dabah said that, "Some training is as short as a few days. Some certification programs can last up to two years. Although the training costs fluctuate, the return on investment is 13X."

During the evening, one of Propel's enrollees, Natalie

*Continued on page 16*



Host Hymie Mamiye, Propel Co-President Haim Dabah, Co-Founder Ezra S. Ashkenazi

# The grass is greener where you water it.

PROPEL helps community women discover a profession, cover the cost of tuition, and enroll in certification programs that generate higher income.

Since our inception in June 2015, Propel has helped 37 women graduate from certificate courses. Collectively, they will earn approximately \$954,800 annually with salaries as high as \$75,000 in their first year.

## **PROPEL**

646-494-0822 | [info@thepropelnetwork.org](mailto:info@thepropelnetwork.org)



Continued from page 14

Halawani, shared her personal story explaining how serious challenges piled up threatening to impact her ability to care for her family. She reached out to Propel to explore options that might put her in a better position. "I am learning part time, online in the evenings so that I can keep my current day job. I hope to graduate in January 2018 and be able to earn substantially more than I earn now. I am hopeful and I owe that to Propel."

To date, there are thirty seven Propel graduates representing \$954,800.00 in full time earning potential. While some graduates choose to work full time, a large percentage of graduates are working part time in order to give the proper attention in raising young families.

Propel follows a process in order to successfully take a woman from wanting to earn to actually earning. After making an appointment, each potential client meets with a coach at least once but can meet up to three times. During those meetings her strengths are identified along with emerging opportunities in the job market. Her lifestyle is taken into consideration; some women need to work from home, some need flexible hours: some want part time work: some full time.

Taking all the variables into account, the coach and the client make a sustainable plan.

The objective is to help each woman earn as much as possible

while allowing her to honor our traditional family values.

"We try to give women skills that are needed in expanding industries so that the odds are in their favor as they enter the job market," says Mr. Dabah. Once an individual career is identified, research is done to identify the best schools, teachers, and programs. Some training takes place online but most are in person. Each client is coached throughout her time in school, during her job search, and up to three months after being hired. This added layer of support can be crucial to a woman who might feel anxious at the thought of facing change. It's easy to be overwhelmed when juggling personal and work schedules.

"When a business closes, or the breadwinner loses his job, the financial repercussions can devastate a family. Propel is breeding financial resilience in families by helping community women gain skills that translate into better paying jobs," says co-president Jaqueline Harary.

Everyone knows a community woman who wants to earn but is unaware of the best way to proceed. Let Propel help you "do what you love for those you love."

**For additional information or to make an appointment please call:**

**646.493.0822**

**[Viviane@thePropelNetwork.org](mailto:Viviane@thePropelNetwork.org)**

**[www.thePropelNetwork.org](http://www.thePropelNetwork.org)**



Eva Ben Dayan, Sarah Hanan, Eilzen Benun and Yvonne Benun

## INTERVIEW WITH RABBI ISAAC TAWIL

### QQ: What is your current position with the SCA?

**RIT:** I am currently the director of the Men's Evening learning program in the SCA summer learning program in addition to the rabbi of the young adult minyan at Edmond J Safra Synagogue. This is my 9th summer involved in the program and it has been an honor to assume the position of director. Our goal in running this program is to create a hub of Limud Torah during the summer months where our boys can build upon their torah knowledge acquired during the year in our community Yeshivot. It is also a place where the boys can gather socially on the Jersey shore in a healthy environment.

### QQ: When you are not with the SCA what is your position throughout the year?

**RIT:** I am the head rabbi of Kol Israel Congregation in Brooklyn. I am also an administrator at MDY High School where I hold the title of Student Activities Director and Head of Student Life and Hessed.

### QQ: How many total classes were given through the SCA program?

**RIT:** We had over 20 unique classes given each night from 15 different rabbis and teachers. Altogether we hosted over 100 classes per week in addition to our women's and Shabbat programming.

### QQ: What were some of the highlights of the program?

**RIT:** All the rabbis were committed to our vision of Torah growth over the summer which is what made the program

a success. Rabbi Nathan Dweck's middle school class, Rabbi Ike Hanon's young boys class and Rabbi Sutton's Habrutah program were among the most successful parts of our program

### QQ: Why are these classes so important?

**RIT:** These classes are so important because it gives the boys a place to grow during the leisurely summer months. It also bonds people through Limud Torah which is the strongest connection people can have with each other. Our hope is that people will invite their friends to create a larger network of learners and enjoy each others company outside the Beit Midrash as well.

### QQ: What is the largest challenge about educating youth today?

**RIT:** It is difficult to compete with all the ways there are to spend one's time. We need to make Torah as appealing as these activities. Showing the youth that a Torah life not only enhances their lives but functions as a prerequisite to leading a great life is our toughest job.

### QQ: What can parents do?

**RIT:** Parents can guide the boys towards our program and make it just as mandatory to their summer schedule as their basketball league, tennis

lesson or weekly volleyball game. Every parent insures months in advance that their son is enrolled in the right camp, the right after camp basketball league etc. They should also make sure that their child is "enrolled" in two or three weekly hours in our program. Helping with carpools are also a major plus!





# THOUGHTS

## MENTAL BATTLES

Mr. Harold Shamah

“The LORD is my strength and my shield, In Him has my heart trusted, And I am helped.” (Psalms28:7)

As I awoke in the middle of the night, thoughts of various problems began to stir. Then, an armored shield with the letters *yud hey vav hey* printed across the front, appeared in my mind’s eye. As I consciously pointed it towards where I felt the thoughts were originating, they were weakened and I was able to sleep. It happened repeatedly that night.

Sometimes messages are cryptic and sometimes they are crystal clear. This one was unmistakably obvious. Who placed a picture of this shield with G-d's name printed on it, in my imagination? It may be too deep a question for me to ever expect a clear answer, but what I do know is that the active mind has a support system that is rooted in our soul. The passive mind - usually in the control of what we call the evil inclination, shoots arrows. The active mind - the thoughts that we actively initiate, has to play defense - never letting down its guard.

Occasionally we are blessed with aid. Neshama - soul, and neshima - breath, share the same root in the Hebrew language. Hashem told us that he breathed life into Adam. I literally have a spark of the Almighty within my mortal body. It's a scary thought. How much have I tarnished it? Embarrassed it? Scared it away? But if I treat it tenderly at times it will reveal itself. When it does, it is my job to realize it, treasure it, & follow its lead.

Hazal teach that the best way for me to access that wisdom

and strength is to make myself an open vessel; light shines everywhere except where we cast a shadow. These ideas are somewhat abstract and hard for me to fully comprehend but one message is clear. The more I am able to beat down my ego and acknowledge the true source of everything, the more peaceful & productive I will feel. By making oneself nothing we can begin to access everything. If I strip away the anxiety, the doubt, the pessimism, and the ingratitude, I am left with a clean slate which allows wisdom and blessing to flow inwards. The only thing I can take credit for is getting out of the way.



They are by no means advocating a passive lifestyle. My happiness and accomplishments are directly correlated with my effort and level of contribution. They are seemingly contradictory ideas; work hard but give all the credit to Hashem. Yet that is precisely what I have to do; stay true to the course and it will take me where I am meant to go. The fuel is confidence in God. The more I trust, the faster I go. Hashem is only goodness. If I align my actions with those traits, undoubtedly I make room for that spark to glow. It is no coincidence

that when anxiety tries to overcome me all I need do is BREATHE and take out my shield and fight to the death.



Mr. Shamah is a community businessman and occasional lecturer. He recently authored “Journal To The Soul; A Compilation Of Knowledge In Support Of Jewish Faith” which chronicles his research on Judaism.



# PERASHAT BERESHIT

## RISING ABOVE THE NORM

*Rabbi Sion Setton*

Each one of us is born into our own unique circumstances; and, ideally, as we mature, we strive to become accomplished individuals--the “best we can be.” At times we may be hard on ourselves, saying “I will never be as great as so and so;” perhaps we even compare ourselves to people of prior generations, believing we can never be as great as they were. I would argue that at those times of comparison and doubt, we often sell ourselves short by not recognizing the power we hold as individuals to seek and accomplish greatness of our own.

At the end of Parashat Bereshit we read that Noah was:

איש צדיק תמים היה בדורתו

*A righteous and wholesome man of his generation.*

*(Bereshit 6:9)*

***“Noah’s story can teach us to strive to be the most righteous and wholesome beings--the “best we can be”--given our unique life situation.”***

Famously, Rashi comments on this verse and asks why the text mentions Noah’s righteousness in the context of his generation. Why not simply say that Noah was righteous? Rashi offers that if Noah had been born into a different generation--perhaps the generation of Avraham--he would not have been considered as righteous. Based on Rashi’s exegesis, I would like to suggest that Noah’s story can teach us to strive to be the most righteous and wholesome beings--the “best we can be”--given our unique life situation.

In the first *Parasha* of the Torah, *Bereshit*, we learn about the temptation to avoid responsibility and shift the blame to others. When Adam eats from the forbidden fruit and HaShem questions why, he blames Hava, who in turn blames the snake. When Hashem confronts Cain over the murder of his brother Hebel, Cain tries to deny his actions.

The hero of our *Parasha*, Noah, demonstrates the proper way of assuming responsibility. Noah has every excuse in the world to not be good. The Torah says that in Noah’s time the world was filled with social corruption (*hamas*). If he would have given into peer pressure, Noah could and should have been just like everybody else. But Noah chooses to be different and to walk righteously.

While some commentators criticize Noah for not influencing others to follow in his good example, we should not forget the profound significance of the fact that he managed to remain good and wholesome, rising above a culture of overwhelming inequity. How often do we ourselves refuse to be different when everyone around us refrains from doing the right thing? How often do we blame our own conduct on social pressure and collective norms?

Let Noah be an inspiration for us. He does not just survive a flood and rise above the thundering waters. He is able to stand up to an entire society and chooses to be good in the face of corruption. Noah’s story teaches us the power of one person who chooses to do the right thing and take responsibility, saving himself, humanity and the world as we know it.



*Rabbi Setton is the Principal of Yeshivah Prep High School. He is the founding Chairman and member of the Downtown Va'ad and serves as an affiliate Chaplain at New York University.*

# CREATION AND MODERN SCIENCE

Professor Nathan Aviezer

The harmony between the biblical account of the origin and development of the universe and many new scientific discoveries has recently become a subject of interest to many scientists. A single example suffices to make the point. The Bible begins with the famous words, "*In the beginning* God created....," from which it follows that the universe was created ex nihilo. This is also the position taken by modern science.

For over two decades "creation" has been commonly used by cosmologists to describe the beginning of the universe. *The Big Bang* theory maintains that the universe was indeed created out of nothing. Creation has essentially become a scientific fact. It is instructive to quote several first class cosmologists on the subject (for references, see my book, *In the Beginning*, Tel Aviv, 1994, pp. 14-15):

Nobel laureate Paul Dirac, from Cambridge University, a leading physicist of the twentieth century,

wrote, "It seems certain that there was a definite time of creation."

Prof. Allan Guth, an important cosmologist, wrote, "The instant of creation remains unexplained."

Prof. Joseph Silk, from the University of California, began his new book on modern cosmology, *The Big Bang*, with the words, "The big bang is the modern version of the creation of the universe."

Prof. Steven Hawking, of Cambridge University, a highly reputed cosmologist, wrote, "The actual point of creation lies outside the scope of presently known laws of physics."

The titles of recently-published books and articles also indicate this development. Two scientific works on cosmology, published in the eighties, were entitled *The*



*Moment of Creation* and *The Creation*, and an article recently published in *Physics Letters* carried the title "Creation of the Universe from Nothing."

All these citations clearly show that the term "creation" has left the private preserve of biblical scholars

This fact has been stressed by Prof. Steven Weinberg, Harvard Nobel laureate, who decided to call his book on modern cosmology *The First Three Minutes*. However it takes Weinberg 151 pages to describe the momentous cosmological changes that took place in **a mere three minutes**.

*“Creation has essentially become a scientific fact.”*

and has become part of the scientific lexicon. There can no longer be any meaningful scientific discussion of cosmology where creation does not play a central role.

What essentially was created at the inception of the universe? Scientists have discovered that the universe began with the sudden and inexplicable appearance of a vast explosion of light, called by cosmologists the "primeval fireball," but more popularly known as the "big bang." This we see as the scientific correlation to Scripture's "God said: 'Let there be light'; and there was light"(Gen. 1:3). The remains of the primeval fireball were discovered in 1965 by two American scientists, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, winning them the Nobel prize in physics in 1978.

We conclude with a few words on chronology. How long did the cosmic events having to do with the creation of the universe take? Surprisingly, only a few minutes.

The correlation between modern science and the account of creation given in Genesis is, in my opinion, quite striking in all areas: the emergence of the solar system, the ice age, the mysterious origin of life, the sudden appearance of the animal world and the inexplicable appearance of modern man. To see this the reader has but to refer to the relevant discussions in my aforementioned book.

**"How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thy thoughts are very deep"** (Ps. 92:6)



*Professor Aviezer is a former SCA scholar in residence and a Professor of Physics who has written widely on Torah and Science.*

*Check out the SCA Website and Social Media:*

[WWW.SCAUPDATES.ORG](http://WWW.SCAUPDATES.ORG)

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# COMMUNITY EVENT

## A RECEPTION WITH DEPUTY MINISTER TZIPI HOTOVELY

Mrs. Sally Choueka

Member of Knesset (MK) and current Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely is used to tough questions. It came as no surprise that she was able to answer a series of pointed, often deeply emotional questions from a group of community members in a recent reception in Brooklyn. Deputy Minister Hotovely has been a leading member of the Likud party in the 18th, 19th, and 20th Knesset of Israel, and has served as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2015.

Throughout our community's history, we have been active and vocal supporters of Israel. While acknowledging the importance of being vocal, MK Hotovely pointed to the reality in modern political discussion: today's political winners are those with the



Deputy Minister Tzipi Hotovely

an established, unshakeable answer to the question of why the Jewish people belong to the Jewish State. Many community members share MK Hotovely's conviction that Judaism can and should be the foremost reason for that sense of belonging. "It is not enough to speak about our 'creative energy,'" MK Hotovely stated, in reference to a tendency in Israel supporters to tout Israel's technological achievements. "The dialogue needs to tell our story." 'Our story' does not begin and end with modern military, technological, or even social achievements (which are numerous).

Questions from the audience focused on issues of politics, religion, social, and historical record. It is rare to hear religion as justification cited in modern political dialogue, and rarer still to hear an accurate

***"Remembering the unique historical and religious ties to the land are the best modes of defense, according to MK Hotovely."***

best story. In recent years, identity politics have taken center stage; Israelis and supporters of Israel must have

history of the Middle East from the anti-Israel camp. Remembering the unique historical and religious ties to

the land are the best modes of defense, according to MK Hotovely.

MK Hotovely views the modern State of Israel as the meeting place of Eastern and Western civilization; essentially it is the place where these two sides of the world can and must interact. The disastrous effects of the 'Arab Spring,' or, more aptly described by the MK as the 'Arab Winter,' have intensified the need for international cooperation. Israel is emerging as a world player; one whose advances in many fields are valuable and sought after. The time is fast approaching when Israel's place can no longer afford to be disputed.

The matter of identity is similarly indisputable. Like the modern state, the modern nation must recognize its

roots, its rights, and it's potential. For Americans who wish to advocate for the state in a tangible way, MK Hotovely believes they belong overseas in Israel. One college student asked if living in the United States was truly a harm done to Israel. "What you are hurting most," the MK replied, "is yourself." Shortly after the session, MK Hotovely traveled to Washington D.C. where she continued to advocate for a strong Jewish identity, and the Jewish right to the State of Israel.



*Mrs. Choueka is a graduate student at the Pennsylvania State University*

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אשל

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