

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



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DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF MR. MOE MALEH A"H
BY ABIE AND SABRINA MALEH



*Dedicated in Loving Memory of
Mr. Moe Maleh A"H
by
Abie and Sabrina Maleh*

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The Sephardic Community Alliance is an organization established to reinforce and preserve the traditional Sephardic way of life of our ancestors based on the principles set forth in our Declaration of Values. Our commitment is to serve as a platform for lay leaders to work in unison with Community Rabbis, institutions and organizations in promoting the perpetuation of these Values. We support all those who embrace our traditions and rich heritage and that uphold and endorse these values.

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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

To promote Torah throughout our community by providing
a platform for our rabbis, students and institutions.

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Parashat Toledot

YISHAQ AND RIBQA

Rabbi Isaac Tawil

Many critics look at the texts of *Parashat Toledot* and *Parashat Vayesse* and derive from them that our Patriarch and Matriarch *Yishaq* and *Ribqa* had what modern day psychologists would call a “dysfunctional marriage.” This theory is based on *Yishaq* and *Ribqa*’s scarce interaction with one another in the text; the Torah records only a handful of words exchanged between them. It can also be argued that the episode between *Yaaqob* and *Esav* fighting over *Yishaq*’s blessing was caused because of a breakdown in communication between husband and wife about which one of their children should have gotten the blessing of the *Bechora* (the first born). However, a closer look at the text teaches us quite the opposite about *Yishaq* and *Ribqa*’s relationship.

When *Yishaq* is pouring his heart out to Hashem in prayer to grant him children, the text introduces his tefillah in a strange way. The pasuk reads: “וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה יִשְׂחָק לַיהוָה לְנִכְחַת אִשְׁתּוֹ פִּי” —“And *Yishaq* beseeched G-d on behalf of his wife because she was barren.” The question is, why did *Yishaq* go out of his way to pray only for *Ribqa*? Why didn’t he pray on his own behalf? Didn’t *Yishaq* need to seek out G-d just as much as *Ribqa* did?

The *Meshech Hochma* answers that *Yishaq* was confident that **he** would have children. He was promised it explicitly from G-d: “וְיָבִיאוּ לְךָ בָּנִים וְקָרָאתָ אֶת שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וְהָקַמְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ” —“I will erect my covenant with him forever, and his generations that come after (from) him.” However, *Ribqa* was not guaranteed anything. Who was to say that *Yishaq*’s children had to come from *Ribqa*? Maybe Hashem had planned to give him another wife to be the mother of his children? Despite this, *Yishaq* recognized how much he needed *Ribqa*. Hashem’s promise to him that he’d have children, but that was not enough; it needed to be with his beloved *Ribqa*. He needed to share his life with someone who could help him accomplish his mission and whom he loved dearly.

Yishaq is rarely recorded actively doing things, yet

“The perfect relationship is one where the partners work together to achieve their goals.”

the Torah records this incident to show how close he was with *Ribqa* and how much he loved her. He viewed her as a life partner that could fill in his weaknesses and would be able to run the holiest of households. Regarding this, *Midrash Rabbah* states that *Yishaq* called out to G-d: “רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם כָּל בָּנִים” —“Please G-d let all my offspring that you are to give me come from this righteous woman.”

Of course *Yishaq* knew that he had two sons, one who would be worthy of fathering the 12 tribes and one who would not be. But *Yishaq* knew his limitations, being someone who studied all day, an *Olah Temimah* (as holy as a sacrifice) and being blind on top of it, he feared that he might not have the clearest picture of who that was on his own. He knew he needed *Ribqa* by his side to help him discern which one would be most deserving of the blessing. The perfect relationship is one where the partners work together to achieve their goals.



Esav Selling his Birthright
- Hendrick ter Brugghen

Something that *Yishaq* and *Ribqa* knew in their “relationship for the ages.”

Rabbi Isaac Tawil is
the Rabbi of Congregation Kol Israel



Guest Articles

THE FIRSTBORN MALE: THE TORAH’S AMBIGUOUS POSITION

Rabbi Mark A. Saada

Many ancient civilizations and cultures ascribe great significance to the “first” of different life cycles such as livestock, agricultural produce, and the firstborn male of each family. And like many Torah laws that seem to mimic those of the ancient world, the Torah consistently incorporates the specialness of “first” things and endows them with its monotheistic and just value system. However, when comparing the laws and narratives that deal with the firstborn male, the symmetry between the laws of the Torah and its value system is challenged and a conflicting view of the firstborn emerges. This article will describe the Torah’s ambivalent view of the firstborn by citing cases that both seem to support and negate the firstborn’s unique status and will also attempt to illuminate the reason for such ambiguity.

A study of the last four books of the Bible would conclude that the Torah grants special status and privilege to the firstborn male, yet when reading the book of *Beresheet* in isolation the reader would walk away with a completely different view. As the book of *Beresheet* brilliantly and eloquently develops the struggles of the Patriarchs’ families, a common plot line emerges, namely, the struggle between the older and younger brother. The reader naturally identifies with the major characters, empathizes with their internal and external conflicts, and experiences the resulting stress of the clashing siblings. As the reader progresses throughout the narratives of each set of siblings, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and the Brothers, the tension thickens and the emotional plot becomes more and more gripping, reaching a most moving climax of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers in Egypt. What is even more striking is that each story ends in the same fashion, with the firstborn losing the mantle of leadership. This motif of the younger usurping the older sibling, is quite puzzling in light of the fact there are many *Misvot* in the Torah that take the opposite position and bestow the highest adoration for “first” things, especially the firstborn male (hereafter “firstborn”). As a result the reader is likely to walk away with an uncertain view of the Torah’s position regarding the firstborn.

The first instance in the Torah where we see that the firstborn is given preferred status is in the Exodus story. There, the Torah describes the final and most devastating plague to the Egyptian people, the death of the firstborn. The Torah states:

“And Moses said: ‘Thus saith the LORD: About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there hath been none like it, nor shall be like it any more.... And all these servants shall come down unto me, and bow down unto me, saying: Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee; and after that I will go out.’” (*Shemot* Ch. 11, verses 4-8)

The passage above shows the plague that killed the firstborn Egyptians was so devastating that it served as a catalyst that brought the powerful Pharaoh and Egyptians to their knees and freed the Israelites. The Torah goes on to state, “For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (*Shemot* Ch. 12, verse 12). The passage is showing the elevated status of the firstborn via the fact that the firstborn is mentioned in the same breath with the gods of Egypt. It is worthy to note that there were many societies throughout history that held similar views of the first born and even today there is still a custom amongst some Catholic families for the firstborn son to go into the Catholic Priesthood, and become men of god.

The Torah also shows in the Exodus story that the firstborn has special importance when it states, “And Hashem Said to Moses saying; ‘Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn, whatsoever opened the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast, it is Mine’” (*Shemot* Ch. 13 verse 1-2). The Torah goes on to say later in *Sefer Bemidbar*:

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“Take the Levites instead of all the first-born among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be Mine, I am the LORD. And as for the redemption of the two hundred and three score and thirteen of the first-born of the children of Israel, that are over and above the number of the Levites, thou shall take five shekels apiece by the poll; after the shekel of the sanctuary shall thou take them--the shekel is twenty *gerahs*. And thou shall give the money wherewith they that remain over of them are redeemed unto Aaron and to his sons.’ And Moses took the redemption-money from them that were over and above them that were redeemed by the Levites (*Bemidbar* Ch. 3 verse 45 – 49).”

This passage describes that the sanctified firstborns of Israel and their livestock were to be redeemed and replaced by the Levites and the proceeds would in turn go to the *Kohanim*. The practice of redeeming the firstborn of the Israelites and the livestock were practiced during the temple period and codified into Jewish law. In fact, the custom to redeem the firstborn male and give the proceeds to the *Kohen* is even practiced today in Jewish communities all over the world.

“The Torah consistently incorporates the specialness of “first” things & endows them with its monotheistic & just value system.”

There is another Torah law which explicitly supports the superior position of the firstborn in the family. The Torah states:

“If a man has two wives, the one beloved, and the other hated, and they have borne unto him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born son is of the hated one; then it shall be, in the day that he caused his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved the first-born before the son of the hated, who is the first-born; but he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the hated, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the first-fruits of his strength, the right of the first-born is his (*Debarim* Ch. 15, verse 15-17).”

In this passage we see that the Torah established that oldest male child the son would assume the privileged role of the firstborn, even above the beloved wife’s son. This Torah law is even more fascinating when compared to ancient near-eastern practices which permitted a man from giving the preferred wife’s son, albeit he was younger, the unique status of firstborn. Despite the fact that the law was adapted to adhere to *Hashem*’s just system, the fact remains that the role of the firstborn was still privileged.

The *Hakhamim* of the Midrash have a different take on the firstborn Israelites. The Rabbis wrote, “The service was performed all throughout history by the firstborn. When they faltered at the Golden Calf, they lost that privilege (*Bemidbar Rabba* 35)”. When analyzing this *Midrash* one must understand that the Torah doesn’t explicitly state that the firstborn caused or even played a role in the sin of the Golden Calf. If that is the case why do the Rabbis inject them into the story? Are the Rabbis trying to teach that the Torah frowns upon giving the firstborn the mantle of leadership? If that is the case, what evidence are the Rabbis basing this on?

There is strong support from the narratives in the Torah that seems to oppose firstborn leadership in a Torah society. In the book of *Beresheet* we see a striking trend amongst some of the key characters and families which undermine the prestige of the firstborn. First, in the story of Kain and Habel (*Beresheet* Ch. 4), *Hashem* does not accept the offering of the firstborn son, Kain, while he accepts the offering of the younger son, Habel. The same is the case in the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In *Beresheet* 21, Sarah demands that Abraham’s firstborn son does not share in the inheritance with his younger son Isaac. And although Abraham is infuriated by this request, Abraham abides by it after *Hashem* intervenes and instructs him to listen to Sarah. In addition, in the story of Esau and Jacob (*Beresheet* 28:4) the narrative clearly states that the legacy of the family, “the blessing of Abraham” was to be carried on by Jacob. Furthermore, in Jacob’s family the responsibility and leadership was bypassed and later stripped away from the firstborn Reuben. On Jacob’s death bed Reuben, Jacob’s first born, was rebuked for being impetuous and not living up to the leadership expected of him (*Beresheet* 49:1-3). Jacob’s son Judah - a non-firstborn whose repentance and subsequent leadership is instrumental in bringing about the salvation and unification of Jacob’s family and earns the privilege to be progenitor of the Davidic Dynasty and the monarchy of Israel - has two sons with Tamar. The narrative tells a puzzling story of twins boys being born to Tamar, where one of them, intended to be the firstborn, recoils

his arm and re-enters the womb thereby allowing his brother to be born prior (*Beresheet* 38:27-30). Lastly, there is the story of Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Menashe, who were brought to Jacob in his last days to receive blessings. Joseph places his firstborn, Menashe, against Jacob’s right hand and the younger son, Ephraim, against the left. Upon seeing Jacob reverse the order of his hands, Joseph is dismayed and requests that Jacob place his right hand on Menashe. The Torah states, “And his father refused, and said: ‘I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; howbeit his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations’ (*Beresheet* 48,19:).” When comparing this pattern of Abraham’s family to that of Laban’s - one that is dedicated to *Hashem* and the other to idolatry – we see the stark contrast between the two families in regard to the firstborn. Jacob’s malicious uncle Laban tricked him into marrying his older daughter Leah before Rachel, and justified his actions by saying “the custom of this place is not to marry off the younger before the firstborn [female] (*Beresheet* 29, 26:).”

It is evident from the cases cited above that the Torah is undermining the social structure of firstborn leadership that existed in the ancient world. Perhaps the Torah is teaching that the children of Abraham should not value this institution because it is contrary to the central theme of Abraham’s covenant with *Hashem* - “to keep the ways of *Hashem* and perform righteousness and justice” (*Beresheet* 18,18:). The firstborn institution, on the other hand gives power and leadership by natural right, and does not require the firstborn to earn the position. The institution feeds into the firstborn’s fantasy that he has been predetermined by the power(s) of the universe, through the order of his birth, to be inherently superior to those that follow him and he therefore has the right to lead according to his desires. This type of leadership model inevitably lends itself to an abuse of power, corruption and encroaches on other’s rights and liberties, which is contrary to Abraham’s covenant with *Hashem*.

Despite the book *Beresheet*’s attempt to limit the power of the firstborn we are still left with the question as to why the Torah instituted the double portion of inheritance which reinforces his importance. In answering this question this article assumes that this law has a rational and just reason and harmonizes with the covenant of Abraham and the Jewish Nation at Mount Sinai. The phrase used to describe the firstborn’s double portion is **פִּי שְׁנַיִם**, which is found only three times in the entire *Tanakh* (not to be confused with **עֲדִים שְׁנַיִם**). When analyzing the context and the manner in which this phrase is used in the book *Melachim* II an insightful idea emerges. The chapter tells the story of the events that transpired between Elijah and Elisha, the disciple, before Elijah’s miraculous death. The prophet states:

“The Torah grants the firstborn an additional portion of the family’s inheritance, not for his own benefit, but rather for the practical needs of the family.”

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha: ‘Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee.’ And Elisha said: ‘I pray thee, let a double portion (**פִּי שְׁנַיִם**) of thy spirit be upon me.’ And he said: ‘Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so’ (*Melachim* II, 2:8-10).

The first passage describes an act performed by Elijah which reminds the reader of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds via the staff of Moses. Parenthetically, because of the similarities performed by both Elijah and Moses the two prophets are compared and contrasted by our *Hakhamim*, many of whom consider Elijah’s leadership to be a continuation of Moses’. When Elisha asks for a *double portion* of Elijah’s “spirit” he is in essence asking to continue his mission and bear the responsibility of his ‘mantle’. Thus, the double portion in this context is not a reward but a tool used by Elisha to continue the responsibility of Elijah’s leadership for the nation of Israel (albeit in a more compassionate and understanding manner).

This idea learned from Elisha’s *double portion* sheds light on the Torah’s commandment to give a double portion to the firstborn. Unlike Elisha’s leadership the commandment toward the firstborn with a double portion speaks not of a national

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Israel Spotlight

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN ISRAEL IN FOUR DAYS?

Mrs. Grace Timsit

“What are you going to do in Israel for 4 days?” That was the response I got when I said I was leaving *Motsaei Shabbat* to return to NY four days later on Thursday Morning. Looking back I can’t believe all we did was just 4 days (3.5 really – 80 hours).

In just 4 days we met with Jonathan Shachter, top advisor to PM Netanyahu. He took time out of his busy schedule to really sit down with us and ask for our thoughts and opinions of what we see needs to happen in Israel. He even took note on a side comment I made on Syrian Jews that had to escape from Syria in 1948 (like my Mother) to bring it and other opinions to the forefront in Israel policy. Chanan Elias and Sandra Rejwan of the Face of Israel were also present and inquiring of our opinions and thoughts.

In just 4 days we met with Eliran Lazar and Yosi Grishinsky, soldiers of the IDF, who shared their experience of fighting terrorism in Gaza and the attack that took the life of their friend Yair Ashkenazi. Terrorists dressed as IDF soldiers in order to kill real IDF soldiers. It was devastating to them yet they continue to fight. They continue because they feel safe with those in the unit that they consider as brothers and want to protect them in battle as well. We really were so impressed with their bravery and passion for Israel. May Hashem protect them!

In just 4 days we were inspired by R’ Shemuel Eliyahu, son on R’ Mordechai Eliyahu a”h. He shared with us his love of *Eretz Yisrael* by being one with *Am Yisrael* with love and *Achdut*.

In just 4 days we met with the entrepreneurs of MobilEye technologies who made *Aliyah* from South Africa and Australia and started the company mostly to be a part of *Tiqunn ‘Olam*. Their innovations are used worldwide for the prevention of car accidents. This company is just soaring with their accomplishments; on the NYSE, their IPO hit unprecedented numbers a few weeks ago (MBLY).

In just 4 days we met amazing people in the Shomron. Rachel Zimmerman, a mother of 10, made *Aliyah* 30 years ago despite coming from a totally unaffiliated family. Rachel sleeps 4 hours a night. She starts her day tending to her all organic farms, which was mostly destroyed since the snowstorm this past year. She also makes food to sell in her market: Fresh cheeses and yogurts, granola – all RAW! She is also a long distance runner and runs miles and miles a day. As she was telling us about all she does, she mentioned in passing that her gun was just returned to her after the investigation of an incident. She killed a terrorist. Yes, read it again.

We also met an amazing group of people from Hayovel. A group of Christians who volunteer as workers on Har Haberacha to fulfill the prophesy of Isaiah (65:1): “Foreigners will be your shepherds and they will tend to your farms and vineyards.” They come from all over the world so they can be part of the Geula. Tommy Waller and his sons Joshua and Caleb (seriously) do this to stand with Israel and show their support and are beyond happy to do it. (You can read about their story on Hayovel.com.)

“If given the chance to go to Israel, even 4 days can make a difference.”

In the 4 days that we were in Israel there was a breakdown in the cease fire. After singing on the rooftops of the Old City of *Yerushalayim* enjoying the sounds coming from concert nearby, of families playing and after enjoying the weather and laughter, I went back to the hotel while others went to eat on Ben Yehuda or



Iron Dome Being Deployed

shopping. A missile was coming towards *Yerushalayim* and we got an *AZ’AKA ADOM*- a red alert. Being unprepared I was a bit shaken up but was ushered to the shelter a few feet over from us. In the shelter our phones were dinging from all the messages of concern for each other checking on everyone, if they were in shelters and safe. Baruch Hashem the Iron Dome stepped in and we were safe. My friends on Ben Yehuda went back to their dinners and actually got a round of drink for those that came out of the shelter with them. Life continues as usual.

In the 4 days that we were in Israel, Hamas threatened us with riots and barrages of missiles. Late at night we were told that our trip to Sederot would be 99% cancelled. I was upset that these terrorists were ruining my trip to Israel my first time back in 19 years! At breakfast the next morning we had the option of going to Sederot. We had a tight schedule that was originally planned for another activity, However we unanimously voted to go to Sederot. We met the City’s deputy mayor in his “bunker” office, and we watched a video from a week before of a missile hitting a nearby park. He spoke about what they wish to see for the city in the future. They would like a revival of culture in the area – Music, Art etc. From there we were taken to a nearby hilltop and we were able to see Gaza. It was so close we couldn’t believe it. There is a house nearby with a huge hole from a missile on the side being repaired for the family to come back home to. While regrouping one of our group leaders saw a missile coming up out of Gaza and yelled out “*Yetziah!*” (missile). The security got *Az’akot* (alerts) from their radio – and by the time we got down to the ground we heard a hiss and a light boom – the Iron Dome at work again (note: watch for thorn bushes when ducking for cover). This was just a bit of what the people go through daily. At this point the words of Rabbi Eliyahu came to me- “*Ani Am Yisrael*” - I am the nation of Israel. I was never prouder to utter those words. We all got up, praised Hashem, and the IDF soldiers danced. We were just in awe at what we had just witnessed and were a part of. It was really a defining moment that brought us together and strengthened our bonds as Jews and members of a wonderful community.

In the 4 days that we were in Israel we had the distinct honor and pleasure of meeting Mrs. Racheli Frankel. I could not stop saying how her inner beauty reflects her outer beauty, a smile always on her face. I was anxious in meeting her – I kept saying to myself, how am I going to get my words out without letting my emotions get in the way. She has this inner light and wisdom that is just amazing. She was able to comfort us all with her words when it was our original goal to try and provide her some comfort. She spoke to each of our hearts directly. I can never forget how she eased us and pulled the fear out of us and put the love and warmth in. She is truly a woman to aspire to be like.

In the 4 days that we were in Israel. I got to meet amazing people. Mostly I got to go through these experiences with

“It was really a defining moment that brought us together & strengthened our bonds as Jews & members of a wonderful community.”

people of all walks of community life: Doctors, social workers, business men, mothers and students. Most of our bond came from the love we share for Israel. We appreciated and respected every aspect and difference that we have. We learned about each other in ways that never happen on a chance encounter at a community function. I want to thank Rabbi Haim Ovadia for his tremendous effort in getting us all together and organizing this trip. Also, I want to thank the many sponsors that donated to help this important mission, I would do it again in a heartbeat.

We need to show the world that we are really there for Israel and this is the way to do it. **Be there!** A shop keeper on Ben Yehudah requested that I convey his message: “Please come to Israel- we need you, we need the Parnassah, we love the prayers for our safety. Do not cancel a trip because of the situation – Israel is where the Jews need to be.” Rabbi David Zeit took some time to meet with us and his words were so inspiring – especially coming from a community man from the “old country.” He said, “I left a community to be part of a nation” and “Israel should not only be a **B and B** – for **Bar**- Misvas and **Burials**. It should be our every vacation destination.”

In the 4 days in Israel I went through many different emotions and amazingly enough did so much more than what is listed here. I urge all of you: If given the chance to go to Israel, even 4 days can make a world of difference. All of our meetings had ended with an appreciation for us being there. They all thanked us, from shopkeepers to restaurant owners to political officials to old women sitting on park benches. We need to be there and say “*Ani Am Yisrael*”.

Mrs. Timsit is an Allegra Franco graduate. She teaches Limudei Kodesh in various community schools.



Sephardic Rabbis

RABBI YISHAQ DAYYAN: COMPREHENSIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

Rabbi Daniel Kahana

Dedicated to the memory of Rahamim Shayo A"H a nephew of Rabbi Yishaq Dayyan¹

The Jewish community of Haleb (Aleppo, Syria) may be among the most ancient continuous Jewish communities. It dates back over 3,000 years to the times of *Daveed Ha-melekh*, when tradition relays that the city was conquered by Yoab Ben Seruya¹. Haleb was renowned as a significant Torah center. In Maimonides' (1138 – 1204) famous letter to the Rabbis of Lunel, Maimonides laments the decline of Torah study in many communities yet he mentions “in all of Syria one city, that is, *Aram Soba* - Haleb, has some *hakameem* who study Torah”². The beloved student for whom Maimonides authored the “Guide for the Perplexed”, Yosef ben Yehuda ibn Shim'on (died 1225) who came from the west to Egypt in order to study with Maimonides, later (around the year 1187) establishes his residence in Haleb³. Rabbi Yehuda Al-Harizi (1165 – 1234), the celebrated Hebrew poet, some thirty years later visits the city in his travels and relays the following description: “...I arrived at the city of kings, *Aram Soba* blessed with all great things, since there God willed his blessings, by all its dear characteristics renown, on the heads of kings a crown”⁴. Not only was the city home to great sages and ancient traditions, but it was a depository of the most ancient rare and precious Jewish manuscripts. The Aleppo Codex, which represents the most pristine and precise manuscript of the entire *Tanakh* (until 1947), about which Maimonides states: “the famous book...on it I relied regarding a sefer Torah which I wrote in accordance with the *halakha*”⁵, was housed in Haleb for hundreds of years. Decedents of Maimonides migrated from Egypt to Haleb and brought many invaluable manuscripts, such as the autograph copy of Maimonides commentary to the Mishna⁶.

Among the most prestigious and ancient families in Haleb, which embodies the legacy of the city, is the Dayyan family⁷. The Dayyan family is of the *musta'arab* families who were indigenous to Haleb prior to the influx of Spanish Jewry in the 15th and 16th centuries. Rabbi Moshe Dayyan (died 1901) records the Dayyan family tree and maps the lineage back to *David Ha-Melekh*⁸. From ancient times, the position of Nasi/Dayyan of the community was held by the Dayyan family and passed down from father to son. This included the political as well as the Torah leadership of the people⁹. The centrality of leadership began to change in the time of the Spanish inquisition when “some people (*כמה בעלי בתים*) came to reside in the land (*לגור בארץ*), they stood up and separated and became a distinct community (*קהל בפני עצמו*) and they appointed a teacher of their own to judge”¹⁰. This dichotomy in the Halabi community became less pronounced in the years to come, yet existed until modern times. The Dayyan family always remained one of the most prominent families in the community¹¹.

¹ Rabbi Abraham Dayyan, “Zikhron Dibre Eres” in “Holekh Tameem U'fo'el Sedeq”, Levorno, 5610(1850), pp. 66.

² שלא נשאר בזמן הזה הקשה, אנשים להרים דגל משה, ולדקדק בדברי רבינא ורב אשי... אבל בכל המקומות האלה אבדה תורה מבנים ורב המדינות הגדולות מתות ועשונן גוססות וכמו שלושה ארבעה”
”מקומות חולין בארץ ישראל ובכל סוריא מדינה אחת והינו ארם צובה היא אחלב ויש בה מקצץ חכמים עוסקים בתורה
Iggrot Ha-Rambam, Rabbi Yishaq Shilat, Jerusalem 5755(1995), volume II, pp.558 – 559. The community, maintained correspondence with Maimonides. See Teshubot Ha-Rambam, J. Blau, Jerusalem 5720(1960), volume II, siman 224, pp. 398 – 400 and siman 269, pp. 515 – 516.. Parenthetically, this teshuba is quite relevant to the development of pizmonim and musical culture of the Halabi community.

³ בא אלי כתב ושליח מתלמיד נכבד חכם גדול היה תלמיד אבא מרי ז"ל ר' יוסף בר' יהודה בר שמעון היה שמו, בצובה היתה ישיבה שלו אחר פרידתו מן הרב אבא מרי ז"ל, והוא שחיבר אבא מרי ז"ל מורה”
Rabbi Abraham ben Ha-Rambam, “Milhamot Hashem”, Margaliyot, Jerusalem 5713(1953), pg. 54.

⁴ ומשם באתי לעיר המלוכה, היא ארם צובה הברוכה, כי שם צוה ה' את הברכה, כל מדות חמודות אוספת, והיא על ראש המלכים מצנפת, ומלבד נעם מדות קהלים, וחמודות אציליה, בא אליה זה שלשים”
”שנה מושיע רב, מארץ מערב, הוא החכם רבי יוסף מערב, חכמתו כקהלת, ושכלו כגחלת, ולשונו אש אוכלת
(Tahkemoni, chapter 46).

⁵ Mishne Torah, Hilkhos tefillin mezuzah ve-sefer Torah, 8:4.

⁶ See the valuable historical summary and analysis by, Simon Hopkins “Perush Ha-Rambam Le-Masekhet Shabbat”, Jerusalem 5761(2001). See Menahem ben Sassoon, “The ‘Libraries’ of the Maimonides Family between Cairo and Aleppo”, in “Aleppo Studies” volume I, Jerusalem 5769(2009), pp. 51 – 105.

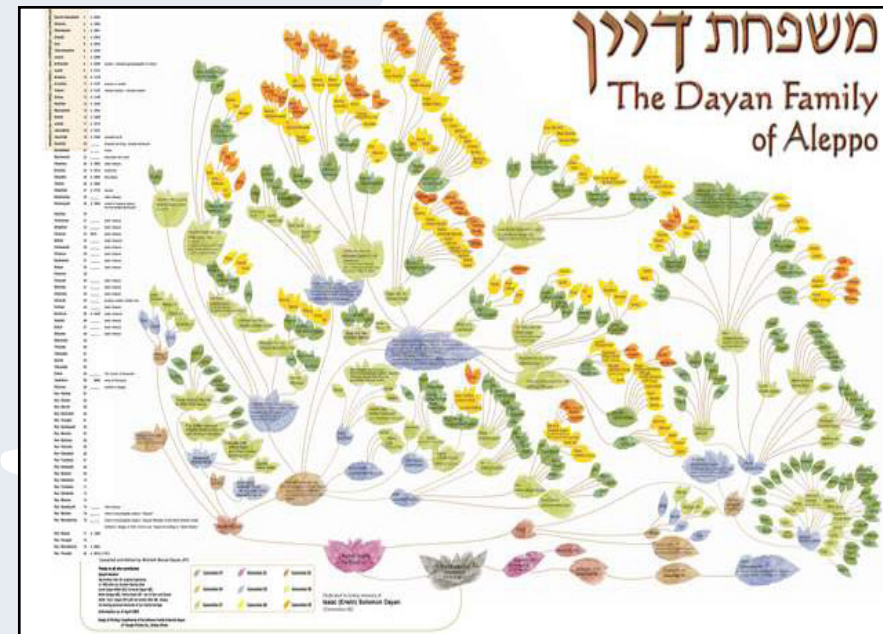
⁷ Yaron Harel, “By Ships of Fire to the West”, Jerusalem 5763(2003), pg. 48.

⁸ “Yashir Moshe”, Levorno 5639(1879), until pg 15.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. the first side of the leaf before page 1.

¹¹ The Hakham from the Dayyan family had the exclusive authority regarding matters of legal documents such as ketubah and peruzbul documents. The Dayyan family reserved the honor of reciting Kal Nidre on kippureem as well as aliyot including shira on Shabbat Shira, Aseret Ha-diberot, hatan Torah. The seventh and final haqqafa



Abadi Shayo (1870 – 1939) along side his colleague and friend Rabbi Matloub Shaul Abadi (1889 – 1970). Their studies were not limited to classical rabbinic literature (*ש"ס ופוסקים*). The two studied the great masterpieces of the golden age of *Sepharad* including Hebrew language and grammar as well as Jewish philosophy, and classical *Sepharadi* poetry. The great creations of Rabenu Se'adya Gaon (882 – 942), Rabbi Shemuel ben Hofni Gaon (died 1013), Rabenu Bahye Ibn Paquda (1050 – 1120), Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi (1075 – 1141) Rabbi Abraham Ibn Azra (1092/3 – 1167), and Maimonides were indispensable to their ethos and world view¹². Rabbi Yehuda Atiya (1878 – 1961) in the year 1924 describes Hakham Yishaq as:

“Dear precious master, vessel full of honey, the son of *qedosheem*, angels and celestial beings. The master, son of our great master the fortified stronghold and citadel, the master of our city (*מאריה דאתרין*) *Rosh Ab Bet Din* sanctified, as *qedushat torato kevod morenu ha-rab* Yesha'aya Dayyan *zekher saddiq ve-qaddosh le-brakha* may his merit stand for us amen, he is no other than my honored friend, great Rabbi as *qedushat torato kevod morenu ha-rab* Yishaq Dayyan may the merciful one watch him and redeem him, may he shine and illuminate, may he live a long and good life amen”¹³.

Hakham Yishaq inherited the crown and position of his father. He was the 85th generation from *David Ha-Melekh*. Not only was he a great leader, but he was the head *mohel* of the community¹⁴. He was very involved in enhancing Jewish education of the youth, and worked tirelessly in building up and strengthening the Talmud Torah in Haleb¹⁵. A document of the Talmud Torah of Haleb from the year 1943, identifies Rabbi Yishaq Dayyan as the “Honorary president” (*נשיא הכבוד*) of the educational institution¹⁶. Rabbi Yishaq Dayyan possessed a tremendous unmatched library including the most ancient and precious manuscripts. Many manuscripts of the famous Sassoon collection were obtained from Hakham Yishaq. The majority of the poetry of the great Rabbi Shemuel Ha-Naghid ibn Naghrela (993 – 1056) was thought to be extinct, yet it was preserved in its entirety in a single manuscript preserved by the Dayyan family¹⁷. The most important and authentic manuscript of the famous

which is related to Daveen Ha-melekh was given only to a member of the Dayyan family. These are some examples of rights retained by the Dayyan family until recent times.

¹² “Liqdosheem Asher Ba-Ares”, third edition, Rabbi Efrayim Ezra Lanyado, Jerusalem 5769(2009), pg. 102.

¹³ “Minhat Yehuda”, Aleppo 5624(1924), pg. 12.

¹⁴ Hakham Yishaq's notebook of beritot which logs names and dates of about 7,500 beritot performed by his uncle and himself is of the most invaluable of community historical documents.

¹⁵ “Liqdosheem Asher Ba-Ares”, pg. 103.

¹⁶ “Heiru Fene Ha-Mizrah” Zvi Zohar, Israel 5761(2001), pg. 100.

¹⁷ “Diwan of Shemuel Hannaghid”, David Solomon Sassoon; published for the first time in its entirety according to a unique manuscript, London 5694(1934). See page xxxviii: “אני קניתי מר' יצחק בן ישעיה דייאן תושב ארם צובה, ביום י"א תשרי תרפ"ד”. See also “Ohel Dawid”, David Solomon Sasson, London 5,692(1932), volume I, pg. 460. For additional manuscripts of the Sasson collection which came from Rabbi Yishaq Dayyan see pages 47, 101, 106, 417, 470, and volume II pg. 689.

Continued on page 12

“Iggeret Rab Sherira Gaon”¹⁸ was purchased from Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan in the year 1910¹⁹. Rabbi Yisḥaq made Aliyah. When he came to visit Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Jerusalem, Rabbi Ezra Atiya (1887 – 1970) stood to honor him²⁰. He served as the head of the *Halabi* community in Tel Aviv. In 1958 Hakham Yisḥaq visited the Brooklyn community. This is recorded by Hakham Matloub Abadi as follows: “In the year 5718 *Shekhina* rested in our camp of New York, with the arrival of my dear friend the *Rab Gaon Hakham, kevod Morenu Ha-Rab* Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan”²¹. From New York he continued to Brazil where he served as Chief Rabbi of the *Halabi* community there. Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan passed away in Brazil on the 2nd of Kislev 5725(1964)²².

In 1923 Hakham Yisḥaq authored an epistle titled “Torat Yisrael Ve-Am Yisrael” which opens up a window into the mind of this great Hakham and his Torah approach, as well as his approach to Jewish education. The work was published in the beginning of “Minhat Yehuda” of Rabbi Yehuda Atiya in Aleppo 1924. The majority of Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan’s written Torah has been scattered in different publications²³, and in unpublished manuscripts²⁴. In 2007 a book titled “Yede Yisḥaq” was published. The book gathers all the Torah of Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan including unpublished manuscripts²⁵.

The Torah and methodology of this great Hakham can not be exhaustively analyzed in these few pages²⁶, yet we would like to relay some aspects of the approach of Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan to Torah in general and to Jewish education.

In “Torat Yisrael Ve-Am Yisrael”, Hakham Yisḥaq is imparting the approach to Torah upon which Jewish education should predicate itself²⁷. The essential spinal vertebra (לֵוִי שֶׁבְּשֹׁרֶרֶת) is used to represent the Torah of Israel. It is “the foundational limb of man, the place of the brain on which the entire body is based” (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 6) “the life source of the body”, the “secret of the survival of Israel” (Ibid pg. 2). The Torah is indispensable to the nation; “the Torah and Israel are one man, the Torah – the soul, Israel – the body” (Ibid pg. 6). The Torah is the unifying force of *Am Yisrael*. “Just as the soul...unifies and connects mans internal and external parts...so too the Torah which is the soul of Israel, facilitates...unification of the entire body of the nation” (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 6 – 7). It unifies the nation socially as well as in the area of thought and spirit. Hakham Yisḥaq’s approach to Torah and his world view, represent a faithful uninterrupted chain of tradition from the great *geonim* of Babel and the *hakameem* of *Andalus* (south Spain):

The Torah unifies and connects the spiritual consciousness of the nation, which includes the disciplines of intellect, logic, physics and divine (metaphysics), all for the singular objective, which is existential knowledge as things (truly) are, and knowledge of the true oneness of God (יְהוָה), and this will be clear to he who studies the approach of the early scholars – the *hakameem* of Spain, Rabenu Se’adya Gaon, Rabbi Shemuel ben Hofni, and the author of ‘Duties of the Hearts’²⁸, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi in his ‘Kuzari’ and in his poetry, Rabbi Abraham ben Azra, Maimonides and others (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg 7 – 8).

Hakham Yisḥaq contrasts these classic *hakameem* who truly internalized and personified the all encompassing nature of Torah

¹⁸ “Iggeret Rab Sherira Gaon” is the most important source of historical data regarding the compilation of the Mishna and Talmud and the history of the years following – the Saboraic and Geonic periods. It was written in the year 986 as a response to question from Rabbi Ya’aqob ben Nissim ibn Shahin of Karawan.

¹⁹ “Iggeret Rab Sherira Gaon”, Dr. Binyamin Menashe Levin, Haifa 5681(1921), pg. xxxviii. In contrast to what Levin maintains in his introduction, Ya’aqov Nahum Ha-Levi Epstein has conclusively demonstrated that the version of the Iggeret reflected in the Aram Soba manuscript is the more ancient and authentic one.

²⁰ “Liqdosheem Asher Ba-Ares”, pg. 103.

²¹ “Magen Baadi”, Rabbi Shaul Matloub Abadi, Jerusalem 5770(2009), pg. 59 (on Hebrew side). Hakham Matloub refers to Rabbi Yisḥaq as “הרב הגדול, משרידי הדור האחרון” – “Magen Baadi” pg 13.

²² Hakham Yisḥaq had three sons (Yesha’aya, Ram and Shelomo) who lived in Brazil and one daughter who lived in New York (married to Salim Sitt).

²³ “Hamassef”, year 4, Jerusalem 5659(1899) and year 5, Jerusalem 5660(1900). Some of Rabbi Yisḥaq’s Torah can be found in “Magen Baadi”, of Rabbi Shaul Matloub Abadi, which was originally published in 5730(1970).

²⁴ Some derashot and articals on Jewish thought were published from manuscript in “Siyah Shoshanim” volume 2, Jerusalem 5756(1996), pp. 11 – 72. A letter of hiddushe Torah written by Rabbi Yisḥaq in 1943 to Rabbi Ya’aqob Addes was published in “Ginze Eres” Jerusalem 5761(2001) siman 22, pp. 61 – 63.

²⁵ Edited by Rabbi Hayyim Ha-Levi and Rabbi Moshe Rahameem Sha’ayo published Jerusalem 5767(2007).

²⁶ The literary repertoire of Hakham Yisḥaq not only reflects a mastery of all areas of Torah but a genuine Sepharadi approach within each area, which unfortunately has become rare today. His explanations on the Gemara reflect a classical approach often referred to as “העיון הספרדי” which stresses an impeccable understanding of each word of the text well as the classical commentators. He approached the text in a methodological fashion and quotes classical Sepharadi works on “Kelale Ha-Talmud” such as “Yabin Shemu’a” of Rabbi Shelomo Algazi. Hakham Yisḥaq’s response are concise and succinct. They do not only deal with “religious law”. The majority of his teshubot pertain to “Hoshen Mishpat” (i.e. בין אדם לחברו). Hakham Yisḥaq’s derashot reflect a unique method employed by Hakameem Sepharadeem in which derashot are not built upon aggadaic elements but rather on halakha principles and legal concepts. The meshing of the intricate halakha concepts throughout the derasha is a masterpiece which induces immense ecstasy in those talmide hakameem familiar with the halakha building blocks and the unique rhetoric.

²⁷ “Heiru Fene Ha-Mizrah” Zvi Zohar, Israel 5761(2001), pg. 100.

²⁸ Rabenu Bahye Ibn Paquda (1050 – 1120).

and its integrality to *Am Yisrael*, with the more recent generations.

Our predecessors our forefathers and our early rabbis, understood all this, a true and clear understanding...they knew that in the absence of Torah they would die; death of the soul and death of the body, a spiritual and physical death, a death in this world and in the world to come! For how could the nation live without the Torah? Can the body live devoid of a soul? The Levi²⁹ strongly expresses this commitment and states in his poem: “in my distancing from You (God), death (comes) to me while I live, and if I cling to you I live (even) in death” (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 8).

Hakham Yisḥaq laments that even though the current generation observes *misvot* laws and practices according to the *halakha* “as they were given at Sinai”, the generation lacks the framework and comprehensive approach to Torah that came so naturally to the old generations. “They are thoroughly aware of the multitude of ‘trees’ of laws and *halakhot*, but are not intellectually and emotionally in touch with the meaning and value of the ‘forest’ in its entirety”³⁰.

To our grief, now this internal tremendous emotion is dead, and I do not think that now we can find amongst us men of brave spirit who strive towards the tremendous level...as they (the *hakameem*) of blessed memory stated (Shabbat 138b): “in the future the Torah will be forgotten from Israel”. Their intention in this statement is not knowledge of practical *misvot* laws statutes and judgments, for regarding these God promised us that “they will never be forgotten from your offspring”, and it is true all the *misvot* of the Torah are still observed by us as they were given at Sinai. Rather their intention was to the deep value of the Torah, the introspection into the value of *misvot* and the knowledge and realization in their immense truth and eternity to Israel, and to know a sensory awareness (ידיעה חושית) and an emotional awareness, that the Torah is the soul of the nation, its spirit, its life-force, and without it Israel can not exist (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 9).

Hakham Yisḥaq stresses Jewish nationalism and the importance of our nation taking action in order to restore our glory as a sovereign nation living in *Eres Yisrael*.

So too, the emotion of Jewish nationalistic pride has died from inside of us, our recognition in our own sovereignty has ceased. Our yearning and longing to our homeland has been lost. So too the emotion had died from us so that we do not desire to improve our own situation by our own initiative, we simply aspire the hand-outs of others (שולחנם של) or (we aspire) wonders and miracles. (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg 9).

Indeed Hakham Yisḥaq counts having “the tremendous desire yearning and intense longing to live and settle in *Eres Yisrael*, ... and come and show fondness to her soil, and kiss and hug her stones” (Ibid pg 18) as a prerequisite to the redemption of Am Yisrael. In the 1920’s Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan expresses content to the movement in his time of returning to Israel.

Behold we see now a tremendous awakening for the redemption of Israel, all of Israel in the scattered diaspora that are God fearing...are awakening to build *Siyyon*, surly God is content in their actions and will aid them and in their days redeem Israel a everlasting redemption (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg 18).

Hakham Yisḥaq emphasizes how critical it is to provide our children with an all-encompassing comprehensive Jewish education. The entire framework by which a Jewish child should think must be Jewish. He should think in Hebrew and perceive cyclical time from a Jewish point of view. He should be versed in Jewish texts and Hebrew poetry and Jewish history thought and philosophy. The entire milieu of his thought processes should be primarily Jewish.

“it is incumbent upon us to direct all of our energy and desires and endeavors to educate our children in our own spirit, to implant and instill in their hearts our *musar*, our language³¹, our dating system (calendar), our studies, our spirit which is embodied in the *Tanakh* the *aggadot* of the Talmud and the *midrasheem*, since the pure spirit and elevated *musar* in them is the soul and spirit” (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 16). “It is incumbent upon us to be particular to educate our children in our own spirit. If we do not act who will do this for us? Our precious children, upon whom our entire universe, present and future hangs, as they (=the *hakameem*) of blessed memory said: ‘the world exists upon the speech of young children of *yeshibah* (תִּינוּקוֹת של בית רבן), Shabbat 119b)’, our tender children, we should not plant

²⁹ Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi in his poem “Hashem neghdekha kol taavati”.

³⁰ “Heiru Fene Ha-Mizrah” Zvi Zohar, Israel 5761(2001), pg. 106.

³¹ Rabbi Yisḥaq Dayyan composed a poem praising the Hebrew language which begins “Hebrew Hebrew our language, beautiful and praised, it shall not be forgotten from our mouths, we shall not abandon it” (*Yede Yisḥaq* pg. 230).

in them an alien branch or different spirit foreign to our own spirit, and to the spirit of our Torah and our soul. We must bring life in their hearts to the Jewish soul, the vast love and dedication to our sanctity our nation and our Torah, through which and only through which they will attain true life in the present and future, only this way will they be successful when they mature, only then will they be successful and productive for themselves and for their nation and for others and for the world at large (*Yede Yisshaq* pg. 11).

An important component of Hakham Yisshaq's curriculum is *aggada*. "The studies and ethics that are contained in the *aggadot* of the Talmud and the *midrasheem*, these *hakameem* knew the depth of our souls" (*Yede Yisshaq* pg. 11). Not only does he prescribe it as an integral part of Jewish education³² but it stands at the center of all his writings on Jewish thought and philosophy. He typically begins by quoting a Talmudic or Midrashic *aggada* and engages in a true deep analysis in order to bring out the conceptual meaning of the *aggada*. A typical opening of Rabbi Yisshaq is: "Behold we are compelled to maintain that there is a deep esoteric meaning in this statement, since to explain it at face value (כפשוטו) is implausible" (Ibid pg. 2). He proceeds to bring to light the "fantastic hint and elevated allegory" (רמז) (נפלא ומשל נשגב, ibid) contained in the *aggada*. This approach as well, represents a faithful continuation of the ancient geonim and *Sepharadi hakameem* who grasped the deep importance of the study of *aggada* and understood it as "forms of poetic expressions"³³.

Rabbi Yisshaq Dayyan repeatedly stresses the great value in studying and reflecting upon Jewish history.

One who pays attention to the history of Israel and grasps the changing of the periods which they (Israel) endured... will be stunned and speechless regarding this awesome nation, ancient predating all other nations, how with all the volatility and overwhelming times, its fortitude did not weaken, and its influence was not minimized. Behold huge nations, and mighty kings, who did not endure one miniscule fraction of what Israel endured, and ... (the other nations) were destroyed and their remembrance wiped out. Yet only Israel the smallest and poorest of nations... at the time of harsh crisis, new inner lively strength emerges; tremendous strength which gives the nation life and reassurance. How fantastic it is that in accordance to the severity of the hardship, so too is the intensiveness of the inner life force that is generated in the nation" (*Yede Yisshaq* pg. 25). One who studies Jewish history, will intellectually conclude that they (*Am Yisrael*) will be positively in existence forever... this is a sign and demonstration clear to all who have eyes, of there future existence (Ibid pg. 14).

May we succeed in educating our children in the authentic path of our ancestors and great *hakameem* and provide for them a true comprehensive all encompassing Jewish education. "Education is the major foundation upon which *Yisrael* exists eternally" (*Yede Yisshaq* pg. 16).

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³² Many *hakameem Sepharadeem* have the practice of starting the instruction of Talmud to youngsters with the 5th chapter of tractate *Berachot* since this chapter is saturated in *aggada* which draws students in and instills foundational principles of Torah. This practice is mentioned by the R. Moshe ben Nahman (1194 – 1270) in his introduction to "Milhamot Hashem" as well as by R. Shelomo ben Adrete (1235 – 1310) in his response, *siman* 363.

³³ "על דרך הדרשות אשר שיטתן ידועה למי שמבינים את דבריהם. כי הם, לדעתם, בצורת מליצות פיוטיות, ולא שזאת משמעות הכתוב" *Maimonides, "Guide to the Perplexed" (III, 43), M. Shwartz edition volume 2, pg. 598. See Maimonides introduction to "pereq heleq" in his commentary to the mishna.*



Aleppo Citadel

MAQAM OF THE WEEK

SEPHARDIC PIZMONIM PROJECT, WWW.PIZMONIM.COM

Dr. David Betesh DDS

For **Shabbat Toledot** (Genesis 25:19-28:9), the prayers are conducted in *Maqam Mahour*, which is described as a high *Maqam Rast*, according to ALL Syrian sources. 'Mahour, which means 'chagrined' or 'broken-hearted' in Arabic, is applied, because Esau is chagrined and broken-hearted when his blessing is taken from him. Another explanation is that *Maqam 'Mahour'*, a word derived from the Zoroastrian deity 'Mei' (meaning 'exchange' or 'changed'), is used when there is an exchange, and in this case, Esau exchanges his birthright for lentils. *HAZZANUT* (Hazzan Moshe Ashear): *Semehim: Yadekha Tanheni* (page 149). *PIZMONIM*: Melody selections for this Shabbat focus on the theme of repentance (*Shabti Shabti, Hobi Malki Selah, and Hobi Kaper*). *ALIYOT*: The sixth *aliyah* is reserved for Isaac's blessing to Jacob. *MISHMARA*: Toledot, 1 Samuel 1-8, Psalms 52-65, *Mishnah Berachot* (Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com).

On **Shabbat Vayese** (Genesis 28:10-32:3), prayers are conducted in *Maqam Ajam* (meaning 'foreigner' or 'Persian' in Arabic), according to most sources. AJAM, reserved for happy occasions (i.e. *Sheba Berachot* of a wedding), is applied, because we read about Jacob's wedding. Another explanation is because Jacob is a 'foreigner' ('*Ajami*') in Aram. *HAZZANUT* (Hazzan Moshe Ashear): There is a tradition of transposing Hazzan Israel Najara's *pizmon* (melodies in *Maqam Girka-Ajam* or *Saba*), *Yedidi Roe Meqimi* (page 417), for *Semehim*, because this *pizmon* mentions Rahel coming with her sheep. According to the sources of Abraham E. Shrem and Abraham Dweck, Maqam *Saba* should be applied for the entire *Nishmat* prayer perhaps to facilitate the application of the *Saba* melody of the *pizmon* mentioned above. *MISHMARA*: Vayese, 1 Samuel 9-13, Psalms 66-73, *Mishnah Ketubot* (Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com).

THE FIRSTBORN MALE:

THE TORAH'S AMBIGUOUS POSITION...Continued from page 7

to the firstborn. When Elisha asks for a *double portion* of Elijah's "spirit" he is in essence asking to continue his mission and bear the responsibility of his 'mantle'. Thus, the double portion in this context is not a reward but a tool used by Elisha to continue the responsibility of Elijah's leadership for the nation of Israel (albeit in a more compassionate and understanding manner).

This idea learned from Elisha's double portion sheds light on the Torah's commandment to give a double portion to the firstborn. Unlike Elisha's leadership the commandment toward the firstborn with a double portion speaks not of a national leadership but rather a localized familial leadership. The Torah understood that in event of a father's death the family had to be sustained and continued. And even up until the 20th Century a family's female members, young children, sick persons and other dependents had no financial safety net and they were unable to sustain themselves. The responsibility to provide for the family fell on the oldest son, who was the most able bodied person available to sustain the family and fill the leadership vacuum created by the father's absence. Therefore, the *double portion* inherited by the firstborn son was there to aid him in providing for the dependents in the family. Like Elisha's request, the double portion was not a luxury or additional gift, rather it was a responsibility and a burden placed on the inheritor to care for those who can't care for themselves. Such an idea clearly adheres to the values of Abraham and the covenant made with Hashem because its purpose is to continue the family's existence and not, as the primitive cultures believe, as a right to infringe on an individual's liberties.

As one can see the Torah narratives teach many ideas and virtues about social structures and human rights. In turn, Torah Laws are instituted in order to compliment these values, not to simply adopt the practices of other civilizations. At first glance, however, the institution of the firstborn presents a contradiction between the law and its values system, leaving the reader with an ambiguous view of it. This study reconciles this conflict by understanding that the Torah discourages the firstborn's entitlement of national leadership due to the political and spiritual dangers and corruption that accompany it, and at the same, the Torah grants the firstborn an additional portion of the family's inheritance, not for his own benefit, but rather for the practical needs of the family.

Rabbi Saada is a community based Rabbi and works in real estate



Sephardic History

A LAST RESORT:

THE FATE OF THE *CONVERSO* - PART I

Mrs. Natalie Mizrachi

Karen Mosquera Barrera was a 22 year old graduate student tragically murdered in a terror attack on Jerusalem's Ammunition hill less than one month ago (Oct.26, 2014.) She had moved from her native Ecuador to Israel in the last year to convert because she had learned of her family's Converso roots. The irony of her cultural journey – from Catholic South American to Jewish victim of terror is no less astonishing than the horrific struggles endured by Spanish Conversos over these past 500 years since the Expulsion of Iberian Jewry in 1492.

Since that time and indeed well up until the late 20th century, a Jew who converted to Christianity and found secretly practicing his or her old religion was subject to arrest, interrogation and torture at the hands of the Inquisition. The goal was to wrench a confession, punish and reform him from lapsing back into Jewish practice. Judaizing or preaching throughout the Spanish Empire, at times which included Spain, Portugal, parts of Italy and their colonies, was severely dealt with. As a result, the tactic of falsely accusing a political or business enemy, or threatening to expose a landlord or moneylender was common in Middle and South America where the persecution of Conversos and Christian citizens alike lasted decades longer than anywhere else under the Church's control.

Many people today are unaware of the fear and subjugation Conversos lived under as they grasped at fewer and fewer fumes of a once vibrant Jewish existence. Upon speculating the reasons that would drive a family to lead a dual life it is often assumed that their insistence to remain on Spanish soil was either materially driven or a case of vast incredulosity.

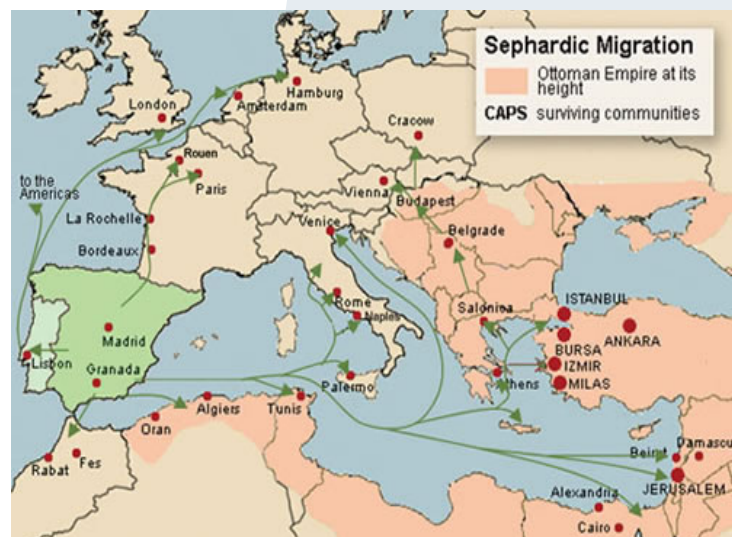
History however, provides another more disturbing answer.

First let us consider the choice put before the last generation of Spanish Jews. Some 300,000 Sephardim lived in Iberia on the eve of expulsion.¹ Centuries of vibrant scholarship and fruitful entrepreneurship was coming to an end and now a difficult decision was put before them; Convert or leave.

Some would travel to points East, joining older, Levantine communities. Others would attempt to stay on the peninsula by fleeing to Portugal. Of the ones who decided to convert there were 2 groups: those who honestly wanted to join Christianity, and those who did so falsely, waiting for a time when the madness would end. Neither of these 'converts' had an inkling of the increasing hatred that would befall them or their descendants in the years to come.

This was the situation: When the Jews left Spain they left their ancestors, their cemeteries, their homes, mikvehs and synagogues. They left their fortunes, their holdings and any hope of ever collecting debts owed to them. They sold what they could for a pittance as they prepared to exit centuries old homes. If any Christian was caught harboring a Jew past the date of expulsion – August 2, 1492, his property would be confiscated. The expulsion was no short lived fad, but rather a culmination of decades of tension, religious fervor, and the crown's apparent theft of property; the many debts owed to the Jewish community by the crown would be annulled. The Spanish Church benefited monetarily as well in that all synagogues were turned into churches.

¹ Carroll, James, *Constantine's Sword, The Church and The Jews*, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, Pg 362



The Sephardic Diaspora

To add injury to their sorrow, at the time of the expulsion the plague was raging in Castile. It was thought the refugees were the cause of it. By arrangement the Portuguese sailors were to provide a safe conduit off the peninsula, but on account of the plague the entire affair was conducted harshly and with speed. Many captains and sailors plundered and then deserted the sick refugees on the North African coast. Some died of starvation while others were sold into slavery to the Moors².

Those who had chosen Portugal as a haven-somewhere between 60,000 and 120,000³ were subject to pay a tax upon entering. Children aged 3 to 10 were exempt, however upon leaving proof of having paid the entry fee on these same children was required! All the parents who could not suddenly pay both fees had their offspring confiscated and sent to live under the Church. In their newly destitute state, many families who refused to be split up simply could not get off the continent.

This theme of abducting children would be played out again when Portugal took up the Expulsion of its own indigenous Jewish population in 1496. By this time the contrivance of a toll tax was dispensed with and whichever way a parent looked was trouble.

No one was exempt, not even the richest of Spanish families that had bribed their way to security thus far. Every Jewish child- defined as under the age of 14 and about to go into exile with his or her family was to be confiscated and dispersed among the citizenry to be raised as Christians. Many were sent to monasteries at the far end of the New World.

The edict took into effect and the children were easily rounded-up on the eve of Passover when families gathered together. Over the next months as children were dragged from their homes, some were hidden by kind hearted Christians. Others were even reportedly killed by their parents who then killed themselves.⁴

The crown would not soften. The King, Don Manoel, allowed only one point of departure- and that was Lisbon where 20,000 Jewish people assembled. They were housed in a barrack and exhorted to convert while a new edict took effect; now all children between 14 and 21 would be taken from their parents and baptized as well. The only way parents could have their children restored to them was to accept baptism. Needless to say, many of them took this option. To leave their children behind at the mercy of an over-zealous cult of death- was an outrage. No physical torture could be worse than losing a child and so was born the post- expulsion false convert- the Morrano. (The word, of course, is Spanish for pig- a way to discover hidden Sephardim who were averse to eating pork.)

“By examining the causes & consequences of the very different paths the Iberian Jews were compelled to take a full range of historic lessons & examples can hopefully be learned.”

Yet many Sephardim actually persisted in their resolve not to take an oath. Despite being locked up without food or water for three days, many still rejected Christianity. While this torture was taking place, the ruler Don Manoel was in the process of marrying the daughter of Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella, Donna Maria. A Jew –free Portugal and this peninsula was his wedding gift to her.

Some Portuguese Morranos in that generation managed to leave behind all worldly goods and escaped to the East or West to the uncharted New World. This is remarkable because travel by a New Christian was restricted for this reason. The others who remained behind were subject to riots at the hands of angry mobs. By 1541 the Inquisition in Portugal became official- and everyone not only the hidden Sephardim had reason to be afraid.

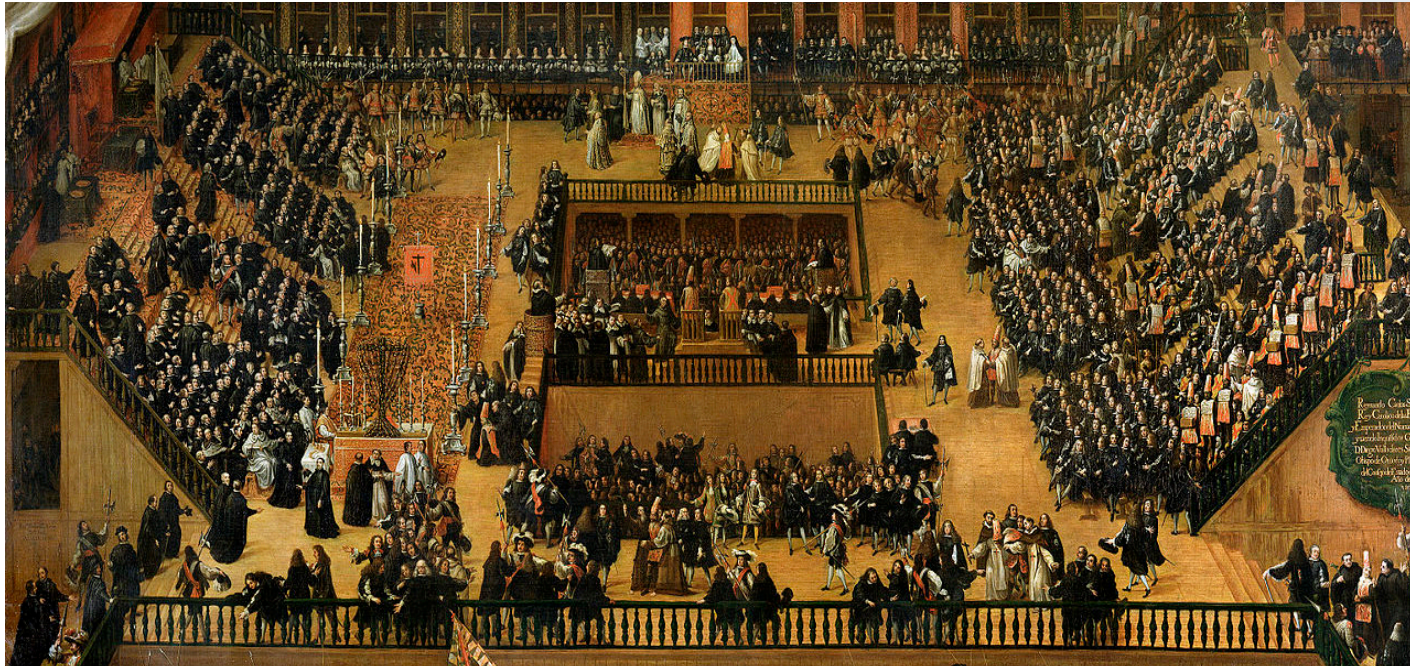
Meant to route out heretics within their midst, The Inquisition of both Spain and Portugal was a vast engine assuming to control the religious life of men[it] grew to be in reality the most vital, or rather the most deadly organ of the State.”⁵ Not

² A derogatory medieval name for the North African Muslim Berbers

³ iiHordes, Stanley M., *To The End of The Earth: A History of Crypto –Jews of New Mexico*, Columbia University Press, 2005 pg.24

⁴ iii Mocatto, Frederic D., *The Jews and Portugal and the Inquisition*, the Jewish Historical Society England, 1877, reprinted by David Bortin, 1933, New York pg.54
Gerber, Jane S., *the Jews of Spain*

Continued on page 18



Painting by Francisco Rizi Depicting the Auto da fe held in Plaza Mayor, Madrid

even the royalty could escape it.

This is how it worked: Anonymous declarations of accusation were accepted by the court of the Inquisition. The suspected were then seized without prior notice to the dungeons of the Inquisition building. Family and friends were not allowed to know the charges. They were not allowed to communicate with the accused who was imprisoned- for several years. All their property was seized.

The accused never knew their accusers. They were told to confess crimes but had no idea what magic words to say. (They could however accuse others and begin the sad cycle for someone else.) Counsel might be given to the accused, but he could only communicate with the counsel in the presence of the Inquisitors. Often prisoners were sent to their cells for months or years before given the chance to confess again. Some were housed in fetid cells with little or no food- others were tortured by ingenious means all to procure a confession that would doom them to the stake. Surely many wished to confess to end a lifetime of torture but had no way of knowing what it was the Inquisitors sought. If a confession was retrieved it was

“The expulsion was no short lived fad, but rather a culmination of decades of tension, religious fervor, and the crown’s apparent theft of property...”

then examined for ludicrously. If deemed not what the Inquisitor wanted, the torture would be repeated. There was little to no way to establish innocence.

Even when confirmed guilty and condemned, the suffering of the prisoner did not end. Sometimes for years until an Auto-da-fe was convened to celebrate the auspicious day of a festival, did a prisoner have to wait to *burn at the stake*. The pageantry of this fiesta took time to prepare as a stage was built in the town square and the glitter of the Inquisitor General’s entourage prepared. All the officials, monks, royalty and commoners convened, crying “Viva la fe!” *Long live the faith!* Ultimately the climax of the gala would be the mass burning of heretics and relapsed Jews. The chance would be given to them one last time to accept baptism and in return they would be strangled before being mounted on the stake.

The largest documented Auto da fe in Spanish history was held in Madrid, celebrating the 1680 marriage of Charles II to Marie Louise, a niece of Louis XIV of France. Some 54 confessed and repented prisoners in the *sanbenito* garb were present, 120 prisoners were judged and 22 put to the stake . 18 of them were Jewish. Reportedly one 17 year old and newly

convicted Jewish girl cried to the princess, “Noble Queen, cannot your royal presence save me from this? I sucked in my religion with my mother’s milk, must I now die for it?”The bride, raised undoubtedly in a freer society in the spirit of the Renaissance could do nothing but cry.

According to historians Will and Ariel Durant, Charles II, the last Hapsburg King of Spanish rule who was physically

“That Christian Spain post the expulsion became an isolated continent is a tale of how the Jewish people can affect history even by its non-presence.”

and mentally disabled- near the end of his life created a Junta Magna (Great Council) to examine and investigate the Spanish Inquisition. The report was so damning to the Holy Office that the Inquisitor General convinced the decrepit monarch to “consign the ‘terrible indictment’ to the flames”. When Philip V took the throne, he called for the report but no copy could be found.

If an Inquisitional pardon was given- a former prisoner could never have a relapse; he would be burnt at the stake. A former prisoner had to wear, sometimes for months, or sometimes for the rest of his life, the grab of the *sanbenito*. On Sundays he would be made to stand at the entrance to the church in this attire as a point of derision.

That Christian Spain post the expulsion became an isolated continent is a tale of how the Jewish people can affect history even by its non-presence. 16th century Spain saw itself as a romantic kingdom purged of all infidels with a sacred mission in converting the ‘savages of the New World’. Not only spiritually but culturally it cut itself off from the main European continent in that even literature from the outside was forbidden. As the Enlightenment seized the rest of European society, Spain, Portugal, and their viceroyalties were stuck in a specifically medieval mindset. The common citizenry was suspect of each other and forced to live in fear of the Inquisition. Ideas from other cultures and general notions of emancipation that were taking place elsewhere did not catch on. Isabella got what she dreamed of; a religiously pure but stymied kingdom.

In conclusion, when Karen Mosquera Barrera died specifically because she chose to expose herself as a Jew living openly among Jews, it is more than ironic- it is a regression to a fearful medieval mindset. It is history either repeating itself or coming full circle.

By examining the causes and consequences of the very different paths the Iberian Jews were compelled to take a full range of historic lessons and examples can hopefully be learned.

Next Installment: The Fate of the Converso - Part II The Americas

Mrs. Mizrachi is a community based writer and current marketing coordinator at Gesher Yehuda Yeshiva

⁵ *ibid* Mocatto pg 64

With summaries of readings :

Menocal, Maria Rosa, *Ornament of the World, How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, Little Brown and Co, 2002

Gerber, Jane S., *the Jews of Spain*



Parashat Toledot

BORN TO BE WILD?

Rabbi Sion Setton

There is a certain beauty to our continuous reading of the weekly *parashiyot* in *Sefer Beresheet*. We read the beloved and familiar words telling us of Hashem's creation, of the travel of Abraham to *Eretz Yisrael*, and of the challenges and triumphs of our patriarchs and matriarchs. We embrace the stories of Abraham, Yishak and Ya'akov, of Sara, Ribka, Rahel and Leah and strive to live our lives in a more moral and ethical way guided by their journeys.

There is, however, a pedagogical '*danger*' that lurks in our study of these stories. Sometimes, because of our deep familiarity with the narratives in the Torah, we read the episodes with their conclusion in mind. When we read the unfolding of the *Aqeda*, for example, we might briefly forget that this was a real test for Abraham, that he had the free choice whether to succeed in this *nisayon*, trial. Because we have learned the story of the *Aqeda* so many times, we read its beginning with its end in mind. This sort of '*I already know the end*' reading is a natural consequence of our learning of Torah. But sometimes, it can hinder us from examining and learning the intricate and subtle nuances in the Torah's narrative.

“We embrace the stories of Abraham, Yishak and Ya'akov, of Sara, Ribka, Rahel and Leah and strive to live our lives in a more moral & ethical way guided by their journeys.”

In *Parashat Toledot*, we read about the twin sons of Yishak and Ribka: Ya'akov and Esav. As children we have already encountered and learned about their personalities. We know that Ya'akov is an **איש תם יושב אוהלים**, the patriarch of our people, and that Esav ends up giving birth to Edom, a nation which oppresses Israel over many generations. We think of Esav as a bad man - one born to destroy and pillage.

However, when we engage in a careful reading of the basic meaning of text of the Torah we can discover more complex layers in the formation of Esav. The verses tell us that when Ribka is pregnant she feels unusual movement in her belly and goes to seek *Hashem*. She receives a divine message telling her that there are two nations in her womb and that **יעבוד צעיר רב** (*Beresheet* 25:23). The Rada"q, Rabbi David Qimhi (1160–1235), explains that the meaning of this statement is somewhat ambiguous. It could be read as though the elder - *rav*- will serve the young, or the young - *sa'ir*, will serve the elder. This prophecy, Rabbi Qimhi writes, foreshadows the future tumultuous relationship between Israel and Edom.

The birth of the twins is also fraught with complexities. Esav is born first but Ya'akov is not far behind. He is clinging to his heel, possibly vying for the place of the first-born. The birth of the boys does not clarify the message that Ribka has received. It is still unclear who is '*rav*' and who is '*sa'ir*'.

The next time we meet Ya'akov and Esav they are already grown men - "**ויגדלו**" - Esav is described as an **איש ידע ציד** and Ya'akov as an **איש תם יושב אוהלים** (*Beresheet* 25:27). Esav is a hunter, a man of the fields; Ya'akov is a scholar, a man of integrity. They are already beginning to exhibit personality traits that will prime them to be able to inherit - or not - the heritage of *Abraham Abinu*.

In his commentary on the word: "**ויגדלו**", Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch provides an illuminating explanation. He writes that it was only when Esav and Ya'akov grow up that they are shown to be unlike each other. As children, it was difficult to distinguish them by their personalities. Only when they become older do they develop radically different ways of being. R' Hirsch takes these verses to indicate the importance of personalized education – **חנוך לנער על פי דרכו** (*Mishle* 22:6). He explains that Esav developed into a man of evil ways partly because the environment in which he interacted with did not allow his personality and tendencies to develop in a positive manner.

Rabbi Hirsch writes that if Esav had encountered different circumstances, it may have been easier to for him channel “the strength, skills and courage latent within him... for God's service, [and] the future **גיבור ציד** would not have become a **גיבור** but a true **גיבור לפני ה'**. Ya'akov and Esav, despite their different natures, would have remained twin brothers in spirit and in way of life. Early on, the sword of Esav would have entered into a covenant with the spirit of Ya'akov, and who knows what turn history would have taken!”¹



Painting by Gerrit Willemsz Horst Depicting Isaac Blessing Jacob

While Rabbi Hirsch focuses on the value and importance of personalized education I want to draw attention to an important implication from his commentary: we have no way of knowing how history would have unfolded had Esav made other choices with his life. What must be clear to us, though, is that we cannot study the beginning of Esav's life based on the conclusion of his life, but must study him as an individual who made choices regarding his destiny. After all, one of the most important principles in our tradition is that every human being has the freedom of choice to be good or to be evil.²

Rabbi Hirsch's commentary seems to indicate that our lives are *not predestined*. Esav and Yaakov could have both been righteous - two tribes - and the nation of Israel would have been shaped by these two brothers instead of just one.

However, this did not happen. Esav pursued a life antithetical to that of his parents and gave birth to a nation that became the arch-enemy of the Jewish people. The end of Esav's life, though, should never make us forget that Esav became who he was out of his own free will, and that history could have looked different. It teaches us that we each have the freedom of choice to pursue goodness or evil, to further and continue the tradition of our fore parents or to forgo it for the pleasures of this world. Above all, we learn from our *parasha* that our actions can have enormous and far-reaching repercussions. Each decision that we make and each choice that will pursue will impact the future history of the Jewish people.

May we continue to embrace the lessons of our beloved Torah and *Be'ezrat Hashem* draw strength from its teachings to become the best individuals we can be.

Rabbi Setton is the Rabbi of Magen David of Manhattan and teaches Judaic Studies in Barkai Yeshiva

¹ The Hirsch Chumash: Sefer Bereshit. Vol. 1. Feldheim Publishers, 2002, p. 558.

² משנה תורה הלכות תשובה ה:א



Parashat Vayese

SHABBAT TABLE TALKS HELPING OUR CHILDREN OVERCOME FEAR

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

For younger children there is a persistent fear. Helping our children to understand the fear and letting them know that we are there for them is important. Belittling the fear will not make it go away. Only when our child feels that we really care about his fear and understand why he might be afraid can we begin to help him deal with his fear and reduce it. *Halakha* dictates that as we go to sleep we say *Qeri'at Shema* and say other things. Some of these things are meant to remind us of the “big picture” of how the world works as we go to sleep. Most importantly, we must try to understand what our children need as they fall asleep, and try to fill those needs. Satisfied needs are forgotten; frustrated needs come back in many different ways.

Background: Ya'aqob, our patriarch, begins this week's *perasha* in flight from Esav, who wants to murder him. We see Ya'aqob, as the sun is setting, preparing for his night he puts stones around and under his head and goes to sleep. His dream of the angels going up and down the ladder from earth to heaven contains in it very important words from Hashem—words that Ya'aqob needed to hear at that moment.

Text: Beresheet 28:10-17 (SB)

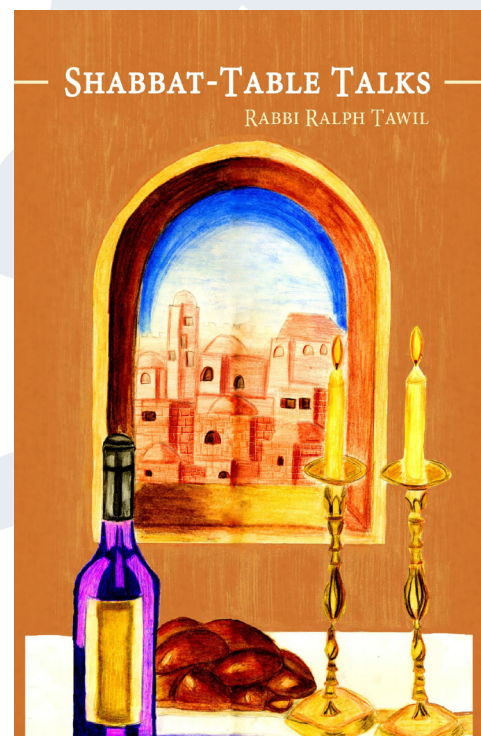
Ya'aqob went out from Be'er Sheva and went toward Haran, and encountered a certain place. He had to spend the night there, for the sun had come in. Now he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place.

And he dreamt: Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, and here: messengers of God were going up and down on it. And here: Hashem was standing over against him.

He said: I am Hashem, the God of Abraham, your father and the God of Yishaq. The land on which you lie I give to you and to your seed. Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, to the Sea, to the east, to the north, to the Negev. All the families of the earth will find blessing through you and through your seed!

Here, I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this soil; indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.

Ya'aqob awoke from his sleep and said: Why, Hashem is in this place, and I, I did not know it! He was awestruck and said: How awe-inspiring is this place. This is none other than a house of God, and that is the gate of heaven.



“Helping our children to understand the fear & letting them know that we are there for them is important.”

Discussion: Why did Ya'aqob leave his home? (Because his mother suggested he flee to Laban, her brother in order to escape his murderous brother Esav.) How do you think Ya'aqob felt? (Ya'aqob was running away from his brother who wanted to kill him. He was alone and on the road. He probably was not sure that he had done the right thing by tricking his father into giving him the blessings. Perhaps he was scared and guilty.)

“Do you ever feel scared when you go to sleep?” (Let the children talk, even if you know that your child does feel scared in the nighttime, let him express it.) “Do you know that when I was little I used to be scared also?” (If this is true, it can encourage your child to speak more openly about his fear.)

What about the nighttime makes you feel afraid? (Whatever it is, accept what your child is saying as a real fear—for him it is very real!)

How can we deal with our children's fear after we show understanding? (We can use the “ladder method.” Imagine the situation is like a ladder. The lowest rung is the situation that causes the least anxiety, and the highest rung is the situation that causes the greatest fear and anxiety.) Ask your child to describe situations that do not cause any anxiety at all (for example, when he is in the room in the nighttime, with the lights lit and one of his parents is in the room.) After describing the situation with no fear, what is the situation that causes the greatest fear (for example, being alone in the a dark room.) Talk about some of the gradations in the middle. (You could make a chart that has pictures showing the different levels of the ladder. Let your child mark his progress on the chart, as he slowly moves to situations that used to cause him high levels of anxiety. [By the way, the ladder technique can be useful for fears and anxiety-ridden situations in our own lives as well. By constructing situations of low anxiety and graduation to situations that used to be more anxiety ridden, we can overcome some of the things that we fear. I have used it myself on occasion.])

How do you think Ya'aqob felt after hearing Hashem's message? (Hashem's message was exactly what Ya'aqob needed to hear. It affirmed the blessing that his father gave him and promised him that he will be sustained and protected.) Our children need our affirmation as well as our promise of protection. The security of knowing your parent is in the same room is very comforting to young children. We understand why our children want it, and when we make a point of giving it when it is needed, they will be able to become independent sooner. (This might take some reprioritizing of your time, but it is well

**“How can we deal with our children's fear after we show understanding? We can use the ‘ladder method.’
Imagine the situation is like a ladder.”**

worth it in the long run.)

A part of the bedtime ritual according the Jewish practice, is the reciting of *Qeri'at Shema*. This affirms the most important aspect of Judaism, that Hashem is the one and only Master of the Creation, controlling the world and demanding behavior in line with the words of His Torah. Our world is based on these deep beliefs. Being aware of this as we go to sleep adds to our children's sense of security.

Jewish practice includes a declaration of forgiveness in the bedtime prayers. If taken seriously, this declaration allows us to look beyond the people and situation that caused us pain in the day. It is a way of putting all grudges and feelings of vengeance out of your mind as you go to sleep.

Master of the Universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or provoked me, or anyone who sinned against me whether with regard to my physical person, my finances, my honor or anything belonging to me; whether accidentally or willfully; etc. May no person be punished on my account. May it be Your will, Hashem My God, and God of my fathers, that I not sin again. And may You, in Your great mercy erase that which I have sinned against You, but not through suffering or severe illnesses. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable before You, my Rock and Redeemer. (Siddur Kol Yaakob, Sephardic Heritage Foundation, pp. 810, 812)

Preparing for bed by reviewing our actions, forgiving those who have sinned against us, and affirming our faith in one God, are the ways that we close our day of service to the Holy One, blessed be He. When our day ends in this way, even if we are laying our heads on a rock, alone in the road, we know that Hashem is with us.

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