

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



Special Pesah Issue
IN HONOR OF VIVIEN HIDARY
BY HER HUSBAND MORRIS HIDARY
AND THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN



*In Honor of Vivien Hidary
by her husband Morris Hidary
and their children and grandchildren*

SCA MISSION

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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Editor in Chief: Murray J. Mizrachi

Content Editors: Rabbi Harold Sutton, Rabbi Yosef Bitton, Rabbi Nathan Dweck

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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

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

CONTENTS

<i>Editor's Note</i> Mr. Murray J. Mizrachi	4
<i>The Story Re-told: Why Bother?</i> Rabbi Ezra Labaton PhD A"H	5
<i>Why Do We Eat Masah?</i> Rabbi Yosef Bitton	8
<i>SCA Values</i>	9
<i>Their Cries Rose Up to God</i> Mr. Louis J Shamie.....	10
<i>Model Seder – The One and Only</i> Rabbi Haim Ovadia	12
<i>The Purpose of Yeshivah</i> Mr. Isaac Shalom A"H	15
<i>Passover: The Holiday of Our Freedom</i> Mr. Sam Catton A"H	15
<i>A Pesah Message</i> Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks	16
<i>Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Event</i> Ms. Sally Mizrachi	17
<i>Maqam of the Week</i>	19
<i>Can a Man Shave his Facial Hair on Hol HaMo'ed?</i> Mr. Joseph Mosseri.....	20
<i>What is Our Minhag? (Eating the Shankbone)</i> Mr. Morris Arking	24
<i>Pass-Over?</i> Mr. Eddie Mishaan	26
<i>"And I will Harden Pharaoh's Heart"</i> Mr. Charles Mizrahi.....	28
<i>The Pathological Jew?</i> Rabbi Moses Haber	30
<i>Shabbat-Table Talk</i> Rabbi Ralph Tawil	32
<i>Sephardic History Part V: Western Europe and Emancipation</i> Mrs. Natalie Mizrachi...	34

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

For the better part of a year, Qol Ha'Qahal has been distributing quality publications for the greater community with the goal of spreading Torah. Tens of thousands of copies and over one hundred articles have been circulated throughout our community in Brooklyn, Deal, Manhattan, and beyond, with many more accessed via email and the web. It is with sincere thanks that we wish our member affiliates a Hazaq U'baruch for spreading quality Torah throughout our community. It is with great thanks and the partnership of all those involved that such a feat was achieved. We have regular requests from readers from as far as California and Israel to send print copies in addition to the digital copies. We hope that the community will continue to reach out and use Qol Ha'Qahal as a platform for dialogue and the publication of high quality and relevant Torah material.

Pesah is a holiday of questions. It is incumbent upon us as a nation to answer the questions of every generation in an informed and appropriate manner. The challenges posed today by technology, secularism, and anti-Zionism find strong answers within the pages of this publication. Many have approached me about their children's experience on the college campus and beyond. The struggle to find balance and appropriate answers is needed now more than ever and can seem like a daunting challenge. Our Community Rabbis have been able to address some of the most critical problems facing our community today in mature and informed ways, in part by utilizing the platform of Qol Ha'Qahal.

As Sephardim we have always strived to find the path of moderation and inclusion. The SCA stands firmly behind its values of a commitment to halakha, growth through education, respect and tolerance, and interaction with society. It is for this reason that we have chosen to republish our values in this issue (see page 9).

As Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks told us during his recent visit to the Sephardic Community, "we believe in unity not uniformity." The SCA, like Rabbi Sacks, believes in mutual respect and tolerance for a wide variety of dialogue

when spreading Torah, while remaining true to our core values. In an effort to consistently improve the quality of our publication, we ask our rabbis and laymen alike to recommend improvements on a regular basis. Our goals are to never offend or alienate, but rather to inform and include. We will gladly republish letters submitted to the editor at Qahalnewsletter@gmail.com.

Looking towards the remainder of 5775, we at the SCA are excited for another summer full of men's and women's classes and an excellent roster of world-renowned Shabbat guest lecturers. We invite you to join us and help build a stronger community together.

*Hag Kashner v'Sameah,
Tizku L'shanim Rabnot Ne'imot V'Tobot,*

*Murray J. Mizrachi
Editor In Chief, Qol Ha'Qahal*





The Seder

THE STORY RE-TOLD: WHY BOTHER?¹

Rabbi Ezra Labaton Ph.D. A"H

The Haggadah is a revered text. Family members gather around the Haggadah on the first nights of Passover to plumb its wisdom and gather insights into our historical experience. As a people, this love of the Haggadah text expresses itself in the multiple commentaries that Rabbis have authored over the centuries: Midrashic commentaries, Medieval commentaries, Rabbinic commentaries, Kabbalistic commentaries, Renaissance humanistic commentaries, and of course Modern commentaries. A year does not go by without the publication of a new commentary on the Haggadah. This year [2010] Rabbi Norman Lamm's commentary was just published, while last year [2009] Rabbi Soloveichick's commentary graced our table, gleaming with new ideas, thoughts and concepts. The pathways of Jewish creativity in reading and interpreting the Haggadah seem endless. On a yearly basis the Haggadah asks of us questions and expects newly minted creative answers. Or better, the Haggadah asks of us – begs of us – to ask the questions ourselves and respond to these self-imposed questions with answers of deeper understanding of what the Haggadah tries to teach us.

On this holiday of questions, I raise my Passover question on precisely that Haggadah passage that challenges us to study again and again, to raise new questions and provide new creative answers.

First, let us note that the Haggadah begins by asking its famous four questions. Then, the Haggadah answers these questions with the classic response of *Avadim*. For me, this very answer contains the seeds of my question. Here we read:

Even if we are all wise,
And we are all understanding,
And we are all elders,
And we all know the Torah,
We are obligated to tell the story

Of the Exodus from Egypt.

I ask why? What is the point of telling a story that we all know? We know the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. It's the same story as last year. Nothing new, nothing has changed. But the Haggadah persists and emphasizes: Even if we are *Hachamim* (accumulated much knowledge), even if we are *Nevonim* (insightful), and even if we are *Zekenim* (we have been to the seder table many times before and the story has not changed!) – still we must retell. And again the question comes to the fore: Why must we re-tell a story that we all know?

Certainly, the most obvious answer is that we are not retelling the story for ourselves but for the children who asked the questions. This answer, however, has to be rejected for two reasons. A) Even if we are completely alone, and there are no children, still we must retell the story. B) The next paragraph of the five great Rabbis – who were all *Hachamim*, *Nevonim* and *Zekenim*, sitting among themselves - retold the story till the wee hours of the morning! Proof positive, that even the greatest Rabbis, who know all, still must still tell the story – even if they sit alone.

Ramban solves the enigma of why great Rabbis must retell a story that is already known to them by emphasizing the important role that the Exodus plays in our world view. In his commentary to Devarim (6:20-21), he elaborates on the *Avadim Hayinu* answer to the *Ki Yish'alecha Bincha* verse. Exodus teaches us about the infinite power of the Almighty and His sovereign mastery over the universe. *Yesi'at Misrayim* demonstrated this mastery over the natural order and we collectively as a nation witnessed this demonstration of Divine power. Our recognition of *Bore Olam* is rooted in our collective experience and vicarious experience of the Exodus. The story must be re-told, if only to re-experience and deepen that awareness of the Sovereign master of all. The re-telling may not grant any new information – but it highlights how central this experience was for the Jewish people. After all, the Ramban argues, the Ten Commandments do not introduce *Bore Olam* not as He who created heaven

¹ Excerpted from: *Tebah's Pesah Reader* (2010)

Continued on page 6

and earth, but as He who took us out of Egypt. Further, the stated reason in Devarim for the holiday of Shabbat is *Yesi'at Misrayim*. Given this central role, the story must be re-told – no matter how wise we are or how many times we heard the story before.

Rabbi Soloveichick, in his Haggadah commentary, raises the very same question. Why must great Rabbis re-tell a story well known to one and all? He roots his answer in the peculiar formulation of the Haggadah itself. The Haggadah says, מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים – “we are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus.” The more conventional way to express this thought would have been מצות עלינו לספר את יציאת מצרים.

Rabbi Soloveichick explains the distinction between these two formulations. The latter (לספר את) refers to a fixed narrative, a story with clear demarcations:

A beginning, middle and end. After the narrative is told and the details known, there is nothing more to say. The Haggadah's formulation

(לספר ביציאת מצרים), however, indicates more than a simple re-telling. Here the *misvah* is, להעמיק בו ולהבינו על בריו ולא רק, “לספר את המעשה שהיה” — we are required to add dimensions to our knowledge of the story. The Haggadah demands not a simple review of events that took place, but a deeper understanding of the theological and spiritual forces, as they intersected with the historical fact of the Exodus. That is, though the great Rabbis may know the simple story, they must deepen – from year to year – their understanding of this central event. Indeed, why the Almighty interacts within the historical process and when, is a profound philosophical question that even the greatest of Jewish minds must think about and revisit.

Here Rabbi Soloveichick is teaching us that our knowledge and understanding of Bore Olam should grow from year to year (presumably, after a year of more Torah study) and therefore we should be able to add new and deeper insights – every year. Rabbi Soloveichick demands of the story teller more than a simple re-telling of the story. He must deepen our understanding of the event, adding new dimensions each

time the *Misvah* of *sippur* is engaged.

Leaving aside the Medieval commentary of the Ramban and the Modern commentary of Rabbi Soloveichick, one may analyze the Haggadah's phrase from a Rabbinic contextual/literary point of view. We note that this formulation of “וכל” “המרבה...הרי זה משובח” (“the more that one does...the more praiseworthy it is”) appears in only two other contexts in all of the vast ocean of Rabbinic literature. First, we find this formulation in the *Mishna* of Sanhedrin (5:1). Here, the judges of a capital case are told that the more they ask, the more they challenge - the more praiseworthy. The accused, about to be executed, may not be able to defend himself from the testimony of the two witnesses. Here the judges must take on the role of the defender of the accused and challenge the witnesses. After all, a person's life hangs in the balance. The judges must go beyond the pro forma questioning of the witnesses. The judges, through their challenges to the

witnesses, will save a life - or not. Here, the *Mishna* demands of the judges to ask more, beyond the minimum, and even beyond the maximum, for the sake of the accused. And the judge who goes

beyond – is praiseworthy.

A second formulation of this type is found in *Mo'ed Kattan* (Yerushalmi 18b). Here the Gemara declares that the more that one engages in the mourning rituals for his deceased parents deserves praise. The *Gemara* here is concerned with the proper honor due to the mourner's parents. The *Korban Edah* adds that the purpose of the “רבוי” - doing more honor to the deceased - is that it provides more comfort for the mourner. Indeed, the *hesped* based on this “רבוי” could give added significance and meaning to the life of the deceased which as well provides help to the mourner.

Do these three contexts, all of which have this very specific formulation – have anything in common? Can one shed light on another? Or, more specifically, do these two other Rabbinical contexts – with the same formulation as our Haggadah – expand or enhance our understanding of the Haggadah's formulation? Without overly eisegizing the matter, perhaps this unique formulation indicates that in the same way that a judge in a capital case can ask ordinary

“Exodus teaches us about the infinite power of the Almighty and His sovereign mastery over the universe.”

questions, and receive ordinary answers, so too a person telling the story of the Exodus can do so in an ordinary fashion – simply going through the motions. Or, the judge may seek out every nook and cranny, may challenge every detail, may bring the event to life through his incisive, penetrating, well-chosen words. Here the story teller is warned through this formulation that *Yesi'at Misrayim* must be told with the same zeal and passion, with the same concern and intensity, with the same penetrating insight, as a judge who sees the life of the accused in his hands. The judge and the story teller are both praised if they conduct themselves beyond the expected measure. The judge must interrogate properly, while he who tells the story of the Exodus must tell the story appropriately - learning the right lessons from the interrogating judge.

And the same is true for the mourner of parents who finds comfort in engaging in *עסקיו של מת* (the needs of the deceased), or for those who seek to comfort the mourner with a *hesped* that frames the life of the deceased in a way that helps the mourner deal with the tragedy. A *hesped* could be ordinary or pro forma, where the *maspid* fails to give meaning and a broader context to the life of the deceased. The mourners remain unmoved and uncomforted. The ordinary words spoken are insipid and empty of meaning. Or the *maspid*, through the power of the spoken word, can turn a tragic loss of sadness into a meaningful event that adds a dimension of significance to the life of the deceased, thereby helping the mourner work his way through the mass of emotions he feels at this loss.

Similarly, the narrative of the Exodus could be recited in an ordinary, run-of-the-mill fashion – adding neither depth, meaning, significance nor insight. The same story told as last year. Or, as the gifted *maspid*, the well chosen words of the story teller can re-create the narrative in a way that adds significance and meaning to the re-telling. The same participant as last year may grace the seder table and though he heard the very same story, sees it with greater clarity and greater insight. The narrative has been re-told in a fashion that has added a deeper dimension of understanding and is seen in a broader framework. In all these cases, the extra effort

is praised. This literary analysis of the key Rabbinic phrase has indeed helped us understand why the known story of the Exodus has to be retold. The other two Rabbinic contexts added a dimension of understanding to the Haggadah's formulation.

There is one final way of approaching a solution to the question, why must great Rabbis, who know the story, re-tell it? Simply, because words matter. Words convey more than knowledge. Words have the power of changing the speaker of the words – even when the speaker recites words which he has recited many times before. The speaker may be moved by his recitation of a narrative he knows – if the appropriate words are chosen – even if he learns nothing new with no new dimensions explored. These words – though recited many times before – penetrate his heart, mind and soul, stimulating a new spiritual response. Such is the power of the recited word.

***“Words convey more than knowledge.
Words have the power of changing the
speaker of the words – even when the
speaker recites words which he has
recited many times before.”***

Prayer may be a good analogy. Many have prayed the same words time and time again. In the last fifty two years that I have supplicated my Creator, not one word has changed. Yet, the words are still meaningful; they

still have the power to move, stimulate, shock and even transform me. Admittedly, some days of prayer are better than others. But on the “better” days, the very same words that I have recited literally thousands of times before, can recharge an old spiritual battery. The Rabbis of the Talmud, who organized and chose these words of prayer, praise and thanksgiving, understood well the energizing power of the *Siddur*'s words. [For more on the power of Prayer, see Rabbi Eliezer's monograph on the “Art of Prayer,” and R. Abraham Heschel's *Man in Search of God* – both works are wonderful expositions on the efficacy and life transforming power of prayer.]

The very same could be said of the Exodus narrative. The words themselves, though recited for years prior, still have the capacity to move and energize the story teller. Thus, even if alone, even if it's a story many times re-told, and even if the teller is the greatest of scholars – this time may be different.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

These very same words may serve to provide a spark of spiritual change in the teller of the narrative.

Or, put a bit differently, the *mitzvah* of “*Sippur Yesi’at Misrayim*,” is not about new knowledge, new aspects, new dimensions or new insights. It’s about creating a feeling of *בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות (להראות) את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים* “in every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.” Admittedly, living in the lap of luxury as most of us, it’s hard to imagine ourselves as slaves, serving the awesome Pharaoh. Not so for the Jew subject to the flames of the Inquisition, Chmielnicki pogroms or concentration camp. They all saw themselves as living in compromised slave-like situations. For them the servitude was real, as were their prayers for redemption. We have a more difficult time with the notion of seeing ourselves as redeemed from Egypt. Yet, try we must. And the words of re-telling are there to create psychologically and emotionally- even momentarily - the experience of servitude and redemption.

Imagine that these words of the Exodus narrative have been told and retold thousands upon thousands of times, by millions upon millions of Jews, during the last two thousand years. The Jews who told and retold the story may have been wise, and aged, and may have heard this very same narrative many times before. Yet, they were always faithful to the *mitzvah* and once again retold the story. Either to emphasize its importance or to gain some new insight into Divine providence and how it operates within the historical context; or, because the words had the power to change the story teller himself, or enable him to experience in some fashion or other, the servitude and redemption experienced by our forefathers. However we understand the *mitzvah* of *Sippur*, let us point out that it is the key to a meaningful Haggadah experience. The *Ba’al HaHaggadah* certainly knew how to stimulate the right questions, now we must take the challenge and find the right answers.

Rabbi Dr. Labaton's A"H Doctoral Thesis on Rabbi Abraham ben Haramabm and many of his classes can be found on <http://rabbilabaton.com/>.

WHY DO WE EAT MASAH?

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Why do we eat Masah? There are at least two reasons. One, is explicitly mentioned in the Torah and the second, less known, is mentioned at the very beginning of the Haggadah. Let us begin from the second reason.

For many, many years when we were slaves in Egypt, every single day we ate exclusively Masah. We ate Masah for breakfast, for lunch and for dinner. Masah was the food conceived by the cruel Egyptians as the ideal meal for the Jewish slaves. Firstly, because the Masah lasted longer than regular bread in the slave’s stomach. And mainly because Masah was cheaper than any other food. All you need to make Masah is flour and water. Masah was also cost-effective because you don’t “waste” any time. To make regular bread you need to let the dough rest for approximately 15-20 minutes and only then you would place the spongy-dough into the oven. In the Egyptian captivity the raising of the dough was skipped. Instead, the Jewish slaves had to put the dough into the oven flat because they had to work for the Egyptians without a pause. The Egyptians were not willing to waste 15 extra minutes of Jewish work to allow the dough to rise and be made into regular bread.

***“By eating Masah we celebrate
our providential freedom,
without forgetting our
terrible suffering.”***

Thus, we declare at the very beginning of the Haggadah pointing at the Masah: *ha lahma ‘aniya...* “This is the bread of poverty that our ancestors ate in Egypt.”

The Biblical text emphasizes a different reason for eating



Masah. Upon our departure from Egypt we also ate Masah. Why? Because we did not leave Egypt progressively, during the course of a few weeks or even days. We were rescued by Hashem in a speedy operation (*behipazon*) which lasted just one night. (Try to visualize the mobilization of 3 million people leaving in one night!) And as much as we were eager to have our first normal meal with bread, ironically, there was no time to spend in preparing bread for the journey. Once again, but for a completely different reason, we did not have even 15 extra minutes to wait for the dough to rise. We had to leave swiftly, carrying the Masot on our shoulders.

Only that this time the Masah also has the taste of freedom. Now, the Masah reminds us how quickly (=miraculously) we left the house of slavery.

The Masah, therefore, represents both, the sweet flavor of freedom and the bitterness of slavery.

By eating Masah we celebrate our providential freedom, without forgetting our terrible suffering.

Rabbi Bitton is Rabbi of Congregation Ohel David U'Shlomo.

SCA VALUES

OUR COMMUNITY HAS BARUKH HASHEM, A LONG AND PROUD HISTORY OF TORAH OBSERVANCE AND ADHERENCE TO TRADITIONAL SEPHARDIC VALUES AND CUSTOMS. IN ORDER TO PERPETUATE THESE VALUES AND CUSTOMS AND TO HELP ENSURE THE CONTINUITY OF THE BLESSINGS THAT WE HAVE LONG ENJOYED AS A COMMUNITY, WE HEREBY DECLARE THE FOLLOWING:

COMMITMENT TO HALAKHA

We are committed to conformity to Halakha, based upon the Code of Law written by R. Yosef Karo, as shaped and developed through the generations by the long-standing customs and practices of the Sephardic community (*minhag*), and as expressed by the Rabbis of our synagogues. At the same time we recognize that those who may not totally conform to Halakha today are still deserving of our respect and guidance.

GROWTH THROUGH EDUCATION

We feel strongly that constructive change within the community will come about through education, cooperation and positive interaction rather than through coercion and through unilateral edicts.

RESPECT AND TOLERANCE

We assert that, regardless of ideological or other differences, community Rabbis are obligated to treat each other, and their respective congregants, with respect, and dignity. It follows that all Community institutions, even those which have philosophies with which we may differ, are to be accorded respect.

TORAH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

We stand strongly in favor of higher secular education and recognize the value and necessity of a college and university education in creating a complete Torah-Jew who can function in the world at-large, fulfill his or her potential and appreciate all of God's work.

INTERACTION WITH SOCIETY

In accordance with our Sephardic heritage, we believe that community members should be engaged not only to prosper and grow in the practice of traditional Judaism, but to engage the world in a productive and creative manner.

LEARNING AND EARNING

We cherish the traditional way of life in which one combines the learning of Torah and observance of mitzvot together with earning a livelihood (*Torah im Derech Eress*).

MEDINAT YISRAEL

We recognize God's providence in the establishment of the State of Israel, fully support its security and prosperity and, in prayer and in deed, celebrate its existence.

THEIR CRIES ROSE UP TO GOD

Mr. Louis J Shamie

“*Vata’al shav’atam el haElohim*” – “And their cry came up to God”

We open our prayers on Pesah evening with *Mizmor* 107. There is no direct mention of the Exodus in the *mizmor*. Instead, it recounts various episodes of people in distress – lost in the wilderness, caught in a storm at sea, imprisoned in darkness. In each episode, “they cried out to God in their troubles, and He saved them from their distress.”

There is universality to this repeated line, to the cry and the answer. A cry is elemental, with no syntax or content. It is the last plea of the desperate. In many ways, it represents the moment where God is called to act in the lives of men.

The choice to associate this *mizmor* with Pesah and the redemption from Egypt is very fitting. It mirrors the Torah’s own description of the Exodus story, which hinges on a cry of distress and a Divine answer. This critical point found at the end of the second chapter of Shemot. For most of the chapter, the narrative had been focusing on Moshe’s development, following him from birth in Egypt to his exile in Midian, where he settles and starts a family. At this point the Torah (in chapter 2) pans back to Egypt and returns focus to the plight of the Israelite nation. It is ready to set the stage for the redemption.

23. And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry came up to God from the labor.

24. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

25. And God saw the children of Israel, and God knew.

The imagery is powerful: The Jews are crying out in suffering, to the extent that their cry is rising to the heavens. More so, their cry is heard and received, and God empathizes with their plight.

Think of how the paragraph might have been written. The text could have read: “And so it came time for God to redeem Abraham’s descendants as he had promised, after four centuries in a foreign land.” It would have fit the facts, God had foreshadowed the Exodus way back in Bereshit. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years and ultimately redeemed. We don’t believe God forgets, and so it seems strange to imply that God “remembered” this plan only once he heard the groaning of the nation.

So which is it? Is God faithfully executing a centuries-long plan, keeping his promise in a timely manner? Or is he recognizing a dire situation and responding with compassion?

Both can be true, in that both reasons are sufficient for God to act. But it is important to notice which reason the Torah highlights. The text is making a choice to focus on the cries and compassion, even seeming to make the entire redemption contingent upon them. It is telling us something with that choice, something that runs deep through our tradition and how it portrays our God.

Let’s look to Hallel, a collection of celebratory Tehillim that we read throughout the holiday. The text praises God “who resides on high; who descends to see in the heavens and the earth” (113:5-6). This praise is not generic and we would be wrong to gloss over it. It is important to understand exactly which qualities of God are highlighted by our tradition. We recognize our God as one who investigates all that happens on the earth. Though his majesty is limitless and represented by the heavens, He concerns himself with very-unmajestic situations on Earth. We praise Him for “lifting the poor from

“Unlike other cultures who trumpeted their gods’ might and tied them to powerful monarchies (as in Egypt) or privileged priestly classes (India’s Brahmins), we are taught to see God’s greatness in his justice, kindness and care for the lowliest person.”

the dust” (113:7). When the Torah elucidates God’s qualities, it demonstrates the values by which we ought to live. Here it is telling us: *as high and respected as you may be, it is never beneath your dignity to remedy an injustice.*

Unlike other cultures who trumpeted their gods’ might and tied them to powerful monarchies (as in Egypt) or privileged priestly classes (India’s Brahmins), we are taught to see God’s greatness in his justice, kindness and care for the lowliest person. The Greek gods were constantly squabbling with each other, making morality seem moot, and were often indifferent or even hostile to humanity. Our religion breaks from these others. Judaism recognizes that there is one God, upholding one Law, with a deep concern for the welfare of humanity and the justice of human society.

This theme resonates throughout the Torah in ways reminiscent of God hearing Israel’s cries in Egypt. What we see from our scriptures is a God who is very much attuned to cries of suffering and injustice. Early in Bereshit, after Kayin kills Hebel, God tells Kayin “the voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Bereshit 4:10) Hebel himself cannot protest, but his murder calls out for God’s response.

A little later, God tells Abraham: “the cry of Sedom and Amorah is great... I will go down and see if they have done altogether as the cry that has come to me.” (Bereshit 18:20-21). Metaphorically, the repeated crimes of evil people create a din that rouses God to investigate. Just as we saw in Hallel, God descends in order to perform justice.

Perhaps most moving is the case of Hagar and Yishmael. Lost in the wilderness and without water, Hagar despairs and abandons her child so as not to witness his death. At this heart-wrenching moment, “God heard the voice of the boy”, (Bereshit 21:17), and guides the pair to a well. Note that God intervened on hearing the cry of the boy alone; the Torah does not mention the merit of his father Abraham.

The knowledge that God cares about humanity emboldens us to pray in times of distress, and to have confidence that He is listening. But there is more to it than that. If we want to be heard by God, we must abandon hypocrisy. Isaiah (chapter

58) addresses a people disappointed that God ignores their prayers and fasting. The prophet says that as long as they stick to their unjust ways, their fasting will not “make [their] voice heard on high” (58:4). Not all cries cut through to the heavens! Only when the people turn away from wickedness and care for the poor, “you will cry, and He will say ‘here I am’” (58:9).

If God is the ultimate authority and He sides with the oppressed, then woe unto us if we find ourselves as the oppressors! We see this message in Mishpatim (Shemot 22:20-23). God first instructs us not to oppress the stranger (“ger” in Hebrew) as we ourselves were once strangers in Egypt. Then we are commanded to not afflict the widow or orphan, “for if they cry to Me, I will hear their cry... I will kill you by the sword, and your wives shall be widows and your children orphans.” This harrowing warning shows that the God of Exodus, who exacted fearful revenge on behalf of the downtrodden Israelites, takes this same approach to all generations and all situations. Being Jewish does not put us irreversibly under God’s protection: if we inflict pain on innocents, we will be punished just as Pharaoh was.



Moses played by Charlton Heston in the Ten Commandments (1956)

Moshe, chosen to be God’s most faithful messenger, exemplified these values. Before receiving his mission, he had already rescued a slave from an Egyptian persecutor, and defended women he did not know from the shepherds who were harassing them. It was in his character to stick up for those without power.

There will always be disadvantaged people among us, those too easily disregarded or exploited. Think of the immigrant far from her home country, working as a maid to provide for her family. Think of the sincere convert who comes to a community without social ties or status, looking for acceptance. Think of the man with a failing business, having trouble meeting tuition bills or paying his rent. When we are true to our traditions, we emulate God in showing respect for their humanity and care for their plight. Then, when we are in distress, we should take comfort in the fact that God is attentive as our cries rise up to the heavens.

Louis J Shamie is a partner at Zimmer Partners, an investment firm.

MODEL SEDER – THE ONE AND ONLY

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

A model seder, ideally, should occur once a year (twice, outside the Holy Land). It is a little different every year, because we keep changing and evolving. We can choose to learn from our mistakes, ignore them or fix them. We hopefully grow more intelligent, sensitive and understanding with each passing year, although it is becoming ever so difficult to do so in a society which gives little respect to age and to the wisdom acquired with it. We might have been learning, or reading, or asking ourselves tough questions during the year, questions not there last Pesah. Our seders will also vary because of the participants. Do we get along with all of them, or do some give us anxiety attacks? Are we celebrating the seder at home with close family and friends, at a shul with hundreds of somewhat familiar people, or at a resort with close family and friends and hundreds of total strangers? The ingredients of the seder night are so varied and volatile that as a result, not all of our seders can be created equal. (For me, two seders stand poles apart, on one hand the first seder, as a teenager, without my beloved grandfather, and on the other, 31 years later, the first seder with my youngest daughter who was born just a day earlier).

In light of the infinite possibilities for a real seder to evolve, the whole notion of a “Model Seder,” whether for kids at school or as a community event, seems to be counterintuitive. The power and energy of the seder stem from the people, their experience, knowledge, curiosity, place in life, history, past, and future. It hinges on how excited are the participants to be Jewish and to observe the seder or, conversely, how detached they feel from the rituals and the lore of this wonderful night. How can one anticipate and prepare for all these unknown factors which will unfold only at the moment of truth? I really want to know who thought that this is a good idea. Who came up with the idea of a “Model Seder?” My google search for the “first Model Seder” retrieved many interesting matches which made me rethink the concepts “model” and “Seder,” but it did not provide the name of that man or woman who is responsible for this now ubiquitous practice.

“We hopefully grow more intelligent, sensitive and understanding with each passing year”

It seems, unfortunately, that the “Model Seder,” alongside the fire, the wheel and the first written alphabet, would join the great inventions which forever changed the course of human civilization, without giving us the opportunity to thank the anonymous inventor. According to most researchers in the yet not fully explored field of Model Seder sciences (especially the renowned scholar Dr. Manish Evitz) the practice was either the intellectual brain-child of a frustrated, authoritarian teacher who wanted to make sure that even when away from school, the students would march to the tune of his military style, or the frustration was for lack of educational materials to feed the students, a problem beautifully solved by preparing them, for one whole month, for a one night event which was supposed! to be! a SURPRISE!

Model Seder as Dress Rehearsal?

Dress rehearsals are indispensable before a show or a presentation, and they could be tolerated and maybe even understood before a wedding, but would you have one before a surprise birthday party, with the birthday boy or girl in attendance? I think not! I have a feeling that such a move would somewhat diminish the element of surprise.

But let me approach the problem from a more levelheaded perspective. I think that there are three issues every seder table should be aware of. One is that we focus all of our attention on the kids, the second is that our attention is dedicated to what WE think they need to know or ask, and the third is the taming of the Haggadah. (If I would follow the pattern of the Haggadah I would add a fourth problem, but I leave that to you).

Let us start with the first issue: focusing on the kids.

The ancient Exodus marked the beginning of a covenant between God and the Israelites. God delivered the Israelites from Egypt and gave them their freedom and independence. In return, all He asked of them was to fulfill their part of the covenant, to walk in

His ways. It was, as a matter of fact, a unilateral covenant, because the only beneficiary was the Israelites, but it was still a commitment, and for thousands of years there were those who chose to remain in the fold and do great things in the

name of Judaism, others who opted out, and yet others who despite defining themselves as non-observant went on to accomplish great deeds for humanity in the spirit of Judaism. The seder is a reenactment of the covenant between us and God, into which we bring each year the new generation, each year a little more mature and ready than the previous. Obviously, we cannot recruit new members and enjoin them in the covenant if we are not fully committed, so what the seder requires from us first and foremost is to ask questions and find out if we have answers:

- What does it mean to be Jewish?
- How am I different then my father or grandmother?
- How am I different then the younger me, the “me” of last year or ten years ago?
- Does the Exodus still have an impact on me 3,500 years later?
- What do I expect from my sons, my daughters, my family and friends to do as Jews?

The list can go on and on, and every question is important because it engages us in a dialog with God and with ourselves. By asking, we are willing to recognize challenges and doubts and when we do we might be able to face and overcome them.

The Four Sons of the Haggadah? They are us, or in us, all of them, at different junctures in life. We are at times inquisitive and curious, seeking spiritual awareness and personal improvement, and at times brash and cynical, seeing only suffering and futile religious ritual which we want to avoid. At times we would feel that something is wrong but we would not be able to put our finger on it, not knowing what to ask and how to address the situation, or we might just turn our sensitivities off and sail through events apathetic and indifferent.

This whole process of asking why (why the Exodus? Now what? What does God want from me? God, why don’t you leave me alone? God, why do you leave me alone?) cannot be rehearsed in a model seder. It must coalesce with the smell of the food and the taste of the wine and the sight of the people and the thoughts rushing through your mind and the things you want to forget and the moments you want to

remember forever and... get you ready to impart all these in a real personal way to those you bring into the covenant, your children.

Children: The Most Awesome Learning Machines

A couple of things we tend to forget when we think of children, especially when they are with adults: Children are smart. They love to learn. We do know, however, even if only subconsciously, that they can tell if we are genuine or not, and we are therefore careful not to let them have an advantage by pointing out our faults.

We understand that because they read us, we must be really connected to what we do and not be superficial or hypocritical, and that is probably why many adults, when “teaching” children, are actually training them. Treading the terrain of content, message, emotions or thoughts is deemed dangerous because when these are applied to the intricate and unique soul and persona of each human being, their versatility is manifested and they become very difficult to manage and control. It is much easier to stick to mechanical motions: Do this, don’t do that, measure this and write that. This is true in a regular school setting, and much more so when we are dealing with religious rituals. God forbid I should try to explain to a kid the ethical implication of being a slave or owning one. This might lead him to question suffering, social justice and even Divine justice. No, the drill sergeant approach is much safer: Say *HaGefen*; Wash hands; No blessing; do not talk; eat celery; No more than 2 ounces and so on and so on. The model seder, then, becomes a dress rehearsal for preparing the airplane for takeoff. You could check lights, fuel, visibility, weather, but the plane will never take off if the pilot is not there. Teaching your kid to fly, to spread her wings and take off on her own does not happen in one model seder, going through the motions. It happens throughout the year by grooming curiosity and being a role model for a spiritual, wholesome and purpose driven life.

Children are the most awesome learning machines. They learn to crawl, fall, talk and rationalize without being instructed. They are always on the lookout for new and exciting adventures, whether in mom’s kitchen or the great outdoors. Children learn by observation. They watch, absorb

*“Children learn by observation.
They watch, absorb
and emulate”*

Continued - page 14

Continued from page 13

and emulate, and when they encounter something they don't understand they touch it, turn it and roll it over, the toddler will put it in his mouth and the teenager will put his mind to it. In short, kids do not stop learning, at least not until we step in and suffocate their curiosity by over-instruction. The best way to kill a kid's curiosity, says Peter Gray in *Free to Learn*, is to hover around him and offer ways to enhance knowledge. For example, on a field trip a kid sees an interesting rock and comments on it. The teacher gets all excited: so you like rocks? Great, let me recommend this book, and this kit, and why don't you write a paper on rocks or start a rock collection and, hey, you can do a presentation. The kid learns one important lesson: next time, if he is interested in something, he'd better not tell anyone about it.

Imagine, just imagine, what would have happened if you never told your kids anything about the seder and its weird practices until it was actually here. What a surprise would that have been! Hearing the word Pesah or seder before the holidays the brain will get active and retrieve memories from an earlier age, and they will be the kid's own memories, the moments that stood out for her last year and not the ones we choose to highlight. At the actual seder table these memories will merge with the current experience and will add another dimension to the personal and unique perception of the



Holiday, helping the young participant to own the moment and join the covenant on her own volition.

The Taming of the Haggadah

I would like to go back to the adults now. Generations of legal discussions by scholars and religious anxiety of those who observe the Torah, have taken away from the Haggadah its flexible and unexpected nature. The Haggadah is meant to be a natural and organic process. It was supposed to interact with us in a slightly different way each year and to provide us with new insights and incentives to immerse ourselves in the redemptive power of the Torah which will eventually bring us to the end of the journey started with the Exodus. The elements surrounding the narration of the Haggadah were put there in order to connect the intellectual experience with a palpable one, touching and igniting all our senses. And what have we done with it? Just as we drill the kids, so we drill ourselves. We dwell so much on the technical and quantitative aspects of the seder while letting the redeeming and personal aspects of it be hidden away, perhaps with the *Afikomin*. Our seder has become compartmentalized, a collection of self-contained units, each with its set of rules, with no intrinsic progression and connection. The obsession with the proper quantities, the duration of time allotted for consumption, the recitation of every word and the forced participation of all in a *D'var Torah* ritual distract us from the main goal of the seder night:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא
יצא ממצרים

*In every generation a person must internalize
and express himself as if he left Egypt*

Am I a slave now? To what? How do I break free? How do I help others break free?

***“The Haggadah is meant to be
a natural and organic process”***

I'd like to conclude by sailing back on the waves of nostalgia to my grandfather's seder table. Around his table there was never tension. He would not remind anyone how much wine or masah they must consume. When we washed

Continued on page 18



Community Archive

COMMUNITY BULLETIN

Purpose Of Yeshivah

January 1952

The future of our children is at stake in these materialistic times. Every conscientious Jew, deep in his heart, is fearful of the destiny of his children

Will they remain in the Jewish fold?

Will they cherish and respect the way of life of our fathers?

Will they observe the laws of the Holy Torah?

Will they grow up as intelligent, learned and devoted Jews?

Or will they be lured away by underhanded methods of good times and remain ignorant of the great heritage and be surrounded by a sea of indifference towards everything Jewish?

Our peace of mind and security depends upon the proper answer to these questions. In the YESHIVOT we find the solution to these vexing problems.

Our new Yeshivah building provides 500 boys and girls with a thorough Jewish education and a complete public and high school course. These children will be raised as leaders and pioneers in the struggle for true Judaism and constructive citizenship.

We urge you to send your children to our new Yeshiva building. This is the only way you will fulfill your duty to G-d, to yourself and to your child.

ISAAC SHALOM A"H

PASSOVER: The Holiday of Our Freedom

Pesah 1989

The first of our festivals is the Holiday of Passover in which God showed His might in Egypt for the sake of His preferred people. We were lowly slaves in the land of Egypt and our enslavers were desirous of destroying our existence as a Nation.

The Almighty did not forget His promise to Abraham and with his great power, redeemed us from our slavery in Egypt.

The observance of this Holiday has many aspects which are very well-known. The first of which is to recite the HAGGADAH, in which we tell the story of our miraculous delivery from Egypt to our children in order to establish for all generations to come the basis of our faith in God, and the reason of our existence as a free people. Only "Kosher for Passover" foods and beverages may be consumed or even present in our households.

As we came out of Egypt some 3,400 years ago, the sun of freedom broke out and shined upon us. It was truly the miracle of all time. The Talmud states that "in the month of Nissan we were redeemed and we will once again be redeemed in this same month." May the Almighty hasten that day.

SAM CATTON A"H
SEPHARDIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION

A PESAH MESSAGE¹

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The story of Pesah, of the Exodus from Egypt, is one of the oldest and greatest in the world. It tells of how one people, long ago, experienced oppression and were led to liberty through a long and arduous journey across the desert. It is the most dramatic story of slavery to freedom ever told, one that has become the West's most influential source-book of liberty. "Since the Exodus," said Heinrich Heine, the 19th century German poet, "Freedom has always spoken with a Hebrew accent."

We read in the *maggid* section of the Haggadah of Rabbi Gamliel who said that one who did not discuss the Pesah lamb, the *masah* and the bitter herbs had not fulfilled their obligation of the Seder. Why these three things are clear: The Pesah lamb, a food of luxury, symbolizes freedom. The bitter herbs represent slavery due to their sharp taste. The *masah* combines both. It was the bread the Israelites ate in Egypt as slaves. It was also the bread they left when leaving Egypt as free people.

It is not just the symbolism, but also the order these items are spoken about in the Haggadah that is interesting. First we speak of the Pesah lamb, then the *masah*, and finally the bitter herbs. But this seems strange. Why do the symbols of freedom precede those of slavery? Surely slavery preceded freedom so it would be more logical to talk of the bitter herbs first? The answer, according to the Chassidic teachers, is that only to a free human people does slavery taste bitter. Had the Israelites forgotten freedom they would have grown used to slavery. The worst exile is to forget that you are in exile.

To truly be free, we must understand what it means to not be free. Yet "freedom" itself has different dimensions, a point reflected in the two Hebrew words used to describe it, *hofesh* (חופש) and *herut* (חירות). *Hofesh* is "freedom from," *herut* is "freedom to." *Hofesh* is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to

someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why *hofesh* is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination.

Herut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognizing the sovereignty of God and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, "Next year may we all be *bnei horin* (free people)," invoking *herut* not *hofesh*. It means, "May we be free in a way that honors the freedom of all."

The Pesah story, more than any other, remains the inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who long for freedom. It taught that right was sovereign over might; that freedom and justice must belong to all, not some; that, under God, all human beings are equal; and that over all earthly power, the King of Kings, who hears the cry of the oppressed and who intervenes in history to liberate slaves.

It took many centuries for this vision to become the shared property of liberal democracies of the West and beyond; and there is no guarantee that it will remain so. Freedom is a moral achievement, and without a constant effort of education it atrophies and must be fought for again. Nowhere more than on Pesah, though, do we see how the story of one people can become the inspiration of many; how, loyal to its faith across the centuries, the Jewish people became the guardians of a vision through which, ultimately, "all the peoples of the earth will be blessed."

Rabbi Lord Sacks recently addressed the SCA in an exclusive event at the Center for Jewish History.



¹ Adapted from: http://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/pesach_message/.
With permission from Rabbi Sacks



Community Spotlight

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS EVENT: A MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY'S YOUTH

Ms. Sally Mizrahi

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks addressed a full auditorium at the Center for Jewish History on a recent Thursday night. It was yet another successful event run by the Sephardic Community Alliance with over 250 attendees. The majority of the audience consisted of college students and young professionals. A brief introduction sufficed for a Jewish leader who needed none, and an inspiring discourse ensued.

Rabbi Sacks is world renowned for his ability to merge the modern world and Torah values into a cohesive whole. The global recognition of his person and message was, according to Rabbi Sacks, wholly intentional. In the opening lines of his speech, he stated that essentially, "the entirety of Britain was turned into an outreach program." Through broadcasts with the BBC, articles in prestigious periodicals, and even radio, Rabbi Sacks brought Judaism into a public sphere. This the Rabbi did with traditional, intellectual, and characteristic integrity.

A range of topics were covered, spanning from the sanctity of Shabbat to the Dali Lama. In every point, a sophisticated voice spoke to themes celebrated in the Jewish world

including the importance of family, charity, and confidence in Judaism itself. To the growing fear of anti-Semitism, Rabbi Sacks reasoned that "non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. Non-Jews are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism." It was certainly motivating, if not comforting to hear admit in a growing state of uncertainty in the international Jewish community. He furthered the point with the belief that, "if we (Jews) walk tall we bring blessing to ourselves and the world."

A moment in introductory remarks by SCA President Hymie Shamah underlined Rabbi Sacks' idea that as a Jewish community, the affiliated SCA institutions stand "unified not uniform." Rabbi Sacks spoke to this ideal by consistently referencing distinctive global figures, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who contributed in some way to his expressions and experience of faith. He mentioned physicists, philanthropists, and even atheists as people who all had what to do with Judaism through his representation as Chief Rabbi of Britain. Quoting Moses Montefiore, Rabbi

Sacks stated that "we are worth what we are willing to share with others." Montefiore had been referring to charity, but the message of curiosity, interaction, and experience resonate through his words.

Essentially, according to Rabbi Sacks, to be a Jew is to ask questions; he cited Jewish figures of faith like Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah, to name a few. "We are confident enough in our faith," he commented further, "to encourage



*SCA event with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
February 26, 2015*

Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

...RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS...

questions.” This remark was followed by a question & answer segment led by moderators Joseph Sasson Esq. and community author, Adele Chabot. The dialogue centered on questions of faith, Jewish polarization, and Jewish identity. A well informed and educated approach met each question with a sense that if regularly incorporated into daily life, Judaism may do for the soul what exercise does for the body. It revitalizes and keeps one in touch with the tools to move forward in a healthy way. “It is important,” Rabbi Sacks stated, “to renew our contact with the things that matter.”

“Sophistication, tradition, and education remain and have been standing tenants in the leaders of our community, and will continue to be.”

Closing remarks consisted of presenting the Rabbi with a newly written Megillat Esther by Nathan Zaboulani and a copy of *Aromas of Aleppo* to Rebbetzin Elaine Sacks. SCA board member Gaby Khezrie commented that “The Rabbi articulated perfectly the messages that the community’s youth are waiting to spread.” Sophistication, tradition, and education remain and have been standing tenants in the leaders of our community, and will continue to be.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks made a very good case for the continuation of those same values. He is one to follow, and certainly one to esteem.

Ms. Mizrachi is a student at Hunter College.

Continued from page 14

...MODEL SEDER

for *karpas*, there would be mountains of celery to dip in a mix of lemon and orange juice, fresh boiled fava beans in their shells, fluffy Persian rice, sliced cucumbers and hard boiled eggs (which we dipped, of course, in the sour-sweet juice). We were never hungry during the Haggadah, which we sang through, taking turns, translating the fun parts to Arabic and just basking in the beauty of the moment, the unforgettable experience of being with someone who embodied the covenant and waiting for him to bring us in.

You see, my grandfather was the model of my true Model Seder. He was a passionate Zionist, a living Bible, a poet and philosopher who, despite having a rabbinic ordination and being a descendant of eight consecutive generations of rabbis, dedicated his life to social service to the physically and mentally ill, and to education through books he published. I still look up to him, 31 years after he left this world, knowing that he was the center of my seder, and as such, also the focal point of my religious life and my own perspective of our ancient, living covenant. At the end of the seder he would put his head between his hands, and sing with us, the grandchildren who were still awake, a traditional Babylonian Piyyut:

נכון לבו, איש הוא ירא, כל נתיבו מצות בורא
נאמר בו, כתוב אשרי, כל חוסי בו אשרי שומרי

*The pure of heart is the one who reveres God,
whose life leads to his Creator.*

*It is regarding him that it is written:
all those who trust in Hashem are joyous.*

As he sang it, I knew, deep in my little kid’s heart, that the poem was written about him.

Let us be the Model of our Seder, for our children and others to emulate.

Rabbi Ovadia is currently writing a book on Sefer Bereshit.





Sephardic Pizmonim Project

MAQAM OF THE WEEK: PASSOVER 2015

Saturday, April 4, 2015:

First day of Pesah: Maqam SIGAH.

PIZMON SEFER TORAH: Ata Marom (page 435).

Sunday, April 5, 2015:

Second day of Pesah: Maqam AJAM.

PIZMON SEFER TORAH: El Maleh HaNehsar (page 175).

Friday, April 10, 2015:

Seventh day of Pesah: Maqam AJAM.

PIZMON SEFER TORAH: Rahum Ata Ki Ga'alta (page 216).

Saturday, April 11, 2015:

Eight day of Pesah (Diaspora Only): Maqam SABA.

NAQDISHAKH: Yehish Mebaser (page 380).

PIZMON SEFER TORAH: Ressen Ahub (page 427).

*For more information and to hear recordings please visit
www.pizmonim.com*



*Sefer Shir Ushbaha Hallel Ve'Zimrah,
"The Red Book"*

עִנְיָאם / עִנְיָאם - This maqam originated and is named after Persia (Iran), which translates to Ajam in Arabic.

Ajam means "foreigner" in Arabic... Typically referring to the Persians.

Ajam is the Arabic equivalent of the Western Major scale.

This maqam is linked with festivity and joy.

There are many patriotic tunes in this maqam.

It contains many pizmonim that are associated with holidays and weddings.

צָבָא - The Arabic word Sabi means baby boy, and this is why Maqam Saba - **צָבָא** - is used for the Berit Milah (circumcision). Saba is used for Torah portions that contain either births, covenants (berit), a multitude of laws, or the reference to an army (Hebrew: Saba).





Sephardic Customs

CAN A MAN SHAVE HIS FACIAL HAIR ON HOL HAMO'ED?

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

When I was young everyone I knew was clean shaven for the first days of Yom Tob, the last days of Yom Tob, and Shabbat Hol HaMo'ed. In fact it wasn't until 1981 that I ever encountered the concept of not shaving on Hol HaMo'ed. At the time I was talking to a young rabbinical student in the community, and he asked me if I shave on Hol HaMo'ed, and I said yes, why not? He then proceeded to open *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 531:1-4 which states:

מצוה לגלח בערב יום טוב

It is a misvah to shave on 'Erev Yom Tob.

אין מגלחין במועד אפילו אם גילח קודם מועד

One does not shave during the [intermediate days of the] holiday even if he shaved before the holiday.

אפילו אם היה אנוס ומפני כך לא גילח בערב מועד אינו מגלח במועד והוא הדין למי שהיה חולה ונתרפא במועד

Even if a person was under duress and that was the reason that prevented him from shaving on the eve of the holiday, he does not shave during the [intermediate days of the] holiday, and this is also the law for a person that was ill and was cured during the holiday.

ואלו מגלחין במועד מי שיצא מבית השביה ולא היה לו פנאי לגלח קודם המועד ומי שיצא מבית האסורים ואפילו היה חבוש ביד ישראל שהיו מניחין לו לגלח וכן המנוחה שהתירו לו ברגל וכן מי שנדר שלא לגלח ונשאל על נדרו ברגל וכן הבא ממדינת הים בחול המועד או שבא בערב הרגל ולא היה שהות ביום לגלח

And these people shave during the [intermediate days of the] holiday: someone who was released from captivity and he did not have the opportunity to shave before the holiday, and someone who was released from prison even if he was locked up by Jews who would have allowed him to shave, and the outcast that was given permission to return on the

holiday, and someone who made a vow not to shave but he asked for an annulment on the holiday, and someone that returns from overseas during Hol HaMo'ed or he returned on the holiday eve and he did not have a chance to shave.

With amazement and disbelief I said to the rabbinical student "This cannot be a halakhah and must an issue of minhag! Clearly if we look around you'll see that everyone shaves, as we know of no one with facial hair on the last two days neither of Pesah nor on Shemini Asseret or Simhat Torah." With confidence the student replied "The people are not following halakhah. Just ask any rabbi what the law is and he'll admit to what is written in *Shulhan Arukh*." I was troubled by the student's answer. Could it really be that the majority of our community is violating the law?

At that moment I decided to thoroughly research this important issue. I needed to answer so many important questions. So my quest began to find out what was going on. Were the people correct or was this rabbinical student correct? Do we follow *Shulhan Arukh* or don't we? I asked a few community rabbis and they all told me the halakhah is like *Shulhan Arukh*. I was shocked because clearly the reality was that everyone was shaving throughout Hol HaMo'ed just like any regular weekday. When I asked the rabbis, they either said the people do not know the Halakhah or they said we don't teach this law to them.

Talmudic Basis for the Decree Prohibiting Shaving

The Mishnah in Mo'ed Qatan 3:1 recounts:

The following are permitted to shave on Hol HaMo'ed: One who comes from far away or is released as a prisoner or released from prison or one who was excommunicated and whose excommunication was removed during Hol HaMo'ed or one who took a vow not to shave and his vow was rescinded by a Rabbi during Hol HaMo'ed or one who is a *nazir* or a *messorah* and who goes from uncleanness to cleanliness.

The Mishnah continues and states:

The following can wash their clothes on Hol HaMo'ed: one who comes from far away and is released from captivity or prison or one who is excommunicated and is released during Hol HaMo'ed or one who swore not to wash his clothes and his vow was lifted during Hol HaMo'ed...

The Talmud, Mo'ed Qatan 13b-18b, in explaining the rule of the Mishnah, states that a decree was enacted by the Hakhamim that one should groom oneself and wash one's garments prior to the onset of the holiday so as to ensure that one looks dignified and neat for the holiday. The Talmud adds that in order to give this decree some teeth and assist in compliance, the Hakhamim further decreed that one may not shave or wash one's clothes during Hol HaMo'ed so as to ensure that one be careful to shave and wash on the eve of holiday. The rules mentioned in the Mishnah concerning people who were permitted to shave during Hol HaMo'ed and were granted a dispensation from this decree are limited to cases of people who could not shave prior to the holiday.

The Talmud questions the rule by asking:

One who loses an object [which he is looking for] prior to the holiday so that he is duressed into not shaving prior to the holiday [because he is looking for his object] may he shave during Hol HaMo'ed? Or perhaps since it is not apparent to others why he could not shave it is not permissible for him to shave? Abayye replies to this question by stating: "Can we say that all of the garments may not be washed except for a particular person's garment."

While the Talmud is not categorically clear that the normative halakhah is like Abayye, almost all early and late authorities accept his opinion and limit the dispensation to shave not merely to those who were under duress. They therefore mandate, that only those who were publicly duressed so that their special status would be known to one and all may shave during Hol HaMo'ed. All others may not.

However, there are two basic ways to understand this Talmudic discourse¹:

¹ Much of the material here was taken from Professor Meir Benayahu's book *Tiglahat Beholo Shel Mo'ed*, an article in *Techumin* volume 2 by Rabbi Pehah, as well as two excellent articles online by Rabbi Michael J Broyde and Dan

A) The overwhelming majority of the *rishonim* (see the Bet Yosef -Tur Orah Haim 531) rule that a rabbinic decree was enacted and the nature of the decree was as follows:

1. One may not shave during Hol HaMo'ed. The reason for this decree was in order to induce a person to shave prior to the onset of the holiday.
2. An exception to this decree was made for those who could not shave prior to the holiday due to duress or a compelling circumstance and this duress or compelling circumstance was obvious to the casual observer, like a person who is released from prison. A person, who was duressed, but only in a manner which would be private and unknown to others, is prohibited by rabbinic decree from shaving.

B) Rabbenu Tam (1100-1171), however, provides a different framework for discussing this dispute. He ruled that the decree was as follows:

1. One who does not shave in preparation of the holiday may not do so during Hol HaMo'ed as the Hakhamim penalized this person for not preparing himself for the holiday.
2. This penalty provision was waived for a person who – to the casual observer – could not shave prior to the holiday due to public duress.
3. This penalty provision was inapplicable to a person who, in fact, does shave prior to the holidays.

Thus, Rabbenu Tam ruled that one who does shave prior to the holidays in preparation of the holiday may shave during Hol HaMo'ed. Rabbenu Tam argues that there is no point in preventing a person who had shaved in preparation for the holiday from also shaving during Hol HaMo'ed.

While apparently analytically logical, Rabbenu Tam's position can be critiqued – as noted by the Tur – since if Rabbenu Tam was right, the Mishnah should have included a person who shaved prior to the holiday in preparation for the holiday in its list of people who may shave. In addition, the Tur notes that Rabbenu Tam's reasoning would defeat one

Rabinowitz.

Continued on page 22

Continued from page 21

of the purposes of the decree of the Hakhamim – which was designed to create a significant encouragement to shave on the eve of a holiday by preventing one from shaving for a week after that day – as who would really know who shaved and who did not. Bearded people could then shave during Hol HaMo'ed and claim that their conduct is permissible, by stating that they shaved on the holiday eve.

For the next few hundred years this is where things remained, with Rabbenu Tam allowing it and practically every other Rishon and Aharon forbidding it. At this point you would probably think case closed, no shaving and that's the end of this discussion. But here's where it gets good!

Clean Shaven Society

While we are generally aware that denominations other than the Orthodox change and adapt to the times, in reality, Orthodoxy has also made significant changes. Of course, these changes are all within the parameters of Halakhah. The Torah is not just a set of laws but it is a way of life that was given to us for all places and times. Only through the sincere acceptance, study and application of *Torah Shebikhtab* and *Torah Shebe'al Peh*, can Jews in every time and place survive and thrive as we continue to move forward.

The 18th century, however, saw an increase in emancipation and closer contact between Jews and non-Jews. This was on an unprecedented level, and Jews did not want to appear strange and thus many Jews began a common norm today, dressing in contemporary style and the like. Jews also, although there were also earlier examples, began to appear clean shaven. Now, during the rest of the year, maintaining a clean shaven look did not pose too significant of a problem. However, there was one time where, based upon precedent, it would be difficult to remain clean shaven – during Hol HaMo'ed. A clean shaven person in a clean shaven society creates a new *halakhic* question vis-a-vis shaving during Hol HaMo'ed. A person who has no beard, even if he shaves in preparation of the holiday, nonetheless will look unkempt during the holiday and it will be visibly apparent to all that this person shaved in preparation of the holiday and yet still needs to shave again. The fact that the person shaved prior to the holiday does not, in any way, ensure that this person will look proper during Hol HaMo'ed. The only way for a clean shaven person to look neat during Hol HaMo'ed is for him

to shave during that time. The presence of many such people ensures that this fact is common knowledge.

The first to re-address this issue was Rabbi Yehezqel Landau (Poland 1713-Prague 1793), the author of *Noda' Biyhudah* and one of the greatest Rabbis of his time. In approximately 1775, Rabbi Landau was asked if there was any way for those who shave year round, and did so prior to the holiday, to do so on Hol HaMo'ed. R. Landau ruled in the affirmative, with one important condition – that it is done with a poor barber. This condition was an attempt to conform to the various prior opinions. Namely, Rabbi Landau understood the rejection of Rabbenu Tam's opinion was limited to instances which the person would shave themselves. However, a poor Jewish barber who needed this to survive and thus was able to do work on Hol HaMo'ed anyways, everyone would agree shaving would be permitted. As Rabbi Landau was highly respected, his opinion did not go unnoticed. With the publication of this responsa the reaction was almost immediate and negative. From all over Europe various people either directly addressed Rabbi Landau or wrote their own private responses expressing their opinion to maintain the status quo. The reaction was summed up by the HID"Á, Hakham Haim Yosef David Azoulai (Jerusalem 1724-Livorno 1806) in his *Yosef Omess* (Livorno 1798) chapter 7:

During that time I heard immediately they quickly girded themselves, the great ones, the Rabbi of Berlin, the Rabbi of Amsterdam and they disagreed with Rabbi Landau. I also heard from trustworthy sources that the Rabbis of Poland and Germany were extremely disturbed by this leniency and they went so far as to disparage Rabbi Landau. And I have no doubt that the Rabbis in Israel, Istanbul, Izmir, Salonika, and all of Turkey, Egypt, Damascus, Aleppo, and the entire North Africa, all agree with the Rabbis of Poland and Germany.

This issue began to quiet down until Rabbi Yisshaq Shemuel Reggio (Italy 1784-1855) wrote a work on this topic entitled *Maamar HaTiglahat* (Vienna 1835). Rabbi Reggio, unlike Rabbi Landau, offers that even the person themselves can shave and they do not need to be shaven by a poor Jewish barber. This is because, as he understands it, during the time of the original enactment, it was highly uncommon to shave weekly and certainly not daily. From this assumption Rabbi Reggio notes that for those who shave more often, the hair

returns more quickly. And so, even though in the past it was common practice to not shave over an eight day period, today, in a short period of time, hair regrows very quickly. Therefore, since everyone now shaves often, this is not the set of circumstances the original enactment was aimed at. That is, only for those for whom shaving was infrequent was there a true fear of forgetting or pushing off shaving, but today this is not nearly as much of a consideration. Of course, Rabbi Reggio notes that if one did not shave prior to the holiday he cannot shave on Hol HaMo'ed.

To this day, shaving on Hol HaMo'ed remains a contentious issue. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Uzda 1895-New York 1986) one of the greatest American Rabbis, allowed shaving for similar reasons to Reggio. Rabbi Feinstein explains in his *Igrot Mosheh* that "today for those who shave daily, they can shave on Hol HaMo'ed." Although this is a permissive opinion from one of the most highly respected rabbis, it still did not end this issue.

What about our Sephardic Hakhamim?

Hakham Obadiah Yosef (Baghdad 1920-Jerusalem 2013) in his early *halakhic* writings in the *Qol Sinai* journal of 1964 page 163, adopts the simplest *halakhic* position and rules that the decree made by the Hakhamim of the Talmud has only the delimited exceptions given in the Mishnah and cases identical to them. Even if it might perchance have been logical for the Hakhamim in the time of the Mishnah to exempt a clean shaven person in a clean-shaven society, for whatever reason, they chose not to do so and they enacted a broad decree without any exemption – except for one who is clearly duressed and was not able to shave on the holiday eve. Hakham Obadiah states: "Even if one shaved his beard on the eve of the holiday, it is prohibited to shave again during Hol HaMo'ed; this is true even if one is accustomed to shaving every other or third day." This is a position he upheld even in his most recent writings in *Hazon Obadiah* – Yom Tob – page 190 (Jerusalem 2003).

This was the general approach of our Sephardic Hakhamim. Among those who forbade it in the last century

or so are: Hakham Yisshaq Ben Walid, Hakham Hizqiyah Medini, Hakham Ben Sion Meir Hai Ouziel, Hakham Obadiah Hedaya, Hakham Yosef Yedid HaLevi, and Hakham Shalom Messas.

There were of course Sephardic Hakhamim who did permit shaving on Hol HaMo'ed. They were: Hakham Mosheh Malkah, Hakham Mosheh Kohen, Hakham Yosef Messas, Hakham David Chelouche, and Rabbi Yisshaq Pehah.

Hakham Matloub Abadi

Back to our community and my dilemma of to shave or not to shave: As I said earlier, 35 years ago everyone was shaving but I decided not to. For at least a decade if not more, I did not hear this issue being discussed but I never stopped researching. Only a few years ago did I decide to shave on Hol

HaMo'ed based upon much study, thought, and reflection. However, at a certain point in time I slowly started to hear people say we shave because Hakham Matloub Abadi (Aleppo 1891-Brooklyn 1970) said so. Hakham Matloub was the premier *halakhic* decisor (*poseq*) of the community and what he said was accepted by all. Each person I asked about this ruling said they never heard it from the

rabbi's mouth but they know he said it. I searched Hakham Matloub's only published book, *Maghen Ba'adi*, but I was disappointed that nothing turned up on this issue. I honestly felt the masses were attributing something to the Hakham which he never said.

Just a few months ago I discovered what I will call a treasure. While going through hundreds of cassette tapes in the home of a senior community member, there was a tape that said Rabbi Matloub Abadi. It turned out to be a class given by the Rabbi circa 1968, with over an hour of Hakham Matloub speaking in his haunting, heavily accented, authentic Hebrew. The class had to do with a ruling he made regarding mourners but he prefaced the class with less than two minutes about shaving on Hol HaMo'ed.

Hakham Matloub said the following:

Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

I made a ruling and said that shaving during Hol HaMo'ed is completely permissible now. I did not rule like the *Noda' BiYhudah* (Rabbi Landau) that you need to be shaved by a poor Jewish barber. I have allowed it based upon 4 conditions. I want Rabbi Kassin and Rabbi Hecht to hear me so it is clear and so that no one makes a mistake and misquotes me.

The four conditions are:

1. You cannot get a haircut, you can only shave.
2. You must have shaved on the eve of the holiday, if not; you cannot shave during Hol HaMo'ed at all.
3. You must regularly shave at least two to three times a week. If you only shave once a week or once every two weeks, you cannot shave during Hol HaMo'ed.
4. You must shave yourself with a machine. You cannot go to the barber and you cannot have someone else do it for you.

In conclusion, we now have a better understanding of some of the key issues involved and the opinions of those who permit and those who forbid, and why. Our Torah is beautiful and all its ways are peaceful. Please be tolerant of those who shave or those who do not shave during Hol HaMo'ed as they all have respected sources to rely upon.

If anyone has any recordings or writings of Hakham Matloub Abadi or any of the earlier Rabbis of our community please bring them to my attention so we can all benefit from their wisdom. If someone would like to hear the audio of Hakham Matloub on this topic, please send an email with your FULL NAME and cell phone number to hakhammatloub@gmail.com requesting this recording.

Mr. Mosseri a well-known community member who among other things is highly regarded for his knowledge of hazzanut, Sephardic history, hakhamim, laws, customs, and books.



WHAT IS OUR MINHAG?

Mr. Morris Arking

It is our custom to eat the Z'roa' (roasted shank-bone) at the beginning of Shulhan 'Orekh.

How Do We Know That This is Our Minhag?

1. R Abraham Hamway in his Mahzor for Pesah and Shabu'ot – *Bet HaBehirah* (printed 1875) wrote in *Dine' Korekh, Halakhah Tet Vav*: "After eating the sandwich we eat the Z'roa' like it is written in *Shulhan 'Arukh Siman 476*, 'A place that has the custom to eat roasted (meat) on the nights of Pesah eats it...' And in our land Aram Soba, Halab it is the custom to eat (roasted meat)..."



2. *Keter Shem Tob Heleq Gimal* (printed in 1948) wrote: "The custom of the Sepharadim in the Land of Israel is to eat the roasted Z'roa' in the middle of the meal." In his footnote the author adds, "since the Sepharadim in the Land of Israel eat the roasted Z'roa', from there we learn that they had the custom to eat roasted meat on Pesah."
3. *Eress Hayyim* (customs of the Land of Israel printed 1908) by R. Hayyim Menasheh Sittehon (1871-1918) wrote in OH 476: "Examine the *Hoq Ya'aqob* in *se'if qatan alef* that even in a place that has the custom to eat roasted (meat), in any case it is prohibited to eat the roasted Z'roa' that is brought in memory of the Pesah (sacrifice), and examine what the later authorities wrote previously regarding *Siman 473 Se'if 4*. However our teacher *Malki BaQodesh* page 21 at the beginning of the first column refuted this and

in his conclusion wrote that our custom is to eat it.”

4. *Derekh Eress* (1990) in *Seder Pesah, Vav* wrote: “Z’roa’: On ‘Ereb Pesah the Z’roa’ is boiled and also roasted and is eaten on both nights.” He cites H. Edmon Cohen and the *Siddur Bet HaBehirah* by R. Abraham Hamway.

What is Our Minhag Based On?

According to the straightforward ruling of HaRambam (MT Hamess UMassah Ch. 8 H. 11) and Maran (SA OH 476:1) eating roasted meat on Pesah night is dependent upon local custom and only a whole lamb that was roasted completely while it was whole is prohibited in all places. And even though Maran specifically writes (OH 473:4) that it is customary to serve roasted meat in memory of the Pesah sacrifice, he never mentions any prohibition of eating it on Pesah night. Therefore Maran does not differentiate between the Z’roa’ and other roasted meat in a place that has the custom to eat roasted meat on Pesah night. Only a whole lamb that was completely roasted whole is prohibited in a place that has the custom to eat roasted meat on Pesah night.

Which Posqim Disagree?

The Ashkenazim have the custom to not eat roasted meat on Pesah night (Mishnah Berurah 476 1:1) and therefore they do not eat the Z’roa’ on Pesah night if it was roasted. There are some Ashkenazi Posqim who require eating the meat in memory of the Qorban Pesah on Pesah night (based on their understanding of Pesachim 114B) and therefore write that it should be boiled (*Bayit Hadash* based on the MaHaRShaL and the Sh’LaH).

According to the P’ri Hadash (R. Hizqiyah B. David DiSilva-1659-1695), who was an Italian born Rabbi who became the Rabbi of Jerusalem, the Talmud never intended the meat in memory of the Qorban Pesah to be eaten, and therefore he prohibits eating it (OH 473:4). Furthermore, according to the Ben Ish Hai it is customary not to eat roasted meats both on Pesah night and Pesah day. This custom was also recorded by R. Yehudah ‘Ayyash in his book *Bet Yehudah* (printed 1746) on the customs of Algeria, and by R. David Pardo (1718-1790) in his book *Hasde’ David* (printed 1776-1790), who was an Italian born Rabbi who also officiated in Jerusalem.

Hakham ‘Obadyah Yosef writes that it is our custom not to eat roasted meat on Pesah night (*Yehave Da’at* 3:27), however he allows roasted meat (including the Z’roa’) on Pesah day. He also writes that even in a place where roasted meat is eaten on Pesah night, the Z’roa’ should not be eaten. His sources for this include the *P’ri Hadash*, *HoqYa’aqob*, *P’ri Megadim* and HaGaon R. Zalman. This is also the opinion of *Kaf HaHayyim Sofer* (473:61). The *Kaf HaHayyim Sofer* also cites the custom of Izmir to refrain from eating roasted meats on both nights of Pesah as well as on the first day (476:2).

Conclusion

The custom of Halab and the original custom of the Sepharadim in the Land of Israel is to eat roasted meat on Pesah night and to eat the roasted Z’roa’ as part of the meal. However the Ashkenazim and many Sepharadim from other

***“The custom of Halab and
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countries do not eat roasted meat on Pesah night (and some do not eat it on Pesah day either). Furthermore there are some later authorities who differentiate between roasted meat and the Z’roa’ in a place that has the custom to eat roasted meat on Pesah, and therefore prohibit eating the Z’roa’. But the custom of Halab and the Sepharadim in the Land of Israel is based on the straightforward ruling of Maran and HaRambam who did not differentiate between the Z’roa’ and other roasted meat, and only prohibit a whole lamb that was completely roasted whole, in all places on Pesah night. Therefore the Syrian community should not change their custom of eating the Z’roa’ on Pesah night even if it was only roasted, since it is a Halakhically legitimate custom that was recorded by our Rabbis.

Mr. Arking is an expert on Sephardic customs and a regular contributor to Qol Ha’Qahal.



Passover Thoughts

PASS-OVER?

Mr. Eddie Mishaan

The upcoming holiday of פסח (referred to in the Torah as חג המצות, “holiday of unleavened bread”) is most commonly known in our English vernacular as Passover. This name comes from the idea that, on the night before the Exodus, God smote every first-born Egyptian while “passing over” the houses of the Israelites. While this understanding certainly provokes some memorable imagery, I would like to take a closer look at the פ-ס-ח root as it has been understood in the past, and propose an interpretation that may seem new to the modern reader, but in fact is so old that it has been almost forgotten.

The root letters פ-ס-ח appear 74 times in Tanach and is broken down into 4 entries in the Eben Shoshan concordance (Kiryat Sefer: Jerusalem, 1988). The least common formulation (and the least relevant to this article)

of the letters פ-ס-ח is as a name. It appears four times, like in the verse: “בני עוזא בני פסח בני בסי” “The sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai” (Ezra 2:49). The letters פ-ס-ח refer to a lame individual 14 times in Tanach as in the verse: “כי כל איש אשר בו מום לא יקרב איש עור או פסח או חרום או שרוע” “No one at all who has a defect shall be qualified: no man who is blind, or lame, or has a limb too short or too long” (Lev 21:18). The majority of the entries (49 appearances) are the word פסח referring to the holiday or its sacrifice, observed in the springtime, as seen in the verse: “ויעשו בני ישראל את הפסח” “Let the Israelite people offer the pesah sacrifice at its set time” (Num 9:2). The other seven פ-ס-ח appearances in the Tanach are classified by Eben Shoshan as “skipping over” although the case can be made that this understanding is a more modern development and may not be true to the original meaning of the פ-ס-ח root.

A pivotal verse where a פ-ס-ח verbal form may be misunderstood is Exodus 12:13. The verse reads:

והיה הדם לכם לאות על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את הדם
ופסחתי עליכם ולא יהיה בכם למשחית בהכותי בארץ מצרים
“And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall
be a sign for you, when I see the blood I will pass over you
so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land
of Egypt.”

Many English translations including those of the Jewish Publication Society (1917 and 1985 editions), the King James Bible, and the American Standard Version, among others, all translate the word ופסחתי as “pass over.” However, it is worthwhile to look at older translations to see how they understood the Hebrew original, and what they can teach us about the night of the killing of the firstborns.

*“Over the course of millennia,
the understanding of the
phrase ופסחתי עליכם
underwent a change.”*

One of the primary translations of the Torah into another language is the translation of Onqelos. Living in the beginning of the Common Era, he translated the entire Torah into Aramaic, the

vernacular of his day. His translation was so highly regarded and well received, that for many centuries, it was recited publicly during the weekly Torah readings, interspersed verse by verse with the Hebrew original. The translation of Onqelos was also printed in Humashim alongside the Hebrew original since at least the first printing of the *Miqraot Gedolot* in 1524 (and presumably written alongside it for much longer). His translation was considered the authoritative Aramaic translation by the Rabbis (see BT Megillah 3a) and served to make the Torah understandable to countless Jewish people. It is therefore interesting and worthwhile to see how he rendered the verse and chose to translate words from the פ-ס-ח root in his work.

Onqelos translates Exodus 12:13 as

ויהי דמא לכוון לאת, על בתיא דאתון תמן, ואחזי ית דמא, ואחז
עליכון ולא יהי בכון מותא לחבלא, במקטלי בארעא דמצרים.

The phrase ופסחתי עליכם (translated by the NJPS as “pass

over you”) is rendered by Onqelos as ואחוס עליכון - and I shall take pity on you. It is interesting to note that while he is coming to translate a word with the פ-ס-ח root, he does not use the Aramaic terms he used elsewhere in his translation. Had Onqelos understood the word ופסחתי to mean “pass over,” he should have used a word with the ע-ב-ר root, which he used elsewhere to mean “pass over” (see Exod. 34:6 et al.) and could theoretically have been used here. However, that is not the case and his translation of ופסחתי עליכם utilizes the word, אחוס. Coming from the root ח-ו-ס, it is used to denote compassion, pity, and mercy. This idea is not evident in the English translations and invites further investigation.

When faced with questions over words and their meanings, the first place to look is in a dictionary, called in rabbinic Hebrew ספר השרשים or “Book of Roots.” Menahem Ben Saruq (c. 920-970) author of *Mahberet Menahem*, one of the earlier books of Hebrew linguistics, contains an entry for the פ-ס-ח root in his work. He divides the פ-ס-ח root into two meanings. The first meaning, which applies to the verse ופסחתי עליכם is best understood as relating to compassion, חמלה. In that case, the phrase ופסחתי עליכם can be understood as God stating that He will have compassion (חמלה) when He passes over the Israelite houses. Ben Saruq continues and writes that the second understanding of the root, relates to deficiencies of the legs, being lame or walking with a limp (*Mahberet Menahem*, London 1854, s.v. פסח p 143).

Proceeding chronologically, Rabbi Yonah ibn Janah, a 10th century grammarian writes in his *Sefer HaShorashim* in the entry on the root letters פ-ס-ח that the phrase ופסחתי עליכם, is to be understood as manifesting ideas of mercy and favor (ענינו) (הרחמים והחנינה). Thus, he understood the verse to mean that God had mercy on the Israelites when He was passing over their houses. Ibn Janah presents a second understanding of the root: to lean on someone or something physically. Hence, the word פיסח comes to mean lame (Ibn Janah, *Shorashim*, Berlin 1896, p 405). This second understanding is similar to the second interpretation provided by Menahem Ben Saruq.

Similar definitions to those of Ibn Janah are also found in the *Aruch* of Rabbi Shelomo Ibn Parhon (*Aruch*, Pressburg 1844, p 54).

Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki, France 1040-1105) while not focusing his commentary on grammar, does have many insights into grammar and linguistics. On the phrase in question, ופסחתי עליכם, he writes וחמלתי, “and I will have compassion,” the same explanation presented by Menahem ben Saruq (Rashi on Exod 12:13 s.v. ופסחתי). Rashi continues his comments and writes that in his own opinion, any usage of the פ-ס-ח root denotes skipping or jumping over, leading him to explain the phrase as “I skipped over you.” This second explanation of Rashi is similar to those found in many English translations, that God skipped or passed over the Israelite houses. Thus, Rashi presents two ways to understand the phrase. The first one is that found in the translation of Onqelos and the dictionaries of Menahem ben Saruq and Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janah. His second interpretation is the idea later adopted by English language translations.

Rabbi David Qimhi (Radaq, 1160-1235) in his *Sefer HaShorashim*, begins his entry on the root letters פ-ס-ח with

the references to someone who walks with a limp. He then quotes the phrase ופסחתי עליכם and writes: כלומר ידלג על הפתח “meaning, He will skip over the entrance when He sees the blood and the destroyer will not come [to that house]” (*Shorashim*, Berlin 1847, p 295). The rest of the entry is related to verses in which the פ-ס-ח root is understood as not standing with two full legs but rather skipping and limping. It is interesting to note that the verses with פסח roots in them which he explains as skipping over were explained by earlier linguists as compassion and mercy.

Based on the above survey, there was a tradition to view the actions of God not necessarily as skipping over the Israelites, but as taking pity on the Israelites. He had compassion on His people and did not allow the destroyer to attack them. However, it seems that later translators focused more on his

“On the seder nights, when we remember how God passed over the Israelite houses in Egypt thousands of years ago, it is worthwhile to remember not only His passing over, but also His compassion and pity”

Continued on page 37

“AND I WILL HARDEN PHARAOH’S HEART” (EX. 7:3)

Mr. Charles Mizrahi

Maimonides states¹ that the whole concept of reward and punishment rests on freedom of choice. If so, then why did God intervene in Pharaoh’s case: “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 7:3)...?² How can Pharaoh be responsible for his actions?

Biblical commentators have wrestled with this dilemma over the centuries. Some commentators deny that “hardening of the heart” has anything to do with freedom of choice. Instead, it connotes keeping him alive.³ Others, claim that had Pharaoh released the Israelites due to the plagues, Pharaoh would not have genuinely repented.⁴

Maimonides⁵ views that Pharaoh was punished precisely by losing the opportunity for repentance, and that God closes the gates of repentance for those that commit heinous acts.

While these explanations may satisfy many, one can’t fully understand the choices Pharaoh faced and his stubbornness to not free his slaves. In order to appreciate the challenges faced by Pharaoh in freeing the Hebrew slaves, an overview of the U.S. south prior to the Civil War (1861) may give us insight as to why he acted the way he did and also explain “how” God hardened his heart.

“Maimonides views that Pharaoh was punished precisely by losing the opportunity for repentance, and that God closes the gates of repentance for those that commit heinous acts.”

King Cotton and the Southern Economy

Until the end of the 18th century, clothing was difficult to clean and uncomfortable to wear. Cotton could be worn in cold climates next to the skin and in hotter climates as a whole garment. Prior to the industrialization of the industry, the price of cotton was out of the reach of the masses. After sugar and tobacco, cotton was one of the world’s first luxury commodities, and became the first mass produced consumer commodity.

The harvesting of cotton was extremely labor intensive. It would take one person a full day to clean five to six pounds of cotton. The invention of the cotton gin (1793), which separates cotton fibers from seeds increased the productivity of cotton dramatically. Using the cotton gin, one person could clean 1,000 pounds of cotton a day!

The industrial revolution in Britain fueled the demand for cotton. The mills of England could now produce cotton yarn at higher rates at much lower prices, resulting in universal demand. The main source of superior cotton for British traders was the U.S. south. By the mid-1800s, the backbone of the southern economy was “King Cotton.”

In 1790, the U.S. produced 1.5 million pounds of cotton. Due to the increased efficiencies in picking cotton, by 1860, near the start of the Civil War, *cotton production was more than 2.2 billion pounds.*

Planters grew more cotton to meet soaring worldwide demand. The more cotton in the ground, the more slaves were needed to process it...which also increased the fortunes of Southern planters.

The need for more slaves

Over the course of the nineteenth century, southern slave prices more than tripled. The rate for a prime male field hand in New Orleans began at around \$500 in 1800 and rose to more than \$1,800 by the time of the Civil War.⁶

¹ Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 5:ii

² *And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.”* (Ex. 7:3-5)

³ Saadia Gaon (Book of Beliefs and Opinions, IV:6), or providing respite Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (chapter 36 of his Akedat Yitzchak).

⁴ Nachmanides’ and R. Sforno’s commentaries to Exodus 7:3, and in R. Joseph Albo’s Book of Roots, IV:25.

⁵ Eight Chapters, chapter 8

⁶ Deyle, Steven. *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*. New York: Oxford

By 1860, slave property was greater than the assessed value of *all the real estate in slaveholding states*. To fully appreciate the value of slave property, it needs to be put in comparative perspective. The total value of southern slaves was:

- Roughly three times greater than the total amount invested in banks
- Equal to about seven times the total value of all currency in circulation in the country,
- 3x the value of the entire livestock population,
- 12x the value of the entire U.S. cotton crop and
- 48x the total expenditure of the federal government that year.⁷

How could the slave owning class think about freeing their slaves? When they realized that the majority of their capital was in jeopardy, they saw no choice but to secede from the U.S.

Ancient Egypt's economy

The two most important sectors of the Egyptian economy were agriculture and natural resources.

Due to the annual inundations of the Nile River, Egypt's soil was rich and fertile. Ancient Egyptians cultivated wheat and barley (and other cereal grains) used to make two main food staples, bread and beer. Egypt was also a major exporter of grains.

Egypt also was rich in natural resources, especially building and decorative stone, copper and lead ores, gold, and semiprecious stones. British historian Paul Johnson

says that it was gold rather than military power which sustained the Egyptian empire and made it the world power throughout the third quarter of the second millennium BCE.⁸

“Labor is the largest cost for a producer of commodities. A slave population is needed in order to maintain a competitive advantage...”

Agriculture and mining both require extensive labor. Labor is the largest cost for a producer of commodities. A slave population is needed in order to maintain a competitive advantage over competitors that have a paid labor force. The prosperity of Egypt, just like the U.S. south in 1860, was built on slavery.

What choice did Pharaoh have in freeing his slaves? The implications could have resulted in civil war and eventually economic collapse. Slave labor tipped the scales in Pharaoh's decision making...just like it did for the southern states in 1860.



Wheat Fields

“I have hardened his heart”

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the “Rav”), one of greatest Jewish philosophers of the 20th century, offers a unique approach to understanding God's intervention in Pharaoh's decision making process.

The Rav said that it was ridiculous to think that that God discouraged Pharaoh from setting the Israelites free. In fact, Pharaoh's choice was never interfered with. If so, the problem of free choice would be negated...which is a cardinal tenet of Jewish belief.

Instead, the Rav interprets the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as “God made the choice for Pharaoh very difficult.” God did not allow Pharaoh to see how his economy could prosper without slave labor.

Similar to Southern leaders before the Civil War, they too

⁷ UP, 2005. Print. p. 56.

⁷ *ibid.* p.60

⁸ Johnson, Paul. *The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.

⁹ Lecture parashat Bo, Jan. 10, 1976

THE PATHOLOGICAL JEW?

Rabbi Moses Haber

*The ultimate measure of a man is not
where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience,
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.¹*

Posttraumatic stress disorder is a condition one has after undergoing a traumatic experience. It is common place for soldiers returning from the battlefield to be diagnosed with this disorder (PTSD). The sights and sounds of war often stay with a soldier for many years after returning to safety. Because these memories can be too hard to bear, the soldier is often referred for therapy or medical care to assist him in learning how to deal with the thoughts that haunt him. Without proper care, many unfortunately, find it difficult to return to normal life within society. These brave men and women are not to blame for this condition. It is completely understandable that the intensity of war or the pain of torture would affect a human psyche in this way.

One would suspect that the events of Jewish History would have similar consequences on the national memory of the Jewish people. Beginning with the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and throughout the ages, Jews have consistently been tormented by the Pharaoh's and Haman's of the world. It is hard to believe, but even in England, the home of William Shakespeare, Oxford and Cambridge universities, Jews were prohibited from living there from 1290 to 1657.

Yet contrary to the understandably expected reaction, Jews over the long term, have not turned inward and callous toward those living around us.² After each episode of hatred and debasement, pogrom or expulsion, the Jew, remarkably maintained his composure, dusted off and refrained from providing any excuse to act with vengeance or malice to others around us. The Jew, true to his nature, kept the characteristics of peace, kindness and compassion as national values to live by.³

¹ Martin Luther King Jr.

² While there are many Holocaust survivors who have had, most understandably, difficulty returning to "normal" interactions with non-Jews. Most have not used their memories as an excuse to turn inward and shun the outside world. Even if they had, recognize that within the course of human history the past 60 years represents only a short time within the scope of our national memory.

³ This past summer we read of Israeli doctors who treated Palestinians who were wounded

How can we explain this unusual reaction to years of torment and persecution? Consider the biblical citations listed below from Vayikra and Devarim.⁴ The common denominator being, the purposeful use of the horrid memories of our stay in Egypt for good and not evil, as one would expect.

One would think that we could find a commandment which would say something like:

- "because of what the Egyptians did to you, remember to never trust or deal kindly with any host nation,"
- "remember what the Egyptians did to you, therefore treat strangers the way you were treated" or,
- "because you were a slave in Egypt, therefore, remember their iniquity and take vengeance on them for generations."⁵

***"The Jew, true to his nature,
kept the characteristics of
peace, kindness and compassion
as national values to live by."***

Strangely, the opposite is true. We are commanded to use the memory of our difficult past as the rationale to be compassionate and kind to those who might find themselves in a similar life situation. We are told "Love the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" or "Don't abhor the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." Moreover, the commandments for the proper treatment of the widow and

during the conflict.

⁴ ויִקְרָא יְהוָה לְעַבְדֵּי אֱתָנָה גֵר, בְּאַרְצָכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ, אֹתוֹ. (לד) בְּאֹרֶחַ מִסֵּם יְהוָה לָכֶם הָגֵר הָגֵר אֲתָכֶם, וְאַהֲבַת לֹו כְמוֹד בְּיָגִים וְיָתִים, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
דְּבָרִים פָּרָק י"ט וְאַהֲבַתְם, אֶת-הָגֵר: כִּי-גֵרִים הִיִּיתֶם, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
דְּבָרִים פָּרָק כ"ג לֹא-תִתֵּעַב אָדָמִי, כִּי אֲחִיךָ הוּא, לֹא-תִתֵּעַב מִצְרִי, כִּי-גֵר הָיִיתָ בְּאַרְצוֹ. (ט) בְּנִים אֲשֶׁר-יִזְלְדוּ לָהֶם, דֹּר שְׁלִישִׁי יָבֹא לָהֶם, בְּקִנְיָן יִי
דְּבָרִים פָּרָק כ"ד יִי "לֹא תִשָּׂה, מִשְׁפַּט גֵר יָתוֹם; וְלֹא תִחַבֵּל, בְּגֵד אֶלְמָנָה. (יח) וְזָכַרְתָּ, כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְיִפְדֶּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, מִשָּׁם; עַל-כֵּן אֲנִכִּי מִצְוָה, לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-הַדָּבָר, הַזֶּה. (יט) כִּי תִקְצֹר קִצְיֶיךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה וּשְׂבָכָתָה עִמָּךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה, לֹא תָשׁוּב לִקְחוֹת—לָגֵר לַיְתוֹם וְלָאֶלְמָנָה, יְהִיָּה: לְמַעַן יִבְרַכְךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יְדֶיךָ. (כ) כִּי תִחַבֵּט וִיָּתֶךָ, לֹא תִפְאֹר אֲחֵרֶיךָ: לָגֵר לַיְתוֹם וְלָאֶלְמָנָה, יְהִיָּה. (כא) כִּי תִבְצֹר פְּרִמָּךְ, לֹא תַעֲזוֹל אֲחֵרֶיךָ: לָגֵר לַיְתוֹם וְלָאֶלְמָנָה, יְהִיָּה. (כב) וְזָכַרְתָּ, כִּי-עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל-כֵּן אֲנִכִּי מִצְוָה, לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-הַדָּבָר, הַזֶּה

⁵ This expectation wouldn't be too much of a stretch when compared to commandments concerning the nations of Moab and Edom. There are pesukim that do in fact command us from treating certain nations with kindness. But the reasons for doing so, do not seem justified when compared to what the Egyptians did to the Jews. Amon and Moab are two nations that we are prohibited from allowing entry to the Jewish nation. Why? For not presenting us with food and water upon our exit from Egypt. The Egyptians on the other hand enslaved us for 210 years and killed our first born sons. But we are commanded not to abhor them (Devarim 23:8). How could we explain the dichotomy between our response to the Amon and Moab (וְטָבַתְם, לָא-תִרְשָׁו שְׂלֵמָה, וְטָבַתְם, לָא-תִרְשָׁו שְׂלֵמָה, בְּיָגֵר יְהוָה בְּאַרְצוֹ) in comparison to the Egyptians (כָּל יְמֵיךָ, לְעוֹלָם

orphan as well as the laws of a form of charity שכחה, find their purpose in the annals of our national memory.

In an opinion article for the WSJ, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, the “freedom” the Jews actually received upon leaving Egypt:

A passage in Deuteronomy has momentous modern-day implications. Moses, nearing the end of his life, is addressing the next generation of Israelites, the people who will cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. “Do not hate an Egyptian,” he tells them, “for you were a stranger in his land.”

This is one of the most **counterintuitive** verses in the Bible. The Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites and planned a slow genocide against them. Was this not a reason to hate them?

*But Moses’ words are among history’s wisest political insights. If the Israelites had continued to hate their erstwhile persecutors, Moses might have succeeded in leading them out of Egypt, but he would have failed in taking Egypt out of them. The Israelites would still have been slaves: to their memories and resentments, their sense of humiliation—slaves, in short, to the past. To be free, you have to let go of hate. You have to stop seeing yourself as a victim—or else you will succeed only in making more victims.*⁶

An example of our strange and unexpected reaction to our difficult history, comes from the *haftara* chosen for Shabbat Zachor. Found in Sefer Shemuel I, King Shaul is tasked by Shemuel the prophet, to annihilate the Amalekite nation. After mustering the troops but before beginning the attack, Shaul sends a warning to the nation of Keni to leave the area, lest they get caught up in the storm that is about to swarm the Amalekites.⁷ Why did Shaul go through the trouble of warning the tribe of Keni? To repay the favor of helping the Jews on their journey from Egypt. Literally, calling what they did for the Jews a “kindness” חסד! Interestingly, no clear “favor” is found in the text, hinting to its simplicity

but considered a kindness nonetheless.⁸ We see that Jewish memory is not single minded in its approach to history. Repayment of good is equally required as repayment for bad. It is this use of memory that defines Jewish freedom **from our past** and a key element of our national identity.

In a sense then, our behavior as a people, does not fit the expected behavior of a people that went through the humiliation and torment that we did. That is why I call it a “pathological condition.” It is a disorder, in that, it is not the normally expected response to the trauma we endured. Our disorder simply put, is that no event, no matter how devastating, is powerful enough to break our resolve to act peacefully, compassionately, and kindly to those around us.

“For Jews, God through our Torah, helps to “free us” from the past by commanding us to utilize our memories in a way in which to grow from, instead of being limited by them.”

It would seem, for a brief moment that we are unable to accept history and reality for what it really is. But that is actually untrue! We as Jews do not forget what others have done to us. Rather, instead of stooping below the weight of memory, the Jew stands up to it. Jews **choose how we remember!** Memory does not have a dictated response. Patients diagnosed with PTSD are trained, **not to delete** the horrors of their experiences, but to compartmentalize those memories properly. For Jews, God through our Torah, helps to “free us” from the past by commanding us to utilize our memories in a way in which to grow from, instead of being limited by them.

Can it be that the long term benefit of this “freedom,” the freedom to choose how to remember, and how to react to it, is in actuality, the cause for our continued existence? What would we (as a nation) have been like, if we responded to

Continued on page 37

⁶ Wall Street Journal, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks 1/30/2015. A special thanks to Stephen Montague for bringing this article to my attention.

⁷ (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁאוּל אֶל-הַקֵּנִי לֵכּוּ סְרִי רְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ עֲמָלֵק, כִּי-אֶסְפֶּק עִמּוֹ, וְאַתֶּם עֹשִׂיתֶם חֶסֶד עִם-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֶלְזָתָם מִיַּצְרָיִם; וְיִסֵּר קִנִּי, מִתּוֹךְ עֲמָלֵק.

⁸ Some commentators suggest that the Keni mentioned is Yitro, Moshe’s father in law. See Shemot 19, Shoftim 1:16.



Shabbat-Table Talks

PARASHAT BO (PESAH TORAH PORTION)

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Generating Thinking by Asking Questions

One of the most important ways that we find out more about the world is by asking questions. We ask questions of people when we are trying to understand what they are saying or when we think they have something to teach us. We ask questions of books and answer them through careful reading. Scientists ask questions of the world and answer them through controlled experiments. We ask questions of ourselves when we are trying to understand ourselves. Teach your children the value of asking questions and you will teach them a most important learning and growth tool. Create an atmosphere in the home where all questions are allowed. Compliment the question when appropriate and thank your child for asking it, as it helps you know what to teach him.

Texts: The first two texts are from the perasha, and are used in the Passover Haggadah. The third text is also found in the Passover Haggadah.

And it will be when your children say to you, "What does this service mean to you?" then say it is the slaughter-meal of Pesah to Hashem who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt... (Shemot 12:26 [SB])

"The questions in these talks are meant to be open ended, with many possible answers. The idea is to spur on discussion, and not to spew out information."



It shall be when your child asks you on the morrow, saying, "What's this?" You are to say to him: By strength of hand Hashem brought us out of Egypt... (Shemot 13:14 [SB])

When your child asks you on the morrow, saying: What (mean) the precepts, the laws, and the regulations that

Hashem our God has commanded you? Then you are to say to your child: Slaves we were to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand. (Debarim 6:20-21 [SB])

Regard the days of ages past, understand the years of generations and generations ago; Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will declare it to you. (Debarim 32:7 [SB])

The bashful person does not learn and the impatient person should not teach. (Pirke Abot 2:6)

Discussion: Why is it good to ask questions? (Asking questions is the way to learn.) When should you ask questions? (Whenever you have one, without interrupting, of course.)

Did you ask a question to your teacher today, or this week? Is it easy to ask questions to your teachers? What can you do when your

teacher says, "No questions now"? (Write them down to ask later.)

Can you ask a book a question? (Yes. A simple example is asking a phone book for a number. Asking a cookbook how much flour to put in a recipe.) What questions do you have and which books could you turn to for the answers?

If you could ask God three questions what would they be? How can you ask them of God? (Prayer, learning Torah.) What books could you turn to for the answers? Which people can you ask? (Parent, teacher, Rabbi, friend, all of them.)

Why do you think our Rabbis told us that the bashful person does not learn? Do you ever feel embarrassed to ask questions? Why?

Why do you think our Rabbis taught us that the impatient person should not teach?

Are there any questions that you should not ask? (Prying personal questions.)

Further Discussion: The types of questions that our children are exposed to in school are very often of the short, one-right-answer type. These questions are usually testing the recall of information. We should get our children used to thinking about questions where there is not one right answer, but many possible answers. The questions in these talks are meant to be open ended, with many possible answers. The idea is to spur on discussion, and not to spew out information.

Whether in the classroom or at home, we want to get our children to think and to articulate their thinking. We must deepen our children's thinking by giving them time to think. I know this sounds simple, but it takes some getting used to. Educators use a concept called "wait time." There is "wait-time 1" and "wait-time 2."

- "Wait-time 1" is the time that the student is given after the question is asked before he is expected to answer. Some teachers have the practice of not accepting any answers for at least one or two minutes after a question is asked (especially if it is an open-ended question with many possible answers). This allows more students to think of answers that are more thoughtful. It also breaks the game show kind of competition that can sometimes prevail in the classroom or at home. What does this mean practically? Inform your children that you will ask a question that has many correct answers and that you want them to think about the answer. You will give

them as much time as they want, and will not accept any answers for the first three minutes. Then make sure to give them the time to think through the answers.

- "Wait-time 2" is the time between the child's answer and the teacher's (or parent's) reaction. Give the child time to complete the answer without any reaction. He will go on and

on defending his answer or bringing examples or in many ways elaborating his answer. All that deepens the child's thinking. How can we put this into practice? When the child answers, do not interrupt him. When he stops, do not say anything for at least five seconds (it is a long time for silence, count it out!). More often than not, the child will continue talking, elaborating his answer that is deepening his thinking.

Use these concepts at home when you are discussing the perasha or having any discussion. You will see how it can really enhance your children's (and your own) thinking abilities.

"Whether in the classroom or at home, we want to get our children to think and to articulate their thinking."



Rabbi Tawil's Shabbat-Table Talks (2012) can be purchased online or your local Judaica Store.



Sephardic History

PART V: WESTERN EUROPE AND EMANCIPATION

Mrs. Natalie Mizrahi

To recap part 4, post 1492 some Sephardic exiles travelled eastward joining already established Jewish communities across the Levant, modern day Bagdad, and the ever expanding Ottoman Empire. Handfuls arrived in India and even China. At the same time many Sepharadim remained in Western Europe primarily in one of two ways: within the Spanish Empire as false New Christians-*conversos*,¹ or they lived in greater Europe under the guise and somewhat open secret of being “Portuguese Merchants.” This latter group was often invited to conduct commerce in busy port cities under the condition that they maintain their religion out of sight and not appear or speak as Jews in public.

Some notable European cities of the 16th century include: the tolerant city of Ferrara, where Don Isaac Abrabanel settled with some 10,000 followers.² With no need for a charade there, Don Isaac’s niece, Benvenida Abrabanel was heavily involved in political life and served as a tutor to the Grande Duchess of Tuscany. Elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, this period saw the functioning of a Talmud Torah for girls in Rome. In Venice however, the acceptance of Jews would diminish in response to the Church’s fear

of the growing Protestantism. Even while the Venetian ghetto, established in 1516 thrived, (it lasted until 1797), “Sepharadim continued to prosper, playing a special role in that commerce as a result of their family business connections in the Ottoman Empire.”³ Interestingly, in Venice there was an Iberian congregation already from the 1490’s -before the expulsion, a later established *converso* congregation, and a Sephardic merchant congregation from Ottoman Turkey!

Directing focus now to the west, other children and grandchildren of the exiles were just beginning to take their place in affecting world affairs. Rabbi Moses Pallache was born in 1635 in Marrakesh, from the line of Rabbis going back to *The Four Captives*⁴ and the founding of Cordoba. A famous and inspiring orator, he traveled to Turkey, then Palestine, the Balkans and ultimately settled in Venice. Everywhere he spoke, he drew large audiences- many of them *conversos*. His brother, Isaac Pallache, was the Rabbi of Fez. Isaac’s two sons, Samuel and Joseph Pallache, even as youths, began smuggling merchandise across the straits of Gibraltar and slipping into Spain proper.

The Mediterranean Sea was under Moslem control by the middle of the 16th century. The Pallache brothers were in part



Menasseh Ben Israel by Rembrandt

³ Ibid. Gerber

⁴ The Legend of The Four Captives holds that in the late 10th century four Talmudic Sages were taken captive by Iberian pirates. They were later ransomed by different Jewish communities where they established traditional rabbinic colleges to carry on the transmission of both the Written and Oral Torahs: R. Moses in Cordoba, Spain; R. Shemarya in Fostat (Old Cairo), R. Hushi'el in Kairowan (Tunisia), and the fourth's name is unknown yet his school flourished under R. Gershom in Byzantine Italy. These establishments were of pivotal importance due to the fact that communities geographically and culturally distant from Babylon were already in the 8th century filling the vacuum of their lack of knowledge with local folklore. Legend or not, without guidance from Babylonia there would have been no continuity of the authentic Talmudic transmission at all.

¹ Scholars seem to use the terms *converso* and *marrano* interchangeably. *Marrano* means swine which Jews do not eat, so this was a derogatory term of reference to them. Interestingly much Spanish food is known to contain pork for this reason.

² Gerber, Jane, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, The Free Press, New York, 1994.

inspired by the Barbary pirate Barbarossa, who sailed with Sinan, a confirmed Jewish privateer, on the mutual mission to enrich themselves and impoverish Christendom. Attracting notice of the Sultan for their exploits, the Pallaches were recruited for espionage within the Iberian Empire on his behalf.

Things did not go smoothly. Unable to remain undetected, they were suspected of encouraging Spanish New Christians to revert to Judaism. The brothers sought refuge in the home of the French ambassador in Madrid. Ultimately it was the English who were able to smuggle the pair out to the north, where Samuel emerged as the first open Jew in The Netherlands. He would serve as the emissary brokering a treaty between Holland and Fez- where both countries agreed to attack Spain. He would also become Fez's ambassador to the Netherlands from 1612-1616.⁵

The Netherlands had broken away from Spain in 1579. In 1591, Pallache, testing the new found Dutch notion of tolerance, attempted open Jewish settlement. Not until 1609 did he achieve rights for the fledgling Sephardic congregation in Amsterdam. By Pallache's efforts his childhood contemporary from Fez, Menasseh ben Israel, became the community's spiritual anchor. Hakham Menasseh ben Israel was a prestigious and leading intellectual of his day; one of the most accomplished and cosmopolitan rabbis of his time, "Scholar, philosopher, diplomat, teacher, editor, translator, printer – no activity seems to have been outside his talents."⁶ He would, among other achievements, try to convince Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews to settle officially in England. (Famously, Cromwell was against their coming and when his short reign ended -with his execution- the community was better off for not having had anything to do with his revolt. Eventually the first Sephardic settlers

squatted in England without asking for any permission at all.)

Hakham Menasseh ben Israel posed for Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), as did many of his Sephardic congregants who lived in Amsterdam, as subjects for his Biblical paintings. The significance of Rembrandt's rendition of Sepharadim in Biblical roles was that his images helped liberate Jewry in the Christian imagination. Previously Jews from Christian countries were depicted as ugly, ghoulish Christ-killers intent on more nefarious and devious schemes. Furthermore, the paintings were dark and if the Hebrew language was involved in the composition it was purposely drawn upside down, or as scribble as if to make it appear ridiculous. Rembrandt and other famous artists of the time distanced themselves from those negative stereotypes by depicting Biblical characters as clear faced, bright, and strong.

"The immigrant Sepharadim adapted well to the fashions of the day; from hairstyles to home décor.

This marked them with an air of sophistication that the society at large was not to forget... Members of the Nation lived in relative peace and behaved in an orderly and discreet way with their Christian neighbors. Interacting in compatible ways with the host society was a Sephardic mark of distinction that brought a tendency towards harmonious relations with their non-Jewish neighbors. The

beauty of this was that compatibility does not equal assimilation, i.e., losing one's Jewish identity. In the Sephardic consciousness, they were bona fide Jews; sons and daughters of the covenant and inheritors of all the privileges and troubles offered by their adherence to their ancient religion."⁷

It has been proposed that within the Amsterdam Sephardic

Continued on page 36

⁵ bid Gerber, pg. 163

⁶ Kritzler, Edward, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean: How a Generation of Swashbuckling Jews Carved out an Empire in the New World in Their Quest for Treasure, Religious Freedom - and Revenge*, Doubleday 2008.

⁷ Steven Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Continued from page 35

...PART V: WESTERN EUROPE...

community a secretive organization continued slipping into Iberia to communicate with the descendants of the *conversos* still living in Iberia.⁸ There is a small amount of evidence in Inquisition records of Ottoman Sepharadim slipping back into Iberia for this reason, even securing assets on the outside for their brethren in the event they would be able to escape.⁹ Scholars feel that the dearth of more evidence is due to the success of the clandestine effort. With no wonder, the Sephardic custom of Hatarat Nedarim- dissolution of vows via rabbinic tribunal- came into special relevance in Amsterdam during this period as the exiled or escaped Spaniards renounced all oaths to uphold Christianity they may have taken to gain trust and acceptance of their brethren.

Dutch Sephardic synagogue elder, Michael Spinoza, died on March 19, 1654 in Amsterdam. It took until July 27, 1656 for the synagogue of the Sephardic community to officially excommunicate his twenty four year old genius son, Baruch. "Bad opinions and actions, horrible heresies and for grave and monstrous acts that he commits."¹⁰

Renaming himself Benadictus he never took on another religion. He left Amsterdam in 1660 for Rijnsburg where he thereafter associated with among others, liberal Protestants. In seeking to reconcile his banishment with the

"...the Calvinists challenged the sanctioned Roman Catholic reading of the Bible with the rational commentaries of the Sephardic Grammarian Rabbi David Qimhi (RADAQ)"

realities of medieval life, Spinoza became the first secularist. During an age when it was imperative that every individual be identified by a religion, Spinoza devised the notion of separating Church and State. In a nutshell, he asserted that an individual could serve the State obediently without belonging to its theocracy. Calvinist leaders who were expelled from England for their divergent religious beliefs and living in Holland frequented his discussions. (Even after Spinoza's death, John Locke came to Holland to glean the philosopher's teachings.) The Calvinists successfully applied his theories first hand in the New World. Newport, Rhode Island was a colony founded on religious freedom, equality, and the separation of Church and State.

As a fascinating side point, it is well known that the Calvinists challenged the sanctioned Roman Catholic reading of the Bible with the rational commentaries of the Sephardic

Grammarian Rabbi David Qimhi (RADAQ). The RADAQ's writings, penned during the Maimonidean controversy centuries earlier stood as a pillar of emancipated theological thought that abetted Dutch nation building in terms of human rights, banking practices, and free commerce- in no short order some of the guiding principles they would utilize in the founding of the United



Map of Holland

States of America.¹¹

Mrs. Mizrachi is a community based writer who enjoys Sephardic History.

⁸ Kritzler *ibid*.

⁹ Gerber, *ibid* pg. 163

¹⁰ Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity*, SUNY Press, 2012, pgs. 142-149.

¹¹ Carroll, James, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and The Jews*, Houghton Mifflin, 2001

Continued from page 27

...PASS-OVER?

action that night, skipping over the houses rather than his outlook towards the occupants explaining why the phrase was translated as “pass over” and not “pity.”

The earliest recorded debate on the meaning of this verse appears in the Mekhilta, a work of midrash traditionally attributed to R. Ishmael, a 2nd century *tanna*. The passage (Mekhilta Bo 49) reads:

רבי יאשיה אומר: אל תקרי ופסחתי אלא ופסעתי - שהקדוש ברוך הוא מדלג על בתי בני ישראל במצרים ... רבי יונתן אומר: ופסחתי עליכם - עליכם אני חס, ואין אני חס על המצרים.

R. Josiah says: Do not read ופסחתי, but rather ופסעתי (and I will step over [you])... R. Jonathan says: ופסחתי עליכם – [meaning that] it is you [Israel] whom I will pity, and I will not pity the Egyptians.

The basis of the debate between R. Josiah and R. Jonathan is the question: what would have happened to Egyptians who happened to be in Israelite houses during the plague of the firstborn? R. Josiah says that God was simply skipping over the Israelite houses - meaning that if an Israelite firstborn were in an Egyptian house he would have died, while if an Egyptian firstborn were in an Israelite house he would have been spared. R. Jonathan says that it was the Israelites themselves whom God pitied and therefore one's physical location at the time of the plague would not have mattered. What is most interesting about this passage for the purposes of our discussion is that it seems obvious to both rabbis that the plain meaning of ופסחתי is and *I will take pity* and not *skip over*. This is evidenced by the fact that, rather than explain ופסחתי as *skip over*, R. Josiah begins his statement with the modifier אל תקרי, do not read, indicating that his forthcoming explanation differs from the literal interpretation, presented by R. Jonathan. R. Jonathan does not even consider that the meaning of ופסחתי might be anything other than *pity*, as he seized on the word עליכם (on you) to make his point, and does not even discuss ופסחתי.

Over the course of millennia, the understanding of the phrase ופסחתי עליכם underwent a change. The Mekhilta, Targum Onqelos, early grammarians, and Rashi's first explanation understood the phrase as *pity* - when God passed over the Israelite houses, He had pity on them and

spared them. Rashi's larger comment, which translated the word ופסחתי as “I will pass over” and presented an overall translation for words from the פ-ס-ח root as “pass over” is built upon R. Josiah's statement in the Mekhilta that God skipped over the Israelite houses. This understanding and the translation of ופסחתי and words from the פ-ס-ח root as “pass over” was adopted by later generations. Radak, (who lived after Rashi) explained words from the פ-ס-ח root in terms of passing over and not compassion unlike his grammarian predecessors. Thus, while translating the phrase ופסחתי עליכם as “passing over” can describe God's actions, the earlier translation “pity” describes his mindset on that fateful night. On the seder nights, when we remember how God passed over the Israelite houses in Egypt thousands of years ago, it is worthwhile to remember not only His passing over, but also His compassion and pity which belied His passing over, and the unceasing pity and compassion He has showed to His people throughout the generations.

Mr. Mishaan is a teacher in Barkai Yeshivah.

Continued from page 31

...THE PATHOLOGICAL JEW?

our past with hatred and feelings of vengeance towards those who harmed us? If we used each memory of persecution and humiliation as an excuse to distance ourselves from those unlike us? Would we have been the nation we are today, one that has contributed so much to humanity over the last three millennia? No one can know for sure, but I would suggest, that the freedom from being limited by the past, has allowed us to grow from it.

Rabbi Haber is associate rabbi of congregation Bnei Yitzhak and a Judaic studies teacher at the Yeshivah of Flatbush High School. He is the Program Coordinator for the SCA summer program in Deal.



Continued from page 29

...AND I WILL HARDEN PHARAOH'S...

couldn't see how their economy could continue to prosper without slave labor.

Orthodox Jews during the Great Depression

To live one's life as an Orthodox Jew in the United States in the later part of the 20th century has not been much of a challenge. Employees have protection of religious rights under Federal employment law, which prohibit discrimination over one's beliefs.

Federal law requires an employer to "reasonably accommodate" an employee's religious observances, practices and beliefs unless the employer can show that accommodation would cause an "undue hardship" to the employer's business.¹⁰ As a Jewish employee, not working on the Sabbath or Jewish holidays would not cause their position to be terminated.

¹⁰ <http://www.jlaw.com/LawPolicy/accommodation.html>

However, such was not the case less than a century ago. In fact, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, it was much more difficult to not work on those days...one could lose their job and face the prospects of not being able to put food on their table or a roof over their head.

Was the Orthodox Jew during the Great Depression deprived of his or her choice? Hardly, instead they were faced with a very difficult one, not on par with Pharaoh or Southern slave owners, but a choice that was very difficult to make. There were a minority of Jews that lost their jobs and didn't violate the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, while the majority saw no alternative but to work on those days.

Pharaoh, Southern slave owners, and the Jews during the Depression, never lost their freedom of choice. Instead, they were faced with a choice which was difficult to make. The Rav stated that at no time is freedom of choice ever taken away...even from the most hardened criminal.

Mr. Mizrahi is a community member.

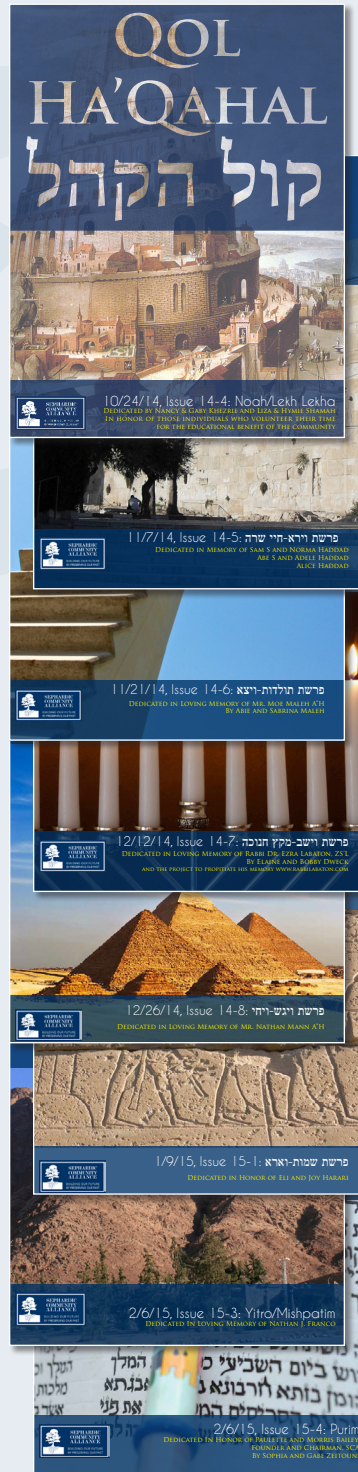


Cotton Field

It is with great admiration and appreciation that Qol Ha'Qahal would like to thank all of the writers that helped make Qol Ha'Qahal a success.

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