

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



Yom Ha'asmaut Issue

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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>A Living Prophecy for the Modern State of Israel</i> Rabbi Joseph Beyda	4
<i>Israel - You Cannot Be Neutral</i> Rabbi Haim Ovadia	7
<i>A Light Among Nations</i> Mr. Irving Safdieh.....	10
<i>Once You Choose Hope, Anything's Possible- Haftarat Mesora</i> Rabbi Nathan Dweck.....	11
<i>Israel Education</i> Rabbi Joseph M. Mizrachi	13
<i>Hallel on Yom Ha'asmaut</i> Rabbi Ilan Acoca	14
<i>Never Forget Our Noble Heritage</i> Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman	16
<i>Baqashot at Beth Torah</i> Dr. David M Betesh, DMD	18
<i>What Can I Do?</i> Mrs. Lenore Mizrachi	20
<i>IDF Hero Joseph D. Benun</i> Mr. Joseph Tawil	22

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Thoughts on Israel

A LIVING PROPHECY FOR THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL: A CONTEMPORARY READING OF YEHEZKEL'S DRY BONES PROPHECY

Rabbi Joseph Beyda

Each year on Shabbat Hol HaMoed of Pesah we read Yehezkel's "Dry Bones" prophecy (Yehezkel 37:1-14) as the *haftarah*. It is a stirring message with powerful imagery intended to provide hope to those who witnessed the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and the subsequent exile to Babylonia. As it explicitly makes clear, the People should not give in to despair. It is my belief that this short prophecy, one that spoke powerfully to the generation it was delivered to and many subsequent ones, has a different message today. Let us analyze it in order to make the point.

Yehezkel opens by describing that God placed him in a valley filled with dried bones and put forth a challenge to him.

37:1 The Lord's hand was on me. The Spirit of the Lord took me out and placed me down in the middle of the Valley; it was full of dried bones.

37:2 He passed me over them, around and around, behold, there were many bones on the surface of the valley; the bones were very dry.

37:3 Then the Lord said to me, "Human Being, can these bones come to life?" I said, "Lord God, you know."

The Valley is doubtless a reference to Babylonia, the same valley referred to in the Tower of Babel narrative. The dried

bones are an obvious reference to the remnants of the Jewish People that lived there. It is in the gloomy exile in Babylonia that the once proud Jewish People are like the dried bones - they are not merely dead, they are scattered and desiccated - long removed from life. The idea of the bones "living" is preposterous save for the fact that God poses it as a possibility.

God instructs Yehezkel to play a role in reviving the bones. Like a good prophet, Yehezkel is advised in advance what will happen and is to inform the "People," in this case the bones, what God will do. Of note is the two-step process by which this will all happen. First the bones will be covered with the living features of bodies: sinews, muscles, and skin. Second, they will receive the breath of life. This will lead to the knowledge of the Lord.

37:4 Then He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones. Tell them, 'Dry Bones, listen to the word of the Lord'."

37:5 This is what the Lord God says to you: I will cause breath to come into you, and you will come to life!

37:6 I will put sinew and muscles on you, and I will cover you with skin. Then I will put breath in you, and you will come back to life! Then you will know that I am the Lord."

"This simple but piercing vision gave them hope for the future, hope that was passed on generation after generation."

Yehezkel does as he is commanded. First he speaks to the bones. Miraculously, the bones draw close to one another, become covered with flesh, and return to the stage of corpses - devoid of life.

At that point, God tells him to summon the wind from the four corners of the Earth to breathe life into the corpses. On Yehezkel's cue, the wind does the impossible and brings the corpses to life. Not only are the corpses alive, they stand as a powerful army. In two stages, dried bones become an imposing military force.

37:7 I prophesied as I was commanded. There was a sound as I was prophesying and behold a loud noise (tremor). And

the bones drew close, one bone to another.

37:8 There before my eyes, I saw sinew and muscles begin to cover the bones. Skin began to cover them, but there was no breath in them.

37:9 Then the Lord said to me, "Prophecy to the wind; Human Being, prophecy to the wind. Tell the wind that this is what the Lord God says: 'Wind, come from the four directions and breathe air into these corpses and they will live!'"

37:10 And I prophesied as He commanded me; and the wind came into them and they lived they stood up on their feet - a very large army!

Yehezkel, having witnessed the miraculous now must deliver the critical message to save the people from despair. He must explain to them that they are the bones and their future holds a revival unlike anything in human history.

37:11 And He said to me, "Human Being, these bones are the whole House of Israel. Behold they say, 'Our bones have dried up; our hope is lost. We have been decreed against!'"

37:12 Therefore prophecy and say to them, "This is what the Lord God says: 'Behold, I open your graves and will bring you up out of them, My People! Then I will bring you to the ground of Israel.

37:13 And you will know that I am the Lord, as I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, My People.

37:14 I will put my spirit in you, and you will live. And I will place you in your land. And you will know that I am the Lord. I have spoken and performed.'" This is what the Lord said.

We know Yehezkel was successful because the People did not waste away in despair like dried bones. Instead, they took comfort from his words and instituted their reading yearly on the redemption-themed festival of Pesah. This simple but piercing vision gave them hope for the future, hope

that was passed on generation after generation. Whether in Babylonia, Rome, Spain, Aleppo, Prague, Poland, Germany, or the United States this prophecy solidified optimism and hope for a better future as a People in the Land of Israel. It was no less powerful than "Next year in Jerusalem," offered up at the end of the Pesah Seder. Indeed, a reference to this prophecy forms the key line in the Zionist and ultimately Israeli National Anthem, "HaTikvah." Playing upon verse 10, Naftali Herz Imber penned, "our hope is NOT lost."

With this perspective, we can marvel at the power of the prophetic word. Fourteen short verses spoken by God to Yehezkel reverberated through two millennia and played a crucial, if not defining, role in their fulfillment. The Dried Bones vision could not be a more apt description of the founding of the State of Israel. In the years following the Holocaust and the many other persecutions and troubles in the centuries leading up to that, the Jewish People were "left for dead." We were dried bones. Looking at images of survivors in concentration camps and Displaced Persons camps, one was looking at the "bones" and "corpses" Yehezkel spoke to. At that point, God stepped in and changed the course of history.

Within a thirty-five year span (1940-1975), the Jewish populations of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East were nearly completely emptied and a huge percentage of those that were not murdered by the Nazis emigrated to Israel. That continued when the Jews of Ethiopia and then the Soviet Union made Israel their home. Today, Israel has approximately 6 million Jews, up from less than half a million in 1940. It is a true fulfillment of the ingathering of exiles foretold in Yehezkel's prophesy.

"Virtually every Jew in the world can live in Israel if he/she so chooses. Upon arrival, a Jew will find a thriving economic, intellectual, technological, social and military power."

It is an amazing story, one with few, if any, parallels in the history of mankind. However, a closer look teaches us that this once hope-inspiring vision may have a different message for us, today.

As noted above, God plans for and commands Yehezkel to bring the bones to life in a two stage process. First the bones

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

will become lifeless corpses, then wind will be breathed into them and they will become a living platoon. Obviously, God seeks to impart a message by resuscitating in two stages instead of one. There is the physical recovery, symbolized by the transformation from dried scattered bones to lifeless corpses. However, that is still not life. Life is symbolized by the wind, which is symbolic of the spirit. Indeed, in verses 6 and 14, the result of the wind is “knowledge of God.” The revival is spiritual as much as it is physical.

With that key element of the prophecy in mind, the words that for two and a half millennia were words of comfort, inspiration, and optimism have now taken on a new meaning: unfulfilled expectation and maybe even rebuke. God has done His part. He has brought us the physical redemption. We have been swept up from the four corners of the Earth and been returned to our homeland under our own banner. Virtually every Jew in the world can live in Israel if he/she so chooses. Upon arrival, a Jew will find a thriving economic, intellectual, technological, social and military power. Yet, it remains very much like the corpses in Yehezkel’s vision - devoid of the life that is “knowledge of God.” The strength of the army Yehezkel envisioned was not military, economic, or

political - it was one infused with “knowledge of God.” That has not come to fruition. Certainly not in a country that has no reference to God in its Declaration of Independence or its National Anthem. Yes, there is an unequalled quantity of Torah learned in Israel and around the world as a direct consequence of the existence of the State of Israel. Yet that, alone, is not the “knowledge of God” that Yehezkel dreamed of. Knowledge of God is an existence in which the inhabitants of Israel (and those that should be inhabitants of Israel) are so acutely aware of God in their lives that He is the focus and cause of how they live. To that level, we have not yet arrived.

It could be that the achievement of “knowledge of God” is something that must be granted by Him. There are certainly verses in the Bible (including a number of statements by Yehezkel) that could support such an assertion. Equally likely, though, is that such a spiritual attainment is entirely dependent upon us. If that is true, then the words of Yehezkel which, for so many years said, “believe,” may now be subtly saying, “can you do better?”

Rabbi Beyda is the Rabbi of Congregation Bnei Yitzhak.



View of the Western Wall from Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter

ISRAEL – YOU CANNOT BE NEUTRAL

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

Neutrality is an attitude we can claim toward certain things in life, such as orange juice pulp, traffic signs' color, or the president's wardrobe, but we cannot remain neutral in an armed conflict (for example, neutral Switzerland in WWII was nothing less than a criminal accomplice of the Nazis), and as Jews we cannot be neutral when it comes to the question of the State of Israel and its *raison d'être*. The choice is not between acquiescing with, or rejecting, everything Israel does as a country. We are entitled to argue, criticize, get angry or emotional about events in Israel, raise our voice or remain quiet when Israel's reputation is tarnished in the international media, live comfortably outside the borders of this contested, disputed yet beautiful land, or choose to do Aliyah and take an active part in the building and developing of the Land of our Fathers, but we must have an opinion regarding the formation and existence of the State of Israel. We either feel that the State of Israel must have been created the way it was, or the opposite, which means that the Jewish people would have been better off without the State of Israel. Each one of these two extremes can be the result of religious or atheistic worldviews, but in this article my main concern is to explore the religious divide and let the reader decide which path he or she would like to choose as observant Jews.

The primary source for the opposition to the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State has been the Midrash on Shir HaShirim. The Midrash addresses the triple repetition of the call of the girl to the daughters of Jerusalem, asking them to swear that they will not awaken the love before its time has come: **השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים: בצבאות או באילות השדה אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את האהבה עד שתחפץ.**

The Midrash explains that God made the Jews take three oaths: they should not instigate the nations; they should not try to bring the redemption before its time has come; and they should not try to climb the wall.

This Midrash has been interpreted by many later scholars, especially in Western Europe, as suggesting that *Am Yisrael* should suffer under the boot of the oppressor until miraculous events will lead to the Redemption and the Third Temple will descend, all built and shiny, from heaven. This attitude has

led, in turn, to the glorification of exile and to the belief that Diaspora is the preferred status of the Jewish People.

Even if this interpretation of the Midrash would have been correct, it would be hard to argue that the events leading to the establishment of the State of Israel were not momentous and miraculous. It would also be very hard to imagine our lives today without the State. In the not too recent past there were still those among the Ultra-Orthodox, Anti-Israel camp who claimed that the only reason we are attacked in Israel is the State of Israel itself. Without the “provocative” act of claiming independence and establishing your “own” country, they claim, the Arab nations would not have been hostile and rather than suffering terrorist attacks and investing billions of dollars and the lives of our bravest, we would have prospered comfortably under the protective regime of our benevolent Muslim rulers. This could have been a valid argument (to the slightly insane or completely naïve) ten or twenty years ago, but show me one observant Jew who would move, of his own free will, to live in one of the neighboring countries. The world has witnessed with horror (albeit with little care and intervention) as one regime after another has dislocated, attacked, imprisoned and brutally murdered its own citizens. If there was a book called *1,000 Places You Do not Want to See before You Die*, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, the Sudan, and Iran would have easily made the Top Ten.

Having rejected this ridiculous argument, though, we must return to the Midrash and try to understand the meaning of its warning. As it is well known to serious students, Midrashic material cannot be understood outside its historical context, and this Midrash is no different. As a matter of fact it provides a clue to the exact time and circumstances of its composition. At around the time of Bar Kokhva revolt, Jerusalem was declared a pagan city by the Roman emperor Hadrian and was renamed Aelia Capitolina. In 136 CE, after the rebellion was cruelly crushed by the Romans, Jews were forbidden from entering the city, except for Tisha Be'Av, in which the pagans would mock the miserable, mourning Jews. It was only natural for some zealots to try and infiltrate Jerusalem despite the prohibition and the penalty of tortures and execution they would face if caught. It was then that the rabbis created this Midrash using the text of Shir HaShirim. They understood that the Roman Empire has a different *modus operandi* than that of the Greek Empire and that insistence on recruiting freedom fighters

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

and mounting guerilla attacks would only exacerbate the situation and will lead to total annihilation of Jews in Israel. In order to convince the survivors of the Bar Kokhva Rebellion that they should put down their weapons, cease fighting, and wait for the Roman Empire to disappear, the Rabbis created a Midrash which anchored these commitments in the Biblical text, but their intention was never that we would remain, as a nation, forever subjugated, enslaved, persecuted, and executed.

This understanding has been well expressed by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Toledano (Tiberias 1880 - Jerusalem 1960) in chapter 93 of his book *Yam HaGadol*, written while he served as Chief (Chief Rabbi of Alexandria):

"Many of the great rabbis in our and in past generations erred and misled our nation to think that as long as we are in this exile, we must not raise our head but are rather obligated to bow down to every tyrant and ruler, to expose our backs to their lashes and our cheeks to those who pull our hairs, as if our blood is worthless and as if it is a divine decree to have Israel robbed and Yaakov raided.

They thought slavery and humiliation to be part of the decree of being in exile and subjugated to the nations. They thought that giving up one's life and willingly become slaves and captives of their enemies is a sanctification of God's name, even when they had the opportunity to defend themselves. I say without fear that with all due respect, they have caused the destruction of individuals and communities, many of which could have been saved, if only their rabbis would have instructed them to confront their enemies, as the law mandates: if someone threatens to kill you, you should be the first one to act. Rather than doing that, they accepted the verdict and went as sheep to slaughter. All that was caused by the distorted opinion and the exilic practice to consider themselves dust and vermin; They did not understand that the biblical prophecies of fire and



brimstone were only temporary, and definitely not mandatory... some of the prophecies happened for a short while and some of them never happened but were rather meant as a threat and a deterrent... in the past the great rabbis and community leaders cared for their honor and that of their followers and whenever possible they stood up to their enemies. It was only in France, Germany and Russia that they lost self-respect and never tried to oppose or fight back... The exile which was decreed upon us is to be wandering and traveling from place to place, abiding by the laws of the different governments and paying their taxes, but not to be humiliated and disgraced. This is tantamount to the destruction of the third Temple, because the false humility which the leaders taught their followers lengthened the exile and postponed the coming of Messiah.

Unfortunately I have seen the same tendency in the Holy Land in the recent pogroms of 1929 in Hebron when many of the Yeshiva students and the commoners who were educated to be submissive and docile were killed and tortured."

Later on Rabbi Toledano calls on the heads of the Yeshivot to include military training and self-defense classes in their curricula. One can but wonder how the Jewish world would have looked like today, had they accepted his suggestion, made in 1930, thus entering WWII with a different state of mind and with some preparedness.

Rabbi Toledano, who merited to see the establishment of the State of Israel and even serve as a minister in its first government, celebrated Yom Ha'asmat with a passion as did all Sephardic sages, including Hakham Ovadia Yossef ZT"l who would say *hallel* on that day.

I recall special moments of Yom Ha'asmat in Israel: Holding my grandfather's hand when I was seven years old and walking with him from our home near Shuk Mahane Yehuda to the Kotel, among singing throngs of people which can be described by no other verse: **כי אעבור בסך אדם עד בית**

חוגג ("How I walked with the crowd, moved with them, the festive throng, to the House of God with joyous shouts of praise," Tehillim 42:5); I remember Erev Yom Ha'asmat, festive *tefillah* at the Great Sephardic Synagogue in Bayit VeGan with Rabbi Davit Setton ZT"l, people dressed in Shabbat attire, the hazzan leading a beautiful service and the rabbi reading the full *hallel*, with a *berakha* and blowing the shofar at the open gates of the Holy Ark to show our gratitude for the beginning of *Geulah* and our yearning for its completion. Tears were flowing, tears of joy and happiness, as well as remembrance of the great sacrifices made, leaving not a dry eye in the crowd; And I also remember, with horror, how while praying and dancing on Yom Ha'asmat at the Kotel, with the most diverse group of Israelis, new immigrants and tourists, we noticed a bunch of Hassidic Jews sitting on the ground in torn garments, lamenting and mourning what they believe is an accursed day in the history of the Jewish People.

Who do we choose to align with? If we, as observant Jews, acknowledge the day not just by skipping *tahanun* but by studying our history, praising God, saying *hallel* and treating the day as a religious holiday, then we belong to the camp of those who love the State of Israel and realize that its establishment was a miraculous event guided by *Bore Olam*. If on the other hand, we claim neutrality, we don't object but don't rejoice, we don't say *tahanun* but also not *hallel*, if we fail to give special significance to this day, then God forbid we fall under the other rubric, of those who believe that the State of Israel should not exist. And if there are among us those who so think, from the fanatic ultra-orthodox, to the middle of the road Hassidim to J-Street, what can we expect from our enemies? Do we really want to adhere to the camp of people such as "rabbi" Daniel Bitton of Israel? This is how he describes, in 1994, the situation in Israel:

The Amalekites of our generation are the defiled Zionists... they think that if we have a state like all other nations the persecutions, pogroms and exile will end, an opinion which is heresy and blasphemy, a rebellion against God and His prophets... these

sects, who followed the contaminated idea of establishing a state before the time has come, a state without Torah, have brought the people to terrible heresy and transgressions... and the defiled Zionist scheme to trap all under the hands of their master, the Devil... (תשנ"ד, עמ' יא-יג). זכרון יעקב, קובץ תורני יורו משפטיד ליעקב, זכרון יעקב).

I do not want to quote more here as to not give this man another platform but in the many years I have spent outside the State of Israel I have come to this very clear realization: when it comes to our perception and understanding of Israel there is no halfway, there is no neutrality. One cannot claim that he does not really care whether there is or there is not a safe haven in the Middle East, a safe haven with beautiful beaches, amazing hotels, and thriving tourist industry, which happens to correspond to ancient Israel and which provides visitors with the thrill and rush of touching 3,000 years of history.

"I know that this coming Yom Ha'asmat I will rejoice and give thanks to Hashem as I read the hallel and the festive prayers."

If one's breath is not taken away by the miracle called Israel and its independence, even though he does not agree with everything it does, if one is not looking forward to Yom Ha'asmat as a day of being closer to Hashem, a day of praise and gratitude, a day of showing love and commitment toward the people and the state, then *Has VeShalom*, one is indicating that he belongs to the other camp.

I know that this coming Yom Ha'asmat I will rejoice and give thanks to Hashem as I read the *hallel* and the festive prayers. I will pray for the souls of the heroes who sacrificed their lives, for the speedy recovery of the wounded, and for the well-being and safe return home of our brave soldiers.

I will celebrate and cherish every moment of Yom Ha'asmat, and I wish and hope that if not all, at least the majority of observant Jews will do the same.

Hag Sameah

Rabbi Ovadia is currently writing a book on Sefer Bereshit.

A LIGHT AMONG NATIONS

Mr. Irving Safdieh

On Yom Ha'asmaut we celebrate Israel, a sliver of land containing less than 1/1000th of the world's population, and its disproportionate contributions to people around the world. We also celebrate its thriving and inclusive democracy. We can proudly say that Israel is the only one of its kind in the Middle East that stands for the same basic human rights, such as freedom of religion and freedom of speech, as we do here in the USA.

Many of us are ingrained with a love for our Jewish homeland. We've had our Bar Mitzvas at the Kotel, traveled with friends on Birthright, and spent a year there after high school. But despite our fervent love for the land, we remain ill-equipped to combat the rising Anti-Israel rhetoric demonstrated in the media, on campuses and in international politics. The opposition seems well-educated, well-organized and indicative of popular opinion.

How do we reconcile the Israel we know and love to the negative headlines we see in the paper? We can start by educating ourselves on two all too common allegations against Israel and illustrate the importance of historical knowledge, context, and objectivity.

“We can proudly say that Israel is the only of its kind in the Middle East that stands for the same basic human rights, such as freedom of religion and freedom of speech, as we do here in the USA.”

“Israel is an Apartheid State”

Statements such as these are intimidating and, believe it or not, have even been verbalized by the President of the UN

General Assembly. However, a closer look at the historical facts tells a different story. Apartheid was a system of racial segregation in South Africa under which the majority black population and other ethnic groups were denied basic rights. The contrast between 20th century South Africa and modern-day Israel could not be greater. Not only are Arab



Map of Israel in the Middle East

Israelis able to vote in Israeli elections but there are currently 16 Arabs serving in the Knesset. Calling Israel an Apartheid state is factually incorrect and insensitive to the people who suffered under Apartheid.

“Israel is the Prime Violator of Human Rights”

At the 58th Commission on the Status of Women (a UN committee) session, Israel was singlehandedly called out as the prime abuser of women's rights.

Context, or lack thereof, is vital. It is important to note that elected members of the commission include representatives from Cuba, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, China and Egypt - countries that are certainly not proponents of human rights. Furthermore, while today in Sudan 65.5% of women have undergone genital mutilation, not only were no documents generated against Sudan, its representative to the commission, Mohamed Elbahi, was elected Vice-Chair.

To single out Israel—a nation whose entrepreneurship rate amongst women is the highest in the world—for

women's rights abuses and not, for example, Saudi Arabia, where women are arrested for driving—is baffling to say the least. Furthermore, the proportion of UN resolutions that single out Israel and not nations like China, Cuba, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey, and Venezuela, who fare far worse on the issue of human rights, is also a clear case of demonization and double standards.

Israel is not perfect. No nation is, however, Israel's track record in its 67 years of existence is comparable to, if not better than, countries leading the charge for democracy and human rights, including the USA.

“Let’s commit to having an active and involved relationship.”

As of 2015, 126 countries swear their allegiance to Christianity and 49 to Islam – including one country, Jordan, with a majority Palestinian population. There is only one country, smaller than the state of New Jersey, raising a flag with the Star of David. It's vital that we educate ourselves to the real facts about our Homeland and to truly understand that we have a right to exist in Israel. Jews have lived in Israel for over 4,000 years - 2,000 years prior to the start of Christianity and far before the 7th century founding of Islam. The land of Israel isn't a right given to us by a UN Partition Plan or the Balfour Declaration. Our existence in the land predates these organizations and empires by thousands of years.

So, on her 67th birthday, what is the best gift that we can give Israel? Let's commit to having an active and involved relationship. Let's educate ourselves, our peers, our friends and children. Together we can prime our next generation of leaders to be a formidable force of advocacy locally and globally. Israel is the light among nations. May her glow continue to be a guide and inspiration on the world stage for many years to come.

Mr. Safdieh recently chaired the SCA Israel event in Manhattan and is an active member of the SCA's Israel Committee.

ONCE YOU CHOOSE HOPE, ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE- HAFTARAT MESORA

Rabbi Nathan Dweck

This week's Haftarah (2 Melakhim 7:3-20) tells us of a miraculous story that takes place during the Aramean siege on Shomron, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Due to this siege, there was a great famine in Shomron. It gets so bad to a point that the people are forced to eat their children for food! The king, believing that Elisha the prophet is responsible for all that is happening, sends his aide to kill Elisha. Elisha expects them, and when the messenger and the king arrive, they have lost hope: "This calamity is from Hashem. What more can I hope from Hashem?" (2 Melakhim 6:33). Elisha responds to this comment that the famine will end the next day. In disbelief of Elisha's prophecy, the aide of the king answered: "Even if Hashem were to make windows in the sky, could this thing happen?" Elisha told this messenger that it will indeed happen, but he will not eat of it.

This is where our Haftarah begins. There are four lepers outside the city gate (as this week's parashah says that a leper must "dwell outside the camp" until the disease is healed). They decide to surrender themselves to the Arameans, since waiting outside the city or entering the city where there was a famine would lead to their death. Upon arriving, there is no one there in the Aramean camp; Hashem caused the Aramean camp to hear the sound of chariots. Hearing this they feared

“Our belief, our hope, that although we had been exiled out of our land for nearly 2,000 years, Hashem would one day return us back there.”

that the Israelites had hired the Hittites and Egyptians to battle them- so they fled. Once the camp was deserted, the lepers went from tent to tent enjoying some food and drink, and burying the spoils.

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

The four lepers then went to go tell the king, Yehoram, about the absence of the Aramean camp. Upon hearing this, the king – despite the fact that he was told by the prophet that the famine would end – did not believe that they fled, but rather that the Arameans were waiting to ambush the Israelites. He was convinced, however, to send some messengers to go check- and indeed it was as reported by the lepers. The people went out and plundered the Aramean camp. The messenger of the king, who expressed disbelief to Elisha’s promise, was trampled to death at the gate. The Haftarah could have ended there—but it doesn’t. Three more verses (vv. 18-20) are spent to recall why he was killed- stressing that this was the same man who questioned Elisha’s prophecy. The purpose of this repetition is to show that it was his own disbelief in God’s salvation that killed him—not allowing him to enjoy the results of God’s miracle.

This Haftarah is indeed an appropriate one for Hag Yom Ha’asmaut (Israel Independence Day), which we celebrated this week. The Zionists, since the First Zionist Congress in 1897, had the vision of establishing a home for the Jewish people in Palestine. In 1917, the British Mandate provided a glimmer of hope, supporting “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” But this was only to be followed by years of attacks by the Arabs. The Arabs would not accept the possibility of a Jewish state alongside an Arab one, and would do anything to stop it from happening. The Holocaust then staged a devastating blow to the Jewish nation: 6 million Jews had been murdered and whoever survived was left homeless, penniless and in most cases with no family to turn to. Many of the survivors had lost hope – with no country to call their own. Many had resorted to what the messenger told Elisha during the famine: “This calamity is from Hashem. What more can I hope from Hashem?”



Israeli Flag on Jerusalem Old City Wall

However, on May 14, 1948, after the British Mandate in Palestine ended, the Jewish Agency, led by David Ben-Gurion, declared the State of Israel. Immediately, Egypt, TransJordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq declared war and announced their rejection of the UN partition decision. Winning the war seemed impossible, as this small state was fighting against and surrounded by all of these Arab countries. Miraculously, the Jews won the war against the Arabs, and held on to the State of Israel. Just like Hashem saved them from the Arameans and ended the famine, Hashem saved us from an overpowering enemy by giving us the Land of Israel. Ever since, we celebrate Yom Ha’asmaut on the 5th of Iyar- the day *Eress Yisrael* was returned to us. What led to the establishment of the state, something that seemed so out of reach for nearly

2,000 years? Our belief, our hope, that although we had been exiled out of our land for nearly 2,000 years, Hashem would one day return us back there.

To this day, we are threatened by those interested in destroying the State of Israel. There are those, like the president of Iran, who are interested in nothing else but our ultimate destruction. Although Iran claims that their nuclear program is a peaceful one, Iran poses a

threat to Israel and to the world. And yet, like in the story of Elisha in our Haftarah, we should not lose hope. We should not be like the aide of the king, who chose his own poison in his disbelief of the wonders of God. It is, rather, a time for us to act- to join together and “battle” those wishing to destroy us yet again. As Christopher Reeve once said: “Once you choose hope, anything’s possible.”

Rabbi Dweck teaches in Yeshivah of Flatbush Middle Division and is the rabbi of Sephardic Synagogue’s Father – Son Minyan.

ISRAEL EDUCATION

Rabbi Joseph M. Mizrachi

From the Sephardic Rabbi Yehudah Alkalai (1798-1878) right up to the current Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, Israel is a subject that grabs headlines 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are constantly bombarded with negative, and sometimes positive, press about Israeli politics, Israeli life or the Israeli economy.

But how much do we really know about Israel? How much do our kids know? Indeed, how much do we take for granted that our kids know? The answer can sometimes be alarming. The fact is that most of us know a lot less than we think. The challenge in that is our enemies are rather well versed in their version of the story and present that version on American college campuses all over the country and indeed the world. Are we giving our students the correct versions of events? Are we training our young people with how to deal with

“How much do we really know about Israel?”

people who seem innocuous enough but really want us dead?

The European ideology of Nationalism hit its peak in the 19th century. The great nations of Europe began to take shape and national identities were branded, sharpened and magnified. Jews were ultimately excluded from these movements as we were always viewed as the “Other,” the alien. Zionism had its genesis in the ancient yearning of a people that morphed into a modern, political mass movement. Jewish nationalism was born and several decades later a modern Jewish state followed. The history of the nascent country is fascinating. Both its myth and fact are debated and contested, studied and explored

More people today are visiting Israel than ever before. We are doing more Bar Mitzvah trips and more Hesed missions today than even five years ago. The sad reality is that our physical presence in Israel is not educating us about the BDS movement, the goals of Hamas, ISIS, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, Iran or Yemen. So many of our trips are entertaining and fun. Very few are truly for the sole purpose of education. We end up doing fun activities that satisfy our need to unwind, relax

and spend time with our families. We need more meaningful trips to help us truly understand Israel today.

Who then is telling our children about Herzl?, Who is talking to them about Sepharadeem in Israel in the 1950’s? Who is telling them about the Six Day War? Who is telling them about the biblical significance of the sites all around as they travel by bus all day?

We need to experience Israel and see its people, politics, culture, history and zeitgeist. We need more meaningful trips that are not only a “Bar Mitzvah” trip to the kotel. We need a trip that has significance beyond a Disney vacation. We desperately need experiential learning through travel.

Education need not be a classroom and notes. A hike on Mt Carmel with a Tanakh in hand or a visit to the prison in Acco is something that you cannot get in a classroom. The hands-on experience of history resonates long after the trip is over. Bringing the Tanakh alive by actually pointing to a

“Education need not be a classroom and notes.”

spot and reading the *pasuk* is a very powerful educational tool. The leap from theoretical to experiential is significant and enduring. It is also manifest in the everyday Israeli experiences. Speaking the Hebrew language allows it to flow from a *siddur* into everyday life. It allows our children to see, first hand, that indeed “*Am Yisrael Hai*” is not a catchy phrase; that the Jewish people are alive, developing and thriving in the land that G-d promised us 4,000 years ago. It’s the Jewish version of “Living the Dream.”

Rabbi Mizrachi is the co-founder of Barkai Yeshivah and founder of the Beth Torah father-son minyan.





Sephardic Customs

HALLEL ON YOM HA'ASMAUT

Rabbi Ilan Acoca

Question: What is the Sephardic view on reciting *hallel* on Yom Ha'asmaut?

Answer: A little less than a year after the establishment of the state of Israel, on the 13th of Adar 5709 (1949), the Israeli government decided that the 5th of Iyar will become *Yom Hemedina*, “the day of the state” since a year before, on that date, the proclamation of the establishment of the state took place.

Many Knesset members asked that this day should become a day of festivity for the Jewish nation.

The Chief Rabbis of Israel, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Hacham Ben Tzion Meir Hai Oziel, and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, Rav Yitzhak Hertzog were asked about the rituals that should take place on that day. After numerous letters that the Chief Rabbis sent to the Chief Rabbinate council debating what to do since it falls during the Omer, which is a time of mourning, a decision took place stating that on the 5th of Iyar, no *tahanun* will be recited, during the Shahrut service, the complete *hallel* is recited without a *berakha*, a memorial prayer is recited in memory of the fallen soldiers who died during the War of Independence, and we prepare a festive meal and give *tzedakah*.

Through the years the custom has evolved and other rituals and prayers were added.

Rabbi David Shlush (1920-present), current Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Natanya in his response book *Hemda Genuza* (volume 1, Teshuva 71) deals with the question. In the beginning of his answer, he writes an important history fact

that some of the cities (Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias and Safed) were liberated before the 5th of Iyar 5708. Another interesting point that he writes is that on the 5th of Iyar 5708, many Jews did not know what will be the fate of the Jewish state and since the Talmud states that *hallel* is recited only when someone was saved from definite death, *hallel* should not be recited on the 5th of Iyar since we were not saved from a definite death. On the other hand Yom Ha'asmaut is a day that the state of Israel was created and that should be a good reason to recite *hallel*.

Rabbi Shlush goes through these points at length and concludes that the abridged *hallel* should be recited without a *berakha* unless the custom of the community is to recite *hallel* with a *berakha* on *rosh hodesh* and if so, they could recite *hallel* with a blessing on Yom Ha'asmaut.

“...the majority of Sephardic posqim (decisors) rule that *hallel* should be recited on Yom Ha'asmaut”

Ribi Yosef Messas (1892-1974), late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Haifa in his book *Otzar Hamichtavim* (Volume 3, letter 769) was asked the question and in a brief answer answers Avraham Torjman who asked the question, “do not get into a *mahloket* about it, be a Sepharadi Haredi and do what we are doing, recite a full *hallel*, eat, drink and be merry.”

Ribi Shalom Messas (1913-2003), the late Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem in his responsa book *Shemesh Umagen* (volume 3, Teshuva 61) says that Yom Ha'asmaut is a great day of celebration on which the complete *hallel* should be recited. If the community has the custom to recite a blessing, it should continue doing so, however if it is not sure about its custom, it should recite it without a blessing.

Rav Moshe Yaakov Hafuta, a rav in California, in his book *Siftai Daat* (volume 1, Teshuva 11) says that on the one hand Rav Kook was a religious Zionist and on the other hand the Hazon Ish opposed him. Therefore because of these conflicting views, his custom is not to recite *hallel* and to

omit *tahanun* on Yom Ha'asmat.

Hacham Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013) was asked on different occasions about *hallel* on Yom Ha'asmat. Hacham Ovadia writes that having *Eretz Yisrael* is not considered a miracle that is above nature like Hanukah was. Many soldiers had fallen during the establishment of the State and therefore it is not a revealed miracle. Hacham Ovadia continues writing that *Eretz Yisrael* today is a secular country and therefore many Orthodox Jews do not recite *hallel* on this day. On the other hand, Israel is a scion for spirituality. It is filled with Yeshivot, Kolelim, synagogues and learning centers. Therefore, if

someone wants to recite *hallel* on Yom Ha'asmat, he may do so without a *berakha* preferably at the end of *tefillah*.

Conclusion: It seems like the majority of Sephardic *posqim* (decisors) rule that *hallel* should be recited on Yom Ha'asmat and since there is a *mahloket* if to recite the blessing or not, it should not be recited since we have a rule of "*safek berakhot lehakel*," whenever in doubt, a person should not recite a blessing.

Rabbi Ilan Acoca is the rabbi of Congregation Beth Hamidrash Vancouver, BC, Canada.





Sephardic History

NEVER FORGET OUR NOBLE HERITAGE

NUNCA OLVIDES MUESTRA HISTORIA DESTINGUIDA
נונכה אולבידיס מואיסטרה איסטוריה דיסטניגידה

Mr. Sheldon N. Goldman

CHAPTER 2: Beginnings up to 711 CE

Jewish life followed a pattern throughout most of its existence in Spain and the following description as provided by Jane Gerber is typical:

The patterns of Jewish autonomy established in Roman times continued to be respected. Local communities were led by elders, sometimes including women. The synagogues supported schools, the community was allowed to own property, and Jewish legal traditions were so well established that local Jewish courts were able to adjudicate in most instances. The community leadership played a strong role in regulating all aspects of daily life; it was empowered by tradition to supervise such economic activities as controlling prices, regulating wages, and regulating the markets, including the use of weights and measures. In addition, each community had a highly organized network of self-help and welfare institutions, each administered by a special committee: the public kitchen, a chest for the needy, funds for orphans, dowries for indigent brides, and resources for the ransoming of Jewish captives. (Jane Gerber, *Jews of Spain: A History of Sephardic Experience*, New York, Free Press, 1992, p 8-9)

By the time the Visigoth King Recarred (586-601) ruled, there again rose “the Jewish problem.” Early in his rule (595), Recarred convened the first Council of Toledo

in order to win endorsement for his decrees to “regulate relations between Christians and Jews.” These councils were held approximately every nine years in Toledo, the capital of the Visigoth nation. During the third council in 613, Jews were to be converted by force if necessary and their children abducted and raised by Christians; during the eighth council in 658, unconverted Jews were threatened with expulsion; during the twelfth council in 694 they ordered that all slaves and all children of Jews must be raised as Catholics. It was becoming unbearable for Jews to continue living in Spain. They began to migrate to North Africa, including Morocco and other Muslim lands.

However, life was also becoming unbearable for the Christians in Spain as well. Visigothic Spain had many problems including natural disasters. They had bad harvests; they were plagued by locusts; and they suffered famine. Their economy and agriculture were in shambles. At the height of this disorder during the reign of King Erwig (680-687) there was an atmosphere of hysteria in Spain. The country lay in ruins. During Visigoth King Egica’s reign (687-698) in 694 a Jewish plot was discovered. It was in conspiracy with North Africa. Their goal was to overthrow the Visigoth government in Spain. The discovery led to the convening of the 17th Council of Toledo which passed even more stringent anti-Jewish laws.

Eliyahu Ashtor goes into great detail about the Arab movement and invasion of Spain. There was great value in this description because it gave us insight into the Arab thinking and feelings; the Jewish attitudes; and the origin of the tremendous hatred of the Jews that was engendered by what occurred then. Discord in the House of Witiza was a turning point in both Spanish and Sephardic history. King Witiza ruled Spain from 698 to 709. The economic conditions in Spain were aggravated by the fighting between King Witiza’s

“The Arabs used the Jews to populate the cities and the fortresses. The Christians considered the Jews traitors because they supported the Arab enemies”

sons, Roderick, Duke of Betica and his older brother Akhila who was governor of a northern kingdom. Roderick (709-711) was named king and Akhila planned to use force of arms to remove him and become king himself. Akhila was intent on defeating his brother and turned to the Arab rulers of Morocco and in particular to Governor Julian of Ceuta for help and invited them to invade Spain and help him defeat Roderick. The Muslim commander who was assigned to help Akhila was Musa b. Nusair's slave/servant Tariq b. Ziyad, a high officer in the Arab army. (Some historians believe Tariq was a Jew who converted to Islam.) Tariq established a camp on the rock located at the southern tip of Spain, known then as Jabal at-Tariq, and today as Gibraltar. Tariq took a small force into Spain from Gibraltar, immediately taking Carteya and Algeciras, just north of Gibraltar. King Roderick headed a Visigothic Spanish army to oppose Tariq in Andalusia. The Arab army which supported Akhila, met Roderick's army at Lago de Janda on July 19, 711. King Roderick was killed, his army defeated and the future of Spain had been changed for the next 800 years.

Tariq moved north to Ecija and won again. Chaos spread through the Spanish kingdom. Most of the nobles and clergy fled north but the peasants, serfs, and Ibero-Romans rose up against their rulers and supported the invaders. They wanted to rid themselves of the German despots who ruled them. In August 711 after defeating Roderick at Lago de Janda, Tariq's troops were approaching Cordoba. The force had 700 men led by Mughith ar-Rumi. He reached the northern bank of the Guadalquivir River and found Cordoba surrounded by a strong wall. The fortress was defended by the forces of King Roderick who had died a month before, but his troops remained loyal nevertheless. The Jews in the city of Cordoba were behind the walls shut up in their houses awaiting the outcome of the impending battle. The Jews did not fear the invaders. The Jews looked upon them as their liberators.

Under the Visigoths, there were better and worse times for the Jews of Spain. Some of the Visigothic kings were tolerant of them, but most were not. Many anti-Jewish laws were passed but were not enforced due to bribery and economic necessity. The Jews had reason to be optimistic over an Arab victory. The Jews sided with the Arabs but were powerless to act. Ashtor quotes the following in his book:

One night the skies became overcast and the rains came, followed by hail. The guards on the wall sought refuge from the weather and abandoned their rounds. The Africans took advantage of the darkness, crossing the river at a shallow point. The southern wall of the city was built some fifteen yards or less from the river's edge. When Mughith's men arrived at the northern bank of the river, they hastened to

a point where there was a breach in the upper level of the wall. A fig tree grew near the breach. Quickly they climbed the tree and sprang onto the wall. The first man drew the second one up after him, and within moments a group of men stood on the wall. Immediately they dropped down inside, fell on the surprised guards of the nearest gate, and slew them. They opened the gate, and through it, with drawn swords, streamed the forces of Mughith. Here and there an individual sought to resist – only to be beheaded. Most of the populace barred the

doors of their houses and remained quietly within. However, the governor escaped with his forces to a church in the western quarter of the city and fortified himself inside. On the following morning, when the inhabitants of Cordoba emerged from their houses into the streets of the city and saw that Mughith had occupied the governor's palace, they felt the first taste of subjugation. The Jews of the city,



Map of Spain

Continued on page 19



Sephardic Pizmonim Project

BAQASHOT AT BETH TORAH

Dr. David M Betesh, DMD

Sephardic Pizmonim Project (www.pizmonim.com)

Mr Simon Tabbush of Manchester, UK, is a contributor to the content of this article.

One of the most hidden treasures of the Syrian Jewish community is undoubtedly the Shabbat morning *baqashot*. Originating from before the Spanish Inquisition in the late fifteenth century, increased momentum for the beautiful liturgical poems continued to spread in Jewish communities throughout the Middle East. The *baqashot*, as we have it today, evolved out of the tradition of saying petitionary prayers each morning before dawn. The songs principally consist of the praise of God, songs for Shabbat, songs of longing for the Holy Land and so on, and include some poems taken from the main body of the prayer book. Due to the age of these pieces as well as their content, these songs are considered more sacred than the other *pizmonim* in our collection.

The singing of *baqashot* expanded to vast proportions. Special books were compiled showing the tunes and *maqamat* together with the text of the hymns, in order to facilitate the singing of *baqashot* by the congregation. It was customary to wake up in the middle of the night on Shabbat in the winter months, and assemble in synagogue to sing *baqashot* for four hours until the time for the morning service.

The Syrian tradition was introduced to Jerusalem by Raphael Altaras, who came to that city from Aleppo in 1845 and founded a *baqashot* circle at the Kehal Sion synagogue. In this way, the custom of *baqashot* became part of the mainstream Jerusalem Sephardic tradition. Another important influence was Jacob Ades (1857-1925), who immigrated to Jerusalem in 1895 and introduced the tradition to the Persian and Bukharan communities. The main center of the tradition today is the Ades Synagogue in the Nahlaot neighborhood, where the leading spirit was Haim Shaul About.



Ades Synagogue, Nahlaot

The first *baqashot* book, called “*Miqra Qodesh*,” was published in Aleppo in 1864, and only had 43 *baqashot* songs. Nine years later, in 1873, a new version of “*Miqra Qodesh*” came out with more than 70 *baqashot* songs. In 1930, the Aleppo community living in Cairo, under the leadership of Hakhamim Aboud Antar, Abraham Shehebar, and Yosef Ashkenazi, published another *baqashot* song book also called “*Miqra Qodesh*,” and this is similar to the 1873 book. The *baqashot* in our current collection only has 66 songs. Recordings of each song can be found on the website of the Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com.

In recent years, I am happy to report that I have personally witnessed a major resurgence of *baqashot* throughout our community in Brooklyn. Regular *baqashot* sessions are taking place each Shabbat in Congregations Shaare Zion, Bet Yaacob, and Beth Torah. Distinguished individuals, such as the following Hazzanim: Menahem Mustacci, Moshe Mustacci,

Haim Eliahou, Joey Mosseri, Rabbi Eli J Mansour, Ezra R Barry, and others, have worked extremely hard over the past few years to successfully put *baqashot* in Brooklyn back on the map and onto the forefront of our community's agenda. The people mentioned above deserve tremendous gratitude for their efforts.

“This is a perfect opportunity for you, your friends, your children, and other family members, to be reintroduced to this great community treasure.”

At our synagogue, Congregation Beth Torah, abridged *baqashot* sessions continue to take place a few times each year at 8 AM prior to Shacharit services. So far during this year, 2015, *baqashot* sessions took place on February 7 (Shabbat Yitro), and March 21 (Shabbat Vayiqra), and the dates of the upcoming sessions are planned for April 18 (diaspora Shabbat Shemini) and May 16 (diaspora Shabbat Behar-Behuqotai). The event has been organized by Mr Murray J Mizrachi and Mr. Morris Arking. We are extremely blessed to have our services led by our very own distinguished Beth Torah cantors; Hazzan Isaac J Cabasso and Hazzan Yehezqel Zion. Turnout to previous sessions have been very respectable and I think that I can speak for everyone in attendance when I say that everyone had a great, meaningful, and positive experience. This is a perfect opportunity for you, your friends, your children, and other family members, to be reintroduced to this great community treasure. Please join the community in embracing this tradition and beauty of our musical heritage.

Dr. Betesh is a pizmonim enthusiast and on the board of www.pizmonim.com



Continued from page 17

...NEVER FORGET OUR HERITAGE...

on the other hand, exulted. This was the day they had hoped for. They immediately made contact with the Muslim officer, who mobilized them into his army and turned over to them the task of guarding the city. Mughith established his forces within the city and lay siege to the church in which the Gothic governor of the city had taken refuge. It was a sturdy edifice, and the Christians within, who numbered about four hundred, defended themselves courageously. The siege lasted three months; then the Christians were compelled to surrender. (Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*. Volume 1, (translated by A Klein and J Machlowitz) Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973.)

As the Arabs moved north they relied on the Jews to provide security and population in the cities they captured. Although Tariq's forces were getting thinner and smaller, it would have been a disaster for them without the help of the Jews. After the conquering of Cordoba, Tariq sent troops to Malaga in the south. Then he moved his troops north to Jaen and then to Toledo, continuously using the Jews as a security force and to populate the area. Tariq continued moving north to Alcala de Henares and Guadalajara and Burgos. Winter set in and Tariq returned to Toledo. The Visigoths were through. As the Arab forces moved northward through Spain, the Christians fled and the Jews remained behind. The Arabs used the Jews to populate the cities and the fortresses. The Christians considered the Jews traitors because they supported the Arab enemies, but the Jews considered the invaders as their liberators. The Jews who had left Spain for Morocco and other North Africa safe havens now returned to Spain, many settling in the Andalusia area. This area soon established itself as the intellectual center of Spain.

Sheldon N. Goldman is a retired Chemical Engineer who is a member of Congregations Beth Torah and Kol Israel. From 1978 through 1992 he was the Editor of the Beth Torah Bulletin. He was Secretary of Beth Torah from 1980 through 1995 and is still the Editor of the Beth Torah Calendar.



NORPAC Mission

WHAT CAN I DO?

Mrs. Lenore Mizrachi

Do you ever ask yourself as a housewife, as a business person: what can I do from Brooklyn, New York to help Israel and the Jewish people?

Last May I joined a group of people who took a trip to Washington, D.C. with the organization, NORPAC. What is NORPAC?

NORPAC is a Political Action Committee (PAC) whose primary purpose is to support members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. NORPAC supports those members of Congress who are committed to the strength, security and survival of Israel. NORPAC supports them with a donation to their campaign as well as moral support and personal relationships that its members provide. In doing so the goal is to educate the Congress on important issues concerning Israel and the Jewish people.

NORPAC's annual event to Washington, D.C. for the day brings approximately 4000 citizens to advocate for a stronger U.S./Israel relationship. We were bussed to Washington, D.C. on a rainy spring morning. During the ride we were separated into groups of not more than six or eight people and issued talking points. Time flew by as we rehearsed what we would say to the members of Congress we were scheduled to meet; each person in the group would bring up a different talking point and soon we were all well versed. Arriving at the Washington Convention Center we were addressed by such Senators as Ted Cruz and Bob



American & U.S. Flag

“This year we hope to have a strong showing with many buses from our Sephardic community.”

Menendez¹, both of whom are pro-Israel. Afterwards we were separated into our assigned groups and proceeded to the Capitol building to address each of the Congressmen we were assigned to. That day our goal was to discuss and make the members of Congress aware of these specific U.S./Israeli

problems and concerns; the need to implement stronger Iran sanctions, to continue foreign aid to Israel, to develop stronger ties, to approve additional funding for the Iron Dome defense system², and to increase awareness of the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) movement on American college campuses.

One of the women in my group was a Holocaust survivor. Another was a college student.

The student took upon herself the talking point of BDS on campus. The Holocaust survivor kept repeating her experiences and emphasizing how the atrocities did NOT happen all at once but rather, slowly, one incident at a time.

She stressed that we had to be vigilant with groups like BDS and others. The genocide happened in steps. First the Nuremberg Laws, then the exclusion from University, then Kristalnacht, then the

ghettos, the Star of David and ultimately the extermination camps. The Congressmen and our entire group were moved to tears listening to this 80 year old woman's story. A woman who got on the bus at 6:00 a.m., in the rain, and walked

¹ It is interesting to note that Senator Menendez was recently signaled out by the administration for corruption charges. Senator Menendez is known for bucking the democratic party lines when it comes to Israel and Iran.

² This was prescient; Our trip was May 30th 2014- before this summer's Gaza war where the Iron Dome defense more than proved its worth and the need, even now, for further development.

through the Capitol building to visit six separate members of Congress – determined to help. Three of the Congressmen actually hugged her and promised to be more aware of the situation.

This year, more than ever, we need to join this PAC. The continually worsening Iran situation, the anti-Israel demonstrations on campus, the killing of Jews in a Paris grocery, and the continued insults to Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu by the U.S., are just a few of the many issues that need to be addressed and redressed.

We returned to the Convention Center by 5:00 p.m. and boarded the bus back to New York. It was an unbelievably

rewarding experience and a day I will never forget. Unfortunately we were only handful of Sephardic community members that day and joined the group from the greater Flatbush community. This year we hope to have a strong showing with many buses from our Sephardic community. Think what you can do for Israel, the Jewish people and yourself and join us this May!

Mrs. Mizrachi is a small business owner in Brooklyn, NY

The NORPAC Mission to Washington DC will be taking place on Wednesday May 13. To sign up contact Murraymiz@aol.com



United States Capitol



Student Section

IDF HERO JOSEPH D. BENUN

Mr. Joseph Tawil

Over Pesah, several SCA institutions including Beth Torah, Mikdash Eliyahu, Bnei Yitzhak and Shaare Shalom were honored with a visit from our very own IDF hero, Joseph D. Benun.

A Magen David Elementary and Yeshivah of Flatbush High School graduate, Joe joined the IDF at age 21 years old with Machal, a program designed for young men and women from the Diaspora to show their support for their homeland by defending Medinat Yisrael and serving in the IDF for an 18 month period. During training as a paratrooper, Joe was approached by the Duvdevan unit, an elite counter-terrorism special operations unit serving in the Yehudah and Shomron region¹. In order to continue in the defense and service of his country in this elite, Joe extended to three years of service. At age 22, he's now in his ninth month of advanced training.

He discussed with the community much about his experiences as a paratrooper in the IDF, what it's like to be the only American in his unit and details about his current high-intensity training. "When the commander walks in the morning, we have one minute to get out of bed, grab our bullet magazines and be downstairs lined up at attention for the commander to check our guns to make sure there are no bullets inside. If one of us takes too long, we have 45 seconds to get back in our beds and try it again." said Joe, and with a grin he added "And that can be at any time between four and seven in the morning."

With regard to the relationship between the "dati" (religious) and "hiloni" (secular) soldiers in the unit, Joe told us that there's absolutely no rift between the two and all the soldiers regard each other's views and lifestyle choices with the utmost respect. "Sometimes the other guys tease us because we get extra time in the morning to pray and put on tefillin while they have to do more cleaning and work around the base. But it's "all in good fun" he remarked.

His told us his unit is like a family. Many units, upon

finding out that one of their soldiers is going away for two weeks, would be upset, because it results in more guard duties and a creates more responsibility for each of them for that period of time. "But my unit," Joe said "was so excited for me that I would be able to go see my family for Pesah. They were genuinely happy for me that I would get the opportunity to go back to America to see my family and friends."

The hardest part about it all is being away from his family and friends. While his family comes to visit as often as they can, it's still not the same as seeing them every day. "Oh, and no hockey, that's definitely a tough one," he joked.

Many would think that living a life speaking in another language to everyone around them all day would get difficult and tiresome. But Joe assured us that within a month of being there, he got used to it and had no communication problems at all. "The only hard part about the Hebrew is the jokes." Joe commented, "I just can't seem to understand their jokes!"

When asked about what lesson he wants community members in the audience to take from his experiences, Joe said that he wanted to impact the community to be more aware and more involved with Israel. "It's a tough battle we're fighting, and we can use all the help we can get!" he said firmly. When planning a bar misvah trip to Israel, one thing that many families just don't do is go to visit an army base. Sometimes, the soldiers smell a barbecue on base and get really excited. Not only because they're getting a good meal, but because it's a symbol that there are people who care for them and support what they're fighting for. Because there's a family who donated this barbecue for these soldiers who are aware of these soldiers dedication and sacrifice and want to do as much as possible in an effort to help out those who protect what we all stand for.

There are many ways to get involved and show that you care for your homeland. For Joe D. Benun, it was the army. How will you show your support?

Mr. Tawil is currently a student in Brooklyn College and is part of the SCA Israel Group

¹ Yehudah and Shomron are more commonly known as the West Bank of the Jordan River



10 Things Everyone Can Do for Israel

- Go on ILEAD, spend a summer in Israel
- Join trips like Hesed Missions or Birthright
- Become informed and speak up about Israel
- Visit Washington with Aipac, Norpac or ZOA
- Come to the SCA Yom Ha'asmaut celebration
- Join the SCA Israel Group and get involved
- Write to your legal representative
- Vote in the WZO elections
- Invest in Israel
- Consider living your life in Israel

The 3D Test of Anti-Semitism*

How to recognize when reasonable criticism of
Israel 'Crosses the Line' into anti-Semitism

Demonization

When people attribute an evil intention to Israel. An example of this is when someone says "Israel is a genocidal country," or "Israelis are Nazis."

Delegitimization

When people deny Israel's fundamental right to exist. Examples of such statements are "The existence of the State of Israel is racist" and "Israel is not a legitimate country."

Double Standard

When Israel is held to a different standard than any other country. An example of this is when Israel is singled out for human rights abuses by the United Nations while the behavior of known major rights abusers is ignored.

*The 3D test of anti-Semitism was developed by Natan Sharansky, Chairman of the Jewish Agency.

