



# קול הקהל QOL HA'QAHAL

SPONSORED BY THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

9/13/14 Ki Tabo/Nissabim-Vayelekh



Inaugural Issue

*Dedicated In memory of Esther & Joseph Shamah*



## HAVE NO FEAR

*Rabbi Francis Nataf*

Another High Holiday season upon us. Another opportunity slipping away. As important a place as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur occupy on every Jewish calendar, they are the holidays perhaps least in sync with our zeitgeist. Classically referred to as Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim), these days do not suit a generation so unaccustomed to awe and its accompanying fear. Indeed, much of progress has been aimed at understanding phenomena that frighten us. What has become in man's power to control medically, financially, or politically, gives us great emotional comfort.

Fear is certainly not a desirable emotion, but it may be a very useful one. Traditionally, those afraid of Divine retribution would be effectively motivated by the current holiday season to mend their ways. In Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's seminal article, "Rupture and Reconstruction," he recalls a few generations ago the trembling of the average Jew during this season—something we are unable to experience anywhere in our own time. This issue is not cognitive but emotional; believing in Divine retribution is not the same as fearing it. Today this fear belongs to the very few, who have managed to isolate their personalities from the culture at large. What about the rest of us: how do we make the Days of Awe real?

A re-examination of Divine retribution is in order. In one of his most brilliant essays, "Ben Sorer u'Moreh" (Collected Writings, vol. VII), Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch addresses the tricky theological problem of God's punishing children for the sins of their parents. He points out that the Torah is simply presenting empirical consequences of behavior. In other words, just as a polluted atmosphere has measurable negative impact on our bodies, a polluted parental environment has measurable negative impact on our children. Similarly, whenever the Torah warns of consequences to moral depravity, it doesn't mean that God will "decide" to punish us in His anger. Rather, it is saying that all actions have natural, albeit not always immediately apparent, consequences. The Torah thus posits that all vice, no matter how small, will lead to some level of self-destruction in the long run.

## Our Mission

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

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We spend so much of our time rationally planning our careers, finances and purchases. This is done by looking at empirical evidence of the results of each possible choice. I choose to buy car X because it offers me the most desired results at the minimal possible cost. Although buying a car is generally not a choice between a good one and a bad one but rather a question of "how" good a car, the difference between a good car and a better car may end up being just the feature that could save our life in the event of an accident. Being aware of this, we try to be careful and not make a mistake.

When it comes to moral choices, we rarely give them the same type of serious thought we give to our commercial choices. We generally think that we are ok, but what we don't pay attention to is "how" ok. Since the causes may not be so clearly determined, it is quite easy to shrug our shoulders at some of the misfortunes that befall us. It is easy to look elsewhere for the blame since we do not see any major flaw in ourselves. The counter productivity of such an approach is self-evident. How often do we see marriages souring due to lack of the extra effort often needed in such a demanding relationship? For the reader who is more frightened by the

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## Special Guest Articles

### PARASHAT KI TABO: THE BIKKURIM CEREMONY AND THE POWER OF WORDS

By Rabbi Nathan Dweck

In *Parashat Ki Tabo*, Moshe tells Bene Yisrael of the requirement for the Israelite farmer to bring his first fruits- the *bikkurim*- to the Temple. He must also share these fruits with others—the Levite and the stranger. However, before the enjoying of these fruits at the Temple, he must first recite the parashah of “*Arami Obed Abi*” (*Debarim* 26:5–10). In this passage, the farmer declares that his forefathers once wandered without a homeland, went down to Egypt and were oppressed by the Egyptians. He acknowledges how fortunate he is that God saved our nation from this oppression, took them out of Egypt, and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Why is the farmer asked to make such an elaborate declaration? Why isn't bringing the fruits to the Temple and sharing his wealth with others enough? One gets the feeling that simply knowing in the back of his mind that God is the source of it all is not enough. The whole point of this passage—highlighted by the keyword *natan*, “gave”—is for the Israelite farmer to articulate that these are all gifts given to him from God. This requirement to speak out these words places the speaker in the right state of mind, as he publicly reaffirms his dependence on God. Only by reciting this passage can he truly fulfill the requirement of sharing his first fruits with others.

In Judaism, we are required to recite many prayers and blessings which are designed to help us internalize certain messages and values. It is not enough to simply know that everything we own—the clothes we wear, the roof we live under, the food we eat—comes from God. We must speak it out too. We have often times accustomed ourselves to view these prayers and blessings as a “requirement” and quickly read through them. If we are careful to pay attention to the words we speak, they will have a lot more meaning. When our prayers are simply a physical action that we repeatedly “do”—a mere moving of our mouths and no more—then our words will not have an impact on us and will lack sincerity. Once we take the time to stop, think and focus on what we are saying, only then will our words have true meaning.

*Rabbi Nathan Dweck is an assistant rabbi at Sephardic Synagogue and the Executive Director of Tebah Educational Services.*

### SEPHARDIC SELIHOT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

By Mr. Joseph Mosseri

The month of *Eloul* is known as the month of *Rahamim*. This is the time that is most opportune for requesting *Bore Olam*'s mercy and kindness. The custom of the *Sepharadim* is to rise at dawn each morning from the beginning of the month of *Eloul* until *Ereb Yom Kippur* (except for *Rosh Hodesh*, *Shabbat* & *Rosh Hashanah*) to recite *Selihot*. That is a total of 30 days of waking up in darkness for *Selihot*.

The earliest origin we know of for this custom goes back to the days of Rab Ha-a-yeh Gaon and Rab Amram Gaon who refer to this custom of *Selihot* but only during *Aseret Yeme Teshoubah*, the days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Our current custom dates back to Spain; Rabbi Yisshaq ibn Giat (born circa 1020 Lucena died 1091 Cordova) who was a great *Rishon* mentions the custom to begin *Selihot* from *Rosh Hodesh Eloul*. Rabbi David Aboudirham (1286-1354) also refers to the custom beginning from *Rosh*

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# Sephardic History

## SEPHARDIC RABBIS: RABBI MENASHE SETTON (CA. 1810-1876) *By Rabbi Yosef Bitton*

Rabbi Menashe Setton (סתהון, also Sittehon or Sutton) was born in Aram Soba (Aleppo) Syria. He was a great Tora scholar, well versed in secular knowledge like astronomy, philosophy, mathematics and engineering. Although he was an ordained rabbi, Rabbi Setton supported himself through business initiatives. Following the tradition of Sephardic rabbis he was also an expert in Hebrew grammar (diqduq).

Rabbi Setton's most famous book is "*kenesiya leshem shamayim*," a "gathering for the sake of heaven". In this short book rabbi Setton argues fiercely against a prevalent superstitious ceremony called "Endulzado" (Spanish for "sweetening").

In the beginning of his book Rabbi Setton describes this practice: Whenever there was a sick member of the family, a woman about to give birth, or someone whose loved ones were dying, etc. they would empty a house, remove all type of Torah books and Mezuzot and display in the floor all kinds of baked sweets, candies, honey, etc. The patient and the expert exorcist would stay and sleep for three consecutive nights in that house. All this time, it was forbidden for the patient to pronounce any word of Tora or Tefila. The exorcist, usually a female, would summon "demons" (shedim) to visit the house. The demons would come into the house freely, because the house was empty of anything "holy" which would drive them away. Once the exorcist felt that the demons were inside the house, she would offer the demons those sweets to appease them and ask them to cure the patient or release the patient from their curse.

Rabbi Setton first explains that this is a flagrant act of idol-worshipping, known in Hebrew as '*aboda zara*, the most serious offense in the entire Torah. He also explained that these people learned this ceremony from the books of the ancient "sabians," an ancient pagan sect who worshiped angels and demons.

After describing this practice, Rabbi Setton referred to the silence of the rabbis of the city. He said that the reason the rabbis did not denounce this practice was probably because they were not aware of what was going on behind those closed doors. Many of them thought that perhaps, people were just praying in an intense way, etc. Once the rabbis became aware of what was going on in those houses, ALL the rabbis "gathered together for the sake of heaven" (from here the name of the book) to ban and eradicate this pagan practice.

Rabbi Setton was widely supported in his efforts by numerous other rabbis from his city (thirty six rabbis from Aleppo signed their approval of his book) as well as from rabbinic leaders in Jerusalem, Tiberias, Hebron, and Safed, from both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities. Rabbi Menashe Setton died in Alexandria, Egypt in 1876.

*Rabbi Bitton is the Rabbi of Congregation Ohel David u' Shlomo and the author of Awesome Creation (Gefen Publishing 2013)*



# Classes

Any omissions are unintentional. Please help us make this list more accurate by emailing [QahalNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:QahalNewsletter@gmail.com)

*\*Men Women Men and Women Young Adult High School Boys High School Co-ed High School Girls  
Elementary School Elementary School Boys*

## CONGREGATION BETH TORAH

1061 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn [www.beth-torah.com](http://www.beth-torah.com)

### Morning

6:00 AM	M-TH	Mishna	R' Joseph Mizrachi
6:15 AM	M-F	Bet Yosef	R' Ely Matalon
6:20 AM	M-F	Gemara	R' Mordechai Levi
7:45 AM	M-F	Daf Yomi	R' Ashear
8:00 AM	M-F	Halakha	R' Abraham Hayoun
8:00 AM	M-F	Halakha	R' Aryeh Azancot
10:45 AM	Tues.	Beresheet	Mrs. Vivien Hidary (Allegra Franco)

### Evening

5:30-6:15 PM	M	Tanakh	R' Joseph Mizrachi
6:30-7:30 PM	M,W	Tanakh/Mishna	R' Joseph Mizrachi
7:45-8:45 PM	M,W	Misc.	R' Joseph Mizrachi
8:00-9:00 PM	SU	Topical	R' Joseph Mizrachi
8:30 PM	M-F	Rambam	R' Aryeh Azancot
8:30-9:00 PM	M,TH	Minhag	Mr. Morris Arking
8:00-8:50 PM	M	Gemara	R' Ashear
8:30PM-9:30 PM	M	Gemara B'Habrutah	R' Ely Matalon
8:30PM-9:30 PM	T	Tanakh	R' Richard Tobias
8:30PM-9:30 PM	T	Sefer Yonah	R' Aryeh Azancot
8:00PM-9:00 PM	T	Yamim Noraim	R' Richard Tobias
8:00PM-8:50PM	W	Gemara	R' Ashear
8:00PM-9:00PM	W	Rambam Holidays	R' Aryeh Azancot
8:15PM-9:30PM	W	Holiday Prayer	R' Ely Matalon
9:00PM-10:00 PM	W	Yamim Noraim	R' Richard Tobias

### Shabbat

After First Minyan	Topical	Rotating
11:30AM	Daf Yomi	R' Ashear
1 Hour before Minha	Perasha	R' Aryeh Azancot
Minha	Perasha	Mrs. Vivien Hidary

## CONGREGATION KOL ISRAEL

2504 Avenue K, Brooklyn [www.KollIsrael.org](http://www.KollIsrael.org)

### Morning

6:10-7:00 AM	M-F	Gemara	R' Ikey Tawil
7:50-8:10 AM	M-F	Halacha	R' Ikey Tawil
8:00-8:45 AM	M-F	Gemara	R' David Shweky
8:45-9:15 AM	M-F	Hok L'yisrael	R' David Shweky
8:30-9:00 AM	SU	Halacha	R' Ikey Tawil
9:00-10:00 AM	SU	Jewish Philosophy	R' Ikey Tawil
9:45-10:45 AM	SU		R' Ike Hanon
1 <sup>st</sup> Minayn Breakfast	SU		R' David Shweky

### Evening

8:30-9:30PM	M	Rambam	R' Ikey Tawil
8:30-9:30PM	M	Halacha	R' David Shweky
8:30-9:30PM	M	Sefer Ha'hinuch	Ike Hannon
8:30-9:30PM	TU	Mishnayaot	R' Ikey Tawil
8:30-9:30PM	TU		R' Naftali Besser
8:30-9:30PM	W	Halacha	R' Ikey Tawil
8:30-9:30PM	W	Ein Yakkob/Gemara	R' David Shweky
8:30-9:30PM	W	Pirkei Abot	Ike Hannon

### Shabbat

Main Minayn Breakfast			R' Ikey Tawil
11:00AM-11:30AM			R' David Shweky
One Hour Before Minha			R' Ikey Tawil
One Hour Before Minha			R' David Shweky

## OHEL DAVID U'SHLOMO

710 Shore Blvd, Brooklyn [www.ohelds.com](http://www.ohelds.com)

### Morning

After 1st Minyan	SU	Tefilah	R' Yosef Bitton
After 1st Minyan	M-F	General	R' Yosef Bitton
After 1st Minyan	M-F	Hok L'Yisrael	Mr. Shlomo Salman

### Shabbat

Half Hour Before Minha	Parasha	R' Yosef Bitton
Minha	Parasha	Mrs. Bitton
Minha	Children's Class	R' Setton
Seudat Shelisheet	Halacha	R' Yosef Bitton

## SAFRA SYNAGOGUE OF DEAL (HATHAWAY)

75 Hathaway Ave, Deal [safrashulnj.org](http://safrashulnj.org)

### Morning

8:45-9:30	SU	R' Farhi
7:45- 8:30	M	R' Shlomo Haber
7:45- 8:30	TU	R' Farhi
7:45- 8:30	W	R' Aaron Serouya
7:45- 8:30	TH	R' Shlomo Haber
7:45- 8:30	F	R' Farhi

### Shabbat

One Hour Prior to Mincha R' Farhi

## CONGREGATION B'NEI YITZHAK

730 Avenue S, Brooklyn [www.bneiyitzhakweb.org](http://www.bneiyitzhakweb.org)

### Morning

6:30-7:00 AM	M,W,F	Halakha	R' Jack Bassoul
7:00-7:25 AM	M-F	Ma'alot Ha Middot (Character Development)	R' Joseph Beyda
7:00-7:45 AM	M-F	Gemara	TBA
7:45-8:05 AM	M-F, SU	Hok L'Yisrael	Mr. S. Laniado
7:45-8:15 AM	M-F	Minsha	R' Jack Bassoul
7:45-9:15 AM	SU	Basar B'Halab	R' Jack Bassoul
10:00-11:00 AM	SU	Jewish Philosophy	R' Moses Haber
11:00-12:30 AM	M		Mrs. Vivien Hidary

### Evening

8:00-9:00 PM	M	Jewish Heroes	R' Joseph Beyda
8:00-9:00 PM	M	Gemara	R' Jack Bassoul
8:00-9:00 PM	W	Hilkhot Tefilla	R' Jack Bassoul
8:00-9:00 PM	TH	Gemara	R' Jack Bassoul
6:00-7:30 PM	W	Young Men's Class	R' Moses Haber
7:30-8:30 PM	TH	Young Women's Class	R' Moses Haber

### Shabbat

First Minyan Breakfast			R' Jack Bassoul
10:00 AM		Pele Yoetz	R' Jack Bassoul
11:00 AM		Perasha	R' Joseph Beyda
1 hour before Mincha		Varied Topics	R' Joseph Beyda
1 hour before Mincha		Perasha/Halakha	R' Jack Bassoul
After Arvit		Perasha	R' Moses Haber



## SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE

511 Ave R, Brooklyn [www.Judaic.org](http://www.Judaic.org)

### Morning

7:00-7:30 AM	M-F	Mishnayot	Mr. Charles Mizrahi
7:30-8:00 AM	M-F	Parasha/Halacha	R' Ronald Barry
7:30-8:00AM	M-F	Mishnayot	R' Moshe Shamah
12:30 PM	W	Parasha	Mrs. Esther Hidary

### Evening

8:30-9:30 PM	W	Sefer Shemuel (all ages)	R' Nathan Dweck
7:15 PM	TH	Taamim & Pizmonim	Mr. Abe R. Betesh

### Shabbat

After First Minyan	Topical	R' Moshe Shamah
After Teens Minyan	Topical	R' Ephraim Gabbai
After Main Minyan	Perasha/Halkha	R' Ronald Barry
After Main Minyan	Topical	R' Haim Ovadia
After Kids Minyan	Perasha	R' Nathan Dweck
1hr 15 mins before Minha	Perasha	R' Moshe Shamah
Seudat Shelisheet	Halakha: Mekor Hayyim	R' Nathan Dweck
Seudat Shelisheet	Topical	R' Ephraim Gabbai
Seudat Shelisheet	Nevi'im	R' Ronald Barry

## CONGREGATION MAGEN DAVID

2132 McDonald Avenue, Brooklyn

### Morning

9:00 AM	SU	Mishlei	R' Haim Shaul
6:30 AM	M-F	Halakha	R' Haim Shaul
After Shaharit	M-F	Mishlei/Pele Yo'es	R' Haim Shaul

### Evening

After Arbit	SU	Ben Ish Hai	R' Haim Shaul
8:00 PM	M	Talmud	R' Haim Shaul

### Shabbat

9:00AM	Perasha	R' Joey Haber
9:30AM	Perasha	R' Max Dushey
10:00AM	Ben Ish Hai	R' Joey Haber
11:00AM	Midrash Rabbah	R' Haim Shaul
1 Hour before Minha	Perasha	R' Haim Shaul
Seudat Shelisheet		Guest Speakers
After Haddalah		R' Haim Shaul

## HOCHMA U'MUSAR

718 Ave S, Brooklyn [www.hochmaumussar.org](http://www.hochmaumussar.org)

### Morning

6:15-7:00 AM	M-F	Bet Yosef/Shulchan Arukh	R' Harold Sutton
7:45-8:30 AM	M-F	Mishne Torah (Zmanim)	R' David Tawil
7:00 AM	SU	Bet Yosef/Shulchan Arukh	R' Harold Sutton
9:00 AM	SU	Jewish Philosophy: Kuzari	R' Harold Sutton

### Evening

8:30-10 PM	TU	Minhat Cohen on Ben hashemashot	R' Harold Sutton
8:30-10 PM	M/W	Gemara	R' Harold Sutton
8:30-10 PM	W	Mishanyot w/Rambam	R' Harold Sutton

### Shabbat

10:30-11:30 AM before Minha		Ramban on Chumash R' Ben-Amozeg	R' Harold Sutton R' Harold Sutton
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## SAFRA SYNAGOGUE OF MANHATTAN

11 E 63rd St, Manhattan [www.ejsny.org](http://www.ejsny.org)

### Morning

After Shaharit	S-F	Arukhah U'Marpeh	R' Elie Abadie
After Shaharit	S-F	Pirke Abot	R' Greenwald
After Shaharit	S-F	Perasha	R' Sarway
6:30 AM	M-TH	Talmud	R' Elie Abadie

### Evening

half hour prior to Minha	M-TH	Mishnah	R' Sarway
Following Arbit	S-TH	Halacha	R' Sarway
8:30 PM	M	Gemara	Dr. Joseph Shams
7:30 PM	TU		R' Waknin
7:00 PM	W		R' Sarway

## SRC

718 Ave S, Brooklyn

### Evening

8:00-10:00PM	M-TH	Gemara	Habruta Program
8:30-10:00PM	T/TH	Mishnah Berura	R' David Tawil
8:30-10:00PM	M/W	Moadim/Berachot	R' Yaakov Twena
8:30-10:00PM	T	13 Principles of Faith	Mr. Nissim Alouf
8:30-10:00PM	W	Perasha	Mr. Nissim Alouf
8:30-10:00PM	M	Sefer Hamisvot	R' David Tawil
8:30-10:00PM	TH	Perasha	R' Yaakov Twena
8:30-10:00PM	T	Hilchot Shabbat	R' Ike Hanon



# Israel Spotlight



## ISRAEL SOLIDARITY MISSION

By Mr. Joey Shamah

Earlier this summer I had the opportunity to spend three unforgettable days in Israel on a solidarity mission to show soldiers and Israeli citizens that they are not alone. That their efforts are not solely for the Jews of Israel, but for Jews around the globe. That the fight they are fighting, and the battles they are engaged in, are on our minds and in our hearts. Every time they suffer a loss or have an injured soldier we too feel the pain. This is a hard message to convey when we are not the ones fighting, not the ones whose sons, daughters and fathers are out there with their lives on the line. However, after the first few encounters it was proven that our efforts were well received and our thoughts and wishes helped strengthen the soldiers and citizens we were able to meet. I am by no means saying we are now equals; their dedication and selfless acts of protecting our land put each and every one of their "religiosity" way ahead of mine. Below are some of my thoughts on how we need each other and what our seemingly small acts of thanks can do to show our part as a member of our Jewish Nation.

Speaking of our part – attached is a picture of Israeli Soldiers at an Iron Dome base. They are holding a picture and a letter from 6-10 year old boys and girls from Deal, NJ who raised money by selling lemonade and muffins to send gifts to Israeli Soldiers. This picture and many letters such as these are now wall-papering the walls of army bases around the country, giving continued support and *hizuk* to our brothers and sisters protecting our homeland. There is no single act that can change everything, but every little act makes a difference to the collective whole and reshapes the future of our people.

I am just thankful that I was able to be a messenger on this amazing mission, and be the *shaliah* (messenger) for so many wonderful people who took the time to do their part in this mission of *achdut* (unity).

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

That's all we heard from every soldier, hospital worker, social volunteer and taxi cab driver.

Thank me? For what??

From the moment we stepped off the plane we could feel that something was different about this country right now. From the immigration agent to the store clerk you could

feel a sense of belonging. You could feel a sense of love for one another simply because we were here, together, in Israel.

This country has endured a lot over the last two months, from the search of the missing boys to the raining of rockets onto defenseless civilian neighborhoods, to the UN and international media speculation on what we did wrong. Although the pain hurts there is a longer lasting effect that is impacting us as a people and a nation.

We as a people share common threads that go way deeper than recent differences can divide. From religious to secular, right wing to left we all have a sense of nationalistic and religious unity. *כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה* has taken on a new meaning to me after 3 days in Israel this summer. When we stub our toe we feel it 6000 miles away. But more importantly, we MUST let them know that we feel their pain and that we are thinking of them. Simply by the soldiers knowing and feeling appreciated by their Jewish brothers and sisters across the globe gives them the strength to keep fighting for our homeland and our freedom as part of a nation.

So after hearing it time and time again I started to rethink this a bit. It's not thank you and it's not thank me, it's thank us. Thank us for being a nation that together we can stand united, stand with our brothers and feed off each other with a sense of pride of being part of something. We've spent the better part of 2000 years praying and wanting to be part of this great land.

Now that the opportunity is here we need to appreciate it, savor it and not ever take it for granted.

We had the merit over the past week to visit soldiers at army bases, injured soldiers at hospitals and reservists at their bases. Young boys, 19-21 years old, who just left Gaza where they watched their friends and peers perish, had spent the past 52 days away from their home. Living in make shift bunks and eating tuna fish and pickles while risking their lives in Gaza day in and day out. All I did was get on a plane, arrive at a nice hotel and show up to say thank you. Why and how can they be thanking me? But after three days of hearing and seeing the same result over and over, it became apparent that we need each other; we are two halves of the same whole. Together with our support and their dedication we have a unified *עם*, that with the support of *הקב"ה* will continue to thrive and bring us closer to *Mashiah* soon in our days.

*Mr. Joey Shamah is the founder of the ELF Cosmetics and President of Barkai Yeshivah. Joey and his wife Sally are proud parents of 5 children.*



# Spotlight: SCA Birthright Trip with the SCC

## MUST-KNOWS FOR ANYONE CONSIDERING A BIRTHRIGHT TRIP

by Dr. Aharon Caro and Murray Mizrachi MS

*Birthright is an organization funded by the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency to give Jewish students ages 18-26 a free 10 day trip to Israel. To date more than 400,000 participants from 46 countries have gone to Israel with Birthright. Presented here are a few FAQ's for anyone considering signing up. Our community will be hosting our own trip through the SCA, SCC and OU in January and June.*

1. **Is the trip really free?** Yes! Birthright requires a \$250 deposit prior to travel. The deposit is returned when the trip is successfully completed.
2. **Are all trips the same?** Birthright has 17 providers; each of these providers offers niche trips. Examples of these niches include trips geared towards Reform, Conservative, Sephardi, Alcoholics Anonymous, Unaffiliated, and college campus groups. It is important to know which niche and provider you wish to enroll with in advance of registration. It is imperative for parents and participants to do research about your trip organizer and staff.
3. **Will I be eligible if I have been to Israel Before?** Birthright recently opened enrollment to those who have participated on Israel programs while in high school. Please consult Rachel Shammah: [Rachel@Israelfreespirit.com](mailto:Rachel@Israelfreespirit.com) for any specific questions
4. **Is it true some trips do not keep kosher or Shabbat?** Birthright has 17 different organizers. Only two of which hold by kashrut in every location. The SCA- OU & Mayanot (Chabad). The SCA is co-sponsoring and OU Kosher Trip this Winter.
5. **Which organizer should I choose?** One that you are familiar with the organization, their staff and goals etc. Parents and participants are encouraged to not only research the trip organizer but the staff and specific trip details as well.
6. **What are the dates?** Most organizers run trips in January and June. The next SCA-OU trip will be January 4-14, allowing for both a birthright and yeshivah winter vacation trip.



7. **Is it possible to extend my trip for free?** Generally participants are required to pay additional fees and find room and board to extend. In collaboration with Israel Free Spirit, Project Beyond offers a free 5-10 day customized program involving Jewish learning, social entrepreneurship, free time and a more in depth look at Israel society.
8. **How do I sign up?** Enrollment begins at the end of October. To Sign up with the SCA-OU trip and project beyond extensions Please consult Rachel Shammah: [Rachel@Israelfreespirit.com](mailto:Rachel@Israelfreespirit.com) 212-613-8155 or visit [israelfreespirit.com/sca](http://israelfreespirit.com/sca)

Birthright is a tremendously successful and potentially enriching program. It is essential that participants sign up for a trip catered to their background, expectation and needs. The SCA-OU trip is designed for our Sephardic community.

*Dr. Caro is a Professor of Education and the Director of Project Beyond. Murray Mizrachi is on the Board of the SCA and the Director of the SCA-OU Birthright Trip.*



## HAVE NO FEAR

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consequences of his car purchase, the Talmud reminds us that a bad marriage is worse than death.

While some may want to view honesty, kindness and other moral issues as radically different from buying a car, it all comes down to self-interest. Along with many of the modern philosophers, Judaism views man as primarily motivated by self-interest. This is viewed as neither good nor bad, but simply true. Self-interest is what rationally determines which car we purchase and should also rationally determine our moral choices.

That poor decisions and inadequate treatment of character flaws lead to disaster need not be a modern observation. Indeed, this is the stuff of classical Greek tragedy. While all cultures that value reason should admit the critical nature of a person's actions, 21st-century Western man seems to be too sheltered to accept any harsh reality.

When gripped by desire for sin, the Talmud advises us to contemplate our own death. This was patently easier when the mortality rate was so much higher and life expectation so much lower. While poverty, serious illness and death are less common than in the past, they have in no way disappeared—we simply have much less exposure to such things. Our sanitized society isolates most things unpleasant and makes them more removed from our own experience. Presumably to give better medical care, the critically sick and aged are tucked away in

institutions. Our large urban and suburban neighborhoods are bastions of socio-economic segregation. As comfort levels become higher and higher, we also make conscious efforts not to expose ourselves or our children to anything that will

make us unhappy. That being the case, it is difficult to internalize that bad things could happen to us.

Fear can be rational and can fit into our Weltanschauung. More difficult, however, is internalizing even this more cerebral fear. Perhaps we should spend these days going through lung cancer and AIDS wards just to bring home the point that our actions can cause our own demise. If this makes us too uncomfortable, we may well want to focus on the reason for that discomfort.

Before we go to pray on the High Holidays, we need to realize that our futures are largely in our control, and the ten days starting on the first of Tishri is the time to actualize that control. A little fear may well be in order.

*Rabbi Francis Nataf is a respected educator and thinker, well known for his ability to find new ways of looking at tradition and text and for his willingness to confront the community's problems head on.*

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## GUEST ARTICLES

*Sephardic Selihot...continued from page 2*

*Rosh Hodesh Eloul.* Rabbi David Aboudirham (1286-1354) also refers to the custom beginning from *Rosh Hodesh Eloul*. One of the reasons given as to why we begin from *Rosh Hodesh Eloul* is because that is when Mosheh Rabenou went up the mountain to get the second set of *Louhot* (tablets) from God. On the 40th day, which was *Yom Kippur*, God told him “*Salahti K’dbarekha*”!

In “the old countries” *Selihot* began anywhere between 2:00 and 3:30 A.M. Here in Brooklyn, New York the earliest *Selihot* begins at about 4:30A.M, approximately 1½ to 2 hours before sunrise. Rabbi David Sheloush (b.1920) in his introduction to his commentary on *Selihot* says that the proper time for reciting *Selihot* is after midnight as David HaMelekh writes in Tehillim 119: “*Hassot layla aqum lehodot lakh.*” He then quotes verses from a bunch of *Selihot* that mention the later part of the night. He also quotes *Shoulhan Aroukh* that customarily we arise at dawn to say *Selihot* and that according to the *Qabalah* after midnight is *Et Rahamim*, a time of mercy and compassion.

Even though it is not forbidden to say *Selihot* after Sunrise it has always been the custom to say *Selihot* during the dark pre sunrise hours. This is based upon the *pasouq* in Eikhah 2:19: “*Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord*”. As difficult as it sounds I honestly do not think it impractical to attend pre-sunrise *Selihot*. I think the timing is perfect. It is not *hassot* or even a couple of hours after. It is already immediately prior to daybreak. I think it is a wonderful time to concentrate, meditate and reflect. What an excellent time to arise and pour out one’s soul to God. Yes, it demands a lot of diligence and effort to get up that early and some may not be able to do it every day but at least give it a chance. I don’t think it would have existed this long if it did not have its merits.

Personally I do not support the concept of post-sunrise *Selihot*. Those people who are willing to get up at that hour to pray with a minyan should forget about *Selihot* and instead pray from the very beginning in a slow concentrated fashion. Each person should improve upon what he is doing or still needs to do. None of us are perfect, myself included! I realize many of my shortcomings and this yearly season helps me to reflect and better myself, *ben adam lamaqom* and *ben adam lahabero*.

Everybody who attends pre-sunrise *Selihot* should make sure to sleep early at night. Those who work for others are required to get a full night’s sleep so they can be alert & give a proper day’s work for their wages as stated in *Hoshen Mishpat*. Those who are sleepy during the day should not drive as the danger is well known and in such cases we do not say one may rely on the *missvah* for protection. Additionally, they should be cautioned not to wake their wives or children who are not accustomed to rise so early, as it can interfere with their day and that may cause some resentment towards those who are scrupulous with the performance of *missvot*. We do not want to promote one *misvah* & create more serious transgressions.

Those who do decide to recite *Selihot* after sunrise must be very careful to change the words of the *Selihot* so they will be in tune with the timing of the late recitation. Many phrases discuss rising at night or in the dark or pre daybreak. How can one who arises to say *Selihot* after sunrise say such things? It makes him look, God forbid, as a liar!

Whatever the case may be for those who have decided to recite post sunrise *Selihot*, everyone should make the utmost effort and strive to wake up as early as possible to pour forth our supplications and prayers before *Bore ‘Olam* in preparation for *Yamim Noraim*. To further prove this point I present the opinions of two great Sephardic *Hakhamim* on the importance of rising early and reciting *Selihot*.

The following is from *Mayim Hayim* (Fez, 1933) (page 92) by Rabbi Yosef Messas.

A question was asked of him in 1928, this was his response:

*What is the law for someone who rises at dawn during the month of Eloul, is it better to study Gemara, Halakhot, Zohar, etc. or to recite Selihot and supplications?*

Simply said that we must follow the custom and recite *Selihot*. This custom is correct and extremely old going back to the days of the *Geonim*. The month of *Eloul* is especially opportune for repentance and reciting *Selihot* slowly and with concentration can only help to awaken the heart and soul to shed their misgivings and repent fully as no learning can ever do. He continues and says that we have heard

and seen numerous cases of pious ones and men of stature that shed many tears during *Selihot* and it helped them and those around them who witnessed and felt the words and concepts of the *Selihot* cut through their iniquities. Therefore we should all only say *Selihot* during this time, because there is nothing better than the proper item at the proper time, (*dekhoh dabar be'ito mah tob!*) He then quotes the Hid"ra (Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azoulay) who says that it is better during these days to say *Selihot* and additional supplications than to study Torah. It is of course better to go to the Synagogue to say *Selihot* with the congregation but if one is unable to, it is still better to say *Selihot* individually than to study Torah. Again the reason being that the words of the *Selihot* can help a person distance himself from sins and transgressions better than anything else. He continues to quote the Hid"ra who says "I have seen Rabbis who always studied but during the month of Eloul they put aside their learning for a while in order to say *Selihot*."

Rabbi Messas finishes off by quoting an old manuscript from Spain in which is written "that our custom is to always study in the *Yeshivot*, but during Eloul we all put aside our studies in order to say *Selihot*, because they help a person pour forth his true feelings before God, expressing remorse over the sins of his youth and his unkind deeds, and such is proper to do."

Hakham Obadiah Yosef in *Yehaveh Da'at* volume 3 page 132 deals with a similar situation. The question is: *Yeshibah* students study Torah late into the night, and if they wake up so early for *Selihot*, it will interfere with their day time studies. Must they still get up so early to recite *Selihot* with the congregation?

His response is: That these rabbinical students who study late into the night should make an effort to say *Selihot* with a *minyan* after midnight. If they still have difficulty with that they must make a major effort at the very least to say *Selihot* with the congregation during the 10 days of repentance from *Rosh Hashanah* until *Yom Kippur*.

Most importantly, let us not forget the message of the *Selihot*. Repenting, asking forgiveness from God and granting it to our fellow man, and improving ourselves as decent human beings and as Torah observant Jews.

*Mr. Mosseri is a noted expert on Sephardic history, culture, and customs.*

## MAQAM OF THE WEEK

**Pizmonim Project, [www.pizmonim.com](http://www.pizmonim.com)**

*by David Betesh DDS*

### ***Parashat Ki Tabo***

For *Shabbat Ki Tabo* (Deuteronomy 26:1- 29:8), the prayers are conducted in *Maqam Sigah-Iraq*. *Sigah*, which is used for reading the Torah, is used to mark Temple ceremonies. The beginning of the Torah portion discusses the pilgrimage to the Temple when conducting the ceremony of the first fruits. Since the pilgrimage to the Temple is done on the *Shalosh Regalim* holidays, *Maqam Sigah*, the *maqam* used for these holidays, is applied here. The other major ceremony in this reading is the "Covenant Ceremony" (Chapter 27). *Maqam Iraq* would be appropriate due to the famous Israelite declaration, "*Arami Obed Abi*;" *Aram* being the Syrian-Iraq region, which is a place of origin of our nation. **Hazzanut:** Only one *Selihot* melody for *Semehim*: [*Sigah*] *Selihot* melody (Adon Yahid Yasad, page 67). **Aliyot:** Tradition is not to stop in the middle of the *Tokheha* (rebuke) portions. Also, the *Aliyah* of *Samukh* reads from 27:9-28:69

### ***Parashat Nissabim-Vayelech***

For the last *Shabbat* of the year (*Nissabim* is Deuteronomy 29:9- 30:20; *Vayelech* is Deuteronomy 31), the prayers are conducted in *Maqam Nawah* or *Nahawand*. *Nawah* is applied for an ending, and in this case, we are ending the year. *Nahwand*, the *maqam* sometimes associated with conflict or rebuke, is also an option, because this is the time of year where self-introspection (self-rebuke) is required to change our ways. This *Shabbat*, we read the seventh *Haftarah* of Consolation leading to *Rosh Hashana*. **Hazzanut:** Typically, only one *Selihot* melody, and the remainder being standard *Nahwand* melodies. **Semehim:** *Ahot Qetana* (in anticipation for *Rosh Hashana*). The above opinion is based on the notes of Hazzan Gabriel A. Shrem. The opinion of Hazzan Moshe Ashear is very different than that stated above. Ashear's opinion is to apply *Maqam HIJAZ* and apply mostly High Holiday melodies for this *Shabbat*



# Table Talks

## PERASHAT KI TABO

By Rabbi Ralph Tawil

### Value: Being Happy by Realizing How Far You Have Come

Appreciating the things we have rather than complaining about what we lack is a crucial first step towards happiness. Modeling careful thinking about our prosperity and recognizing that it comes from Hashem is one way to help our children develop this attitude. Recounting your personal history in a way that emphasizes your present good situation is one way to generate happiness.

### Context:

Our parasha begins with the commandment to bring the first (or prime) fruits of the land to the *kohen* as an offering to Hashem. When the landowner would bring this offering, he declares that he has entered the land that Hashem had promised to his fathers. When the *kohen* places the basket of fruit in front of the altar, the farmer reviews Israel's history.

### Text: Debarim 26:5-11 (SB)

*"An Aramean astray was my ancestor; he went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to Hashem, the God of our fathers, and Hashem heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. Hashem freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil, which You, Hashem, have given me."*

*You shall leave it before Hashem your God and bow low before Hashem your God. And you shall rejoice, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, for all the bounty that Hashem your God has bestowed upon you and your household.*

### Analysis:

We are familiar with the beginning of this text from the Passover Haggadah. It tersely recounts our history in a few sentences. These verses focus on our oppressive bondage in Egypt and Hashem's might in taking us out of Egypt. The historical account is made personal by mentioning our entering the land of Israel and the farmer's action in bringing his first fruits.

The section begins "*Arami oved avi...*" The most familiar explanation of these words is the one known from the Haggadah (i.e., that Laban the Aramaean tried to destroy our father Ya'aqob). Yet, the more straightforward explanation is that our ancestor was a wandering Aramean, as is translated above.

The section ends with the provision that "you shall enjoy all the bounty that Hashem has given you." Recounting history in this way increases the likelihood of enjoyment of one's present situation.

### Discussion:

Let's look at the history. Is it a "complete" history or does it leave out some important events? (It leaves out the wandering in the wilderness, the receiving of the Torah and the golden calf. These are not important for the goal of this retelling of history.) Why were only the aspects of "our wandering ancestor," our oppression in Egypt, Hashem's miraculous deliverance and the entering into the land mentioned? (The point is that the man should contrast his present situation of owning land and bringing his first fruits to a situation of wandering and of oppressive bondage. This would lead the farmer to appreciate his present situation.) Why does the person bringing the first fruits have to recite the history that everyone knows? (Even though the history is well known, as the man is bringing his first fruits he must reflect upon it. This reflection creates an appreciation for his present situation—a situation that he might otherwise take for granted.)



Talk about your personal history and the history of your family in a way that highlights your present good condition. Speak about this with your children. Talk about the history of your community.

Talk about the history of the Jewish people in the last century:

- The foundation of the Jewish state after nearly two millennia of wandering and after the Nazis attempted genocide.
- Surviving the onslaught of the Arab nations.
- Recapturing our holy sites.

These things might be taken for granted by those of us who were born after the founding of Israel or after the reunification of Jerusalem.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory, taught, “Happiness is not a happening but an obligation.” Many people fall into the trap of thinking, “I would be happy if only this or that happened to me.” Instead, Rav Noah taught that the Torah view is that we are obligated to be happy.

But how can happiness, an emotional state, be an obligation? It is because by thinking, a willful act, we can create the feeling of happiness in ourselves. By focusing on the many things that we have, we can cause ourselves to feel happy. The very ability to sit around the Shabbat table with family, to see, talk and understand one another are things for which we are grateful.

Rav Noah suggested listing the things that we are happy to have and then prioritizing them. This exercise makes us think about what is most important to us. Try it with those at your Shabbat table.

Television personality Hugh Downs expressed this idea succinctly: “A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.”

### **Additional text: Debarim 28:47-48 (SB)**

Our perasha also has a lengthy section of “blessings and curses.” Contained in the “curses” section is the following text relating to the obligation of serving Hashem in happiness for what He has given us:

*“Because you did not serve Hashem your God in joy and in good-feeling of heart out of the abundance of everything. So you will have to serve your enemies, whom Hashem will send-forth against you, in famine and in thirst, in nakedness and in lack of everything...”*

We are happy about the abundance that Hashem has given us and use it in our service of Hashem. The verse that describes the “measure for measure” consequence of not doing so, hints at the basic things for which we should be happy (i.e., food, water, clothing).

*Rabbi Tawil is presently the principal of Yavneh School in Qiryat Tiv'on, Israel.*

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## OUR 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:

*Promoting our Sephardic value of moderation for the future · Facilitating, partnering and growing our institutions together for a stronger community · Jointly initiating high level funding from organizations and Jewish programming · Creating unity and community pride for our youth*

## SCA MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

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