

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



פרשת וישב-מקץ חנוכה: 12/12/14, Issue 14-7

DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF RABBI DR. EZRA LABATON, ZS'L
BY ELAINE AND BOBBY DWECK
AND THE PROJECT TO PROPITIATE HIS MEMORY WWW.RABBILABATON.COM



*Dedicated in Loving Memory of
Rabbi Dr Ezra Labaton, ZSI
by Elaine and Bobby Dweck
and the project to propitiate his memory
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SCA MISSION

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

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The SCA would like to welcome our newest member organizations:
SEPHARDIC BROOKLYN COMMUNITY ERUB AND COMMUNITY MIKVEH
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This is a publication of the SCA.

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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

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

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President's Message

Dear Reader,

We sincerely hope you enjoy reading the publication of the Sephardic Community Alliance, *Qol Ha'Qahal*. In these first few months the response has been extremely positive. Rabbis and lay people have commented on the quality of the content and presentation. Demand continues to rise, distribution has expanded and a digital version is downloadable. We are grateful to the talented and committed individuals working diligently to meet our deadlines and produce this material. Without their contribution, this project could not exist.

Qol Ha'Qahal carries an objective, to spread relevant, meaningful and intelligent Torah messages to the stakeholders of the Affiliate member organizations of the SCA. The SCA today counts a majority of our community's institutions as Affiliates and has evolved to become an active network working to unlock our collective strengths. By coming together and sharing common ideas and challenges we can achieve much more than any single organization can individually.

Affiliation is open to every community educational or spiritual organization that can endorse the SCA Declaration of Values. With the required consent of their executive boards, Affiliates are expected to participate in the decision-making process and overall direction of the SCA. Our goals are product of this process, truly the *Qol Ha'Qahal*. "The Voice of the Assembled".

The Sephardic Community Alliance further unites the Affiliates in addressing the overwhelming wave of change our modern way of life has presented to our traditional values. Our lives in the 21st century bare little resemblance to our past. Since the turn of the millennium we have seen the information explosion, the rise of Google, Facebook, Twitter and the emergence of Humanism. We are witness to a new phenomenon, the convergence of the Peoples of the world along with all their cultural richness and the total interconnectivity of a globe without boundary. No question remains unanswered for long. We have seen breakthroughs in science and technology at astounding pace. From archeology to the study of the human genome we have never known as much about ourselves as we do today. We understand more of our past and can anticipate our future.

"The theory that what has worked for past generations will work for the next fails to consider the wind of change headed our way."

That future lies in the hands of our leaders and educators, our rabbis and teachers, as well as our lay people, our young parents and our youth. Preparing ourselves for what lies ahead is of vital importance. The theory that what has worked for past generations will work for the next fails to consider the wind of change headed our way. Future generations will be faced with challenges we could never have imagined a decade ago. We need bold and united leadership.

Under the SCA umbrella, programing is positioned to help insure the continued majestic glory of our Community. The tent we live under needs to be secured. To that end, the SCA is committed to developing, enabling and facilitating activity that will help our next generations walk with the same *Yerat Shamaim* and *Ahavat Yisrael* as we have had, while still being able to pass confidently though the threshold between our traditional homes and the vibrant world at our doorstep.

The SCA has taken a forward role in communicating with other Jewish organizations here and in the State of Israel. Israel, the miracle of our time, brings great opportunity. We must continue to nurture love for our country. The SCA promotes programing that brings our community and the State of Israel closer together.

Programs such as ILEAD and the SCA Summer Learning and Lectures programs are successful first steps. We also offer professional guidance for institutional compliance. We can act as a distribution system for important information, as we did for Project Education, a program germinated in the SCA.

This September we began printing *Qol Ha'Qahal*, which is effectively raising awareness. Coming in January we add Birthright to our list of offerings. In February the SCA will host Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in a unique environment for the benefit of our Millennials; our young people and our young families. Rabbi Sacks will also address a group of our community lay leaders on issues of community building in the face of modernity. We have made new cutting edge educational materials and libraries accessible to our Affiliates. We support causes that are aligned with our mission. We are addressing difficult issues that will require unilateral Rabbinic and Affiliate support, such as standardizing prenuptial agreements as an addendum to our *ketubot* and promoting *sedakah* guidelines.

If our goal of the continued relevance of our traditional way of life is to be achieved, we need to better understand the contemporary world around us. We must project our values in the context of today's society. Our Affiliates endorsed those values and with your continued support and with the help of *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*, the way of life we hold so dear will perpetuate carrying high the standard of our beloved traditions.

Thank you for reading *Qol Ha'Qahal*.

Hymie Shamah

Mr. Shamah is currently president of the Sephardic Community Alliance.

Qol Ha'Qahal depends on community generosity.
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HANUKKAH

Rabbi Dr. Raymond Harari

Hanukkah: What's It All About?

Hanukkah is undoubtedly one of the most joyful holidays on the Jewish calendar. During Second Temple Times, the Jews found only one cruse of pure oil with which to light the menorah. Miraculously, the *menorah* lit for eight days. Today, as we light the candles each night of Hanukkah, we recount this miracle and sanctify God's name as we show our appreciation for His intervention on our parts. But is that it? Is there more to this holiday? For a fuller understanding of the answer to this question, let's retrace some of the history of the Jews during Second Temple times.

The Greeks and the Jews

Between the years 332-323 B.C.E., Alexander the Great conquered most of the civilized world. The Land of Israel, a critical bridge between Egypt and the lands to the north and east, was captured as well. Alexander and his soldiers brought the culture and ideas of Greece to every conquered land. The unusual blend of Greek culture, on the one hand, and the cultures (or religions) of the East, on the other, came to be known as Hellenism. Like most of his successors, Alexander tried to make this culture part of the lives of the eastern nations. But he did not impose his will on the people. Rather, he used commercial and cultural incentives to attract the people under his control to adopt the Hellenistic way of life.

Hellenism gradually made inroads in the Land of Israel over the next century and a half. Slowly, many Jews began to adapt to Greek culture, changing their language, their names, their way of dress and even their way of thinking. Soon, Jews who had Hellenistic leanings began to campaign for more reforms. This was, they felt, their ticket to greater wealth and acceptance by the nations around them.

Antiochus IV and the Jews

In 167 B.C.E., Antiochus IV, the king of the Seleucid Greek empire, issued legislation making it illegal to practice Judaism. Among other items, Jews were prohibited from performing circumcision, offering sacrifices in the Temple, gathering and worshiping in their synagogues and observing the Shabbat.

Historians have been baffled by Antiochus' decrees.

After all, no other Hellenistic king before him or after him had tried to force his will in this way on the people! Indeed, it was against their usual policy to allow their subjects to choose voluntarily to adopt Hellenistic culture.

Some have suggested that Antiochus was simply cut from a different cloth. Perhaps, they argue, he was a radical Hellenist, bent on breaking the religious backs of the Jews. Others argue that he was half-crazed and irrational; normal routine policies should not be expected of him.

Others have suggested that the answer really lies in the internal politics of the Jews. At the time, the Jews were already arguing amongst themselves. The Hellenists were pushing for more reform and were succeeding. Gymnasia, the seat of

Greek-style education and sports, were beginning to sprout up. Indeed, one of the Hellenists was even installed as *kohen gadol*. The Hasidim, the Jews who had clung to traditional Judaism and values, however, objected strenuously and did everything they could to stem the tide of Hellenism. Eventually, a civil war broke out between the two sides. Antiochus' response was to strike at the traditionalists in the way that would hurt them most. He sent his emissaries to the Land of Israel as a show of force and eventually prohibited the practice of the Jewish religion.

“The significance of Hanukkah, therefore, extends far beyond the miracle of the lights.”

The Maccabees and War

In any case, the promulgation of the decrees in Judea forced many Jews into hiding. Eventually, with the Maccabees at the helm, the traditionalists were able to organize themselves and fight back. But they had an almost impossible task on their hands. They were fighting against great odds. The Greek armies were trained and heavily armed. They greatly

outnumbered the meager army of the Jews. Moreover, the Maccabees found themselves fighting a war on several fronts: against the armies of Antiochus, against pagans recruited from nearby Hellenistic cities and, most painfully, against the Hellenistic Jews.

Within the course of several years, the Maccabees were victorious. Among the factors that contributed to their success were: their firm belief in God, their superior military strategy, their ability to fight guerilla warfare and their knowledge of the turf (“home advantage”). Then, the fateful moment came to rededicate the Temple. Under the leadership of Judah the Maccabee, they reentered the Temple and cleansed it. The Talmud relates that only one pure cruse of undefiled oil was found; miraculously, it lit for eight days.

The Significance of Hanukkah

The significance of Hanukkah, therefore, extends far beyond the miracle of the lights. On the battlefield, the Jews

miraculously overcame the great armies of Antiochus and the Hellenistic pagans. The *Al Ha-nissim* prayer, in fact, recounts this great miracle. On the domestic scene, the traditionalists overpowered the Hellenists who were introducing unacceptable changes into Jewish life. This was essentially a victory against assimilation.

Hanukkah, therefore, is a holiday when we reaffirm our nationalistic, religious and cultural commitments. Our celebration must be imbued with an appreciation for God for what He did for us then and what He continues to do for us now.

Rabbi Dr. Raymond Harari is currently the Rabbi of Congregation Mikdash Eliyahu and Head of School of Yeshivah of Flatbush High School.

THE HANUKKAH CANDLES, THE SUKKOTH BULLS AND THE WINTER SOLSTICE

Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary

The Talmud at Shabbat 21b records a controversy regarding how to light the *Hanukkah*. Beth Hillel says to light one candle on the first night and increase by one each night, as is our custom now. The reason is that “one increases in holiness and does not decrease.” Beth Shammai, however, says one should start with eight candles on the first night and then light one less each successive night until just one light is left on the last night. Why would Beth Shammai want to decrease the lights?

The Talmud explains that this strategy “parallels the bulls of the holiday of Sukkoth.” Bemidbar 29 legislates that 13 bulls are offered in the Temple on the first day of Sukkoth, 12 bulls on the second day and so on until on the last day of Sukkoth when 7 bulls are offered. Just as the number of bulls decreases each day, so should the Hanukkah lights. But what is the connection between the lights of Hanukkah and the bulls of Sukkoth?

The *Book of Maccabees* (2.10.6-7) holds the key to the solution:

[The Maccabees] celebrated [Hanukkah] for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they



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offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place.

“the Maccabees combined their celebration of renewal and hope after a time of darkness & despair onto the most ancient of holidays.”

Beth Shammai’s law preserves a glimmer of the first Hanukkah, which was modeled after Sukkoth. This also explains why we recite full Hallel on all days of Hanukkah, just as we do on Sukkoth.

We can now return to Beth Hillel and wonder why he would not agree with Beth Shammai’s derivation of the holiday. Perhaps Beth Hillel found a different and even earlier model for the Hanukkah celebration. The Babli (Abodah Zara 8a) records the reactions of Adam, who was created in the fall as he experiences the first oncoming of winter:

Our Rabbis taught: When Adam saw the day getting gradually shorter, he said, “Woe is me, perhaps because I have sinned, the world around me is being darkened and returning to its state of chaos and confusion; this then is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced from Heaven!” So he began keeping an eight days’ fast. But as he observed the winter solstice and noted the day getting increasingly longer, he said, “This is the world’s course,” and he set forth to keep an eight days’ festivity.

Many ancient cultures celebrate a winter solstice holiday when the shortest day of the year passes and the days begin to lengthen. Just as other holidays in the Torah add a layer of historical significance to what were always agricultural holidays, so too the Maccabees combined their celebration of renewal and hope after a time of darkness and despair onto the most ancient of holidays. Beth Hillel therefore deemed it most appropriate to celebrate the lengthening of sunlight with each successive day by lighting an extra candle each night of the holiday.

Just as the *halakhah* follows Beth Hillel, so should our perspective during this holiday. As we watch the renewed cycle of growing sunlight in nature, we recall God’s saving providence in history, and we pray for increased blessings in our families and communities.

Rabbi Dr. Hidary is an assistant professor of Judaic Studies at Yeshiva University and the Distinguished Rabbinic Fellow at Congregation Shearith Israel.

THE SHEKHEM NARRATIVE: IS THIS THE WAY THE JEWS BEHAVE?

Mrs. Gitta J. Neufeld

The story of Shekhem - both the city and the man - is troubling because of its violence and questionable morality. In brief, after Jacob’s family settles in the area of Shekhem, Dinah (the only daughter) is kidnapped by Shekhem, the son of the ruler of the city which bears his name. Having raped her, Shekhem and his father then ask for her hand in “proper” marriage. Dinah’s brothers enter into negotiations, which the text describes as *במרמה* (cunningly, deceitfully), and convince them that the only way this marriage will take place is if the entire male population of the city would be circumcised. The people agree, apparently convinced because of Shekhem and Hamor’s presentation of the economic benefits of intermarriage with Jacob’s clan. On the third day after the mass surgery, Shimon and Levi kill all the men, pillage the city, and return their sister to the family. Ya’aqob reprimands them, and they justify their actions by referring to their sister’s honor.

This story is troubling, to say the least. The embryonic Jewish nation had a prime opportunity to teach the world “the way of G-d, doing justice and judgment” (Genesis 18:19). They could have demonstrated to all how to take the moral high road. Instead, they waste this opportunity. They act violently, and destroy an entire city because of the sins of one person. Contrast this with their grandfather Abraham’s impassioned plea to save Sodom, protesting that G-d cannot destroy the innocent with the wicked. Why do his grandsons invert this reasoning? Additionally, the Torah does not consider the rape of an unmarried woman a capital crime. Why then, do Shimon and Levi act this way?

A cursory examination of the text would seem to indicate that Ya’aqob’s angry reaction was focused on the entire incident - the trickery and the mass annihilation and pillage of the city. This analysis is supported when we read of Ya’aqob’s parting words to his children, nearly half a century later, as he is on his deathbed:

“Shimon and Levi are brothers; weapons of cruelty are their swords. Let my soul not come into their council; unto their assembly let my honor not be united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they lamed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Ya’aqob, and scatter them in Israel.” (Genesis 49:5-7)

Some Questions: Is this assessment valid? If Ya’aqob was so troubled by their actions, why didn’t he protest earlier? How does the Torah assess Shimon and Levi’s actions?

Let’s re-examine Ya’aqob’s deathbed words: Note the curse in Ya’aqob’s words: “Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.” Ya’aqob doesn’t curse their actions; he seems to be cursing their anger. If he is morally opposed to the events at Shekhem, why does he single out the anger? Wasn’t the annihilation of an entire city more significant? Why does he stress the anger instead?

When we read of Ya’aqob’s confrontation with the brothers immediately after the destruction of the city, he says: “You have troubled me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house” (34:30). This does not sound like moral outrage. Rather, Ya’aqob seems to disapprove of their strategy because it will cause problems for him with the natives. Is this the way the head of the nation charged with being “a light unto the nations” should act? Are these his priorities?

Finally, the text itself seems to approve of the brothers’ actions. In describing their interactions, reference to the defilement of “Dinah their sister” is repeated (in both verses 13 and 27). In the first verse, Shekhem is described as having defiled Dinah. In the second, the entire population of the city is described in this manner. Why repeat something we know already? Perhaps the texts seek to validate their actions. They took place because Dinah was defiled - a heinous act deserving of punishment. Also, in relating the conversation between Ya’aqob and his sons (34:30-31), the Torah gives the sons “the last word.”:

And Ya’aqob said to Shimon and Levi: “You have troubled me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.” And they said: ‘Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot?’

Ya’aqob seems to be speechless. He has no valid response - because they are in the right. Note that, only 5 verses later, Ya’aqob’s fears are shown to be groundless (35:5): *And they journeyed; and a terror of G-d was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Ya’aqob.* There was no mass reactionary lynching. No one rose up in anger and vengeance. Instead, the locals are so afraid that they don’t pursue them.

Now we need to adjust our questions. If Ya’aqob is not morally opposed to deception, slaughter and pillage, we still have to resolve some issues:

* Why doesn’t Ya’aqob himself assume a leadership role? After all, he was no stranger to deceptive manipulation to achieve his goals. Couldn’t he come up with a strategy?:

* After the massacre, why does he express opposition?

* And - most troublingly - why are Shekhem, his father and the entire city sentenced to death? According to the Torah, this crime is not a capital one. The behavior exhibited by Shimon and Levi (and by tacit implication, approved by Ya’aqob) seems to be the antithesis of the family moral values. How can we justify this?

It’s all in the family

It is interesting to consider the family influences on each of our characters. Ya’aqob grew up knowing his grandfather Abraham, who died when Ya’aqob was a teenager. Of course, he knew his father Yishaq. On the other hand, his sons never knew their great-grandfather, and only met their grandfather when he was old and handicapped. Ya’aqob has just spent the last 20 years or so “on the run” from his only sibling. He seems to be an isolated personality; the only relationship we know about before he married was with his mother. Conversely, his sons (while being raised in a foreign and apparently hostile environment), were blessed with a “full family” support structure, raised in a wealthy and powerful home.

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Ya'aqob was the prototypical "Jew in exile," who had left his homeland many years before, but had a clear connection to his ancestral heritage. His children, born in exile, had never known any other life - and had never directly encountered their heritage.

Let's re-evaluate Ya'aqob's response to his daughter's rape in light of his family background. Both his father and grandfather had faced similar situations, with a woman of the family threatened by a local ruler. In all three of those cases (Abraham in Egypt and Gerar; Yizhaq in Gerar), the woman was presented as a "sister" so as to avert that threat. Consider the Dinah scenario. She really is an unmarried sister. She is taken to the home of the local ruler. Yet here the story lines diverge. Sarah and Ribqa are miraculously saved, yet Dinah is raped and defiled.

Perhaps Ya'aqob's thought process went something like this: *If Abraham was prepared to "play the game" and not antagonize the locals, shouldn't I do the same? Abraham saw that G-d intervened in Egypt, yet he used the same strategy in Gerar rather than relying on that intervention again. Further, he was just passing through Egypt and Gerar, with no intent of settling there, yet he took pains to remain on civil terms. I plan to settle here. G-d hasn't intervened. If I had to exercise cautious restraint while I was in exile (as I did with Laban and Eisav), I must need to be even more restrained here, where I plan to remain permanently.*

The brothers, as products of their upbringing and experiences, see it differently. Non-confrontation is only appropriate if you are not staying in the land. If you avoid standing up for what you think is right, the locals will think that you are weak - and that can have disastrous consequences if you settle there. If we plan to stay here, they argue, we need to protect our families and gain our neighbors' respect and fear. Their thought process: *We need to take a stand. Let everyone know that they can't take us lightly.*

We can bolster this argument by carefully re-examining the conversation. Ya'aqob is concerned that standing up to the indigenous people will lead to an existential threat. Hence his emphasis on the disparity in numbers and on the fact that the "victims" were "the inhabitants of the land." His sons, however, are not willing to have their sister be seen as "fair game." Acquiescing to an assault on her, they argue, is what will create the existential threat.

We are now on the path to answering our first two questions. Ya'aqob doesn't lead an attack and expresses opposition to the sons' attack because he thinks this is the wrong tactic. His disapproval is not a moral issue, but a tactical one.

This approach will help us deal with the final question. The attack on Dinah is not merely a case of criminal assault, which can be ameliorated by payment of a fine. The brothers see it as an attack on the dignity, honor and integrity of the nation. By telling us that they were then able to travel without pursuit or other trouble, the text supports the brothers' version of the events. Their tactic worked. The surrounding nations now knew that the sons of Ya'aqob were a force to be reckoned with. The transient, exile-derived strategy of appeasement was no longer relevant. The sons of Ya'aqob would stand up for what was right. They would not allow their family or their honor to fall victim to others. Gaining the respect of others, they would be able to continue their Abrahamic mission.

I write these words as the images of the massacre in the *Har Nof* Synagogue are being endlessly replayed on television. Tomorrow, a family friend who is the maternal aunt of the four-month old little girl was killed at the light rail stop will be visiting. This summer, my home community forged a strong connection with the community of Talmon, where the Shaer family lives. The Jewish nation - and its leaders - need to assess and reassess their approach. Should we stand idly by, preaching restraint and passivity, or does our mission demand that we actively defend our rights, our property, our people and our land, demonstrating to the world that we will not allow *hakhzona* attitudes towards us. We are not free for the taking. We will not take a conciliatory approach. And, as we confront these challenges bravely, proactively and aggressively, we will merit what Ya'aqob and his family merited: *"And they journeyed; and a terror of G-d was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Ya'aqob."*

Mrs. Gitta J. Neufeld is the Director of Education of the Allegra Franco School of Educational Leadership.

JOINING THE SMALLEST CLUB IN AMERICA

Mr. Jack Doueck

Edited by Mr. Ezra Doueck

On a brisk fall morning in 2013, I was called in to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City for an emergency checkup. Moments later, I sat surrounded by piercing silence and the cold empty white walls of the examination room. My heart rate quickened. Chilling possibilities slowly grew louder in my head, deafening me. I was alone.

"Mr. Doueck..." I heard a distant male voice say, *"It seems you have been diagnosed with a rare disease called PH. There is no cure, but if all goes well, you may have another five years to live."*

My head was now spinning, my vision hazy. I was an active, healthy middle-aged man with a family and a life - and now I was going to die.

Minutes later, my vision refocused, and my heart rate slowed. It was only a mere six months since my mother unexpectedly passed away - and I faced into the fact this this was just my time now to go.

I had first visited Mount Sinai Hospital months ago with a goal of saving a stranger's life, and this was not going to stop me from achieving it.

In June of 2006, I read an article by an "ethicist" who argued that if we could donate an organ to save another person's life, it is our ethical responsibility to do it. Intrigued, I proceeded to research the facts of kidney disease, and what I found was shocking. I learned that nearly 110,000 people are waiting for a kidney transplant, while only 16,000 kidney transplants are done each year, mostly from the deceased.

Kidney dialysis is not a cure. There is a 60% mortality rate for people on dialysis for more than three years, and 80% after five years. This means that in the average six-year waiting period for a kidney, most will not survive. I found that there is virtually no lifestyle changes for kidney donors and thus they literally don't have much to lose after they donate. Yet although the risk of death to a kidney donor is less than 3/10,000 (i.e. it is more dangerous to ride a bicycle in Brooklyn), the number of live, non-directed, "altruistic" kidney donations is a paltry 177. So only 0.00006% of Americans are willing to donate a kidney to save the life of a stranger.

That had to be the smallest club in America and I wanted to join.

One of the most famous passages in the Torah occurs right in the beginning (Genesis 4:9-10): "And the Lord said to Kayin, 'where is Hebel your brother?' And he said, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"

The next verse is much less well-known, but, to me, one of the most powerful statements in the Bible. *"And He (God) said: 'What did you do? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!'"*

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a) explains why the witnesses at capital punishment cases must be admonished and thoroughly investigated. If an innocent man is put to death, his blood and the blood of his descendants, are the witness' responsibility. In the words of the Mishnah, "His [the innocent defendant's] blood and the blood of his descendants are dependent on him [the witness] until the end of the world. As we find with Kayin who murdered Hebel his brother, as it says, 'The blood(s) of your brother is crying out to me from the ground.' It doesn't say 'blood' (in singular form) but 'bloods' (in the plural). [This is to teach us that] his blood and *the blood*

of his descendants..."

The *Mishnah* continues: *"Therefore, man was created singly, to teach us that anyone who destroys a single soul is as if he destroyed an entire world, and anyone who saves a single soul is regarded by scripture as if he saved an entire world."*

I quoted the above in a book I wrote about the power of kindness (and the danger of apathy) in the 1990's. I wrote that I hoped, that when I had the opportunity to save a life, I would remember that every life is a world in and of itself. Now was the time for me to 'walk the talk' and 'practice what I preached.'

At that moment I committed myself to donating one of my kidneys to save the life of a stranger.

Unfortunately, my wife Jamie had other plans. *"No, you're not!"* she exclaimed, and that was the end of it. I spent the next 7 years bidding for her approval.

In the summer of 2013, my wife Jamie and I attended an event hosted by "Renewal" - a kidney donation awareness (and matching) organization. One of the recipients at the event was a close friend of Jamie's who had been on dialysis and now looked like she had a new lease on life.

That night, Jamie turned to me and said, *"If you really still want to donate your kidney, you can do it."* She was touched and inspired by the work of Renewal and didn't want to stand in the way of saving a life.

My goal was back in place. Little did I know that the journey to that goal would produce some of the most challenging and intense soul-searching moments of my life.

I walked into Mount Sinai Hospital the next day to

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begin testing and was immediately thrust into a battery of tests: blood, urine, pulse, blood pressure, EKG, an echo-cardiogram, and a chest x-ray. I walked out healthy and confident.

Next came intensive questioning and warnings by a Psychiatrist (“Why do you want to do this?”), the hospital nephrologist (“Are you sure you want to do this?”), the social worker (“Do you understand the risks to your life?” “Does your family approve?” Do your children know that if they need a kidney you won’t be able to give it to them?”). I answered them all with conviction.

However over the next 12 months, I was thrown into the fire of doubt and panic.

In September of 2013, I was told by the Hospital that I might have a tumor in my stomach. After a few gut-wrenching days of tests, an endoscopy proved it to be a fallacy. In October, I was diagnosed for Pulmonary Hypertension, or the rare fatal disease known as ‘PH’. With no cure, I gathered with my family and accepted my fate. Yet weeks later I was called into the same office and informed that there had been a simple misdiagnosis. Finally, in December I was called once more, and told that I had a threatening tumor in my adrenal gland. I was told that I had a “ticking time bomb inside my body”. Months later, I was again cleared of all issues.

My body was tired. My emotional capacity was drained. My drive in achieving my goal was aggressively challenged. Yet, I emerged clear-headed and resolute. No matter the hurdles or sacrifices that I had to make, saving the life of an innocent person was fixed in my sights.

In June of 2014 I finally received clearance, and Renewal quickly found me a match. The date was set for September 11th, and I found it auspicious to be fulfilling this great deed on a day marked with such sadness and evil.

The day arrived, and I lay on the bare operating table, with my eyes closed and my mind at peace. When I opened them three hours later I knew that someone had just received the gift of life. I smiled as I knew that I had just joined the smallest club in America.

Throughout this exhausting 13-month process, I became acutely aware of many things. Among them is the strength and resolve of the human spirit, along with the clear love and appreciation for the blessings in my life. Above all, what I learned is that if someone is in need, no amount of personal suffering or temporary pain can overcome the opportunity to make a difference in the world. As the Talmud says, “He who saves one soul is regarded as if he saved an entire world.”

Postscript: Hanukkah

The eight days of Hanukkah begin on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev. We light the candles of the menorah in commemoration of the Jews’ victory over their Greek adversaries, in about the year 165 BCE. As a result of the vic-

tory, Judaism and monotheism stayed alive. The Greeks were not looking to kill the Jews. They were committed instead to force the Jews to abandon the Torah and become integrated into Greek culture, Greek religion and Greek life. The Greeks sought a melting pot and a unity of all people. They wanted the Jews to forego the Torah and forget about their mission in life: to be a light among nations.

When the Maccabees regained control of the sanctuary, they rededicated it. This was called “*Hanukat Ha’mizbeiyah*”. The name “Hanukkah” was derived from that rededication. The word is also the etymological source of the word for education, “Hinuch.”

Thanks to the miracle and victory of Hanukkah, Judaism was able to go on and contribute a great deal to society and to the future generations of the world. Maybe the most important contribution was the importance of *hesed*, of acts of loving-kindness. The Jewish People should take the leading role in kindness to strangers. We should be at the forefront of giving and altruism. Hanukkah, for me, has always been symbolic. As our family lights the candles, we are reminded to become the “light among nations”.

It has been about two months since my kidney donation to a stranger. Physically, I’m fully recovered and feel fine. Emotionally, as with all true altruism, paradoxically, this act of kindness did more for me, than for anyone else.

Hanukkah Same’ah.

If readers have any questions about kidney donation, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Doueck: JD@advancedenergycap.com

About Renewal:

Renewal is a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting people suffering from various forms of kidney disease. They have a multi-faceted proactive team that is dedicated to saving lives through kidney donation. For more information, please visit: www.life-renewal.org

Mr. Jack Doueck is the author of several books including *The Chesed Boomerang: How Acts of Kindness Enrich Our Lives* (Yagdiyl Torah Publishing Inc. May 2000).

NER SHABBAT AND NER HANUKKAH

Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l

Submitted by Dr. Joel Wolowelsky

It is instructive to compare the Hanukkah candles to the Sabbath candles. It is permissible, in fact desirable, to make use of the *ner shel Shabbat*, the Sabbath candle, to enjoy its light, to eat by it, to read by it. Indeed, these candles serve the functional purpose of all lamps and lights: to enable one to escape from darkness and enjoy his work. It is a useful light, meant to illuminate our quarters on the Sabbath.

However, *Ner Hanukkah* was declared unusable and unenjoyable. One must not use *ner Hanukkah* for identification of objects, nor may one eat, read, or do work by its light. It is holy, untouchable by and inaccessible to man. The Hanukkah candle is intrinsically unique, different from all other lamps. There is no pragmatic purpose pursued by its lighting; it is, rather, a cultic-ceremonial symbolic object.

The symbolism of the *ner*, the candle, is, in general, a double one. First, the *ner* is a lamp that illuminates and makes things visible. Second, it is a guide in darkness, but does not dissipate the darkness. The sun illuminates. A remote star neither illuminates nor shines; however, it does guide. The star may be a thousand times bigger and more brilliant than the sun; yet it does not shine because of the enormous distance separating the star from us. It twinkles from a mysterious far horizon, winks to us and tells us something we don’t understand.

In other words, a candle is at times the symbol of a bright light; at other times, it is a symbol of remoteness, of unlimited stretches, of guidance from afar. *Ner Hanukkah* is a light of the latter kind; it is lit not to illuminate, but to address itself to us from the vast, dark spaces, to tell us to move along invisible paths.

Ner Shabbat represents the *ner ha-ma’or*, the light of illumination, the shining light enjoyed by many which brilliantly lights up the whole house. *Ner Hanukkah* is a *ner ha-nir’eh merahok*, a remote light. “From afar, *me-rahok*, the Lord appeared to me” (Jer. 31:2). The distant light attracts us, pulls us; we run after it, hoping to come near. Yet the closer we come, the quicker it moves away from us. The twinkling star is perceived but not enjoyed, seen but not used. In terms of physical distance, *ner Hanukkah* is close to us; we can touch it. Yet psychologically, it is as remote from us as the flying nebulae on the outskirts of the universe. It is a singular and peculiar light.

Let us look at two verses from the Torah in order to delve a little deeper into the symbolism of the *ner ha-ma’or* and the *ner ha-nir’eh me-rahok*—the *or nigleh*, the revealed light, and the *or ne’elam*, the hidden light.

Aaron shall burn the incense there; every morning, when he dresses the lamps, shall he make it burn.

And when Aaron lights the lamps at dusk he shall make it burn, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations (Ex. 30:7-8).

These two acts of service symbolize our dialectical approach to reality—to history in general, and to Jewish history in particular. Moreover, this dialectical approach is applicable to man as an individual. *Ner ha-ma’or* symbolizes clarity, rationality, openness, and frankness. It represents a stage in life at which man has no questions and no problems. His life is straightforward and simple. Rationality is interwoven into the very texture of an enjoyable life. In a word, the *ner ha-ma’or* symbolizes man’s great capacity for understanding and rationalizing.

In another chapter dealing with the *nerot*, the Torah says, “When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light towards the body of the candlestick” (Num. 8:2). This represents the human genius: the intellect that unravels mysteries, impresses conceptual form upon hyletic matter, and finds reasonableness and rational patterns in every niche in creation.

Ner ha-nir’eh me-rahok symbolizes the endlessness of the cosmos, its uncharted lanes along which stars are born and perish, come into being and explode. The human eye cannot encompass the distances; one’s intellect cannot penetrate the



Shabbat Candles

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flying nebulae. Of course, man sees a light, a twinkling star. It tells him that the cosmos is the abode of the infinite will and that everything, every particle, every microscopic phenomenon as well as the world in *toto*, is guided by an infinite and omnipotent intelligence. The distant star does not shed light; it does not resolve enigmas or clear up mysteries. However, it does tell one story: namely, that there is a light behind the vast and awesome cosmic drama. The distant star bears witness that Divine harmony and cosmic peace prevail throughout creation.

“Ner Hanukkah represents not the sun, the light of which clears the darkness away and sheds a bright light over our earth, but a remote star whose beam of light does not dissipate the darkness.”

That is why the Torah has united the kindling of the *menorah* with the vaporization or burning of the incense. The *ner hama'or* represents the first part of the *Kedushah*, “Holy holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3). Every corner, every crack, every detail, every particle reflects the glory of God, as the Targum expounds. A strong light shines and illuminates all the cosmic curves and hiding places, what is seen and what is unseen. The Sabbath is testimony that the world is very good—“God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good” (Gen. 1:31)—and that creation was blessed by God. Therefore, the light of the Sabbath is bright. We are told to enjoy it, not to sit in the darkness.

The Torah is also concerned with the *ner ha-nir'eh me-rahok* that does not illuminate. At the exact time of the *had-lakat nerot* in the Temple, the incense is burned on the altar; the vapor, the cloud of smoke, rises and saturates the air in the sanctuary; the lights can hardly shine brightly, since they have to penetrate the haze. One sees the *nerot* but cannot make use of them. The sanctuary is not illuminated because of an impenetrable pillar of incense vapor. One perceives the light but does not enjoy it.

“Every morning, when he dresses the lamps, shall he make [the incense] burn . . . When Aaron lights the lamps at dusk shall he make [the incense] burn” (Ex. 30:7–8). When Aaron is fixing or dressing the lamps, he must not expect that they will shine brilliantly, illuminating the world. The lights, like a *ner ha-nir'eh me-rahok*, a distant polestar, will tell Aaron the story of “Verily, You are a God who hides Yourself” (Isa. 45:15), of a God who dwells beyond and above the outskirts of the cosmos, who guides everything and who implanted an indomitable will in every infinitesimal particle. The clarity and simplicity will be lost in the smoke of the incense. The genius intellect will be deflated if it should undertake to explain the unexplainable. The *ner ha-nir'eh me-rahok* tells us a story of a strange world, of unimaginable darkness.

The *ner ha-nir'eh me-rahok* represents the second verse of the *Kedushah*, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place” (Ezek. 3:12). The distant star does not point at the Glory of God, which fills the universe, but tells us a different story, that God from His transcendent recesses guides the world. It does not simplify but, on the contrary, complicates matters; it narrates the story of anonymous worlds, which exist in cosmic silence, sending beams of light through the endless spaces without giving us a hint how to explain them, how to clear up the mystery.

Ner Hanukkah represents not the sun, the light of which clears the darkness away and sheds a bright light over our earth, but a remote star whose beam of light does not dissipate the darkness. From the darkness, a mysterious world twinkles and addresses itself to us. If we were to use the light of the *ner Hanukkah*, it would not satisfy our curiosity. We would turn it into an illuminating light, a harvest moon, instead of a distant light that announces something mysterious without furnishing us the clue to solve that mystery.

--Days of Deliverance: Essays on Purim and Hanukkah

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik A"H was Rosh HaYeshiva at Yeshiva University.
A special thank you to Dr. Joel Wolowolsky for submitting this article.



Parashat Vayesheb

AN INTEGRATED LIFE

Rabbi Yaakov Savdie

Parashat Vayesheb contains the beginnings of an amazing story; the story of *Yosef Hasadik A"H*. The story of a young man thrown into exile, thrown into Egyptian civilization, sold as a slave in a foreign land with no family or friends. All odds were against him. Yet, he manages to attain great success in Egypt. First he is placed over the entire household of Potiphar, and then he eventually rises to become the viceroy of Egypt- second only to the king. His sudden rise to power seems to be unnatural. **What was the secret of the success of *Yosef Hasadik*?**

“Parashat Vayesheb contains the beginnings of an amazing story; the story of Yosef Hasadik A"H.”

The answer is contained in the *passuqim* which tell his story. If we look at them closely, we find that God was with Yosef every step of the way:

When he was in the house of *Potiphar*, the *passuq* tells us: ***“The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master” (Bereshit 39:2).“***

When he was in jail the *passuq* tells us, ***“But even while he was there in prison. The Lord was with Joseph. He extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the eyes of the chief-jailer” (Bereshit 39:21).“***

And when he interpreted the dreams for Pharaoh as Pharaoh himself said: ***“Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?” (Bereshit 41:38).***

Yet we have to ask ourselves- **what exactly did Yosef do to merit such help from G-d?**

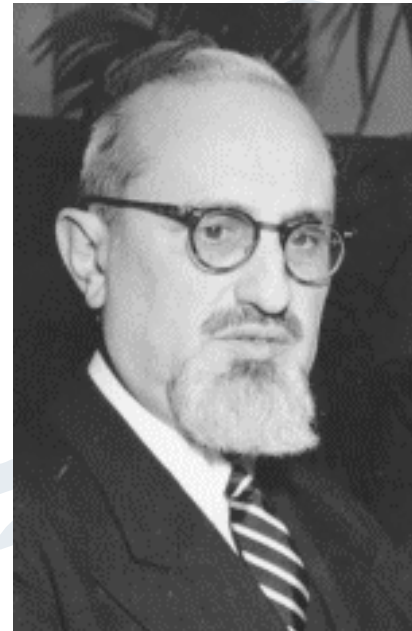
When Yosef arrived in Egypt, he was faced with a most difficult decision. **Should he attempt to blend in & assimilate into Egyptian society?** Should he deny his identity and his upbringing? This would seemingly guarantee a quicker road to success- instead of the Egyptians looking at him as their inferior, they might look upon him as an equal- **Or should he cling to his identity and remain loyal to his heritage and his father's teachings?** This would certainly make it harder for Yosef to succeed in Egypt. Yosef chose the latter. He knew full well that this decision would hinder his success, and he would suffer for it, but he valued his tradition above all else.

Yosef remained steadfast in his commitment to the path of the *Abot* throughout his exile. He never forgot the lessons of his father. When he was tempted to sin, when the wife of Potiphar continuously seduced him each and every day, it was those lessons that saved him. Yosef had every reason in the world to sin. He fully knew the inherent danger that lay in his refusal of her advances. In fact he came very close to committing the sin, but something held him back.

Hazal tell us what it was that stopped him from sinning: ***“At that moment he saw the image of his father in the window” (Sotah 36B).*** Many misunderstand the meaning of this statement- they think that out of the blue, an image of *Yaaqob* suddenly appeared to save Yosef from sinning. There is a profound message here that they are missing. **The image which Yosef saw was a direct result of his own efforts to constantly remember his father and his teachings' while in exile.** He had always remembered the lessons of Abraham, *Yisshaq* & *Yaaqob*. He remembered what made their family unique amongst all other families on earth at that time.

Yosef was able to integrate into Egyptian society without losing one iota of his family's beliefs and traditions. His im-

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Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

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movable faith & trust in G-d accompanied him throughout his life, no matter the circumstance. **Yosef was the first Israelite to live in exile, and he is the model, the paradigm, of how a Jew is to live in exile.** If we wish to succeed in our current exile, if we wish to be accomplished members of society while still adhering to our beliefs & traditions, we must emulate his ways.

It is easy for one to remain a Jew if they separate themselves from society. It is also easy to totally blend into society while throwing off the burden of Judaism. It is extremely difficult to integrate into society while maintaining one's Judaism completely without any sacrifice. Yet this is our responsibility. **This is the legacy that our great Sephardic Hachamim have left for us.** Whether it be the great luminaries from Spain- such as Shemeul Hanagid, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, or those from Egypt- such as Rabbenu Saadya Gaon or Rabbenu HaRambam, they all led successful lives in their respective societies, integrating the Torah with the science, philosophy, math & philology of their times.

“We must follow in the footsteps of our great Sephardic luminaries, and we must pattern our lives after the lives of our ancestors who integrated into society living wholesome and productive lives.”

As *Hanukkah* approaches this lesson becomes even more pertinent & potent. The holiday is about this very struggle. The Greeks came to *Eres Yisrael* & offered the Jews their culture, their secular studies & their means of recreation. The Jews were now faced with the same choice that *Yosef Hasadik* had. **Should they attempt to blend in & assimilate into Greek society and culture?** This would lead to a very enjoyable life- one of comfort physical pleasure and intellectual pursuits, of comfort and safety- **Or should they cling to their identity and remain loyal to the Torah and misvot?**

The decision was made more difficult because Greek culture possessed many great things. At first glance what they were offering seemed very similar to what the Torah had to offer. In fact the Zohar states that the kingdom of the Greece is closest to that of *Yisrael* amongst all the other nations¹. Hence, there is a *halacha* that *Sifre Torah* can be written Hebrew and only one other foreign language- Greek. Although the story takes place in *Eres Yisrael*, *Hazal* still call it *Galut Yavan*- the Greek Exile and refer to it as a period of *hoshech*-darkness. The *Ramhal* explains that this exile is compared to darkness because the Jews had great difficulty discerning what was unique about Judaism, and what made us different than all the nations during this time.

The Jewish Hellenists chose to fully embrace Greek culture; they went too far. Instead of integrating the beauty of Greek culture (*Yaft Elohim Leyefet...*), they chose to totally blend into Greek society while abandoning the tenets of Judaism. The *Hashmonaim* were now required to fight in order to ensure that authentic Judaism would survive. It is only due to their efforts and the help of God that Judaism didn't become utterly lost.

As we still meander in the current Roman exile, as we are flooded by new ideas in science, philosophy, medicine, and technology, we must learn the lessons of history. We must emulate the path that *Yosef Hasadiq* laid before us. We must follow in the footsteps of our great Sephardic luminaries, and we must pattern our lives after the lives of our ancestors who integrated into society living wholesome and productive lives.



Giza Pyramids

Rabbi Savdie posts his *dibre torah* on kolyaakob.com.

¹ Zohar Hadash Parashat Yitro 63B



Student Corner

THE REAL “ISRAEL EXPERIENCE”

Mr. Victor Dweck

“Hello, are you okay?”

“Are you scared?”

“Oh my God, were you in that area when it happened?”

“Don't you just want to come home already and get away from all the craziness?”

These are a few of the common text messages I got from my friends and family after hearing about the terrorist attacks in Israel these past few weeks. What's ironic about these text messages from worried friends and family is that most of the time they found out about the attacks before I did! They were half way around the world, and yet they were keeping me updated on the current events here. It's so relieving to know that back in Brooklyn there is a Zionist community that cares for the well-being of their brothers and sisters in Israel.

While I felt very connected to Israel this past summer, during Operation Protective Edge, I feel a different connection actually living in Israel these past three months. Recently there were two acts of terrorism in the Gush Etzion area. The first one was on a Monday night, when an Arab vehicle drove off the road severely injuring 3 IDF soldiers. The next one happened a few days later, in that same area, when a woman was stabbed, but this time, the terrorists succeeded in murdering a Jew. Earlier that same day another Jew was stabbed to death in Tel Aviv.

I have a friend who is in Yeshivat Har Etzion and my initial thought after each of these attacks was “Oh my God, I hope he's okay.” After taking time to reflect I realized how an Israeli must feel when hearing about horrific terrorist acts. If I hear about a shooting in a specific area I automatically begin thinking about any friends who might be in danger. Then, I began to realize how Israelis must feel after hearing about an attack; they know **hundreds** of people that may be in danger.

After one of these acts of terror, we spent time with one of our school rabbis talking about the situation. We began by asking him if he knew anyone killed this summer, he responded with a bewildered look followed by an awkward seven seconds of silence. He proceeded with telling us “It's rare when an Israeli **Does Not** recognize a name of someone who passed away in a war.”

I want to take you through the day of the most recent¹ attack.

Monday morning started off like any other morning: I slept-walked downstairs, went to minyan, put on my *tefillin* and waited for the others to come so that we could start. Since my school, Yeshivat Eretz HaTzvi, is predominantly Ashkenazi, we have to wait for all the Sephardic kids to come down to minyan before starting, because we have exactly ten every day. Our tenth is a Sephardic man who lives next door to our yeshiva. He is also usually the first one in minyan. That day however, he walked into minyan ten minutes late. I asked him what was wrong and he apologized for coming late, but he had to make sure his daughter was safe after a shooting in a synagogue in the Har Nof. Needless to say, I found it very difficult to focus on the morning prayer, as I nervously began refreshing my phone to get the latest news. When we concluded *Alenu Le'Shabeach* we recited chapters of *tehillim*. We soon found out that five men had been murdered while seven were severely wounded.

Following the afternoon prayer of *Minha*, our Rosh Yeshiva led us in a school-wide *tehillim* reading, concluded by reciting the names of the five people who were mercilessly murdered at the hands of terrorists. One of them was his good friend, the grandson of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. He then went on to announce that our school would go on “partial lockdown,” which meant that we could leave the building, but we should not unless we had to. We were told to travel in groups of three or more and not to go to the Old City or Ben Yehuda. Basically — stay local and stay safe.



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The next day we found out more details about what had happened the previous morning. The two terrorists waited in their car for over 40 minutes waiting for the minyan to reach the silent Amida – so they could commit their act of butchery when those praying had their backs turned to the entrance of the synagogue and focused intently on *Bore Olam*. All prepared and ready, these murderers ran into the synagogue with axes, butchers knives and guns and began the horrifying killing and wounding those in the holiest act of prayer. How did the world portray this despicable act in the news? With headlines such as “4 Israelis, 2 Palestinians dead” or “Police shot, killed 2 Palestinians.” This reporting signifies how the bias media believes and portrays Israel as the terrorist and not as the victim. This is an insult to the victims, and to people of truth and morality everywhere.

How could I just sit back and not do anything? I needed to show that I stood with that synagogue, even if some in the media did not. Just as I finished watching a video blaming Jews for the attack, a friend came into my room and told me that he and a few of his friends had just decided to pray Shacharit in the Har Nof synagogue the next day, less than 48 hours after the attack. He wanted to know if I wanted to come along. It was a no brainer.

Thursday morning called for a 6 o'clock wake up, but for some reason I didn't have any trouble getting out of bed. I felt a cool and unusual breeze while hailing a taxi. When we told the driver our destination, we automatically felt a connection.

We walked into the synagogue, past glass doors with six bullet holes. We walked into the minyan and everything seemed normal. With the exception of five memorial candles in the back and a few signs on the walls with the names of those who perished, everything was normal. It was as if nothing had ever happened. I was very confused, until I remembered what a few of my rabbis from school had explained to us, about the “Israeli mentality.” The way Israelis react to these situations is by going about their everyday life. By not living in fear we deny the terrorists what they want the most - an Israeli society in terror, unable to function and grow.

Throughout the *tefillah* I looked around the room and felt a sense of unity. Unity that I can't get back in Brooklyn, New York. Unity that is only in Israel. We prayed with them a regular *shaharit*, said a few chapters of *tehillim* and returned to our Yeshiva.

So what can you, do to support Israel?

1. Social media. Use your Facebook, Instagram, Twitter accounts to spread the truth about Israel. Something I stumbled upon on Facebook was a group that had the idea to start the following campaign: “On December 1st at 10AM EST, join us on Twitter with the hashtag #EndYourLies and make sure to tag @CNN and @CBCNews.”² Within only 24 hours, this Facebook group got 3,500 thousand people to confirm that they are in and was a huge success. I'm sure there are tons of other campaigns out there. Do what you do best and spend some time on social media.

2. Pray. In memory of all those killed this month and for a healthy recovery to all those who were severely injured, the one to turn to is Bore Olam.

3. Get educated and defend Israel on your college campus. It's a lot easier than it sounds. There are a number of websites that are designed to help teens defend Israel. Sites such as StandWithUs³ have an easy to navigate, point by point breakdown on all accusations of Israel. Study it.

So to answer your questions, yes I am okay, no I am not scared. Thank God I was not in the area when “it” happened. And, the question is do you want to come home already? I'm doing just fine here.

Mr. Dweck is currently studying for the year in Israel.

¹ As of Sunday night, November 23rd.

² <https://www.facebook.com/Events/#EndYourLies-UniteWithIsraeltoCorrectCNN&CBC>

³ See further: <https://www.standwithus.com/factsheets/>



Sephardic Customs

THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

When one thinks of Hanukkah the first thought that really comes to mind is lighting wicks for eight nights. In this short article I would like to point out certain customs related to fire that are peculiar to various Sephardic communities.

Since the bulk of community people reading this are of Aleppian origin, I wish to start with a custom that exists till this day in many families. The Aleppo Jewish community was very ancient and the indigenous Jewish population was known as *Must'arabim*. Many years later when exiles from the Spanish expulsion reached Aleppo they were known as *Sepharadim*. The *Must'arabim* and *Sepharadim* of Aleppo kept many distinctions in liturgy and customs until about 1930. Today there is a distinction which can help families identify if they are from an old Arabic family of Aleppo or of the Spanish families that arrived in Aleppo 500 years ago. This distinction is kindling an extra light each night of Hanukkah.

As is well known on the first night of the holiday one obligatory fire is lit and each night an additional obligatory light is lit as well. In addition to this there is one extra light, the *shamosh/shamash*, i.e., the assistant. This is the universal method among all Jews worldwide so on the first night there is 1 + 1 and by the last night there are 8 + 1. Not so for the Spanish Jews of Aleppo. This group lights an extra light each night. There is the obligatory light, the *shamosh*, and one more light. In other words on the first night a total of three flames and by the last night a total of ten!

These are some of the families which I know to be of these Spanish Aleppians who adhere to this custom till today: Haber, Attie, Tawil, Betesh, Sutton, Cattan, Mishaa, Dweck, Shayo, Abadi, Laniado, Labaton, Matalon, Harari, Safra, Lofes, Baredes and Braha. If you have one of these names and your family does not have the custom of lighting an extra light, please stick to your custom.

Many have asked me: Why? What is the basis for this custom? Please allow me to share several reasons that I have heard in the past:

1) Leaving Spain was very dangerous. The journey by sea and by land presented many risks and terrors and no one knew where they would end up or if they would arrive safely. The group of Spanish exiles that made their way to safety and ended up in Aleppo felt they needed to publicize their own miracle as well. As such they decided to kindle an extra light each night of Hanukkah.

2) Spanish Jews arrived in Aleppo and the local indigenous Jewish population (the *Must'arabim*) did not welcome them into the community at first. The Spanish Jews were ousted from Spain and now their coreligionists were hostile towards them, until Hanukkah when the two groups were able to come to terms and the Spanish exiles were fully accepted into the community. To show their thanks to God for this miracle they began to kindle an extra wick every night of Hanukkah.

3) The Spanish Jews were wealthy. Back then a sign of affluence was the ability to light oil lamps and ensure indoor lighting after sunset. Otherwise you went to bed at nightfall for lack of means to do anything else. These Spanish Jews lit oil lamps in their homes on a regular basis. What were they to do on Hanukkah to make a distinction between themselves and everyone else in Aleppo who for those eight nights had holiday flames illuminating their dwellings? They decided to light an extra oil lamp right next to the obligatory holiday ones to show who they were!

These were the reasons I grew up hearing but I recently discovered something very interesting. The custom in Misrata, Libya in the synagogue only (i.e. not in the homes), was to light the obligatory flame(s) each night plus not one but two *shamashim*, one on the left and one on the right! The reason they give is as such: originally only the one on the right was meant to be the extra light of the *shamash*, while the one on the left side was meant not to be lit but just to be a symbol of the small cruz of oil that was found in the *Bet Hamiqdash* which was the cause of the miracle of Hanukkah. Over time it would seem



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that the reason was forgotten and it was thought that both must be lit as *shamashim*. So just like the *Sepharadim* of Aleppo they would start with 3 lights the first nights and end up with 10 on the last night.

Now please allow me to indulge you in my own take on this. The *Haftarah* for Shabbat Hanukkah is from Zechariah, and if we look at the end of the *Haftarah* (Zechariah 4:1-7) we see the following: Zechariah has a vision of the golden menorah, and he sees it fed with oil by **two** great olive trees, one to the left and one to the right. Recall now that these Spanish exiles were persecuted, downtrodden, scared, and unsure what would happen to them or to the Jewish nation. Many must have doubted if the Jewish nation would continue to exist or if there would ever be salvation with the rebuilding of the *Bet Hamiqdash*. The Menorah symbolized the *Bet Hamiqdash*. In the prophesy the angel tells Zechariah “Not by might, nor by power alone, but by My spirit, said the Lord” (4:6), will the work be completed. It’s the combination of the **two**, the physical strength and the Godly spirit, that will achieve this difficult task. It is the efforts of both Zerubabel- the lay leader the descendant of the Davidic dynasty, and the spiritual leader- Joshua the High Priest, that will complete the task. As such the **two shamashim** used each night caused them to recall this prophetic vision and gave them the hope and stamina to persevere! I believe this to be the true but forgotten origin of the two shamashim kindled by the Sephardic exiles in Aleppo, Syria and Misrata, Libya.

“the two shamashim used each night caused them to recall this prophetic vision and gave them the hope and stamina to persevere!”

Besides kindling the Hanukkah lights at home they are also lit in the synagogue each **night** of the holiday with the appropriate *berakhot*. In Cairo, Egypt it was rekindled each morning of the holiday as well, but without *berakhot*. The reason for this custom was to publicize the miracle. Even though we light each night and the reason is to publicize the miracle, lighting in the daytime when no one benefits at all from the light is an even bigger way to promulgate the miracle. Lighting in the day also serves another purpose to let a person who was traveling or unsure of what day of the holiday it is/was to be made aware.

The custom of Tlemcen, Algeria is that on each night of the holiday immediately prior to ‘Arbit, many children would gather in the synagogue and stand together and they would all recite in unison and in a melody the *berakhot* of lighting, then one child would kindle the Hanukkah wicks, afterwards the entire congregation would chant with them *Hanerot Halalu* and *Mizmor Shir Hanukat HaBayit LeDavid*.

Another very old custom that was prevalent among the Jews of Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Jerusalem, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and probably other places as well is that kindling begins immediately after the first *berakhah* of *Lehadliq Ner Hanukkah*. This is a very old and well established practice based upon the “*peshat*” and the “*sod*”. In recent decades there has been a push to stop this and to only allow lighting after finishing the recitation of all *berakhot*. After the lighting the custom of all these communities was to chant the 51 word version of *Hanerot Halalu* and *Mizmor Shir Hanukat HaBayit LeDavid* (Psalm 30).

The question of what to do with the remaining wicks and oil that were partially used for the purpose of the *Missvah* also concerned our *Hakhamim*. Considering the distance between them, it is interesting to note the common custom in the following three communities. In Tetouan, Morocco, Sina, Kurdistan, and Baghdad, Iraq, they gathered all these remaining leftovers and on the eighth day of the holiday they made a bonfire and burned all these leftovers while dancing around and jumping over the fire.

As is well known, in all our cities and countries of origin only olive oil was used for the *missvah* of kindling fire for Hanukkah and never wax candles. Nonetheless to do so they needed a long wax candle to light the oil steeped wicks. The custom in Aleppo, Alexandria, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus and probably many other places was that the *shamash* of the synagogue would present such a candle to the head of each household, in turn he would be rewarded with a small donation.

On Hanukkah we read from the *Sefer Torah* daily. The portion discusses the completion of the tabernacle and the sacrifices of the princes of each tribe. In memory of these 12 princes, the custom in Aleppo in all the synagogues was to kindle 12 flames. These were always glass cups filled with olive oil in which a floating wick was placed.

There are many other customs to discuss, such as holiday prayers, textual variations, special foods, working, songs, not giving presents, etc. For now I just wanted to bring more attention to the flames of the holiday.

Mr. Joseph Mosseri is on the board of Ahaba Ve Ahva Congregation.



Parashat Miqess

HANNUKAH AND YOSEF HASADIQ

Mr. Morris Arking

There is a strong recurring theme between Yosef and Hanukkah. You might have noticed that *Parashat Miqess*, which focuses on *Yosef HaSadiq* in Egypt, is almost always read on Shabbat Hanukkah. And when there are two Shabbatot on Hanukkah, the first Shabbat is always *Parashat VaYesheb*, which begins the story of Yosef and his brothers, and the second Shabbat is always *Parashat Miqess*.

This connection between *Yosef HaSadiq* and Hanukkah is further alluded to in the *Mizmor Tehillim* (Psalm 30) that we recite on Hanukkah. The *Mizmor* begins “*Mizmor Shir Hanukat HaBayit L’David*” which is why it was selected for recitation on Hanukkah. However in the *Mizmor* itself we find several phrases that are reminiscent of the story of Yosef: “*Hiyyitani MiYardi Bor*” (you have given me life from my descending to the pit); “*Pitahta Saqi*” (you have loosened my sackcloth) is an allusion to the opening of Binyamin’s sack; and “*Mah Bessa’ B’Dami*” (what profit [benefit] is there in my blood [in killing me]) is similar to Yehudah’s “*Mah Bessa’ Ki Naharog Et Ahinu*” (what profit [benefit] is there in killing our brother).

This connection between Yosef and Hanukkah is reiterated once again in the *Gemara*. The second chapter of *Masekhet Shabbat* discusses the holiday of Hanukkah. Included in the *Gemara*’s discussion is the statement of Rab Kahana quoting Rab Natan Bar Manyume in the name of Ribbi Tanhum regarding a *Hanukiyah* that is invalid because it is placed in a very high place. The *Gemara* generally records other statements of a Rabbi that have no other appropriate place in the *Gemara*, together with his statement that is in its appropriate place. Therefore this *Gemara*, which is discussing Hanukkah, continues with another statement of Rab Kahana quoting Rab Natan Bar Manyume in the name of Ribbi Tanhum. Although this statement is not related to Hanukkah, it is not so coincidentally a *Derashah* about Yosef. The *Pasuq* says, “*V’Habor Req En Bo Mayim*” (The pit is empty, it has no water). If the *Pasuq* clearly states that the pit is empty, do I not know that it has no water? The extra words come to teach us “*Mayim En Bo*” (it has no water) “*Abal N’hashim V’Aqrabim Yesh Bo*” (but there are snakes and scorpions in it). The *Gemara* then resumes its discussion about Hanukkah.

The Torah readings, the *Mizmor* and the discussion in the *Gemara* all link Yosef to Hanukkah. What is the significance



Ancient City of Aleppo

of this connection? Yosef as we know lived and flourished in Egypt which was the ultimate non-Jewish society of his time. Egyptian culture was antithetical to Jewish values as the *Pasuq* that introduces prohibited marriages begins with the phrase “*K’Ma’aseh Eress Missrayim Asher Y’shabtem Bah Lo Ta’asu*” (like the acts of the land of Egypt that you dwelled in do not do). Hanukkah marks the victory of the Jewish nation and values over the Greek influence in Israel during that time period. The Greek

empire was not only dominating the world militarily but also culturally as well. Hellenized Jews had adopted the Greek culture and as a result they compromised their commitment to Judaism. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the *Bet Hamiqdash*, our center of holiness and purity, in response to the Greek actions of desecration, and their efforts to influence Jews away from their religion and beliefs. Therefore an important theme of Hanukkah is maintaining a full commitment to the values and teachings of the Torah in the midst of an influential non-Jewish culture. Yosef is the classical biblical figure who did just that. Although Yosef participated in society to the extent that he was the second most powerful man in Egypt, he still maintained his father’s legacy throughout his life becoming forever known as *Yosef HaSadiq*!

In our times no one forces us to accept their way of living over ours; however the influence of the surrounding culture is still very strong. As Sepharadim, we do not completely remove ourselves from society in order to protect ourselves from non-Jewish influence. However we certainly reject those aspects of non-Jewish culture that are contrary to our beliefs. Hanukkah is an opportune time to evaluate how well we are filtering out those aspects of our surrounding culture that contradict our religious teachings.

Wishing you all a Happy and Healthy Hanukkah!

Mr. Morris Arking is a Hazzan and Qoreh in the Brooklyn community. He is a noted expert on Sephardic laws and customs.

HANUKKAH AND THE THIRD BEIT HAMIQDASH

Rabbi Meyer Laniado

The story of Hanukkah as told through rabbinic sources focuses on an external force, the Greeks, culturally and politically oppressing the Jews. The goal of this oppression was not solely for an occupied nation to follow the laws of the occupier, but to destroy the laws, ideas and culture of the Torah. Not only was it legally forbidden for the Jews to follow or even study the Torah, the Jews were forced to desecrate the Torah.¹ What we find in some historical sources² is that this political and cultural war started internally. There were Jews who sought permission to be under Greek law as opposed to Torah law. These Jews took over some of the highest ranking positions in Judaism, such as the high priesthood, and used their position to promote Greek culture. The lesson of Hanukkah is that even when a majority of the Jews are anti-Torah, a foreign army is oppressing the Jews and its national institutions are corrupt, we can rebuild, regain and continue proper Torah Judaism. The strategy of how is found in the story of the Maccabees.

During the time of *Shimon haSadiq*³ and later Onias III, the Jews were treated well by the Greeks. In fact, the Greeks empowered the Jews to follow the Torah and paid for much of the Temple sacrifices. Antiochus III, who was the emperor at the time of Onias III, recognized Onias III and the Jews dedication to the Torah and sent a letter to Ptolemy stating:

“...we have determined, on account of their piety towards God, to bestow on them a pension for their sacrifices of animals that are fit for sacrifice, for wine, oil, and frankincense, the value of twenty thousand pieces of silver...I also order the work on the temple and the porticoes finished and anything else that ought to be rebuilt. For the materials of wood...tax free...and the same shall be done regarding those other materials which will be necessary in order to render the temple more glorious. Let all of the nations live according to the laws of their own country. And let the senate, the priests, the scribes of the temple, and the sacred singers be relieved from the poll tax, the crown tax, and other taxes also...”⁴

Antiochus III in this letter also stated that it should be illegal, according to Greek law, to desecrate certain Torah laws:

“It shall be lawful for no foreigner to come within the limits of the temple round about; which thing is forbidden also to the Jews, unless to those who, according to their own custom, have purified themselves. Nor let any flesh of horses, or of mules, or of any asses, be brought into the city...and, in general, that of any animal which is forbidden of the Jews to eat...and he that transgresseth any of these orders, let him pay to the priests three thousand drachmae of silver.”⁵

While the Jews were dedicated to the Torah, the Greeks respected the Jews’ devotion to Jewish law and supported the Jews.⁶ Unfortunately, there were many Jews who were more interested in Greek values and ideals. They were so bold as to request permission to not follow the law of the land, the Torah.

“At that time there appeared in the land of Israel a group of traitorous Jews who had no regard for the Law and who had a bad influence on many of our people... This proposal appealed to many people, and some of them became so enthusiastic about it that they went to the king and received from him permission to follow Gentile customs. They had surgery performed to hide their circumcision, abandoned the holy covenant, started associating with Gentiles, and did all sorts of other evil things...”⁷

The desire to desert the Torah and follow the Greek way of life was increasing, and from this culture emerged a corrupt priesthood. Jason, the brother of Onias III, bribed Antiochus IV for the High Priesthood, and deposed the righteous Onias III. Jason was a proponent of the Greek values and sought to ‘enlighten’ those Jews who were still following the old values of the Torah.⁸

“Jason came to office, he at once shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life. He set aside the existing royal concessions to the Jews, secured through John...and he destroyed the lawful ways of living and introduced new customs contrary to the law...the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hastened to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the call to the discus, disdaining the honors prized by their fathers and putting the highest values upon Greek forms of prestige...”⁹

So bent on the shift to Greek culture he requested the payments that were received from the Greeks to pay for the Temple sacrifices be stopped! He changed the culture in the Temple, and no longer were the priests zealous to perform the Temple rituals as they once were.¹⁰ This was a victory for those who despised the Torah of their fathers and strove to be like the

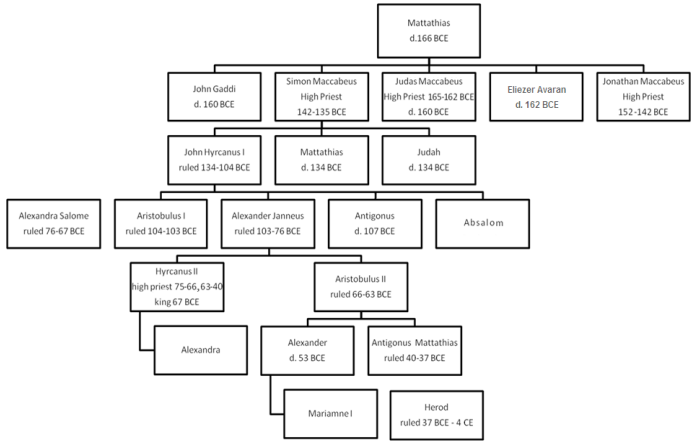
new ‘enlightened’ culture of the Greeks.¹¹

The Greeks actively sought to eradicate Judaism, building altars and burning incense outside the doors of faithful Jews, forcing them to worship idolatry.¹² They were malicious and did all they could to cause others to desecrate the Torah. The Jewish institutions including priesthood were corrupt.¹³ In such a scenario, does the continuation of Torah Judaism stand a chance?

Mattitiah and his family living in a town called Modi’in thought so and fought for Torah Judaism. When the officers of Antiochus came to Modi’in they requested that Mattitiah bring a sacrifice to *avoda zara*. Mattitiah refused and said: “not he nor his sons leave the religious worship of their country.”¹⁴ “His family was loyal to the Torah, and it was from his *bayit*, his family, that the Jewish institutions would be reestablished.

They realized that the core institution of the nation is the family unit, the *bayit*.¹⁵ Sometimes, the choice must be made: “should one follow one’s conscious and stay faithful to the way of one’s grandparents or follow the modern ways.” In the case of Hanukkah, the modern ways, the way of the Greeks, was promoted and supported by the largest Jewish institutions. When that happens, one needs to go back to the most fundamental Jewish institution, the *bayit*, to rebuild.¹⁶ That is why we light our victory symbol, the light of the Hanukkah, outside of each *bayit*, showing that each of our homes are aligned with the Torah Judaism, the side of the Maccabees. The celebration is on winning the cultural and political war, and reestablishing Jewish institutions with proper Jewish practice, values, ideas and ideals. May we merit to be the *bayit*, the family, that rebuilds the third *bayit*, the *Beit Hamiqdash*.

Rabbi Laniado is on track to complete a Master’s in Talmud from Bernard Revel Graduate School of Judaic Studies. He is currently a Rabbi at Congregation Magen David of West Deal and Hillel Yeshiva High School and Middle School.



Maccabean Dynasty

¹Beresheit Rabba 2:4, Pirkei deRibbi Eliezer 28, Mishne Torah Hanukkah 3:1

²Maccabees 1 & 2, and Josephus Antiquities XII and Maccabees 1 1 44-50 “The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king’s decree was death.”

³Josephus Antiquities XI 8 “whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers...he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired...”

⁴Josephus Antiquities XII 3 140-145

⁵Ibid 145-148

⁶Maccabees 2 3:1-3 “Now when the holy city was inhabited with all peace, and the laws were kept very well, because of the godliness of Onias the high priest, and his hatred of wickedness. It came to pass that even the kings themselves did honour the place, and magnify the temple with their best gifts. Insomuch that Seleucus of Asia of his own revenues bare all the costs belonging to the service of the sacrifices.” And Josephus Antiquities XII 3 126 “...the Jews prevailed and obtained leave to make use of their own customs...”

⁷Maccabees 1 1:13-15 and Josephus Antiquities XII 5 1 240-242 “...Menelaus and the sons of Tobias were distressed, and retired to Antiochus and informed him, that they were desirous to leave the laws of their country, and the Jewish way of living according to them, and follow the king’s laws, and the Grecian way of living: wherefore they desired permission to build them a Gymnasium at Jerusalem...Accordingly, they left off all the customs that belonged to their own country, and imitated the practices of the other nations.”

⁸Maccabees 2 1:7 “...from the time that Jason and his company revolted from the holy land and kingdom and burned the porch, and shed innocent blood...”

⁹Maccabees 2 3:10-15

¹⁰Mishna Yuma Chapter 2 Laws 1-4

¹¹Josephus Antiquities XII 5:1 240-242 see footnote 7 and Josephus Antiquities XII 5:4 255 “And indeed many Jews there were who complied with the king’s commands, either voluntarily...”

¹²Maccabees 1 1:54-“commanding the cities of Judea to sacrifice, city by city...built idol altars throughout the cities of Judea on every side and burnt incense at the doors of their houses, and in the streets.” Maccabees 1 2: 25 “...the royal official who was forcing the people to sacrifice...”

¹³See footnote 9

¹⁴Josephus Antiquities XII 6:2 269

¹⁵We were first beitYa’aqob, the house of Jacob. Later, the Jews went down to Egypt as ish ubeto, a man and his household. Later by the exodus from Egypt, it was each bayit that brought the qorban pesah. On the Pesah night in Egypt, it was not the individual persons who were protected; it was the bayit. Exodus 12:3-4, 7, 13. See footnote 16

¹⁶A strong bayit ensures the transmission of the values and lessons learned from the previous generations. The pre-nation of Israel in Egypt recognized who they were and had some sense of their own values. This was because they continued to have the institution of the bayit. They had enough recognition that they had a different set of values that they were able to not get completely swallowed up by the conventions of Egypt. They remembered where they came from and recognized who Abraham Isaac and Jacob were as well as the agreement that G-d made with them. It was precisely because of the bayit, the beitYa’aqob which then became ish ubeito, that the Israelites were grounded in their value system. The strength of these units ensured that even during the difficult times some of their heritage would be passed to the next generation.



Israel Spotlight

MY GIBUSH INTO THE IDF

Mr. Joseph Benun

This past week was my *gibush*/try-out, for the special forces unit *Duvdevan*, or the “cherry” unit in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Out of the 400 trying out for Special Ops Paratroopers as well as the Special Force unit *Maglan*, just over 100 were hand selected for a shot at one of the 20 available spots for *Duvdevan*, a unit that specializes in high risk arrests in Yehuda and Shomrom (aka the West Bank.) The three day *gibush* lasted from 4am on Monday until Thursday morning and was without a doubt, the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life.

It started with a 3k run on Sunday. We would be split into groups based on our individual times and sub-par candidates would be instantly disqualified from the *gibush*. I ran the 1.86 miles in 11:35, trimming 50 seconds off of my previous “bar-or.” We finished the day with some medical testing, various paperwork, and received the gear we would need for the following days- uniforms, a shovel, tent, sleeping bag, rucksack, a coat, sandbag, thermoses...

“We were given 7 minutes to dress and be downstairs with our siyud (gear), plus tefilin”

Monday, 4am:

“GET YOU’RE A**ES UP. *GIBUSH* HAS STARTED,” my commander screamed. We were given 7 minutes to dress and be downstairs with our *siyud* (gear), plus *tefilin* for the religious guys. Needless to say I was one of them, for I knew I could use all the help I could get. Once downstairs they proceeded to split us into *sevets* or groups of which the last three, 14 -16, would be soldiers eligible for *Duvdevan*. I got 14 along with my South African friend Jared, French friend Piere, and Levi, my friend from Miami.

A short man, fully dressed in black, mask and all, ran over to our group. *Sevet* 14, gear on your backs, 2 lines, after me.” He led us to a sand pit about 20 minutes outside of base and proceeded to give out numbered hats and tags. I was assigned #6.

The next five hours were hell. Sprints and crawls, back and forth, with little, if any, rest. Five minute breaks to chug our thermoses, and if we didn’t finish they would know. They were watching us, and nothing went unnoticed. If you’re rear end was too high in the crawls, they noticed. If you didn’t run the full length, they noticed. If you elbowed, kicked, or knocked people out of the way which so commonly occurred, they noticed. It kind of made me feel like a lab rat- they recorded every move and every decision.



After phase one, we moved to a grassy area for some more sprints. There were two stretchers, each with 70 kilos on top. The objective was simple- after a sprint the first 8 people would do a second sprint with the stretchers. Everyone else would do another sprint and a half in an attempt to catch up to the stretcher and swap out with someone carrying it. After about 2 hours of that, we were given 25 minutes to eat and pray. Meals were not breaks. They watched how we ate, what we ate, and how much. They watched if we helped one another, making sure everyone had what to eat, or just went at it like savages. For every meal we were given *menot krav*, a box full of canned foods. Tuna, beans, pineapple, pickles, and more tuna. Most people complain about the *menot krav*, I on the other hand happen to like them... for now... After stretcher sprints we went on a hike. Two stretchers became one heavy stretcher and running became almost impossible. It is here where I reached my limit. Up and down the same steep hill for nearly two hours and by the end, I could barely lift my legs. Both of my groins were pulled and every step was excruciating. Next up was a series of team exercises most of which were impossible to complete. For example, they gave us a rope and told us to hold hands. The first and last soldiers in the chain were instructed to hold each end of the rope, and the task was to make a knot in the rope. After 15 minutes and many different strategies, we were dubbed failures and sentenced to more sprints and even more crawls.

As the sun started to set, we made our way to the shooting ranges where we dropped off our stuff and were instructed to build a tent which we proceeded to take down 15 minutes later. Then they split us up into smaller groups of about 5 for the next task- navigation. One by one we were given a way point and less than one minute to look at the map. We’d then have to lead our group to the waypoint using the fastest route possible. After an hour of navigation, we went back to our bags and were given 15 minutes to eat some chocolate sandwiches and get to bed.

“I didn’t come to serve in Duvdevan, I came to serve in the IDF.”

Tuesday, Day 2:

We happened to get a lot of sleep...way more than I expected, about 8 hours with two 20 minute guard shifts in between. After waking up they took us straight back to the dreaded sand pits. We crawled for about 2 hours until breaking for breakfast and some more team exercises.

After a nice break from physical activity, we were instructed to load up the stretcher and given two minutes to run half way up a steep mountain. There the testers had set up four bags in the shape of a square and we were instructed to run around them as many times as we can while carrying sandbags on our shoulders. Nearly no one ran. After about 45 minutes we sat down and were told to give a speech on anything we wanted, if it wasn’t interesting, we’d get cut off. I spoke about Socrates and the importance of following rules in accord with just action. I think they liked it. Then we did another 30 or so minutes with the sandbags after which we were given three minutes to run down the mountain, fill our thermoses, and await the next task.

After stumbling back up the mountain we got into formation and were given 15 minutes to build a foxhole in order to hide from an enemy. I ripped the shovel out of my bag, proceeded up the mountain, and started to dig. After no more than a foot in I hit solid rock. What the hell am I going to do?! I thought to myself. Searching for an alternative spot, I came across a small crater with just enough space for me to lay down. I dug a small hole on each side,



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one facing the road and one facing up the mountain. I strategically set up two rocks facing the road where I could potentially rest the barrel of a gun and proceeded to pluck weeds and thorns to use as makeshift camouflage. After the 15 minutes were up, we were given an additional five to make a map of Israel facing North- Where the hell is North?!? I try envisioning the base's synagogue and knew that it pointed North toward Jerusalem. Right at that moment, G-d shined down on me and for a brief moment, the sun came out (I forgot to mention that it was raining on and off the entire time- it was freezing and buggers froze like icicles on the brim on my nose). I quickly pulled out my shovel, pointed it straight in the air, and glanced at my watch; 11:48. I knew that at 12 exactly, my shovel's shadow would be facing due North. I made the necessary adjustments and using branches, leaves, rocks, and some thorns for Gaza, I constructed a pretty creative map of Israel. At the end of our allotted time, our testers couldn't even find me. I explained to them the strategy behind my hide and map and without saying much, they told me to run down and join the others. Once fully assembled our group went on another stretcher hike up and down a mountain, this one even more steep than yesterday's. I don't know how long it lasted, but the entire time all I wanted to do was collapse into a little ball. But I soldiered on.

“Nearly 60 hours and 7 menot krav later, I ended up completing the gibush, an enormous accomplishment in and of itself.”

We made our way back to shelter. Those who didn't speak spoke, we were bombarded with some controversial questions such as “a storm is coming, right now, should we stop the *gibush*?” After most people replied no and gave their rationale, we were rewarded with more sprints.

Next they told us to make a larger map of Israel. It came out terrible. I hadn't been able to get a word in amongst all of the screaming teenagers, everyone trying to be heard... Then they asked us some geography questions and I was surprised at how little these Israeli kids knew (one of them put Be'er Sheba on the boarder of Jordan. It was actually very sad.) During the geography test each of us were taken to the side and told to take disassemble and reassemble a machine gun called the *Mag* (the gun Isaac Horowitz lugged around his entire service).

As night fell on day two, we were brought back to where we had slept the night before and given a sociometric test along with questions about ourselves. We filled them out and went to sleep with smiles on our faces, for the physical portion of the *gibush* had come to an end.

After a nice long sleep, we were woken up and lead back to our base. We were congratulated by our testers and told that we weren't as bad as they made us out to be, that the belittling was just part of the test. Although the physical portion had ended, the *gibush* itself did not. We'd each be interviewed by three testers who did not see us perform throughout the *gibush*. To my luck I was last, dead last to be interviewed, and as hard as the last two days had been, helplessly waiting for my number to be called was just as bad. My interview went pretty well, or so I hoped.

Nearly 60 hours and 7 *menot krav* later, I ended up completing the *gibush*, an enormous accomplishment in and of itself. There's a saying in the IDF- “three days for the next three years.” I disagree. More like “three days for the rest of your life,” and whereas it was the most difficult thing I've ever done, I know the hardest is yet to come. I get my answer on Monday and until then all I can do is pray, but I know in my heart that no matter where I end up, it will be the perfect place for me because in the end of the day I didn't come to serve in Duvdevan, I came to serve in the IDF.

Our community is proud to count Mr. Benun as one of ours. We pray for his safety and salute his efforts!

STANDING UP TO THE NEW ANTI SEMITISM

Mr. Murray Mizrachi

The mowing down of a young mother and her infant. The hacking murder of four rabbis while praying the silent *amidah*. The abduction and murder of three innocent students. The shooting of a lecturer and stabbing of innocent pedestrians. This evil all happened to *am yisrael* in Israel over the last few months. Hanukkah is a time of reflection. The Maccabees were proactive leaders who realized it was a time to take a stand to defend the Jewish Nation. They took back what was rightfully theirs and rededicated both themselves and the Temple to God and the Jewish people. Although these inhuman terror attacks grab the headlines are we aware of the more subtle war against our religious ideals and the state of Israel here in the USA?



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Our community students are exposed to an anti-religious, anti-Semitic, anti-Israel atmosphere on campus on a daily basis. The Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents* for 2012 showed an increase in anti-Semitic incidents on campus—nearly tripled in 2012.¹ Since the war in Gaza until the end of October 2014, over 90 anti-Israel events have taken place on U.S. college campuses around the country.² The American campus has become a hostile environment.

Perhaps you or your children in college have heard about the recent Palestinian “die-in” on Brooklyn College campus earlier this Fall? Or maybe you read about the Boycott Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movements that demonize Israel and the Jews as evil? Or more subtly perhaps your morals and ideals were confronted in an unfair way and mocked by a professor? We must make ourselves aware of these issues and train ourselves to counteract the biggest challenges in our times.

The first step to dealing with the new breed of anti-Semitism is to identify the problem. To be sure that Jews are signaled out in a negative way and held to a double standard, demonized and delegitimized;³ consider if Muslims, North Korea or the leaders of ISIS have been scrutinized to the same degree as Judaism, Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Why does such disproportionate action against Israel exist while Muslim countries such as Mauritania⁴ continue to enslave over 600,000 non-Muslim black slaves? Or how about the executions of homo-sexuals or religious minorities in Iran? Where is the outrage of the moral college campus that stands up for minorities and freedom? As Reverend Martin Luther King famously stated: “When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You're talking anti-Semitism.”⁵ The New world order of anti-Zionism is no longer about ethics, morality and values but pure anti-Semitism.

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” That was the infamous motto of Joseph Goebbels and the Nazi party. By strategically lying and undermining the basic tenets of the Jewish faith, The Palestinian Authority (PA) has engaged in a relentless propaganda campaign to deny legitimate Jewish sovereignty to any part of Israel. The PA and anti-Israel groups hope that the public can be conditioned, manipulated and become apathetic through repetition much the same as the Nazi party. Leading anti- Israel political and religious figures such as Yasser Arafat during the Camp David peace accord even went as far as remarking that “archaeologists have not found a single stone proving that the Temple of Solomon was there because historically the Temple was not in Palestine.” Such radical revisionists repeatedly assert that the Jewish presences on the temple mount, the Western Wall and Jerusalem are a sort of myth invented in the Talmudic era.⁶ Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) has documented PA President Abbas and senior PA officials using the term “alleged Temple” over 97 times in official speeches.

To start standing up to the new anti-Semitism we need to thoroughly educate ourselves with facts. Do we really know the Bible well enough to counter such claims?

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Have we stayed abreast of the current war Israel faces against radicalism on daily basis? Once we know the essentials we can start to speak out and speak up for Israel. We need to stay current with the most up to date news stories from sites like dailyalert.org to know what the facts are and speak up. In most cases the anti-Israel propaganda machine is outright lying but no-one cares enough to say anything both in campus and the world at large.⁷

The typical anti-Israel position is to A) first undermine the Bible, B) challenge am yisrael's unique connection to the land Israel and then C) fabricate outright lies.

"When the Zionist movement started to set in motion the Imperialist Settlement plan, it tried to base itself in the biblical legends...the Bible expresses a tradition of legends, that has no connection to history."⁸

Judaism, the Bible and even Hanukkah are all fabrications according to this view. In reality Jewish history and claims to Israel and the Temple Mount predate Islam by some 2,000 years. Anti-Israel advocates would like to claim the Bible was conjured as late as the Talmudic times to support their claims of sovereignty. Dr. Tayseer Al-Tamimi, PA Chief Justice of religious court has gone as far as saying "Jerusalem is the religious, political and spiritual capital of Palestine - the Jews have no right to it." This is a legitimate view according to the Anti-Israel establishment; who have publicly denied the Jewish right to worship at the Western Wall or live in Israel at all.⁹

In the spirit of Hanukkah we must begin standing up for truth and morality like our Maccabee forefathers so long ago. As Jews we must break the apathy and ignorance of the general public for the sake of Israel and our people. It starts by recognizing our new adversaries and getting educated. Speak out against BDS and anti-Semitism on campus and when people spread propaganda. Read our Bible, lobby your political representative and most importantly stay aware of current events.

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¹ "The Alarming Rise of Campus Anti-Semitism." FrontPage Magazine. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2013/joseph-klein/the-alarming-rise-of-campus-anti-semitism/>>.

² "After Israel-Gaza Conflict, Growing Anti-Semitism On US College Campuses." International Business Times. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.ibtimes.com/after-israel-gaza-conflict-growing-anti-semitism-us-college-campuses-1720882>>.

³ "Jewish Political Studies Review." 3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://jcpa.org/phases/phases-sharansky-f04.htm>>.

⁴ Have you ever heard of Mauritania?

⁵ Troy, Gil. The Daily Beast. Newsweek/Daily Beast. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/01/18/remaking-martin-luther-king-as-anti-zionist.html>>.

⁶ "Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) Bulletins." ("All Media." All Media. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=605>>. Source: Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, Dec. 3, 2013

⁷ "Apathy and Anti-Zionism - Times of Israel - Jewish Ideas Daily." Apathy and Anti-Zionism - Times of Israel - Jewish Ideas Daily. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.jidaily.com/J6a>>.

⁸ Dr. Jarir Al-Qidwa, head of the PA public library and Arafat's advisor on education, and Dr. Issam Sissalem, senior historian and former head of history at PA University, 2004. See note below, this is not even true according to Islamic sources such as the Quran.

⁹ "Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) Bulletins." PMW Bulletins. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <http://palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc_id=11046>.

THE WINNING JEWISH COMBINATION - THE MIGHTY MACCABEEM

Rabbi Elie Abadie M.D.

I often ask myself: what is the right path that a Jew should follow? After all, the Jew has been an inhabitant of this Earth for over 3400 years. He has lived among many nations and cultures. He has intermingled with many civilizations and customs. Many opportunities were presented to the Jew to learn, internalize and adopt different ways of life and to choose different paths to follow. Yet, after all these thousands of years, the Jew has remained loyal to his people and proud of his tradition.

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We know however, that there are many different Jewish groups; Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Hassidim, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc. Which Jew is really the model for victory, praise and a promising future? As you can imagine the different groups have asked themselves this question, and have had different answers; of course each one justifying their own practices and paths. Several modes of lifestyle, different customs, and even conflicting attitudes when interpreting Jewish law and past history are examples of these divergent opinions.

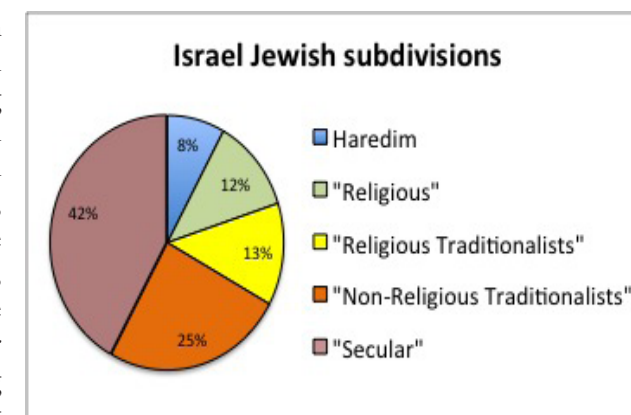
In our own lifetime, unfortunately, there is a small and marginal group of Jews who not only deny the existence of the State of Israel because they believe that we can only return to Zion after the coming of the Messiah, but also are outwardly supportive of our enemies who unequivocally support the destruction of the Jewish people. They believe passivity is our fate. There are other Jews whose isolationist behavior reflect their beliefs, and exclude themselves from the rest of the world. In contradistinction to these, there are Jews convinced that assimilation and apologetic behavior is the way to "be a Jew", and will even question their basic right to exist just to find favor in the world at large.

I cannot presume to know what the exact and correct Jewish behavior should be in our times, but I can look back in our history and reflect on the Jews we will be remembering and celebrating during the holiday of Hanukkah. Our heroes, the *Maccabeem*, combined piety, loyalty to our tradition, pride in our people and activism on behalf of a Jewish State. They are often described as mighty warriors, yet their objective was to secure freedom and liberty, and to observe the Jewish tradition. The *Maccabeem* took action when it was needed, not waiting for a possibility of a miracle or Divine intervention. The *Maccabeem* taught us that we can be proud Jews, and fight for our rights to observe our customs and traditions without undermining religious principles. Survival and success were very much dependent on bold actions and certainly self-defense.

The story of Hanukkah has become associated with a miracle of a small jug of oil lasting for a much longer time than it should have been. A miracle reflects the direct intervention of *Hashem*, and unfortunately we are not privy in our day to such an apparent revelation of G-D, although hidden miracles occur on a daily basis without us realizing. The *Maccabeem* were however the beneficiaries of an even greater and evident miracle, the victory in the war of the weaker against the mightier, the few against the many. We celebrate their accomplishments year after year. The story of Hanukkah lets us know that *Hashem* is in favor of the Jewish people helping themselves, and defending their ideals without disposing of their G-D given traditions. It is my hope that we all take a lesson from a brief time in history when G-D found favor with His people and Jews were proud and determined.

Hag Urim Sameah.

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WAR, OIL AND DIVINE LIGHT

Mr. Edward Benjamin

What is the nature of Hanukkah? What exactly are we celebrating? Are we celebrating the incredible victory of a group of poorly trained Jews against the greatest military at the time? How about the one remaining sealed container of oil that was found in the *Bet Hamiqdash*? Or maybe we are celebrating the miracle that the one container of oil lasted for eight days when it was only supposed to last one? In preparing to write this article most people that I asked gave me one of the above three answers, or some sort of combination.

HaRambam in the *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of Hanukkah Chapter 3) described the origins of the holiday as follows:

(1) “In the time of the second *Bet Hamiqdash* when Greece ruled, they decreed decrees on Israel and nullified their religion and they did not allow them to be involved in the Torah and *Misvot*. Greece’s hands were spread out on the money and on the daughters of Israel...and they caused incredible pain to Israel until the God of our fathers had mercy and saved them. And the house of Hashmonai, the High Priests, killed Greece and saved Israel from their [Greece’s] hands, and they [Hashmonaim] appointed a king from of the priests, and the kingdom of Israel returned for over 200 years. (2) And when Israel overcame their oppressors and destroyed them, it was the 25th of Kislev, and they entered the sanctuary and found only one container of pure oil that only had in it enough to light for one day, and they lit with it the arrangement of candles for eight days until they crushed olives and removed oil from them. (3) **And it is because of this**, that the Sages of that generation enacted that these 8 days, beginning of the 25th of Kislev should be days of happiness, [of reciting] *Hallel*, and that candles should be lit in the openings of all homes night after night of the 8 nights, in order to show-off and make known the miracle...”

“the miracle of the oil is what separates Hanukkah from all other moments in Jewish History where miracles were provided for our salvation”

Although the Rambam includes the military victory, as well as the return of the Israel monarchy, it seems that he understands the establishment of Hanukkah as a result of the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. Hence he waits until the *Halacha* following his description of the miracle of the oil, to say, “and because of this.” He also says that the purpose of the *Misva* of lighting the candles is to show off “the miracle,” as opposed to “the miracles.” This indicates that there is only one miracle that the lighting of the candles is intended to publicize, namely, the miracle regarding the oil.

When analyzed critically this seems a little strange. How could it be that after the entire nation and religion of Israel were rescued from near extinction, that our celebration of Hanukkah be established merely on the fact that a container of oil lasted for eight days? Furthermore, the *Al HaNissim* (lit; “About the Miracles”) passage that is added in the *Amida* and in *Birkat HaMazon* during the days of Hanukkah makes no mention whatsoever of any miracle regarding the oil.

I believe the answer to this ambiguity is to be found in a comment by the Rambam in a completely different context. In his commentary on the *Mishnah*, the Rambam describes a scroll called *Megilat Taanit* (lit; The Scroll of Fasts) that was extant at the time of the Talmud.

“They had a scroll in their time and it was called *Megilat Taanit*, and in it there were **days of remembrance in specific months which God performed miracles with them and nullified oppressions**. Therefore these times were important in their eyes. Of the days listed, there were some that were prohibited to eulogize, and there were some that were prohibited to fast upon. And it has already happened that these days have all been nullified, and there is no prohibition whatsoever to fast and eulogize on these days...” (Taanit 2:8).

The Rabbis of the Talmud did not institute holidays for every one of the miracles mentioned in *Megilat Taanit*. Miracles are not something about which Jews establish holidays. There were, unfortunately, many times that miracles were necessary in order to ensure the survival of the nation of Israel as seen from the dates recorded in *Megilat Taanit*. Miracles teach us that God will not let the enterprise of Israel be destroyed, but they alone do not teach us something that deserves the establishment

of a holiday.

I think that the miraculous military victory of the Hashmonaim over the Greeks would have been relegated to just another date in *Megilat Taanit* had it not been for the miracle of the oil. We wouldn’t know about the “miracle of Hanukkah” just like we are unfamiliar with the other days in *Megilat Taanit*.

I believe the miracle of the oil is what separates Hanukkah from all other moments in Jewish History where miracles were provided for our salvation. The miracle of the oil created the context for which to understand the military victory. In other words, it was only after the Jews found the oil, and that it lasted miraculously for eight days that the Jews could retrospectively look back at the military victory as being “from God.” They were able to understand that the military victory was not a necessity to ensure their survival, but a display of “love from God.” What was no doubt an unprecedented and miraculous defeat could be seen from two diametrically opposed perspectives. It could be seen from the purely historical perspective, namely, that a group of religious zealots who, by using guerilla warfare were able to defeat a powerful army. It could also be seen from the “Jewish” perspective, namely that God’s Providence was guiding the military victory. This perspective however, can only be seen, recognized, and appreciated in retrospect. We can only see the “hand of God” in history when looking back. It is only when the Jews experienced the miracle of the oil, it was only when they were able to continue the lighting of the Menorah uninterrupted, that they looked back and were able to realize that the military defeat had much greater significance than they would have ever imagined. We could imagine the Jews who found the oil saying to themselves, “now this was worth fighting for.” The spiritual salvation that is a result of the miracle of the oil, informs the physical salvation of the military battles.

Hanukkah, then, is not about either of the miracles, nor is it about both. Rather, it is about the interaction of the two miracles, and the divine perspective of history we hope to achieve by commemorating them. Every year, we light candles in the front of our homes to show the world that we subscribe to the “Jewish” perspective of Hanukkah. We believe in God’s Providence over the nation of Israel, and we believe that by looking at and appreciating the “smaller miracles” like a container of oil lasting for an unprecedented amount of time that we can look back and understand history as being guided by the present but hidden hand of God. In celebrating over a container of oil for 8 nights, we can create a lens from which we understand ourselves, our unique history, and our relationship with the God of history.



The Bet Hamiqdash

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THE SCA, THE SRC/AF, PROJECT EDUCATION
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