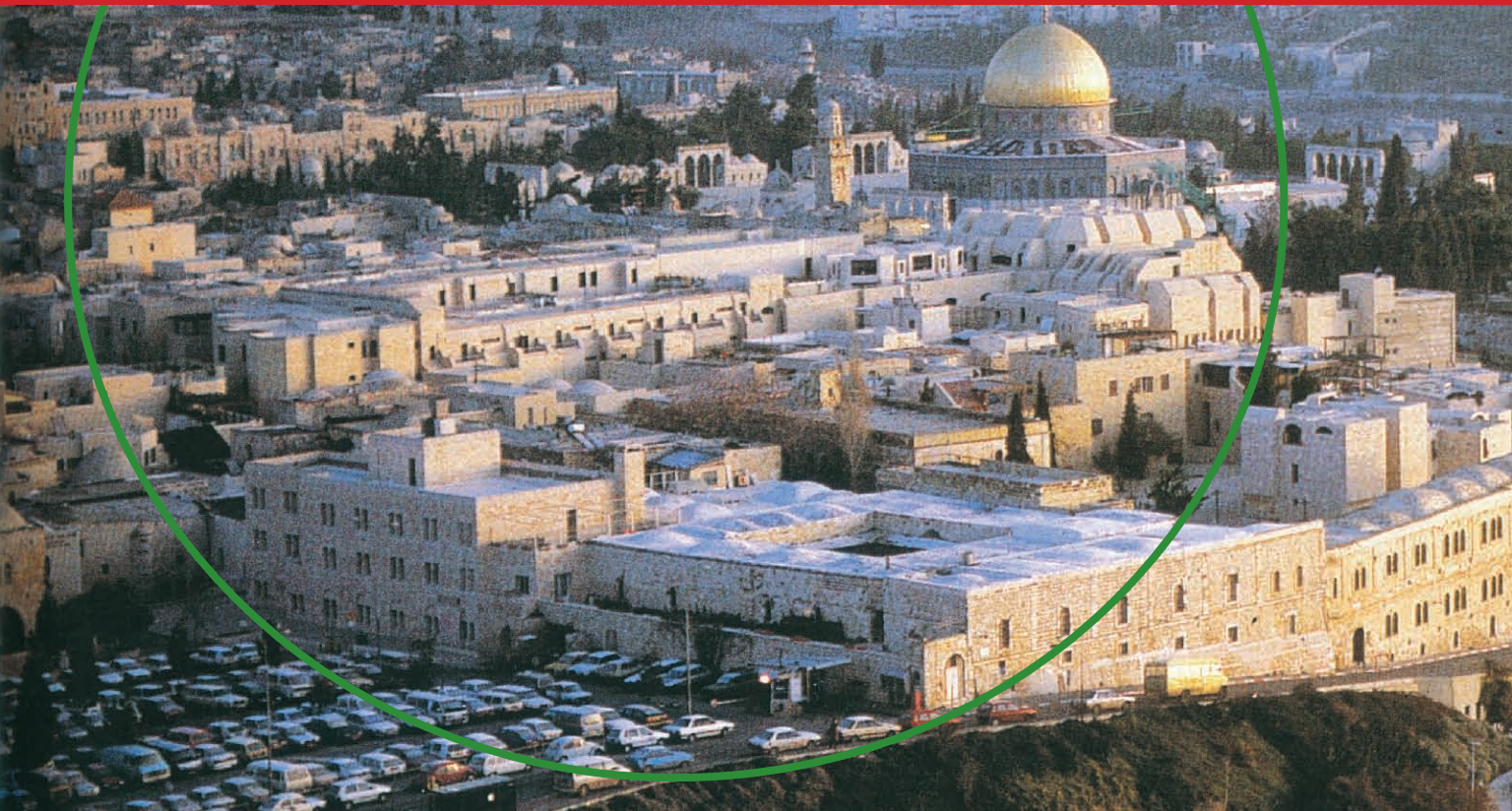


Fall 2010 Edition
Happy New Year 5771

HAMERKAZ

PRESENTS **A PUBLICATION OF THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER**



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

**SECuring
Our Jewish Future**

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Steven Nessim
Prof. Eli Nissim
Dr. Salvador Sarfatti
Neil J. Sheff
Marcia Israel Weingarten

Larry Azose, World Executive Director
lla@secjerusalem.org

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, Director of Special Projects
rdb@secjerusalem.org

SEC Jerusalem Campus

Israel Shalem, Administrative Director
ishalem@secjerusalem.org

SEC Chapters

Los Angeles • Argentina • New York • Montreal

World Executive Offices
6505 Wilshire Blvd • Suite 320
Los Angeles, CA 90048
phone: 310.441.9361 fax: 310.441.9561
email: info@secjerusalem.org

SEC Jerusalem - Educational Headquarters:
Batei Machasseh No. 1
P.O.B. 14326

Old City Jerusalem 91142, Israel
tel: 972 2-628-2344 fax: 972 2-628-4480
General Mailbox: info@secjerusalem.org

SEC Latin America
Tucuman 2153, (1050)
Buenos Aires ,Argentina
tel: 54 11- 4954-3226 fax: 54 11- 4954-3224
General Mailbox: buenosaires @ secjerusalem.org



From the Chairman

Ronald J. Nessim

This has been an exciting year of progress for the SEC.

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, who really lives and embodies our centrist Sephardic philosophy, joined us last Spring on a half time basis as our Director of Special Projects. Among his responsibilities these past few months have been drafting certain key sections of our Long Range Plan, planning our incredibly successful first annual Sephardic Summer Institute this past July in Jerusalem and planning local programs. We are incredibly blessed to have Rabbi Bouskila with us and are in discussions to make his relationship with the SEC full time and permanent. Larry Azose remains our executive director and he and Rabbi Bouskila present a good complement of skills for us to build on.

We held our first annual Summer Institute this past July in our own beautiful buildings in the Rova, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. It was truly an amazing experience for all of us who participated. We began the Institute on a Monday night and concluded it on Saturday night after Shabbat. We participated in discussions with great academics, rabbis and others, including Professor Zvi Zohar of Bar Ilan University, Rabbi Danny Landes of the Pardes Institute, Jerusalem Post reporter Jonah Mandel, Yossi Klein Halevi from the Hartman Institute, Rabbi Yisach Chouraqui from Memizrach Shemesh, Member of Knesset Rabbi Haim Amsellem, Dr. Ariel Picard from the Hartman Institute and our own rabbis in attendance, including Rabbis Bouskila, Moshe Benzaquen, Elie Abadie and Maimon Villareal. The principal purpose of the Institute was to continue defining the philosophy of the SEC and the special niche it can play in the Jewish world. While the attendance in the Institute was intentionally small this year, we intend to open it up next summer to a broader attendance and it is something all of you should seriously consider attending. We also plan to host a rabbinic conference to run side by side with the lay Institute with some joint programs and discussions this coming summer.

Even apart from the Summer Institute, when any of you are in Israel, you should consider the SEC your home! One of our greatest assets are the buildings we own in the heart of the Jewish world. Our great facilities staff led by Israel Shalem is ready to welcome you. Our three buildings include a main and several satellite dining rooms that can host beautiful lunches and dinners after simchas at the Kotel or for any reason whatsoever.

We recently completed a comprehensive five year long range plan. Sections of the Plan include (1) our philosophy, a scholarly section authored by Rabbi Bouskila, (2) our two year plan for programs on our Israel campus, including high school groups and our Lev HaRova program where we will provide short term programs and stays for visiting school and adult groups sponsored by other organizations, (3) our five year plan for our Israel campus, including a one year gap program before college, and rabbinic enrichment and training programs, (4) Diaspora programs, including our ongoing Classes for the Masses, the bi-annual Film Festival, and a one year course on all aspects of Sephardic Jewry that Rabbi Bouskila is organizing, which we are co-sponsoring with the American Jewish University in Los Angeles and which will start this fall, (5) religious standards for all SEC programs reflecting our centrist approach, (6) Latin America programs and strategy, (7) programs in Israel for Israelis, including 2-3 day educational seminars for adults and bar and bat mitzvah programs, (8) building partnerships with other Jewish, Sephardic and non Sephardic, organizations, (9) planned improvements to our Israel campus, including a major renovation of the Spanish courtyard building, (10) a marketing plan, (11) governance and (12) financial.

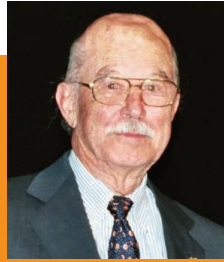
(continued on page 3)

SEC MISSION

The SEC is dedicated to ensuring Jewish identity and continuity by transmitting our rich Sephardic legacy to all Diaspora Jews, especially our youth.

Focusing on the timeless values of unity, compassion, sensitivity, tolerance and moderation embodied by Sephardic Judaism, we promote strength of family & community, pride of heritage & customs, increased knowledge of Torah & practice of Mitzvot, growth in spirituality, a traditional approach to Halacha, engagement with the modern world & society, and a meaningful connection to Israel, our People & Homeland.

MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER



Dear Friends,

Over the course of the last 30 years, the Sephardic Educational Center has grown into an international organization. Our world-center in Jerusalem, occupying historic buildings at the entrance of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and steps from the Kotel, stands to welcome all visitors. The spectacular buildings of the Center serve as an anchor for the world's Sephardim as well as the larger Jewish community of which we are a proud part.

More than 40 years ago, I began working toward bringing together the hundreds of immensely rich and diverse Sephardic communities from around the globe and ensuring that the Sephardic traditions would be properly respected and firmly established in the modern world. The Sephardic worldview is one that stresses tradition, but moderation and tolerance. It shies away from factions and radicalism and endeavors to find the intersection of the spiritual and traditional realms of faith and religion with the modern and secular world. The Sephardic communities and rabbis offer valuable lessons that every Jewish community can benefit from.

All we have accomplished would never have been possible without our wonderful volunteers and staff, and our task is by no means accomplished. I am proud to see the new initiatives and roles the center has taken on. This year, we are lucky to proudly welcome Rabbi Daniel Bouskila as Director of Special Projects. I am confident of his ability to transmit the Sephardic worldview to our next generation. I also appreciate the efforts of our Executive Director Larry Azose And Israel Shalem who is in charge of our Israel campus.

The Center could not exist without the hard work of our dedicated Executive Board. My wife, Freda, and I are happy with the transition to a new generation of leaders. Our board chair, Ron Nessim, as well as Sarita Fields, Ray Mallel, Steve Nessim, Eli Nissim in Israel, Salvador Sarfatti in Argentina, Neil Sheff and Marcia Israel-Weingarten all have worked hard to ensure the Center's continued success and future growth. We hope to add to our board and executive committee in the coming year so there will be new opportunities to get involved.

On behalf of my wife and family, I send you our warmest wishes for a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year. Next year in Jerusalem at the SEC!

Tizku L'shanim Rabot
Dr. Jose A. Nessim

(continued from page 2) Several months ago, we moved our office from our stand alone office on Santa Monica Blvd in West Los Angeles to the Jewish Federation building at 6505 Wilshire Blvd. Once again it is important to us be part of the greater Jewish world and, in addition to putting on our own programs, to build partnerships with other Jewish organizations. It is our philosophy that being Sephardic is no longer just an ethnic phenomenon. My wife is Askenazi. Rather, as set forth in the philosophy section of our Long Range Plan, being Sephardic is an approach to Judaism that is open to all Jews, Ashkenazi or Sephardic. The Classical Sephardic Jewish approach is a traditional but moderate, unifying, centrist and non denominational approach to Judaism that embraces the modern world.

I have been honored to work as chair of the Executive Committee these past years with my fellow skilled and hard working executive committee members whose names are to the side of this column.. We are now ready to expand opportunities for others to get involved on our board and committees. Our success depends on it! If you are interested in getting involved, and I hope that you are, please contact our LA office and talk to Larry Azose, our Executive Director.

Finally, I want to thank my dad, Jose Nessim, who had the vision to start the SEC thirty years ago and to keep it running all of these years, and my mother, Freda, who stood by his side and supported him throughout. A torch has been passed to the next generation. Whether the SEC lives up to its incredible potential is up to all of us. I hope that we succeed.



SEC LOS ANGELES



10TH LOS ANGELES SEPHARDIC JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

Film Festival Program

OPENING NIGHT- SUNDAY - NOVEMBER 14, 2010 - PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

“Coco” France, 2009 (105 min.)

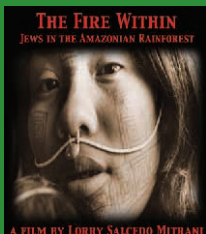
Starring French-Moroccan Jewish actor/comedian Gad Elmaleh, who in 2007 he was voted “la personnalité la plus drôle de France” (The Funniest Person in France). Coco was one of France’s biggest box office hits of the year. A self-made man who has it all, Coco has reached the top of French society and realized just about every dream he could imagine since he first arrived in France 15 years earlier, a penniless immigrant. But he has one great challenge ahead of him: to arrange the bar mitzvah for his son, which he sees as an extravaganza for the country to marvel at. His son, however, helps to remind us that the trappings of wealth can interfere with the love and attention every child desires.

TUESDAY - NOVEMBER 16, 2010

Special Evening: “The Lost Jews”

“The Fire Within” Peru, 2008 (60 min.)

The survival of spirit, belief and heritage. This is the story of the unique Jewish community of Iquitos, Peru. Original Jewish traditions of Spanish Moroccan traders became mixed with indigenous Amazonian life creating a Jewish community struggling for identity.



A FILM BY LORRY SALCEDO MITRANI

TUESDAY - NOVEMBER 16, 2010



“About Sugarcane and Homecoming” Brazil, 2008 (54 min.)

The story of a growing number of people in the North Eastern part of Brazil, on a quest for identity and faith. They are born into Catholicism yet claim they are a part of Judaism. They congregate and create a community that is becoming a sub culture of Judaism, a Jewish community that follows traditional Jewish religion and rites, practices Jewish family and communal life, but is not recognized by the Jewish establishment worldwide. They all hold the conviction that they are descendants of Jews forced to convert to Catholicism after the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the forced conversion in Portugal.

Followed by a panel discussion with Rabbis Daniel Bouskila and Maimon Villareal

WEDNESDAY - NOVEMBER 17, 2010

“Among the Righteous” U.S., 2010 (60 min.)

Did any Arabs save Jews during the Holocaust? That's the question author Robert Satloff had in mind when he set out to discover the lost, true stories of survival, courage and betrayal in Arab lands during World War II. The history of the Holocaust in Europe is well-documented, but the history of what happened to the Jewish people of North Africa has been mostly forgotten, even in the very towns and cities where it occurred. The truth is remarkable and fascinating; one that needs to be told.

“The Pioneers” Israel, 2009 (50 min.)

This film depicts the establishment of the town of Sderot from the viewpoint of its first settlers-Sephardic immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East who were transported on trucks in the middle of the night to a transit camp in the desert.

THURSDAY - NOVEMBER 18, 2010



“The Name My Mother Gave Me” Israel, 2009 (60 min.)

A film about growth and self-discovery. We follow Ethiopian Israeli youth who meet at a leadership training program in Israel. Their year of learning culminates in a journey to Ethiopia where they return to their native villages and confront their roots. Though, back home in Israel, all the participants would consider themselves members of the fringes of Israeli society, in the highlands of the Ethiopian landscape they discover the universality of their experiences and their shared commitment to their new home in Israel. How will this journey transform them?

“I want to Remember; He wants to Forget”

U.S., 1997 (62 min.)

Fifty years ago in Skopje, Macedonia, Solomon Adizes and his son Ichak were sent by the Italians and Bulgarians to a concentration camp. Disguised as Muslims, they managed to escape to Albania, where they found sanctuary with Muslim villagers. Solomon pretended to be a doctor and earned a reputation throughout the entire region. After the war, they returned to Yugoslavia and from there immigrated to Israel. Fifty years later Professor Ichak Adizes and his father Solomon return to the concentration camp in the heart of Skopje, and from there back to Albania to meet the family that saved them from the Nazis.

SUNDAY- NOVEMBER 21, 2010



“Father's Footsteps” (“Comme ton Père”) France, 2008 (95 min.)

In the early 1970s, the Maimons, a rambunctious but tight knit Tunisian-Israeli family, settle in Paris seeking adventure and fortune. Felix (Gad Elmaleh), Mireille (Yael Abecassis) and their two young sons rely on each other, especially when Felix's minor crimes escalate to bank robbery after he meets a local Jewish gangster. Eleven-year-old Michael, who always thought of his father as a “superhero,” discovers that maybe his definition of hero needs to change. A tender emotional portrait of a son whose allegiance to his father is tested and of a fiercely protective mother trying to shield her children from the truth.

10th SEC Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival

Honorees

"Celebrating SEC at 30"

Dr. Jose and Freda Nessim

Founders of the Sephardic Educational Center

Their vision has inspired thousands of young people to experience Judaism through the spiritual, intellectual and cultural values of the Sephardic heritage. By founding the SEC in the Old City of Jerusalem, and its many branches throughout the world, they have taken their place in history as preservers of the Sephardic heritage, and as promoters of a moderate, tolerant and attractive form of Judaism. For their unique vision, and in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the SEC, we proudly bestow upon them our highest honor, the 2010 Maimonides Lifetime Achievement Award.



Michael Benaroya At the young age of 25, Michael Benaroya made a splash in Hollywood by founding his own film finance and development company, named Benaroya Pictures. And while his list of credits may be short, it is nothing shy of remarkable. Benaroya co-financed and executive produced the company's first project, the critically acclaimed feature New York, I Love You. He also produced and financed the company's second film, the recently released romantic comedy "The Romantics" featuring Katie Holmes, Anna Paquin, Josh Duhamel, Adam Brody, Malin Akerman and Elijah Wood.

With his next project, the Wall Street thriller Margin Call starring Kevin Spacey, set to begin production in June, and numerous other projects in the works, Benaroya is busy developing new ways to usher film and television projects from inception to the screen and creating high concept ideas that can exploit multiple formats such as videogames, web content, graphic novels and more.

In the three and a half years since founding Benaroya Pictures, Michael has shown the promise, talent, and creativity to ensure a long lasting career in entertainment. Michael is proud of his Ladino- Sephardic upbringing in Seattle, Washington.

Emmanuelle Chriqui continues to build upon her career in film and television. She starred alongside Adam Sandler in Columbia Pictures comedy “You Don’t Mess with the Zohan,” as well as Adrien Brody in “Cadillac Records.” Recently, she completed production on Renny Harlin’s “Georgia” opposite Andy Garcia. Chriqui can be seen in the independent film “Saint John of Las Vegas” opposite Steve Buscemi as well as director Sebastian Gutierrez’s “Electra Luxx” the comedy follow-up to “Women In Trouble” in which Chriqui also starred in with Carla Gugino.

On television, she continues to reprise her role as Sloan on the HBO Comedy series “Entourage” opposite Kevin Connolly.

Born in Montreal in a Moroccan-Sephardic family and raised in Toronto, upon arriving in LA, Chriqui quickly made a name for herself, landing roles in New Line Cinema’s “Detroit Rock City,” Paramount/Nickelodeon’s “Snow Day” and the cult favorite “100 Girls.” It was Miramax’s “On the Line,” however, that provided Chriqui with her first leading role in a studio film. Her other film roles include “Wrong Turn,” “In The Mix,” “Rick,” “Waiting,” “The Crow: Wicked Prayer,” and “Tortured.” On the small screen, she had recurring roles on both The O.C. and the HBO series Unscripted, a series from George Clooney and Steven Soderbergh.

Emmanuelle, along with Robin Wright Penn, Emile Hirsch, and Joel Madden, helped launch RAISEHOPEFORCONGO.ORG with respected humanitarian John Prendergast.

She currently splits her time between Los Angeles and New York.



Camera Set, Rolling... *Action!*

by Denah Angel & Elianna Rome

Get ready for the 10th Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival! This year we return with a particularly exciting event, the “My Sephardic Experience” Film Competition. The competition is broken down into three different age groups, Group A: High School (Grades, 9, 10, 11 & 12 as of September 2010), Group B: College Students (Ages 18-22 as of September 2010), Group C: Young Professional (Ages 23-35 as of September 2010). Be creative! The Sephardic content can be from a historical or modern perspective.

The purpose of the film competition is to engage young adults in recognizing and learning about the Sephardic heritage. The competition will introduce them to the art of film making as well as expose a new generation to the SEC and our Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival. In the past applicants have been exposed to prestigious professionals in the industry as well as gaining their own experience as independent filmmakers

This year the competition is co-chaired by Denah Angel & Elianna Rome and they encourage everyone who wants participate to submit an entry. If you have an idea and need a crew or vice versa please feel free to contact them directly denahangel@gmail.com or erome123@gmail.com. We want to help your creative vision come to fruition!

For more information and application forms visit www.sephardicfilmfestival.com



The New C4M

(Classes for the Masses)

by Elianna Rome and Denah Angel



Classes for the Masses (C4M) is back and in full force. This group was established in the '90s by SEC-LA and has been revitalized with a new generation of enthusiastic young adults. This group aims to provide both educational and social experiences for ages 18 to 35. Classes for the Masses brings together a diverse group of young professionals in a social environment where everyone who participates can establish lasting friendships and participate in the greater cause of strengthening the next generation of Jewish leaders in Los Angeles.

As the founder of the Young Adult Movement for the Sephardic Educational Center, Neil Sheff has worked hard to put together a new young professional board, eager to be involved in this cause. We are happy to be co-chairing this committee. The lectures have been taking place at the beautiful Luxe Hotel in Bel-Air, Ca. These lectures provide an opportunity for young people to socialize and network at the hotel bar prior to the speaker, as well as an opportunity to hang out and socialize afterwards.

The summer series has included Rabbis and scholars from throughout the Los Angeles area, speaking on a variety of topics including prayer, Jewish history and current Israel politics. In addition to the wonderful educational programming, we also hosted our first social event of the year with a hike at beautiful Temescal Canyon. The group intends to host many more social/networking events throughout the year. We also have a facebook page, where you can join and check for upcoming events. More information about this group and other SEC groups and events can be found on the website at www.secjerusalem.org.



Consul General of Israel Jacob Dayan



New Office Dedication and Welcome Reception for Rabbi Daniel Bouskila





Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cordozo with Neil Sheff



Moussa Shaaya, President of Kahal Joseph in Los Angeles with wife, Shohleh



Former Justice Minister and SEC Counsel, Moshe Nissim, with Mrs. Nissim, Marcia Israel Weingarten, Sartia Fields and Rabbi Bouskila

Sephardic Summer Institute



Mayor Jackie Levy of Bet She'an with Rabbi Bouskila



Special Guest, Knesset Minister Rabbi Haim Amsellem discussing his work on conversion



Jonah Mandel, News Editor & Religious Affairs Correspondent, Jerusalem Post



The SSI opened with a warm welcome to Jerusalem from Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, Director of the Summer Institute and Larry Azose, the World Executive Director to the Sephardic Educational Center's first ever program of its kind.

Participants met in the Old City of Jerusalem, in the heart of the Jewish world, and at the headquarter campus of the SEC where they spent the week together exploring the philosophy of Classic Sephardic Judaism. Our distinguished faculty of speakers, ranking from the leading academic and educational institutions in Israel challenged us to look beyond the traditional regional and ethnic definitions of the word "Sephardic." These scholars enlightened us to the unique worldview of Classic Sephardic Judaism, ultimately demonstrating that the word "Sephardic" can, indeed, transcend birthplace and ethnicity. The ultimate goal of our week of studies, excursions and discussions was a renewed Mission Statement for the Sephardic Educational Center, positioning the SEC as an organization whose program offerings reflect a unique philosophy that can appeal to Jews of all backgrounds.

There is a new spirit of activism that seems to be emerging in the SEC, and this Sephardic Summer Institute is only one of many new and renewed programs that our organization has undertaken for the coming year. Through these programs, we have a unique opportunity to make a positive impact in the Jewish world, promoting and teaching our unique philosophy of "tradition, modernity, intellect, spirituality and culture." Indeed, participants were treated to an intellectually stimulating and spiritually uplifting week of learning together, forging of new friendships and relationships- personally, professionally and as an organization-and sharing the vision for the continuity of our Sephardic communities.



Banner on Hotel

A Tradition with Vision: The Philosophy of the SEC

by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

(The following are excerpts of the paper presented at the Sephardic Summer Institute, Friday, July 30, 2010. The complete work is available on the SEC website)

The Sephardic Educational Center (SEC) is a Jewish organization whose philosophy, educational programs and practice of Judaism reflects Classic Sephardic Judaism, expressed by a fusion between a halakhic lifestyle, tradition and modernity. Judaism is at once our sacred heritage from the past, and our way of life in the modern world. As such, the SEC's mode of Judaism reflects the continuity of halakhic living, and Sephardic traditions, culture and heritage, all living harmoniously with the modern world. Recognizing that individual Jews represent a wide range of observance levels and personal beliefs, the SEC operates as a non-denominational organization that invites and welcomes Jews of all ethnic backgrounds and observance levels who seek to study and experience a Jewish way of life that respects tradition, embraces modernity, celebrates culture, and promotes intellectual and spiritual growth. The SEC reaches out to educate and inspire all Jews with its uniquely Sephardic philosophy of "halakhic tradition, modernity, tolerance, spirituality and culture."

Defining "Classic Sephardic Judaism":

In an article titled "Can Sephardic Judaism Be Reconstructed?", Daniel Elazar addresses this question with the following definition:

One of the greatest, if not the greatest, contribution of Sephardic Jewry was its approach to the theory and practice of Judaism. Iberian Jewry reworked the Jewish materials it inherited from Eretz Israel, Babylonia and North Africa into classical forms, thought through and organized systematically, whether in halakha, philosophy or mysticism, to offer a balanced theory and practice, not given to excess, seriously Jewish, yet worldly and cosmopolitan. Classic Sephardic Judaism was designed by men who lived in the larger world and were active in its affairs, most of whom wanted a Judaism no less rigorous than their Ashkenazi brethren in its essentials, but flexible in its interpretations and applications.

Dr. Elazar's definition is more pronounced and illuminated by Rabbi Yitschak Chouraqui, in his recent article "The Leadership and Tradition of Sephardi Sages in the Modern Era." Rabbi Chouraqui writes:

Sephardic Judaism emphasizes different fundamental points that can be designated as Classical: (a) Tradition - that is to say the continuity of the heritage; concepts of loyalty, a sense of belonging to the general public, and mutual responsibility both in the present and in relation to earlier generations. (b) Compatibility - that is, balance and harmony between the Torah's requirements and those of our lives, between the individual person's work and his integration into society, between the unique Jewish world and the wider world in general, between the traditions handed down through the generations and the new and changing present, between the internal Jewish knowledge and general knowledge.

What we draw from these two complementary definitions of "Classic Sephardic Judaism" is:

- Classic Sephardic Judaism lives life through halakha and a respect for tradition, and considers halakha along with traditions from the past an integral expression of Jewish identity and practice.
- Classic Sephardic Judaism embraces the modern world, and does not separate Judaism from the modern experience, rather looks to strike a balance between Jewish tradition and modern life. This is true, as Dr. Elazar states, in both "the theory and practice of Judaism," the "theory" being the intellectual approach to the study of Judaism, and the "practice" being practical halakhic living and halakhic interpretation.
- Classic Sephardic Judaism is a centrist approach, not given to excessive behavior, extremism or isolationism.



Defining "Fusion between Tradition and Modernity":

Classic Sephardic Judaism achieved the "fusion of tradition and modernity" in two essential areas – the intellectual domain of Judaism (Torah study), and the religious/practical domain of Judaism (Halakha). These two areas – the intellectual and the spiritual - and the manner in which they were handled and developed by Sephardic scholars and rabbis became the hallmarks of Classic Sephardic Judaism.

Halakha:

The most illuminating aspect of Rabbi Chouraqui's analysis is that the Sephardic method of deciding and establishing halakha is in fact different from the rest of the Jewish world. Rabbi Chouraqui asserts that Sephardic Judaism is, in point of fact, a centrist, middle of the road position that sits between the "strict and liberal positions."

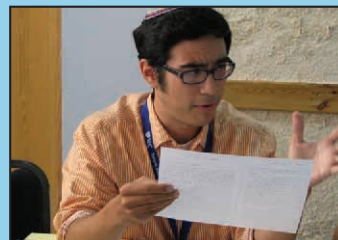
In fact, when it comes to the strict halakhic rulings typical of certain elements of ultra-Orthodoxy, Rabbi Chouraqui states:

Deciding halakha stringently does not reflect the greatness of a Hakham, and many times it attests to an educational concern, or to fear of deciding the halakha, which prevents the Hakham from choosing the easier path over the stricter one. Harsh halakhic decisions and the desire to accommodate all opinions have caused an accumulation of stringencies that makes it difficult for a later posek to weigh, maneuver, and navigate the halakhic process in the directions needed for a specific case that comes before him. Thus, fear of God pushes aside the dynamic force of halakha.

Since halakha is meant to facilitate a Jewish way of life for the individual and the community, the good of the community cannot come at the expense of the "fear of God," and, as Rabbi Chouraqui stated above, "the responsibility of the Hakham is to the whole community, to all of the Jewish people, perhaps for all future generations. Therefore it would not be responsible to set an excessively stringent standard of halakha that would cause a great portion of the community to be lost if they cannot abide by it."



Participants with Rabbi Landes



Rabbi Maimon Villareal of LA



Prof. Zvi Zohar



Dr. Salvador Sarfatti,
Pres. Of SEC-Latin America

Rabbi Bouskila

Classic Sephardic Judaism non-denominational:

Within the context of Ashkenazi Judaism's clear-cut denominational divisions and movements, Sephardic Judaism drastically differs in that its leaders never advocated a radical break with tradition, nor – on the other hand – did they cease to view halakha as a dynamic process. Quite the contrary, Sephardic Judaism remained deeply committed to its tradition and heritage, and simultaneously engaged in modern society by adapting halakha to changing circumstances. Sephardic Judaism achieved this harmony one community at a time, and each community on its own, never viewing this process as the creation of denominations or movements.

Comparing Modern Orthodoxy or Traditional Conservative Judaism?

The founders of Modern Orthodoxy in large part drew from Maimonides and the luminaries of the Golden Age of Spain, and built a movement modeled on the classic Sephardic way of life. "Torah U'Madda" (Torah and Science/Philosophy) had no real precedent as an articulated position in the Ashkenazi world; it is rooted in the classic Sephardic approach of merging Torah, philosophy and science. The great success of Modern Orthodoxy was (and remains) in the intellectual realm, producing a laity and a rabbinic leadership that are educated in both Judaism and general knowledge. In this sense – the intellectual – Modern Orthodoxy resembles Classic Sephardic Judaism.

Where Modern Orthodoxy differs from Classic Sephardic Judaism is in the practical realm of Judaism – the interpretation of halakha. Modern Orthodoxy's spiritual leaders were (and still are) tremendous Torah scholars and intellectuals, but they kept their teaching of halakha theoretical. As a result, Modern Orthodoxy never developed modern-day rabbinic leaders who authored authoritative halakhic responsa that dealt with modern issues in halakha. Again – they studied these topics, but refrained from practically ruling on them. This accounts for the current shift to the right that many lament in the Modern Orthodox world, because if a Modern Orthodox Jew seeks a rabbinic ruling on halakha, they have no authorities to rely upon except those of the more ultra-Orthodox world. Modern Orthodoxy never developed authoritative halakhic scholars like Rabbis Uziel and Halevy, whose engagement with the modern world was not limited to intellectual ideas, but also confronted the realities of life through the lenses of practical halakhic rulings. In this very significant way, Classic Sephardic Judaism differs from Modern Orthodoxy, in that Modern Orthodoxy makes an accommodation with the modern world, where Sephardic Judaism actually lives a modern Jewish life.

Conservative Judaism in the United States originally counted many Sephardic Jews amongst its ranks. The Jewish Theological Seminary was founded by Rabbis Sabato Morais and Pereira Mendes, and classes were first held in the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. The type of learning at the original JTS is reflected on every page of its most famous intellectual product, the Hertz Chumash. Authored by J.H. Hertz, a member of the first graduating class of JTS, the Hertz Chumash is, page by page, a product of Sephardic thinking, with traditional Talmudic knowledge and Medieval Rabbinic Bible Commentary co-existing with philosophy, rationalism, science and even non-Jewish scholarship -- all to explain the Torah in a modern and relevant fashion. As Dr. Elazar correctly points out above, the original Conservative Judaism in the United States did not seek to create a

separate denomination, and saw its purpose to "reanimate what they saw as the flexibility and changing character of tradition," which, as we have discussed at length, is characteristic of Classic Sephardic Judaism. For this reason, prominent Sephardic rabbis and leaders in the United States found a home in Conservative ideology, and felt that in many ways it mirrored the spiritual legacy of their Sephardic ancestors made the newer version of Conservative Judaism ideologically different from the far more traditional stance of Sephardic rabbis on these issues.

It was only when Conservative Judaism decided to become a "movement," listing itself as one of Judaism's "denominations" with a whole new ideology, that Sephardic rabbis and leaders broke ranks and distinguishing itself as one of Judaism's "denominations" with a whole new ideology, that Sephardic rabbis and leaders broke ranks and distanced themselves from Conservative Judaism. The new Conservative Movement's views on the nature of God, revelation, the halakhic process, and the historicity of Biblical events, made the newer version of Conservative Judaism ideologically different from the far more traditional stance of Sephardic rabbis on these issues.

The above differences do not, God forbid, reflect any disrespect for these denominations, nor do they rule out communal cooperation with them. The differences outlined above are necessary to help articulate what distinguishes Classic Sephardic Judaism from current Jewish-American denominations.



Sephardic Tolerance:

In 1994, Dr. Jose Nessim wrote that "The culture of the Sephardim is based on tolerance." What is meant by the word "tolerance" as it relates to Classic Sephardic Judaism?

The dictionary defines "tolerance" as a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions and practices that differ from one's own. As applied to Classic Sephardic Judaism, this definition of "tolerance" touches upon two areas – the individual and the communal. In relating to different individuals, Classic Sephardic Judaism always recognized that there exists a wide range of personal levels of Jewish observance within any given community. In a synagogue, a school classroom, or within the ranks of lay leaders, Classic Sephardic Judaism's position is that each individual makes his/her own choices on levels of halakhic observance, and that every individual's own decision will be tolerated and respected by the community, as long as the individual behaves in a way that respects the community and its established standards. Classic Sephardic Judaism nurtures a tolerance that helps create an umbrella where Jews on different levels of halakhic observance can peacefully and harmoniously live together as a community.





Rabbi Yosef Benarroch

Rabbi Yosef Benarroch stepped down from his position as Educational Director of the SEC in Jerusalem to assume the full time position of Rabbi of the Eshel Women's Midrasha program.

Founded by the SEC last year under the leadership of Rabbi Benarroch and Miriam Tawil, a highly respected educator, Eshel is a post high school year-long gap program for women. "Eshel has exceeded our expectations, and requires almost all my time and attention," said Rabbi Benarroch. "It is with mixed emotions that I make this move, but it affords me the opportunity to do that which I love most, which is to teach."

Rabbi Benarroch has been with the SEC since 1999 when he made Aliya with his family to Israel. He was instrumental in the development of SEC signature programs such as Makor, as well as an inspiring leader for our Taglit Birthright Israel trips and offering special tours of the Jewish Quarter. He initiated the SEC weekly dvar Torah, "Torah Thoughts from Jerusalem" which is widely read internationally.

Rabbi Benarroch will continue his relationship with the SEC as Senior Faculty Advisor, and be working on specific projects and programs. We have all grown very close to Rabbi Benarroch over the years and numerous young adults from around North America have gained tremendous spiritual insights from their time with him on our Israel trips.

Participant's Perspective

by: Marcia Israel Weingarten

Kol HaKavod to the leadership of the SEC for convening and to Rabbi Bouskila for planing this years' Inaugural SEC Summer Institute. It was a privilege and delight to be in Israel and have the chance to sit and learn with such an array of bright and insightful scholars and community leaders. And to do so along with some of our brightest community rabbis and lay leaders! Truly a unique and worthwhile experience.

We were a diverse group from a mix of backgrounds. There was time and space for an exchange of ideas, and no topics were off limits. With ample time to be heard, there was equal time to hear different points of view, expressed in ways that were not totally confrontational. We must admit that we came away with a somewhat different awareness and attitude than when we landed.

All this while we re-envisioned and prepared to re-launch and revive the Sephardic Educational Center as a base from which we can share the classic, more moderate and tolerant Sephardic world view, a post-ethnic position which, we believe, speaks to the hearts of the entire Jewish world today. Through the SEC we can teach, welcome, involve and engage Jews, young and old, throughout the world to live and view life through a prism that enriches us all.

Heady stuff indeed....and something worth being a part of. We welcome you to join us next year!!!

SEC Programs: Summer 2011

Summer 2011/July 10 - August 14

High School Summer in Israel is BACK!!— Home Based at the SEC Campus in Jerusalem, this trip will include travel, informal study, experiencing the unforgettable opportunity of living in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City just steps from the Western Wall. Make friends from around the world and learn about your heritage, traditions and the People of Israel.

Summer 2011/June 27-July 4

Summer Institute at SEC Jerusalem Following up on the momentum of this year's first ever SEC Sephardic Summer Institute, this annual program in Israel, geared towards community lay leaders and members, will explore intriguing Jewish topics, themes and issues through the lenses of Classic Sephardic Judaism.

Summer 2011/June 27-July 4

Rabbinic Think Tank at SEC Jerusalem— Coinciding with the Adult Summer Institute, the Rabbinic Think Tank will afford select pulpit Rabbis and educators the opportunity to study with leading Israeli scholars, creating a forum for the Rabbis to explore burning topics and pressing matters of the day in the Jewish world through the intellectual and halakhic lenses of Classic Sephardic Judaism. Additionally, the Rabbis will benefit from some sessions with professionals who can help them become more effective as community leaders and teachers.

Certain sessions of the lay leaders program and rabbinic program will be together, allowing for healthy interaction and exchange between rabbis and lay leaders, much like we had this week

Lev Ha-Rova (2010-2011 school year)

This represents the SEC's outreach program to Jewish Day Schools and High Schools who organize their own trips to Israel, as well as to Jewish youth organizations like NCSY, Bnei Akiva and USY. We offer them accommodations for the Jerusalem portion of their trip, tours of the Old City, and educational sessions on Classic Sephardic Judaism. It is essential that the SEC hires qualified individuals in Israel who can lead these programs.



Join The SEC
in Reaching Thousands
of Young Men and Women

Legacy Bequests

You can secure our future with the stroke of a pen! Include the SEC in your planned giving and estate planning. All contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

Thank you for your generosity!

(310) 441-9361 or info@secjerusalem.org



Rabbi Daniel Bouskila with Rabbi Moshe Benzaquen



Dr. Nessim writing a final letter of the Torah

SEC Hechal and Torah Dedication

During the Sephardic Summer Institute, we celebrated the dedication of a new Sefer Torah, dedicated by SEC-Jerusalem Director, Israel Shalem, and his family, in memory of his father. The last letters of the beautiful scroll were written during the ceremony by SEC leaders with a special blessing given to each and their families. Following the completion of the Torah, it was paraded in song and dance under a beautiful canopy throughout the cobblestone streets of the Jewish Quarter as residents and tourists looked on and joined in song.

Upon return to the Center, the Torah was taken, along with a second Torah donated by Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel of Los Angeles, and installed in a beautiful Hechal that was just finished and dedicated by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila and Family. The exquisite "parochet" (curtain) with its SEC symbol in gold, reads:

Dedicated to the Sephardic Educational Center by the Bouskila Family in loving memory of Nessim and Alice Bouskila z"l July 28, 2010.

For the first time, Shabbat services were conducted in the new SEC synagogue with Rabbi Moshe Benzaquen of Los Angeles reading from the new Torah in dramatic fashion that left the participants feeling the meaning of each word.

Sephardic Summer Institute - On Women

On the place of women in Jewish life, here is a fascinating responsa from Rabbi Ya'akov Mizrahi, 1888 (Beirut) – 1948 (Buenos Aires), Ve-Zarah Ya'akov, sermon 3:

"A Rabbi must regard all members of the nation's body, of which also women are a part. They (the Rabbis) should not distance her and situate her beyond the bounds of religious studies – for by doing so, the live and strong religious feeling that resides in the heart of Jewish women is erased. If she shall be beyond those bounds, this will have a negative influence upon education. Due to lack of knowledge and to the suffocation of her religious feelings, the Jewish mother will not be able to foster in children's hearts a living belief, that affective religiosity that stands higher than all tendencies of material life. Judaism that is sensitive and does not recognize limits or differences, permits women to be accepted to religious studies..."

Such true piety provides a strong, deep foundation for Jewish family life. A learned woman honored and admired her learned husband, and regarded him with deep respect. One belief joined and unified the husband and wife. One was not higher and the other lower, one learned and the other ignorant. Rather, both were devoted to the One, they were joined together by G-d, both were linked to Him. It was thus that the learned woman strengthened her status in her home, thanks to the influence of religious learning upon her, and through which she influenced her children. By direct participation in study, she gained strength and power, and acquired new capabilities. By virtue of her warmth and purity of heart, she knew well how to influence her husband and her entire family, her sons and her daughters' husbands, to follow the paths of the Torah and commandments.

The Torah permitted women to rise up to the position of a rabbinic decision-maker; if she is worthy of it, there is nothing that blocks her way. Indeed, there were women that attained such high levels and even more, both in early and in more recent generations."

Congregation Ezra Bessaroth In Seattle Celebrates Centennial

The synagogue celebrated its 100-year milestone anniversary in August with a gala dinner, guest lecturers, and the dedication of a new courtyard, sponsored by members Harley and Lela (Sabin) Franco. Lela is an SEC alumna from 1980, the first year the Center opened. The garden features a memorial obelisk inscribed six times, in six languages, that honors the founders' ancestors on the Greek island of Rhodes.

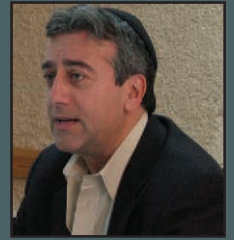


Ezra Bessaroth is a diverse community open to those who practice all levels of Jewish observance, according to President Steve Hemmat. "We are an Orthodox synagogue," he said. "Most members are not, but you will see a tolerance for everyone."

The SEC congratulates the Ezra Bessaroth community and specially one of our own pioneers, Lela Sabin Franco and her husband Harley.... truly a role model couple for us all.



Interior of SEC building



RABBI ELIE ABADIE M.D.

*Rabbi of Safra Synagogue in Manhattan
(and a former SEC Counselor)*

Every year during this season, we look back and reflect inward. In an attempt to improve ourselves, we remember our mishaps and misdeeds; where we went wrong and what we did wrong. Once we identify those actions that were less than desirable, we confess them, regret them and promise not to repeat them. As we mature adults who are aware and responsible of our actions and deeds, we repeat this cycle on a yearly basis.

This year, I would like us to look back in our personal history and the history of our people and the world and see the good deeds that we have performed, the positive actions that we have done, and the right things that we did. As we face the future, let us repeat those good deeds, improve in them and influence others to do the same.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to lead a group of 50 people on a trip to Spain. All participants were able to go back in time and re-visit the Golden Age of Spain. This period in history highlights both the good and the bad. The good, included all the great Jewish Sages that the period produced, their contributions to the Jewish world and their achievements in the world at large; the poetry and literature, the arts, the sciences, the philosophy and logic, the astronomy, arithmetic and cartography. Spanish Jews – the Sephardim were involved in all of those areas of knowledge and they excelled in them. Rabbis were physicians, Jurists, philosophers, military commanders, finance ministers, Viziers, cartographers, astronomers, mathematicians etc. All of this was achieved despite the bad and tragic events that included the forced conversions to either Islam or Christianity, the persecutions, the massacres of Jews and the hand of the Inquisition, the Auto-da-Fe and ultimately the expulsion from Spain in 1492.

I dwelled on the good and the positive. I lectured and taught about the wonderful Jewish community that flourished in the Iberian Peninsula and their contributions to the world. Scholars like Rambam -Maimonides, Yehuda HaLevi, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, Ramban – Nahmanides and 800 more... left a continued impression on both the Jewish and greater world. They were proud, learned and righteous Jews who held the highest positions in secular society without compromise to their religious value system. To achieve the greatest heights of learning and accomplishment there was no separation between the two worlds – the Jewish and general world. They are remarkable role models, and at this time of reflection an ideal to aspire to.

It is that period in our past history that I would like us to reflect upon and identify the positive parts and emulate them; to look at their good deeds and achievements and try to imitate them. At that time Judaism could not be taken for granted and serious choices needed to be made. We thank G-D that today we are living in a country where we can practice Judaism to its fullest. We have the opportunity to combine the great philosophies of the world, with the wisdom of the Torah. Our daily practice of Torah and Mitzvot has the opportunity to flourish. It is imperative that we take advantage of this exceptional time that we live in and represent ourselves as both ambassadors of the world and leaders of the Jewish community. Let us look at the past, learn from our good deeds, cherish them and promise to continue doing and improving on them. Let us commit to influence others to do the same.

As we begin the New Year, may we experience all that a Golden Age has to offer and flourish to our fullest capacity as a proud and accomplished Jewish people.

Tizku L'Shanim Rabot and Happy Holidays



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LARRY AZOSE

Each year brings its unique blessings and challenges. This year has been full of major developments as we have moved forward with defining our mission and creating programs that meet that mission.

This past summer in Jerusalem, the SEC embarked on what will be a seminal moment in its history. SEC leadership, both lay and rabbinic, convened to discuss and articulate a statement of philosophy as part of a strategic plan that will be the guiding force for the SEC's future. Authored by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, SEC Director of Special Projects, this document addresses what sets the Classic Sephardic approach to Judaism apart and why this unique world outlook is the ideal platform for all Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike, in the 21st century and beyond.

Rabbi Bouskila is in a unique situation to draft this assessment. He is a scholar, a master educator, a modern thinker, and most important, he "gets it". He understands what is lacking in our communities today as well as what is needed to communicate the ideas and teachings embodied by the writings of our contemporary sages, such as Rabbis Benzion Meir Uzziel and Haim David Halevy to our youth and adults. We are privileged to have him on the SEC team. The Center in Jerusalem serves as an educational hub with programs impacting thousands of young adults annually. It is our intent to expand these programs and facilities in the coming year.

As SEC Board Chair Ron Nessim states, "a torch has been passed to the next generation. "While still staying faithful to its Founders' vision, this generation has its own dreams for the future.

We invite you to share those dreams and join us in this journey to transmit the values of Sephardic Jewry to our communities and the greater Jewish world.

"Rabbi Tarfon said "The day is short and the task is great" (Ethics of our Fathers 2:15). There is much to do and we need your help. Collectively, we possess the skills, talents and resources necessary to assure the transmission of our heritage to our future generations.

Your comments are most welcome and appreciated. I invite you to email me at lla@secjerusalem.org or contact me at the SEC office in Los Angeles.

I wish you and your families a happy and healthy New Year.

Tizku L'Shanim Rabot

SEC...making a difference in the Jewish world



NEIL J. SHEFF

From the Editor 30 YEARS LATER...

It's been 30 years since I first walked into the SEC in Jerusalem. Animated Mexicans, Ladino-speaking Turks, Americans from Seattle to L.A. to N.Y., Sephardic youth from every background. Everyone having an amazing time, happy to be in Jerusalem, happy to be together in this international gathering of young people, sharing a unique discovery of religion, culture, Israel and their Sephardic heritage, happy to have discovered the Sephardic Educational Center. Over the years, countless lives have been forever changed, inspired, committed to their communities, to Israel and to the observance of their faith. How many friendships have been created, across boundaries, across cultures, across communities that never before had communicated with one another. How much love has come out of these past 30 years with the SEC in our lives. The love of finding one's soul mate, as hundreds of us have. The love of learning about our beautiful religion from incredible educators, among them Rabbi Benito Garzon of Spain, Rabbi Moshe Shamah of Brooklyn, Rabbi Sam Kassin of Jerusalem, Reuben Shellim of Australia, Rabbi Yosef Benarroch of Canada, Rabbi Daniel Bouskila of Los Angeles and Hayim Azses z"l. Many other guest educators and Rabbis, including Israel's Chief Rabbis, joined us from around the world to share their knowledge and love of Torah. The SEC taught us the importance of leadership. It taught us that we must do our part to keep our traditions alive. The SEC continues to teach us.

I've learned about Judaism with a smile. I've learned about the Jewish experience from around the world. To paraphrase the great singer Enrico Macias who sang at the first SEC gala banquet in 1984 in Los Angeles: I am a Rodesli Jew. I am a Syrian Jew. I am a Moroccan Jew. I am an Iraqi Jew. I am an Egyptian Jew. I am an Indian Jew. I am Mexican, Argentinean, French, Turkish, Canadian, Venezuelan, Panamanian, Cuban. I am the SEC.

This year, we celebrate the 30th anniversary of this amazing endeavor. The dream of a solitary man who dared to challenge the Jewish world. A man who called for the Sephardic approach to have a presence once again in our religious life; for Sephardim to have a center of education at the center of the Jewish world; to keep alive the Sephardim of the Diaspora; to become a "Center for All Jews", a beacon of light to Ashkenazi and Sephardi alike; a place like no other in the Jewish World. Few gave it a chance. Few took it seriously. Fewer gave of their time or money. Yet here we are, 30 years later, the dream has become a reality. The next generation of the SEC is taking its place. Our High School kids are getting ready to have their first SEC experience next summer. SEC alumni are leaders in their communities. Throughout the summer, young families visiting Jerusalem took their kids to see where their parents had spent an unforgettable summer and first fell in love with Jerusalem and Judaism.

I know I speak for thousands around the world when I say Dr. Jose Nessim has been my hero, my guiding light, my personal angel. These past 30 years have only been possible with the love and support of his Freda. We know our lives wouldn't quite be the same were it not for the blessing of his vision and determination. Jewish history will one day credit him for helping to save a Jewish philosophy and tradition on the verge of extinction. I therefore invite you to join us when we will gather on November 14, 2010 to honor them both for 30 years of dreams coming true. Join us for a grand reunion that will show the love we have for Doc and Freda and for the eternal gift of the SEC.

Shana Tova – Tizku Leshanim Rabot – Happy New Year,

Neil J. Sheff
Editor