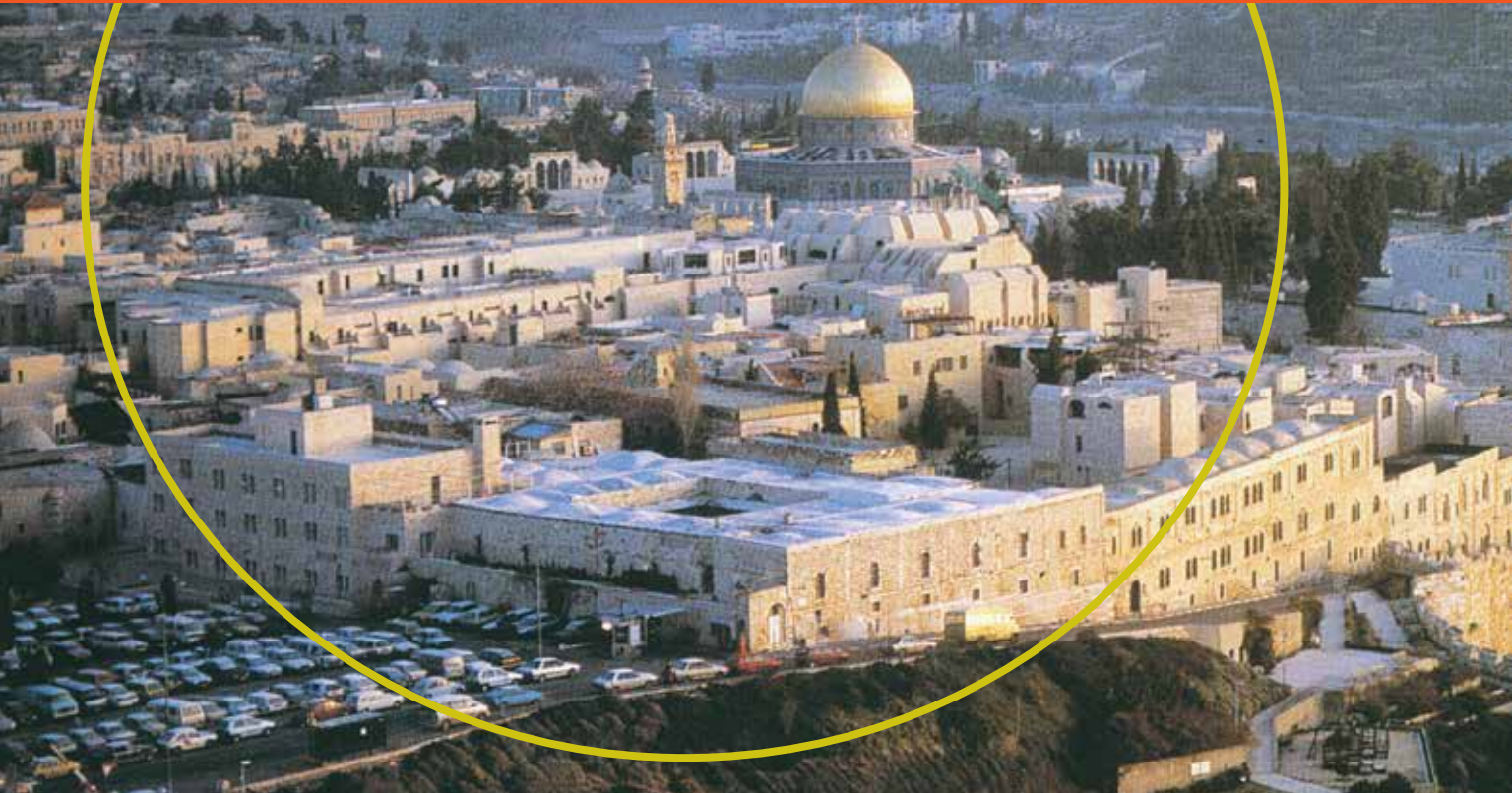


HAMERKAZ

A PUBLICATION OF THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER



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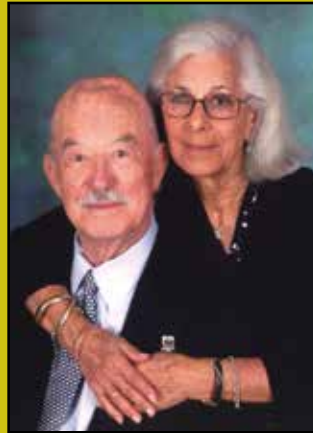
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SEC MISSION

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



As we enter the New Year, 5774, my 91st year and the SEC's 34th year, Freda and I send you our blessings and wish you a tizku leshanim rabot. May each of us and the SEC go from strength to strength. We applaud the leadership of the SEC in continuing to educate the world about Sephardic Judaism and the balanced, moderate approach it has historically embodied. If you care about the future of this unique tradition, please join us by contributing your resources to our global cause. Together we will make a difference.



MEETING in Jerusalem

Left: Rabbi Bouskila, Ray Mallel, Neil Sheff, Sarita Fields & Israel Shalem

Right: Annual Board Meeting with Counsel Moshe Nissim (seated) and Chair, Neil Sheff

SEC CAMPUS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

by Sarita Hasson Fields



SEC-Israel Board Member. They picked us up from the airport and drove us to the SEC where we immediately went to work.

The remodeling of our Center is an enormous undertaking. Although we have had our challenges, it is going to be spectacular. The courtyard building is undergoing the most extensive renovations. Freda Nessim and I have spoken extensively concerning the design of our "Spanish Courtyard". We want our visitors to walk in and feel like they have entered the original courtyard as it once was in Old Jerusalem. We interviewed and hired an expert designer/curator that will be working with us to ensure that our vision is accomplished. Surrounding the courtyard we are creating a very unique Visitors Center/Museum along with a Library, Beit Midrash, a Lounge plus offices and a utility kitchen.

We walked through the construction site several times a day; the rooms upstairs surrounding the courtyard along with the rooms in the connecting building are being totally

renovated and they will be incredible. Israel Shalem has been overseeing this enormous project while continuing to book and welcome with a smile all kinds of groups who visit us year round, from Jewish schools to families celebrating bar mitzvas and weddings.

We also had our annual "Amuta" (Israel Non-Profit Board) meeting; we toasted our Rabbinical Program partnership with "Memizrach Shemesh" with a glass of Raki, met with educators and accomplished as much as we possibly could in one short week. On Shabbat, Sue and Joe Cohen and their family joined us for dinner and Bob Israel and Neal Israel and their families joined us for Shabbat lunch celebrating Neal and Johanna's son's Bar Mitzvah. A family from Kahal Joseph in Los Angeles also had a big Bar Mitzvah luncheon at our Center. If you want to find the Sephardim who might be visiting Jerusalem, you just have to go to Mahane Yehudah (the open market) on Friday afternoon before Shabbat to the "Bureka Lady", and they will all be there; we met so many friends there!

We are eternally grateful to our generous founders and donors for ensuring that the Sephardim have a beautiful Center in Jerusalem that we can call home. Your continued support will enable us to complete and maintain this beautiful Center. The Sephardic Educational Center exists because of the vision, determination and perseverance of Dr. Jose Nessim and I am confident that his vision is and will continue to be realized.

Next time you're in Israel, call us and make arrangements to visit our Center.

Our Historic
SEC Campus



DONOR OPPORTUNITIES & DEDICATIONS

- Courtyard Building – \$1,000,000 (*dedicated*)
- Spanish Courtyard – \$600,000 (*dedicated*)
- Museum/Visitors Center – \$500,000 (**available**)
- Sephardic Library – \$250,000 (*dedicated*)
- Sephardic Synagogue – \$360,000 (**available**)
- Community Lounge – \$250,000 (*dedicated*)
- Multi-Media Lounge – \$250,000 (*dedicated*)
- Residential Suites – \$20,000 each (**15 available**)
- Classrooms – \$50,000 each (**2 available**)
- Offices – \$26,000 each (**2 available**)
- Service Kitchen – \$50,000 (**available**)
- Main Door Mezuzah – \$36,000 (**available**)
- Residential Suites Mezuzot – \$1800 each (*dedicated*)



pictured (l to r) Rabbi David Zenou, Rabbi Yitzhak Chouraqui, Rabbi Avraham Shalem (rabbinic scholar and leading student of Rabbi Uziel) and Rabbi Bouskila, in a visit to Rabbi Shalem's home in Jerusalem this past summer.

NEW Rabbinical Program at SEC Campus

SEC Partners with "Memizrach Shemesh", a program of Alliance Israélite Universelle, to Teach Classical Sephardic Philosophy to Israeli Rabbis

The SEC has long sought to create, develop and house a Sephardic Rabbinical Program, training rabbis in the classic model of studying traditional Jewish texts and interfacing them with contemporary issues. This past summer, the SEC took the first step towards achieving this important goal.

In a partnership three years in the works, the SEC recently celebrated an agreement reached with Memizrach Shemesh – Israel's leading Social Action organization founded ten years ago by Alliance Israélite Universelle– to work together on expanding their successful MERHAV Rabbinical Program. MERHAV will now be based at the SEC's campus in the Old City, and the SEC will be fully involved in planning its curriculum development, candidate outreach and program development.

What is MERHAV? The name of this program reflects the nature, essence and substance of what it stands for. In Hebrew, the word Merhav means "wide open space" or "expanse," and the MERHAV programs seeks to expand the knowledge base of its rabbis, as well as expand their influence to a wider section of the Israeli public. MERHAV is also a creative acronym for Manhigut Rabbanit Hevratit, which means "Rabbinic Leadership for Social Change."

MERHAV trains a select group of rabbis – pulpit rabbis, dayanim (religious court judges), and newly ordained rabbis, empowering them to become agents of social change within their communities and within Israeli society. The two-year program combines an in-depth study of Israeli society and its problems, with exposure to the heritage of the Sephardi/Mizrahi Sages, their study methods and philosophy, and their dynamic encounter with modernity and how they dealt with social conflicts within their communities.

The philosophy of the MERHAV program is that Rabbis in Israel should not only address the spiritual needs of their community, but also their social needs. MERHAV believes the approach of Sephardic Rabbis and Sages, particularly

from the 19th and 20th centuries, has a refreshing and important social message that Israeli society can benefit from. The program trains its rabbis to be sources of information on topics of social justice, education and community empowerment.

Leading educators are at the helm of MERHAV, including Eli Bareket (current Memizrach Shemesh Executive Director), Yehuda Maimran (Memizrach Shemesh founder and current Executive Director of the Israel branch of the Alliance), Rabbis Yitzhak Chouraqui and David Zenou, and educator Drori Yehoshua (Rabbi Chouraqui and Drori Yehoshua both lectured at the SEC's inaugural Sephardic Summer Institute in July 2010). Rabbi Bouskila is currently working with this entire team on various plans and curricular issues, and will be lecturing to MERHAV students during his trips to Israel throughout the year. Another partner in the MERHAV program is Rabbi Marc Angel's Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, positioning MERHAV to become a profoundly influential voice in the Jewish world.

In addition to its new home and partnership with the SEC, MERHAV will also expand in both numbers and scope. The program will accept 16 rabbis (up from 12) and add a new track for school educators. MERHAV is also going global. In one of the most exciting developments, MERHAV will introduce a new track for rabbis from all over the Diaspora. The selected rabbis will study, interact and communicate via SKYPE and video conferencing throughout the year, and then gather in the summer for a 10-day seminar at the SEC campus in Jerusalem. The curriculum development and selection process of rabbis is underway, with plans to convene the first "MERHAV Diaspora" seminar at the SEC in July 2014.

The SEC is proud to provide a home and be an integral part of such a prestigious and unique program and we anticipate MERHAV will have an important impact on Jewish communities, both in Israel and around the world.



From the DIRECTOR

In one of its most meaningful teachings, the Talmud says: A person should always give thanks for the past, and then pray for the future (Berahot 54:a). With another New Year upon us, this wise Talmudic advice is something we should all adhere to. As we stand in prayer before God, we should take the time to reflect upon our past, root out any negativity, and focus on the positive moments from our lives. Giving thanks for all of the blessings we have experienced in life reassures us that despite the many difficulties we may encounter, life is still a blessing. This process clears the mind and opens the heart to help us ask God to bless our upcoming year. The link between past and future creates the flow of continuity that brings meaning to our lives.

This “past/future” process can also apply to a community. Reflecting upon our “SEC past”, we certainly have much to be thankful for. Over 30 years ago, Dr. Jose and Freda Nessim, along with some dedicated community activists, friends and generous philanthropists, founded the modern world’s first ever Sephardic Educational Center, with its own campus in the Old City of Jerusalem. For these past 30+ years, this organization has taught, inspired and uplifted the souls of thousands of young Jews from all over the world. From the SEC’s signature Israel trips based at the center, to Shabbatonim, “Classes for the Masses”, youth conventions, young adult retreats, 11 successful Sephardic Film Festivals and countless other educational, cultural and social activities, the SEC has led a trailblazing path of preserving the cherished Sephardic heritage, all the while bringing its message and traditions into the modern world. Many who are reading this have the SEC to thank for their first Israel trip, their education or inspiration in strengthening their Jewish identity. In many cases, the SEC Israel trip or Shabbaton was the meeting ground for singles that became married couples. In fact, this past December, I led an SEC teen group to Israel for two weeks, and all of the kids were “second generation SEC kids.” Amazing! Yes, when we reflect upon our collective SEC past, we certainly have much to be thankful for.

Looking ahead to the future, this coming year holds great promise for the SEC. We continue to develop our Hamsa Teen program, our Hamsa Israel trips, our diverse menu of classes, our young couples havurah, and our various programs that serve the community at large. In addition to our activities here in Los Angeles, we are reaching out to other communities in the U.S., including Seattle, New York, Atlanta and Miami. Our plans to bring SEC programs to these communities are underway, and we are excited to see our positive influence grow beyond Los Angeles.

In Israel, the remodel of our campus brings great excitement. Under the expert guidance and watchful eye of my dear friend and colleague Israel Shalem, our remodel is our biggest project, and its completion this coming year will open many new doors and opportunities for us. We are developing many exciting new programs in Israel, including Rabbinical and Educators programs, social action outreach to Sephardic youth, and a new Sephardic Beit Midrash for the Jerusalem community. All of this will assure that the SEC becomes a full service, full time, and year round educational institution in Israel, serving Israeli communities as well as the diaspora.

None of this is possible without the hard work, devotion and generosity of the many dedicated people in our SEC family. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Israel Shalem and his entire staff in Israel, for running the SEC campus with such efficiency, and making it such a welcoming environment. My sincere thanks to our outgoing president Ron Nessim, our new president Neil Sheff, and the entire Executive Board for their hard work and support in so many vital areas. To all of our volunteers at our various events, your help is what brings success and a “touch of class” to everything we do. Thank you to my assistant Sharon in the office, and to all who contribute their expertise in various administrative areas. Last but certainly not least, I thank all of our generous donors and supporters. Your philanthropic hearts help us keep the SEC’s vision and message of Classic Sephardic Judaism alive and relevant for this and future generations.

So what do I pray for this year? Exactly what our founder Dr. Nessim (may God grant him health) always used to ask me to pray for every Shabbat: the success and continued growth of the SEC. With thanks and gratitude for our beautiful past, I pray for a bright and prosperous future.

Tizku L'Shanim Rabot
Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Uziel Conference

Rabbi Bouskila to Present Research Paper at Scholarly Conference in Israel

On October 20-22, Bar-Ilan University is convening a special conference on the life and teachings of Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, Israel's first Sephardic Chief Rabbi. Scholars from all over the world will be presenting research papers on various aspects of Rabbi Uziel's life, leadership, halakhic rulings and philosophy. Rabbi Bouskila was invited to be one of the presenters at the conference and his paper is titled "To Unite, Not to Divide: Rabbi Uziel's Complex Sephardic Identity".



FALL LECTURE SERIES in L.A. with Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Sephardim Today Bridging Tradition & Modernity

October 29th

The Visionary: The life of Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.
This beautiful biography of Israel's first Sephardic Chief Rabbi takes us on a journey through the pre-State Yishuv and Israel's early years, through the lenses of the great leader's classic Sephardic philosophy of tradition, modernity and unity.

November 12th

Are Sephardim Orthodox, Conservative or ...?

December 10th

Jewish Challenges, Sephardic Solutions:

How classic Sephardic Philosophy can bring positive changes to the larger Jewish world.

7 p.m.

**The Jewish Federation Building
6505 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles, 90048**

RSVP at least one day prior by calling

(323) 272-4574

or email Sharon@secjerusalem.org

Refreshments will be served.

Please bring photo I.D. for security



Lectures



Meet DRORI YEHOSHUA, SEC's New Educational Coordinator in Jerusalem

The SEC is pleased to welcome Drori Yehoshua to our team of educators and professionals. Born and raised in Jerusalem, Drori is one of Jerusalem's most talented and popular educators. He teaches Talmud at the prestigious Hartman High Schools and is the Director of the Beit Midrash Program for "Memizrach Shemesh" (with whom the SEC is partnering for the Merhav Rabbinical Program).

Drori, who first lectured at the SEC three years ago at its inaugural Sephardic Summer Institute, will be coordinating and leading a host of new educational and cultural programs at the SEC, both for local Israelis and for students from abroad. "We are blessed to have such a knowledgeable, talented and creative person like Drori on our staff," said Rabbi Bouskila. "We have discussed programs together for the past 3 years, and I am glad to finally see him officially join our team." Drori strongly feels that "the SEC philosophy is my philosophy and our work is so important for creating quality Jewish educational programs in the traditional Sephardic style here in Jerusalem".



Sephardic MUSEUM & VISITORS CENTER

One of the most exciting aspects of the SEC's soon-to-open newly remodeled campus is the planned Sephardic Museum and Visitors Center. With our campus located in the heart of the Old City's Jewish Quarter, this new museum – which will tell the rich and beautiful story of the ancient Sephardic communities of the Old City – will make the SEC a featured destination for student groups, schools, tourists and visitors to the Old City.

To help professionally create and design the museum, we have hired Zvia Alter. Zvia brings us years of experience in the field of museum and exhibit design, as well as bringing museum exhibits to life by writing, producing and performing “live museum shows” all over Israel. She has met many times with SEC leadership over the summer, gathering ideas that will help shape the vision for the new museum.

What makes this especially exciting is the building that will house this museum – our historic “Spanish/Sephardic Courtyard” building – itself has a fascinating history. This building once housed four important Sephardic institutions: The legendary “Sephardic Talmud Torah,” the prestigious “Yeshivat Tiferet Yerushalayim,” and two socially conscious community institutions: an orphanage and a shelter for widows. Part of Zvia's work is to create exhibits that will tell and re-create this unique history. This will include documents, photographs, and “live museum” performances that will tell the stories of the widows, orphans and students who lived and studied in this building. Rabbi Bouskila spent many hours in the Jerusalem Municipality's Sephardic Archives section this past summer, gathering manuscripts, photos and a host of memorabilia. Zvia has placed an ad in local newspapers calling on any family or relatives who were once connected with these institutions to contact the SEC.

The SEC welcomes Zvia Alter to our team; her expertise will help us illuminate our past by becoming a leading center of Sephardic culture. We look forward to soon opening our (new) doors to you and visitors from all over the world.



REPORT from Headquarters

Dr. Jose Nessim had a vision: to build and develop a Sephardic campus in Jerusalem, where students and guests from all over the world can come study and experience Sephardic traditions and culture, all the while staying in beautiful and comfortable accommodations. I am pleased to announce that in the past two years, we have been working hard here in Jerusalem to bring this vision into a new era. I have had the privilege of overseeing the complete remodel of our classic two-story Sephardic courtyard building, the oldest and most charming of our beautiful three-building campus. This remodel has involved lots of professional teamwork, including architects, antiquities specialists, preservation architects, landscape architects, interior designers, and



experts on the history of the Old City of Jerusalem. This multifaceted team of professionals are all working towards one goal: to remodel the building anew while preserving its original Spanish/Sephardic architecture, layout and design.

At this stage, we have completed the remodel of our second story, which includes 15 newly built and furnished suites, a media/computer center, the “old/new” balcony, and a lobby to receive visitors and guests. We continue to work hard on the construction of the ground floor, which will include the Sephardic/Spanish courtyard (complete with Mediterranean tiles and décor), a Museum/Visitors Center which will feature exhibits that tell the story of our buildings and the Sephardic history of the Old City, a Sephardic library, a Sephardic synagogue, a lounge/community center, offices, classrooms, a new service kitchen and restrooms.

It is my hope that with the help of God (and the help of the Jerusalem Municipality!), we will complete our construction by the end of this calendar year, and that in 2014 our newly remodeled center will be open to students, visitors and guests.

I want to add that in addition to remodeling the building, I am also equally excited at the introduction of so many new programs for the SEC. I feel blessed to work with Rabbi Bouskila. Together we have designed and coordinated many new programs for our Center. These programs will fill our newly remodeled building with lots of new energy and make our center an active place that we can all be proud of.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you and your families a wonderful New Year, filled with blessings, prosperity, creativity, health and new opportunities.

Shalom from Jerusalem.

Israel Shalem

SEC General Manager, Jerusalem Campus



ISRAEL Consul General

for the Western United States, David Siegel and family in front of SEC. His family was hosted at the SEC this past summer, and their stay included a private VIP tour of the Kotel Tunnels, arranged by Israel Shalem.



VISITORS

Rochelle Ginsburg, with her grandson Robert Carlsson meet up with Sarita Fields at the Burekas Stand in Jerusalem. Robert was winner of the Student Film Competition at the SEC Film Festival.



Meir Fenigstein

Meir Fenigstein, also known as "Poogy" of the 1970's pop group "Kaveret", was performing in their 40 year reunion concert tour in Israel where the group played to sold out crowds in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where the Park Hayarkon venue was packed with 50,000 fans from around the country on two consecutive nights. Kaveret has often been called Israel's "Beatles" and their popularity remains strong among old and young alike. Rabbi Bouskila, Israel Shalem and Neil Sheff were among the audience at their Jerusalem show. Between concerts, Meir and his wife Jessi and their children enjoyed Shabbat dinner with Rabbi Bouskila at the SEC. When he's not a "rock star", Meir directs the Israel Film Festival, now in its 27th year.



Joe and Sue Cohen and Family

Last fall, Sue & I were honored to receive the Sephardic Legacy Award at the SEC's LA Sephardic Film Festival. It was a special evening for Sue & I, our family and our close friends.

This summer Sue & I had the pleasure to visit Israel with our family. Our trip included Masada & The Dead Sea, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and so many other interesting and historical places. The highlight of our trip, though, was visiting and praying at the Western Wall on Friday evening followed by a festive Shabbat dinner at the SEC. My family will always remember Israel and our special "SEC Shabbat".

- Joe Cohen

Neal & Johanna Israel & Family

I found the experience of being at the SEC in Jerusalem after my son's bar mitzvah at the Kotel inspiring. Connecting to your Jewish roots, to your community, is a big part of being Bar Mitzva'd. Being at the SEC reminded us of the long journey from this very city our ancestors took to Spain and then hundreds of years later to the safety of The Ottoman Empire. The SEC building itself has its own fascinating history. It has stood for a very long time as a welcoming beacon to thousands of Sephardic Jews. And that is exactly how we felt being there, welcomed home. It made that day even more meaningful. - Neal Israel

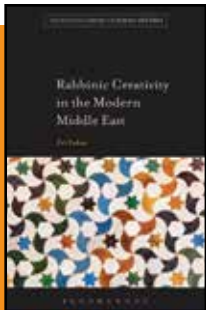
Editor's note: Neal Israel is a Producer/Director and past recipient of the SEC's Cinema Sephard Award



Bumping into Neal Israel at the Burekas Bar



Israel Family - Neal, Finnegan, Sullivan, & Johanna



NEW BOOK Explores Unique Sephardic Philosophy

Reviewed by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

In the past several years, much has been written about the unique approaches of modern Sephardic rabbinical authorities on questions of halakha and modernity, Zionism and Jewish identity. The leading scholar responsible for jumpstarting this field of studies is Professor Zvi Zohar, one of the world's foremost scholars and experts in Sephardic studies. After many scholarly articles exploring these issues, Dr. Zohar published the book *He'iru Pnei ha-Mizrah* ("The Luminous Face of the East"), a comprehensive study of the unique approaches of Sephardic/Middle Eastern rabbis to the complex changes in modern society.

His newest book, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, is an English translation of the sections from *He'iru Pnei ha-Mizrah* that focus on the leading rabbinical authorities from Iraq, Syria and Egypt. In the author's own words, "This is part of my endeavor to rectify the all too Eurocentric perception of mod-

ern Judaism." Reading through this book, you will discover that the approaches of modern Sephardic rabbis to modernity pose a serious challenge to the many commonly held Ashkenazi views regarding Judaism's responses to contemporary issues and questions. For many years, Judaism has followed a completely "Ashkenazi narrative." This is true in the fields of history, literature and intellectual thought, where the Sephardi/Mizrahi experience has been virtually ignored. It is also true in rabbinical writings and halakha, especially when it comes to questions of "tradition vs. change." Zvi Zohar's book enlightens readers to a host of "old/new" approaches on a number of complex issues in Judaism, offering the Jewish world an alternative to what is currently considered "mainstream."

A professor at Bar Ilan University and a Senior Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, Professor Zohar has become a close friend and "scholar-in-residence" of the SEC. He delivered the opening address at our inaugural Sephardic Summer Institute in 2010, has lectured many other times at our Center, and was a guest scholar in the SEC-Los Angeles Chapter last year.

The SEC plans to include Professor Zohar in our upcoming Sephardic Institutes on the West and East Coasts in early 2014, so stay tuned for more details.

In the meanwhile, go to Amazon.com and order this book. It will open your eyes to the creativity and richness of our Sephardic Rabbis of the last two centuries.

SELIHOT CONCERT A Night of Spiritual Music

The SEC hosted the 3rd Annual Selihot Concert with local and visiting hazzanim from all Sephardic backgrounds. Once again, the concert was expertly coordinated by Rabbi Hazan Hagay Batzri of Kahal Joseph Congregation. Those in attendance said that this concert was the most amazing musical event they had

ever attended. Accompanied by Middle Eastern musicians, the Cantors displayed their musical heritage, whether Moroccan, Turkish, Iraqi, or Yerushalmi. It really gets you in the holiday spirit! Our thanks to event sponsors Moussa & Sholeh Shaaya and Ron & Paulette Nessim.



Honorees

Rabbi Haim Amsalem
Daniela Ruah
Joe and Sue Cohen

The SEC sponsored biennial film festival held its Opening Night Gala once again at the elegant Paramount Studios in Hollywood. It was an unforgettable night full of fun, emotions, inspiration, entertainment, good food, and nearly 500 friends of the SEC and our honorees.

Joe and Sue Cohen were honored with the “Sephardic Legacy Award” for their continued support of the SEC and the role models they have served as pillars of our Sephardic community. They were surrounded by their children and grandchildren as they accepted a beautiful painting made especially for them by artist Barbara Mendes depicting all the important people and stages in their lives.

Daniela Ruah, star of “NCIS-LA”, was presented with the “Cinema Sepharad Award” as a young actress proud of her Sephardic heritage. Daniela was born in the U.S. and raised in Portugal, where she started her acting career. Daniela spoke passionately of her love of Sephardic food, tradition and inclusiveness.

Rabbi Haim Amsalem, Minister of Knesset, received the “Maimonides Leadership Award” for his work and dedication to bringing the moderate Sephardic approach to halakhic issues back to the forefront in Israel and the Jewish World.

The Film Festival continued the following week at the Laemmle’s Music Hall Theater in Beverly Hills with films showcasing the Sephardic experience from around the world. The Student Film Competition finalists were also screened at the Sunday Closing Day and included the films, “Beyond Burekas”, by Robert Carlsson (Middle School Category), “The Biskocho”, by Leah Mayesh Glouberman, Sammy Sheff and Danny Silberstein (High School Category), and in the over 18 Category, “Aron Aronov and The Bukharian Museum” by George Itzak. For more information, see www.sephardicfilmfestival.com.



Honorees Rabbi Haim Amsalem, Daniela Ruah, Joe and Sue Cohen



*Rabbi Moshe Benzaquen, Rabbi Amsalem
& Rabbi Bouskila*



*Arthur Benveniste (L.) & Producer Andres Enrique
at the Music Hall*



Honorees with Festival Chairs Sarita Fields, Neil Sheff and SEC Director Rabbi Daniel Bouskila



Student Film Competition Winners



Daniela Ruah



2012 Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival



SEC FILM FESTIVAL





RABBI AVRAHAM SHALEM: A Hidden Gem in Jerusalem

by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

This past summer in Jerusalem, I was blessed with the unique privilege of meeting, befriending and studying with Rabbi Avraham Shalem, one of the great Sephardic rabbinical scholars of our generation. I first became aware of Rabbi Shalem through the documentary film about Rabbi Uziel that we screened at our SEC Film Festival last year (and that we will screen again this coming October 29 at the Jewish Federation in Los Angeles). Rabbi Shalem is featured prominently throughout the film, as he is one of Rabbi Uziel's greatest students, and one of the very few remaining in the world. A classic Sephardi Talmid Haham (rabbinical scholar), Rabbi Shalem was born in Jerusalem, studied directly with and was ordained by Rabbi Uziel, and then served for many years as a rabbi and dayan (rabbinical judge) in the Sephardic communities of Lima, Seattle and Mexico City. Upon his return

to Jerusalem, he continued his rabbinical work, and also authored and edited numerous important rabbinical books.

I obtained Rabbi Shalem's telephone number from David Behar, one of the leaders of Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle (where Rabbi Shalem served for 3 years). I introduced myself over the phone, and asked for the privilege to come and meet him. He graciously invited me to his home, and upon entering his apartment, I immediately discovered a sweet, loving, incredibly knowledgeable and spirited person with whom I became enamored.

Our time together was very special. He told me fascinating and insightful stories about the rabbinical world of the past, and showed me some of the beautiful books and manuscripts in his possession. Sitting and listening to him is an education in Torah and in life, and his endearing personality makes one want to stay in his presence for hours.

I returned to visit Rabbi Shalem on three subsequent occasions, once taking the MERHAV educators, Rabbis Chouraqui and Zeno, and once with our kids. It was a special moment for me to see Rabbi Shalem blessing my son Ilan.

Rabbi Shalem is a hidden gem in Jerusalem. He is still actively writing, but is no longer involved in the public sphere of the rabbinical world. That is why I invited him to become a regular lecturer at our new MERHAV Rabbinical program, where he will share his deep wisdom of Torah and life's experiences with a new generation of rabbis.

NEW LIBI BE'MIZRACH PROGRAM AT SEC CAMPUS: A Unique Jerusalem Heritage Experience for Israeli Students



One of the SEC's new initiatives being launched this year, Libi Be'Mizrach ("My Heart is in the East"), is designed to provide middle and high school students from all over Israel with a unique Jerusalem experience in the Old City. Libi Be'Mizrach will bring hundreds of participants each year to the SEC campus in Jerusalem for a two-day exploration of their heritage. Set to begin in October, the program will include tours of historical sites just steps from the SEC, including the City of David archaeological excavations, the Davidson Archaeological Park, the underground Kotel Tunnels, walking along the Old City ramparts, visiting the Jewish Quarter,

and special seminars on the Sephardic history of the Old City. The students will eat, sleep and study at the SEC Campus, and their experience will culminate with a memorable ceremony at the Kotel.

Libi Be'Mizrach is part of the SEC's new outreach to Israeli students and will target development towns whose schools often do not have the budgets to bring their students to Jerusalem for such a unique experience. It will also strengthen the identity and pride of Sephardic youth in Israel. Most Israeli teenagers have never been to the Old City of Jerusalem and are unfamiliar with the Sephardic history of the Jewish Quarter. The SEC will be providing them with this unique and transformative experience thanks to the support of generous donors and grants. If you would like to become a sponsor, please contact us at rdb@secjerusalem.org.



HAMSA TEENS TRIP TO ISRAEL...

An Amazing Experience

By R. Daniel Bouskila

What a royal kick-off to a new era of the SEC! From the comfort of our inspirational SEC home campus in the Old City of Jerusalem and our visits to the Kotel, to the peaks of Masada at sunrise, through the canyons and riverbeds of the Judean Desert, up the Golan Heights terrain by way of jeeps, matkot (smashball) games across the beaches on the coast, down to the Negev's main Air Force base, and in the best restaurants Israel has to offer, our wonderful group of SEC "Second Generation" participants explored the people, places, history, literature, food, culture and spirit of Israel like no other group has in a long time. This was no mere tour group. It was a real insider's understanding of Israel. Our teens met with other Israeli teens – secular kids from the Tzofim (Scouts) and religious kids from Bnei Akiva. They met with Yom Kippur war hero/tank commander Avigdor Kahalani in a private session for almost 2 hours, and understood firsthand what heroism and dedication is all about. We met privately with Air Force pilots, attended the Air Force graduation ceremony, and even met the historic first religious female combat navigator. We heard Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Barak speak, shook hands with Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, and hung out with veteran IAF pilots.

We were shown the ancient city of Hebron, not by a tour guide, but by Rabbi Yigal Kutai, someone who lives there and can speak personally about what life in Hebron is all about. He touched our kids' souls, and really made them feel the power and spirituality of where they were. We visited antiquities and modern places, heard special lectures from Iron Dome specialists, walked through the same line that young soldiers walk on their first day, and even received personalized IDF dog tags from the actual IDF base that issues them to soldiers. We studied the Holocaust – both the Yad Vashem version, and the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz version. We made our own chocolates at a chocolate factory on the Kinneret, tasted wine in the Golan Heights (shhh!), and mingled with Israelis in Israel's two best melting pots – Mahane Yehuda and Shuk Ha-Carmel, the two largest open-air marketplaces in Israel.

I took our group to Jerusalem's number one literary café – Tmol Shilshom – named after Nobel Prize winner S.Y. Agnon's greatest novel (we visited his house that morning). Before dinner, I explained why we chose this place – we would be engaging in a creative writing workshop, where the students were assigned to write a creative short story describing one day in the life of a Holocaust survivor who had just come to Israel. I have never seen such enthusiasm in a group of teenagers. Their creative juices and energies were flowing, and they produced beautiful and moving stories (see *Hamsa Teens Creative Writing*)

The SEC, the State of Israel and the Jewish People have nine new talented, articulate and passionate ambassadors, who will inspire others to join our new SEC Hamsa Israel Teen Programs. I encourage you to apply for your teens today for our next Hamsa trip in December 2013. Email us at info@secjerusalem.org or call us at (323) 272-4574



(Above) With Brigadier-General Avigdor Kahalani, decorated with Israel's highest medal of courage in the YK War. A Tank Commander, his unit saved the Golan Heights in the YK War. He is currently Director of the Association for the Welfare of IDF Soldiers. He is a true hero of Israel.



HOMELAND: From Rhodes to Jerusalem

By Ezra Soriano, Micah Soriano, Max Sheff & Adam Wannon

Considering where I come from, sitting at the Shabbat table in Jerusalem for the very first time seemed unfathomable. A mere 8 years ago, I was taken captive from the peaceful Mediterranean Island of Rhodes. There, in my native home, I used to wake up and see the elegant blue skyline that perched inches above the turquoise waves of the Mediterranean Sea. This was a stark contrast to the dark, depressing gates of the concentration camps that I was transported to. The years that I spent at those camps redefined hell.

Let me explain. The place I was taken to was not called a ghetto, and I would not even call it a concentration camp. It was a death camp. It was a place where less than one percent of those who entered came out alive. It was a place of death, where over 500,000 people died. Treblinka.

At first, we were deceived into thinking that we were arriving to a place of work. This gave us a false sense of optimism. Within one hour, my family was torn apart. The Nazis stripped us of our identities. We stood and watched as the one thing that helped differentiate our physical appearance – our hair – fell to the floor. We were stripped of our clothes, and forced into some sort of chamber. Lucky is a word that does not even help define how fortunate I am to still be alive today.

After the day of liberation, I did not know what to do, as I felt trapped – mentally and physically. The only viable option for me was to go to the Land of Israel, because it was my true homeland, dating back thousands of years. As they say, “once it’s your home, it’s always home.”

So here I am in Israel today, sitting at a Shabbat table, linking arms with my People, singing the same songs that my ancestors sang, in the same place where they sang them thousands of years ago.

Jerusalem. My “old-new home.” What does it feel like being here? Having survived the death camps, the beatings and the humiliation, it’s an incredible feeling to walk freely through the streets of Jerusalem without that awful yellow star on my clothes. I still marvel at being able to enjoy Shabbat prayers without the fear of being beaten or killed.

But most of all, coming from the place I came from, being in Jerusalem – in the Modern State of Israel – is my assurance that what happened to me and my People will never happen again.

Never again.



**Hamsa Teens Participated in
CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM
following visit to Yad Vashem
Holocaust Memorial.**



LOVE NEVER DIES

By Anaïs Bertet

Falling in love, being with the one person you want to be with, the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, is a feeling not everyone always gets in life. There’s nothing better than falling in love with someone. The worst part about falling in love is possibly losing the person you love, and your loving experiences that you shared turn into nothing but memories.

Sarah and Yonathan grew up together. They fell in love. They were going to spend the rest of their lives together...until they were forcefully taken away from each other and put into terrifying camps. Sarah and Yonathan prayed everyday that they should be able to see each other again, even just once more.

Sarah wrote letters to Yonathan, love letters, that she hoped to give to him once they got out of these horrible camps. She did not know how she would tell Yonathan that she saw his sister being burnt to death right in front of her eyes.

Yonathan didn’t know if and when he would ever see Sarah again. He wrote no letters. He just prayed.

After the Holocaust, Sarah and Yonathan began to look for each other. Amidst the confusion of displaced persons camps, they searched and searched, but to no avail.

Eventually, both Sarah and Yonathan moved to Israel. Yonathan continued to search for Sarah, thinking that perhaps she might be in Israel. But Sarah stopped looking. She no longer had the strength – physical or emotional – to continue looking. She was now convinced that Yonathan was dead. Grief stricken, she would walk around saying, “Love never dies, but Yonathan is dead.”

A year later, Sarah met Jacob, a Holocaust survivor. They shared the bond of surviving, and eventually they fell in love. They were married in Israel, and tried to build a new life together. Sarah never stopped thinking about Yonathan, and she spoke about him a lot, even to Jacob.

Years later, after Israel’s victory in the Six Day War, Sarah – like many Jews – rushed to the Kotel. Despite being traumatized from the Holocaust and grief-stricken over losing Yonathan, she wished to offer prayers of thanks to God for having survived the terrible Holocaust.

As she approached the plaza towards the Kotel, she was suddenly overtaken with emotion by what her eyes beheld. Thousands of Jews crowding towards one sacred wall, and in the midst of it all – Yonathan, the long lost love of her life.

She approached Yonathan, and he approached her. Tears rolled down their eyes. Very few words were exchanged. Prayers, conversation – what could they say?

To this day, they both live in Israel, torn from each other by the horrors of the Holocaust, but united in their hearts with eternal love for one another.

The Holocaust killed millions, but love never dies.

IDENTITY

By Adina Jalali

Who am I? Where do I stand? Looking down at my Israeli passport, it lists things that I already know: Chana Zollsberg, female, 23 years old, 118 pounds. But who am I really? What does all of this mean to me? I look around; people celebrating, praying, praising God. Yet here I am, in the holiest place on earth, feeling nothing whatsoever. After what I've been through, how could I feel anything here? The way the Nazis treated me, treated all of us, how could I believe that there's anything or anyone up there that will answer my prayers and keep me and my People safe?

Auschwitz was a world of demise and trepidation, where it was difficult to linger in the realm of sanity or regain a sense of morality, even when the horror had finally passed. It was a place where my friends and family were murdered right before my very eyes. The trauma still hasn't passed. I don't think it ever will. I try to forget, but the nightmares persist. So where do I go from here?

Who am I?

I am a young Jewish woman trying to start fresh in a new place, surrounded by people I can relate to. I hope to build a family here.

People around me are looking in their Bibles, engrossed in what they are reading. I do the same. "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come? My help is from God, maker of heaven and earth." I think about what I just read, and about the time I had spent in the camps. But now, I stand here at the Kotel. I feel alone, and my mind keeps telling me that I have nothing left to live for.

But my heart says otherwise. "You are here!" my heart screams out to me. "You are here, with eyes to see, lungs to breathe, and a heart beating in your chest." That counts for something. Standing here faithless in this place of faith, I find renewed faith in only one thing: that by having survived, I was left here on earth to make a difference, to help build a better world than the one I have known.

ISRAEL PROGRAM Thank You

Dear SEC:

I really want to take this time to thank you for inviting me and the others who were on this wonderful trip during the winter. Because of the incredible location of the Sephardic Educational Center I was able to get up every morning with the option of praying at a wonderful Sephardic synagogue right next door or taking a 2 minute walk to the holiest of all places in the world, the Kotel. In some ways it felt like being at home, waking up with a home cooked breakfast every single morning. The Shabbat dinners were fantastic, to be surrounded by other Sephardic Jews all singing and dancing to the same tunes and moves we have all grown up with was just one of the best experiences. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for making me feel so welcome, and for helping to make this trip happen.

Sincerely,
Evan Abikzer

Dear Rabbi Bouskila:

Debbie and I would like to thank you once again for the leadership, friendship and spiritual guidance that you have extended to our son, Ezra. Debbie was fortunate to have had the SEC experience – I wasn't as fortunate. So for me, I have lived vicariously through Ezra for the past three weeks. He is very fortunate that he was able to experience this trip with you in particular and with a group of great young Sephardic peers. We had a deluge of information downloaded onto us when he returned and the stories & experiences are still coming forth – amusing, inspirational and a combo thereof as well as their gastronomic experiences!!!

We look forward to these young adults continuing to keep the bond that you have been instrumental in creating. Thank you again and thanks to Peni, Shira & Ilan for letting our children share you!

Fondly,
Simon and Debbie Soriano (Ezra's parents)

Dear Rabbi Bouskila:

I have been trying to think of the right words to write to you and say how amazingly grateful I am that you became a Rabbi in the first place. Adina cannot stop giving us bits of information about Israel, Jewish History and facts about Torah that she learned from you.

You not only have a plethora of information in all those areas and more, you have an amazing ability to convey that information to teens, elders, scholars, laymen, etc. It is for this reason that I was pushing Adina so hard to go on this trip. I finally got to hear the words every mother of a teenage daughter waits to hear: "You were right mom". She is so happy she went; she learned more from being around you than she would have ever learned from books, internet etc. Before I sleep at night I ask God to put people like you in the path of my children. Some prayers get answered. So thank you for the trip of a lifetime for our kids, for watching over them, teaching them, feeding them (steaks!), making them understand that they were a part of something bigger than themselves.

Sincerely,
Molly Jalali (Adina's Mom!)

Creative Writing



HAMSA TEENS LA

The Hamsa Teens enjoyed an educational event screening the Academy Award nominated documentary, "The Gatekeepers", at the Arclight Cinema in Hollywood with a discussion following the film led by Rabbi Bouskila. The evening was sponsored by Yaron and Yael Levy.

HAIM SABATO

A Modern Sephardic Novelist

By R. Daniel Bouskila

In current discourses on modern Israeli literature, the names Oz, Yehoshua and Grossman typically dominate the discussion. But how often do we hear the name Haim Sabato? Who is Sabato, and why is his writing often compared to Nobel Prize-winning Israeli author S.Y. Agnon? When I first met Sabato, the setting was not the typical book-lined study or corner table at the literary cafe. Instead, it was the beit midrash of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Ma'aleh Adumim, where he lives, studies, teaches Talmud — and writes novels.

Born in Egypt and descended from a long line of rabbis from Aleppo, Syria, Sabato is one of the most unique voices in modern Israeli literature. His writing is inspired by Agnon, whose stories he read as a child, and the similarities between the two are striking: Both are religiously observant, both employ a linguistic style that draws heavily from biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, and both tell their stories through a narrator who has a striking resemblance to the author.

But there are major differences, and Sabato pointed them out in — of all places — Beit Agnon (Agnon's House), where he delivered the annual "Agnon Memorial Lecture" a few years ago.

"I followed in Agnon's footsteps in immersing my stories in the traditional sources ... but I felt a few layers were completely missing from his language. I wondered, where are the wordplays of the Sephardic kabbalists, what about the homiletics of the Aleppo scholars, the halachic terminology of Moroccan rabbis, the Aramaic translations of Yemenite Jews, and the Ladino scholars of Jerusalem who mix Midrash and Bible, dip it in Rashi, and create Ladino idioms? I was zealous for them, so their language would not be forsaken and lost. Who will sketch their profiles, in their language?"

Sabato's literary journey began with "Aleppo Tales" and, most recently, "From the Four Winds."

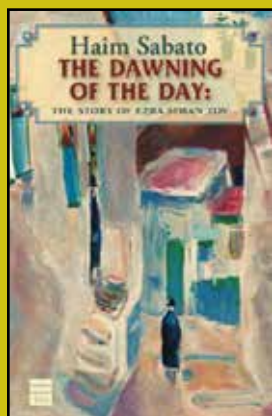
But his second and third books are what distinguish Sabato as a great novelist. In these novels, he writes from a uniquely Sephardic perspective. He tells Israel's Sephardic story, of immigrants and of scholars. He seeks to demonstrate how Sephardic Jews interacted with and ultimately integrated into the predominant Ashkenazic culture of Israeli society, all the while struggling to maintain their distinct culture and heritage.

"Adjusting Sights" is a classic

Yom Kippur War novel; based on Sabato's own experiences, the narrator — Haim — tells the story of what happened to him and his childhood friend, Dov (a real childhood friend of Sabato's), during that war. But beyond the powerful narrative of friendship, faith and the turmoil of the Yom Kippur War, Sabato's story has a deeper message. In the beginning, Haim recounts his childhood as an immigrant from Egypt who now lives in the impoverished neighborhood of Beit Mazmil, just outside of Jerusalem (true to Sabato's own story — which he returns to and expands in his fourth novel, "From the Four Winds"). Haim's cousin, Shabtai, takes him out to play, and as the two sit on the side of the soccer field talking, they are suddenly surrounded by a group of boys from the neighborhood who shout, "Arabs! Arabs!" Haim bursts into tears, and it is a tough Sephardic boy — Momo and his "gang" — who rescues Haim and Shabtai.

"These kids aren't Arabs. They're talking Arabic because they're new ... no one touches them." But as much as Momo is Haim's protector and he felt a kinship toward him, their life journeys are different. Momo, a Moroccan "tough guy" who knows how to pray and recites Psalms by heart, is thrown out of school for misconduct and resorts to the streets, the fate of many Sephardic immigrants in Israel. Haim is a young Torah scholar who befriends Dov, an Ashkenazi immigrant from Romania. The two go on to yeshiva high school and hesder yeshiva together. Although Haim bumps into Momo (now an officer) during the Yom Kippur War, it is with Dov that Haim shares a tank and fights the war. "Adjusting Sights" is a Yom Kippur War story, but beneath its layers lies the story of a Sephardic immigrant whose blending into mainstream Israeli society came during one of Israel's most defining moments.

"The Dawning of the Day: A Jerusalem Tale" is Sabato's ode to Sephardic rabbis and poets (something he began in "Aleppo Tales"). Set in the heavily Sephardic Jerusalem neighborhoods of Nahalaot and Mahane Yehuda, this novel features rabbis named Pinto, Hadad and Ventura, and characters named Tawil, Antebi and Mizrahi. But the novel's main character is a laundry presser named Ezra Siman Tov, whose initials, E.S.T., "could also be read as Ezra Sephardi Tavor — Ezra, a pure Sephardi." Ezra is a Sephardic storyteller who becomes Sabato's voice to the Ashkenazi world, including to Agnon: "There was once a great writer in Jerusalem. All Jerusalem took pride in him, both during his life and after his death. His fame extended throughout the world. At times, on his walks ... he noticed a man with a shining face in the alley near the entrance to the synagogue.



Haim Sabato continued

The man stood encircled by a group of people who were listening to him and were rapt with attention. The writer too began to listen and his eyes lit up ... that storyteller was Ezra Siman Tov." The irony is that in this scene, Siman Tov tells a Chasidic tale! This is Sabato's brilliant way of telling Agnon, "I know your stories, but do you know mine?" Siman Tov and "the great writer" ultimately develop a relationship, a reflection of Sabato's interaction with Agnon's writings, or of the Sephardic writer who seeks to interface with Israel's continuously Ashkenazic narrative.

The greatest difference between Agnon and Sabato is not only their ethnic backgrounds, but also their strikingly different outlook on life. Agnon's novels are filled with cynicism and bitterness. Sabato's novels are — in his own words — "filled with sparks of light, and instead of the bitter drop of fate [in Agnon's stories], a hopeful dose of faith."

Perhaps it's time for Israeli society to re-evaluate its narrative ... and its narrator.

SILHOUETTE

By Benny DeMayo

"Grandpa," they told me, "Were going to Yad Vashem today. We want you to come with us."

I wasn't sure enough time had passed. But my daughter and my grandchildren decided for me that it had been long enough since liberation that I could revisit the Shoah. I've learned since then that in a million years, not enough time will have passed...and yet I must revisit.

Going to Yad Vashem as a Holocaust survivor is like trying to pull a thorn out of your body that, with every yank, gets further driven into your skin. Every photograph was painful. Every artifact was too familiar. To this day, I will bet my daughter's inheritance that one of the pairs of shoes on display was mine. When we walked into the Hall of Names at the end, I shivered as though I knew every single person on the wall. In reality, I had never seen any of them in my life, but that didn't matter. I was overcome by how close I had come to being one of those names on the wall, with nothing left of me except a nationality and a benign smile.

But the biggest impact at Yad Vashem did not come in the form of an artifact or photograph. Rather, emotion hit me the hardest when I saw a young woman at the end of the hall. She was wearing an army uniform. At first, there was nothing special about her. She was like every other soldier who had been walking through the museum that day. But when she laughed, I realized that she was exactly like my sister Rebecca. The last time I had seen her was during the "selection" at Auschwitz, when Rebecca obediently followed the baton that led her to the gas chambers.

My sister was tall and broad shouldered, with blanché white skin and hazel colored hair. The soldier I saw at Yad Vashem was tan, short and slight. Her laugh was Rebecca's laugh, and that was enough to make me break down in front of her.

By the time I started writing this piece, I had thought of many things I could have told the soldier about fighting for Israel. But on that day, I could not say anything to her. I stared down into the pool of water in the Hall of Names, but it wasn't my own silhouette that I saw. Instead, I saw Rebecca's face reflected in the water, and right next to her stood the silhouette of the young soldier.

Creative Writing

Israel 
A week of celebration,
education & reflection

SHABBAT, APRIL 20

 **"Israel, A Sephardic Perspective"**
with Rabbi Daniel Bouskila of the Sephardic Educational Center Los Angeles
Sermon: "Sephardic Zionism, is there a difference?"
Kiddush Luncheon: After Tefila

"After Kiddush: "Rav Uziel & Rav Kook: Two perspectives on religious Zionism"

6:00 PM: "Purim Jews Vs. Pesach Jews: Two paradigms of contemporary Judaism"

Seudah: "The Hope: A spiritual reading of Hatikva"

All events are at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth and are open to the community.

SEATTLE Sephardic Institute April 20, 2013



Rabbi Bouskila delivered four(4!) lectures/classes on Shabbat, inspiring and amazing the community who only complained that they hadn't invited him sooner. The community lunch was sponsored by SEC alumna from 1980, Lela (Sabin) and Harley Franco. Rabbi Bouskila presented the Franco's with a beautiful leather bound SEC Five Books of Torah. In addition to sponsoring the Shabbat program, Lela and Harley committed to continue supporting the SEC and spreading its message throughout the Pacific Northwest. We also got a lot of enthusiasm from our friends in Seattle to help recruit kids for our "Hamsa Teens" Israel program and David and Jamileh Behar volunteered to reach out to parents to encourage their participation. The very informed and active community who attended the lectures really engaged Rabbi Bouskila with intelligent and thoughtful comments and questions throughout the day. In addition to the Franco's, we thank Rabbi and Mrs. Ron-Ami Meyers, Hazan Emeritus Ike Azose, and the entire Ezra Bessaroth Community.

We look forward to creating an annual "Sephardic Institute" on both coasts and hope to expand our partnership with the Seattle Sephardic Community, along with the University of Washington's Sephardic Studies Initiative.

2013 SEC HAMSA TEEN WINTER

The Ultimate Winter Break Experience!



Visit

Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Northern & Southern Israel, IDF Bases, Museums & Special Attractions

Hike

Israel's nature reserves, canyons, Masada... and more!

Pray

at the Kotel, holy sites, and ancient synagogues

Hang out

with old friends & new friends

Live

at the Sephardic Educational Center's luxurious campus in the Old City of Jerusalem

Volunteer

in various social action and Mitzvah Projects throughout Israel

Trip Leader

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Dates

December 22, 2013 - January 5, 2014

Age Group

15 - 17 years old

Cost

You pay the airfare - \$1,800... we cover the rest!
(actual trip value: \$4,200)

For more information

contact the SEC office at
Tel: (323) 272-4574 or e-mail
programs@secjerusalem.org

Deadline to apply

Friday, November 1, 2013

Space is limited... apply now!



To apply...
Find us on Facebook
SEC Hamsa Israel



SEC Hamsa Teens is sponsored in part by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

Blog

Through Sephardic Lenses



Follow Rabbi Daniel Bouskila's new blog at www.jewishjournal.com/through_sephardic_lenses



SHAVUOT in Palm Springs

This past spring, 20 families joined in our annual Shavuot Young Family Retreat in Palm Springs. We had our own prayers led by the participants and a great program, including a midnight cheesecake party and class with Rabbi Bouskila, Garden BBQ dinner, cocktail party and non-stop fun for the kids of all ages that played and went from villa to villa to hang out with their friends. There were some 25 kids under 13 and about 20 teenagers and everyone had an amazing time. The parents said this was the best Shavuot ever!



CELEBRATING Purim at "Saba Sushi"!



SEC Family HAVURA

Following on the success of our annual Shavuot Retreat in Palm Springs, the young families created a monthly Havura that has been meeting in different homes for light dinner, socializing and a short class with Rabbi Bouskila. The first meeting was hosted at the home of Yosi and Esther Avrahamy; the second was host-

ed by Eric and Laurence Wannon; the third at the home of Alan and Sharon Gomperts. To be included in our upcoming events, send your contact info to Esther Avrahamy at avrahamy@sbc-global.net or Laurence Wannon at laurence@wannon.com



SEC'S PUBLICATIONS bring life to EL SALVADOR Jewish Community

Dear SEC:

I wanted to personally thank you again for your gracious book donation to the Jewish community in El Salvador. In May and June, I spent 3 weeks visiting my family in the town of San Juan Opico and in that time I connected to Salvadorian roots as well as my own Jewish roots. And even though my father's family practices Catholicism in this generation, I was able to connect to the stories of my ancestors who preserved their Judaism several generations ago. As you know, I made contact with the small Jewish community in Armenia, just a half hour away from my family's town, who share a similar history to my family. Like my father, many of them were raised Catholic or Christian, but later discovered their Jewish history from a family member or began to question unusual customs that their parents had passed down to them. Another portion of the community converted to Judaism by choice.

What remarkable people they were. They welcomed me into their community with open arms and were eager to share their stories. I was so impressed with the closeness of their community and how organized they were. They meet every day for prayers and Torah study (even after a long day of work) and take pride in educating their younger generations in Judaism and furthering the Judaic study for adults. The Orthodox community of approximately 40 families celebrates Shabbat and holidays together.

I was most moved by their unwavering dedication and devotion to Judaism. A prayer leader of the synagogue, Ishai Avalos, described to me their love of Torah and how important it is to understand their traditions; they yearn to connect to their history and Jewish People around the world.

When I met the community, I brought the prayer books donated by the Sephardic Educational Center. As I took out the books from my suitcase, their smiles grew large and they were so grateful. Everyone grabbed a book and flipped through it, reading the Spanish translation and deciphering the Hebrew letters. They wanted me to personally thank you. I want to thank you too for making this interaction and this gift possible. These humble and devoted people were given such a meaningful gift that day, and it is with your help that this was possible.

I have attached pictures of the community where you can see members holding the books as well as the newsletters from the SEC.

Wishing you all the best,

Kimberly Dueñas

kimberly.duenas@gmail.com



Our SEC Family Grows!

Mazal Tov to:



Joe Tannenbaum and Sharone Sayegh, who were recently married on August 4, 2013 in Temescal Canyon, California. Sharone is the daughter of Nira (SEC Executive Board Member) and Pinny Sayegh, and is a Broadway actress and performer in New York. Joe is a talented and creative web designer in New York. The couple will make their home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.



Shimon Solomon and Elianna Rome who were recently married on August 11, 2013 in Dana Point, California. Elianna is the daughter of Rabbi Robert and Debbie Rome, works as a psychologist, and has been an SEC activist for many years, including recently co-chairing the SEC's Classes for the Masses young adult program. Shimon runs a successful automobile brokerage firm. The couple will make their home in Sherman Oaks, California.

Rabbi Bouskila officiated at both ceremonies.

We wish both couples long lives of happiness and fulfillment together.

ISRAEL PROGRAM Thank You

Dear SEC,

I would like to thank you for hosting and funding this amazing program. As a counselor accompanying the students, I saw the students gain a higher understanding of our struggles as a people and an appreciation for our religion in today's age. This powerful trip, brought to life by Rabbi Bouskila, brought together an amazing group of students under the strong umbrella of Sephardic Jewry. Each day I witnessed the students analyze, question and understand the true miracle of the State of Israel's existence and success. With jam packed days full of fun and intriguing experiences, Rabbi Bouskila brought these students closer to Israel and Judaism. It was such a pleasure to staff this trip and see young minds connect to their heritage and religion.

For me, this trip was as eye opening as it was for the students. I have been fortunate to experience Israel from many different lenses—with Camp Ramah touring Israel for two months, family visits and even studying at Tel Aviv University for a full semester—however, nothing compares to this program. I was intrigued by the antiquity and knowledge found in the State of Israel and just how much Rabbi Bouskila knows and understands—seriously he's a walking encyclopedia!

What I have learned from this trip about our heritage and religion will stay with me forever and guide me in every step of my life. This program was effective fundamentally because of Rabbi Bouskila's hard work and dedication. He brought together such amazing messages and knowledge like no other educator or education can.

As a senior at the University of Colorado at Boulder, I understand the importance of a program like this. In the summer of 10th grade I was fortunate enough to embark on a trip similar to this and led by Rabbi Bouskila, which has helped guide my Israel advocacy. Taking Rabbi Bouskila's teachings to heart has helped me spread awareness on my campus and put an end to the 'Divestment from Israel' program. The SEC Hamsa program has strengthened these young Jewish leaders and I know that when they are faced with rubbish about the State of Israel, they will be proactive by showing the truth through their own experiences. I would like to stress that it is through your support that these leaders of today are shaped, and it is through them that pro-Israel communities emerge. I want to thank the entire SEC for helping this program achieve greatness and come to life by showing each one of us that in the SEC, we have a true home away from home in the heart of Israel.

Todah Rabbah,
Leetal Sayegh/Madricha, SEC Hamsa Israel 2012

Dear Rabbi Bouskila,

I want to thank you for everything you have done for us. If it wasn't for you, the Hamsa trip wouldn't have been as special and meaningful as it was for me. I would like to thank you for your amazing inspiration to love Israel, Judaism and even join the army! I am planning on graduating this year instead of next year and going to Israel next year to study political affairs. Once again, thank you for everything you have done for me, as you have opened my eyes to great ideas and hopefully these ideas will become reality soon. I just wanted to let you know what you did for me and how you were able to change my life. You have opened my eyes to an Israel that I never thought existed. Words can't even express how thankful I am. "Merci pour tout et j'espere a bientot".

Sincerely,
Anais Bertet

Israel INDEPENDENCE DAY

SEC Celebrated Israel Independence Day in Los Angeles with the entire community.



JERUSALEM DAY

SEC Commemorated Jerusalem Day, "Yom Yerushalayim" (the 46th Anniversary of the Six Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem) with an Israeli dinner sponsored in memory of Nessim Bouskila, who fought in the Palmach in the 1948 War of Independence. The SEC is proud to call the Old City of Jerusalem our headquarters and our home, with our beautiful campus sitting in the heart of The Old City. That is why this day is so special to us.



ISRAEL PROGRAMS Committee meets in L.A.

Israel Programs Committee meets in L.A. to plan semester program at the SEC. From left, Yosi Avrahamy, Neil Sheff, Nir Weinblut, Nira Sayegh, Rabbi Bouskila and Isack Fadlon



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Malibu hike



SPIRITUAL WISDOM

from Contemporary Sephardic Sages

Translated by Rabbi Bouskila



The Illuminating Power of Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel – Rishon Letsion/Sephardic Chief Rabbi (1939-1953)

Yom Kippur is the singular greatest mitzva from the Torah that encompasses and reflects the true splendor and beauty of Judaism. The fast lasts only from one night to the next, yet in these 25 hours, we infuse atonement and purity into our souls, we purify our emotions, illuminate our thoughts, we uplift our souls and elevate our spirituality. All of this opens our hearts and minds towards the proper paths of behavior that we commit to take upon ourselves for the coming year. Yom Kippur plants within each of us a deep love for God, the Torah, and the entire Jewish people, thus bringing us closer to our sacred mission of bringing peace and loving kindness into the world for all of humanity.



Soul Searching on Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim – Rishon Letsion/Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (1955-1972)

The High Holidays present us with the opportunity for serious soul searching. Looking upon our situation today, I find it difficult to adjust to a society that lives life exclusively for the individual, void of caring for one's fellow man. Let us look upon the underprivileged, the poor, and the depressed amongst us: have we sought to see and understand their suffering? Have we done enough to help them, educate them and uplift them, fulfilling the commandment of "Your brother shall dwell together with you" to its fullest expression?

Instead, it seems that we are becoming a society that glorifies materialism and individualism, where each person tries to impress the other through fancy clothing, expensive homes and luxurious cars. Nothing seems to stand in our way towards achieving material wealth. Life lived this way is void of holiness and empty of purpose. Where have our family values gone? Parents spend less time in that most sacred educational institution – the home – instead spending time seeking exaggerated material wealth and status. We must contemplate such matters on Yom Kippur, searching deep within our souls for the way back to our cherished values of family, community and loving kindness. May it be God's will that this coming year be one of re-evaluation, of purifying our thoughts and illuminating our souls. May love and unity dwell amongst us, and may peace reign in Israel and throughout the world.

*SEC...making a difference
in the Jewish world*



Neil J. Sheff

From the EDITOR:

Last winter, my son Max (15) was fortunate to be able to attend the inaugural Hamsa Teen trip to Israel. All I could think of was 30 some years ago, I was a counselor at the SEC and starting to organize returning SEC participants into a young adult movement in L.A. and other cities and now, my son was taking his turn to experience an SEC trip almost like the ones I attended for 8 summers in the '80's.

And who was with Max on this trip? Adam Wannon, whose father, Eric, was a participant on the SEC Summer trip in 1985 and I was his counselor. His mother, Laurence, and father met at an SEC Sukkot party in L.A. Anais Bertet's father, Joel, was a participant on the SEC Summer trip in 1984 and I was his counselor. He met Sophie at our first North American Young Adult Convention in 1988 and the rest is history. I met Benny De-Mayo's mom in 1980 when she was a participant on the first SEC Summer program in Israel. Evan Abikzer's

parents both attended the SEC Summer trip in 1985 and I was their counselor. Adina Jalali's parents met at the SEC's Classes for the Masses in the 80's and have been part of the SEC family ever since. Ezra Soriano's mom, Debbie, went to the SEC program and I was also her counselor. Even Eliana Raphael's father went to the SEC program (but I wasn't his counselor!).

Seeing this group of teens along with others coming back from an unforgettable trip to the SEC in Jerusalem was more than witnessing a group that had fun in Israel. This was a milestone for the SEC and all who have worked so hard on making Dr. Nessim's dream a reality. These were the Second Generation! We have indeed come a long way!

Then Shavuot and our annual SEC Family retreat where so many of the young (and not so young anymore!) couples who met through the SEC got together in Palm Springs for our 3rd Shavuot Retreat and had an amazing time together along with over 20 little kids and some 20 high school teens. We spent the holiday praying together, eating (a lot!) together, learning from Rabbi Bouskila and having a lot of fun. Then for several months, the new SEC "Havura" Group has met each month in a different home for dinner, class with Rabbi Bouskila and a good time together. Each month new people join us and have a great night (without kids) laughing and sharing. We have indeed come a long way!

This past year, we lost a dear friend of the SEC who liked to say that SEC stood for "the biggest SECret", since so many people didn't know about our programs. With all of our activities and expansion, I think the "SECret" is out now and our beloved Jack Israel is smiling down from heaven. Jack always had the SEC in his heart, from editing these pages of Hamerkaz to writing articles and interviewing "SEC Couples" in our past issues. He loved what we stood for, attended all of our events from our earliest banquet in 1984 to our last Film Festival and lecture series. Jack had a wise, sharp intellect but was fun to be with and enjoyed conversing with SEC members of all ages and they loved to talk to him, amazed that this 95 year old man was so bright and witty. His contribution to the SEC spirit in so many ways will always be remembered, and his engaging personality at our events is sorely missed. But thanks to Jack and his dedication in telling the SEC story for so many years, our mission is known world-wide and the best is still yet to come!



Jack Israel

I want to thank our Board of Directors who spend so much time caring about the welfare of this organization; we look forward to reaching out to new members and creating a World Board of Governors this coming year. I thank our outgoing Chairman Ron Nessim and Board for the honor in selecting me to lead the SEC into the future; I only hope I will continue to do honor to the vision of my mentor, Dr. Nessim, who taught me so much about what it meant to be a "Sephardic Ben-Adam". I also want to thank God for sending us Rabbi Bouskila to guide our way, teach us and be an incredible source of inspiration to young and old alike. As my son, Max said upon his return from Israel, "Rabbi Bouskila is MY kind of Rabbi!" While I'm sure that had something to do with the great restaurants he took the kids to, I know that it is also because of the love these kids had for him and what he taught them that made their SEC experience so amazing. With Dr. Nessim's vision guiding our way, I can't wait to see what the next year brings us with all the exciting programs we have planned. I wish you all a wonderful and meaningful New Year and ask that you please make your commitment to the SEC so we can spread our message to young and old and insure that our "SECret" be shared with the Jewish World always.

Tizku Le'shanim Rabot,
Neil J. Sheff