

HAMERKAZ

A PUBLICATION OF THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER



SHAVUOT RETREAT



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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR

RABBI DANIEL BOUSKILA

Are Today's Sephardic Synagogues Spiritually Attractive?

In his well written and thought provoking article recently published in the journal Conversations, our SEC President Neil Sheff mentioned that during our annual SEC Shavuot Retreat in Palm Springs in 2015, "we held a town hall discussion as part of our Erev Shavuot study program." Titled What's Wrong with Organized Religion and How Can We Fix It?" we spent the evening discussing the state of affairs in our local Sephardic synagogues. Our audience was all young Sephardic families who are active in various Sephardic synagogues in Los Angeles. Some serve on boards and committees, many attend Shabbat services on a regular or semi-regular basis, and all have kids who, in one way or the other, are connected to these synagogues. The common denominators here were age group (all young families) and a very strong commitment to Sephardic synagogues and Sephardic Judaism.

As in any diverse audience, the comments varied. Some said, "I wish the synagogues focused more on our kids," others felt that the rabbi's sermons "did not reflect current issues." Some felt it was "too much about the rabbi and hazzan and not enough about the community." Some liked the "warmth and intimacy" of their Sephardic synagogues, and others said "I can't say why, but it just feels like home." The provocative amongst the group said, "I feel like I get more spirituality from my yoga teacher than from my rabbi," or "Sephardic rabbis are backwards and out of touch with the modern world." When the teenagers were asked to chime in, some felt the synagogue was "a turnoff," others said "I don't really love it, but as Jews, going to synagogue is part of what we have to do, so we do it." Many of the teens said, "I wish our Shabbat services were as fun and meaningful as the services we have on these SEC Shabbatonim and retreats."

Sephardic synagogues have such great potential. The Sephardic cantorial traditions (known as Maqqam) offer some of the most beautiful, inspirational and uplifting tunes for the prayers and Torah readings. When a good Sephardic Hazzan knows the Maqqam and feels it in his soul, his voice can light up any synagogue, filling the sanctuary's seats and the worshippers hearts.

Many Sephardim feel this passion most potently once a year, during a section of the Yom Kippur services which, in Ashkenazi synagogues, is typically somber: Selihot. There is an incredibly uplifting spiritual energy, joy and passion felt in Sephardic synagogues during the chanting of Selihot. It's not somber at all, but fun, upbeat and deeply spiritual. My kids love and look forward to Yom Kippur just for these tunes. Hashem Melech, Anenu and Hatanu L'fanekha can energize the sanctuary like no other prayers. The challenge of Sephardic synagogues is to create that same energy every Shabbat.

Sephardic rabbis can offer unique angles on Jewish life that many of their Ashkenazi colleagues cannot, simply because Sephardic rabbis are typically not part of the Ashkenazi denominational world. This brings potentially refreshing perspectives on halakhic issues, communal challenges and global concerns. If some Sephardic rabbis were to simply "globalize" their sermonic messages to the point where their young congregants felt that the rabbi actually "has something important to say to me on what's happening in the world," perhaps the teens would start filling the seats.

Despite all of this, many Sephardic synagogues today are quite successful. Through my work with the SEC, I feel blessed to count amongst my good friends a group of Sephardic colleagues across North America and Mexico, who all run successful synagogues, are passionately devoted to the Sephardic tradition, and are quite talented at singing Sephardic liturgy as well as articulating sophisticated positions on many issues.

But for all of the success stories, a larger number of Sephardic synagogues are dragging their feet, struggling to maintain their congregant's interests. The comments we

heard at our SEC retreat on Shavuot are still clear in my mind. What can be done to change this?

Since Sephardim are so often known for our tasty recipes, I'd like to offer a recipe whose ingredients I think would produce more successful Sephardic synagogues:

Take a talented Hazzan whose knowledge and love of the Sephardic melodies inspires joyous and meaningful worship. Mix that with a rabbi who blends tradition, modernity, intellect, education and relevant issues. To reduce the fat and carbs, cut down the number of Aliyot to the Torah, and replace those time-consuming calories with an extended Kiddush after services, filled with Sephardic delicacies and good socializing.

These are the ingredients. Now let's start cooking up a Sephardic synagogue storm!

SEC MISSION

The SEC is dedicated to strengthening Jewish identity for youth and young adults, and to building a new generation of spiritual and community leaders. From our historic campus in the Old City of Jerusalem to our various diaspora branches, the SEC's philosophy of Classic Sephardic Judaism offers Jews an opportunity to connect with their roots in a warm, friendly and positive environment. At the SEC, tradition meets modernity, and the timeless values of intellect, unity, compassion and tolerance blend to create a meaningful connection to Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people.



SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER JERUSALEM CAMPUS

DONOR OPPORTUNITIES & DEDICATIONS

Sephardic Heritage Museum	\$1,000,000	Available
Dormitory Building	\$1,000,000	Available
Courtyard Building	\$1,000,000	Dedicated
Spanish Courtyard	\$600,000	Dedicated
Courtyard Gardens	\$180,000	Available
Sephardic Library	\$250,000	Dedicated
Sephardic Synagogue	\$360,000	Dedicated
Synagogue Heichal	\$100,000	Dedicated
Synagogue Ner Tamid (Eternal Lamp)	\$180,000	Available
Social Lounge	\$500,000	Dedicated
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Beit Midrash Study Hall	\$250,000	Available
Main Reception Lobby	\$250,000	Available
Rishon Le'Zion Historic Lobby	\$180,000	Available
Educators' Offices	\$50,000	Available (2)
Conference Room	\$100,000	Available
New Residence Suites	\$26,000	Available (15)
Main Kitchen	\$180,000	Available

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Shaarei Uziel Rabbinic Leadership Programs	\$1,000,000	Available
Hamsa Israel Experience Programs	\$500,000	Available
Metivta Rabbinical Seminar	\$360,000	Available

MEZUZOT:

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Reception Lobby Mezuzah	\$18,000	Available
Residence Room Mezuzot	\$1,800	Available (18)

For more information or to donate contact Rabbi Daniel Bouskila
phone: **323.272.4574** • email: **info@secjerusalem.org**

We will tailor any gift to your wishes.



THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER: *Donor Opportunities & Dedications*

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Sephardic Educational Center • 6505 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 320, Los Angeles, CA 90048

13th SEC Los Angeles Sephardic Jewish Film Festival

OPENING GALA

November 13, 2016 @ 4 P.M.

PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

Screenings November 14-20

Laemmle's Music Hall Theater

This Year's Honorees



ENRICO MACIAS

Cinema Sepharad

Lifetime Achievement Award

The Sephardic Educational Center's 13th Los Angeles Sephardic Film Festival proudly honors Enrico Macias, an internationally acclaimed French singer of Jewish/Sephardic/North African heritage. Appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace in 1997, Mr. Macias is a human rights activist whose music reflects his strong commitment to the promotion of human rights and world peace. His concerts around the world draw audiences of diverse backgrounds, using music to bring people together. In 1979, Mr. Macias performed a special peace concert soon after Egypt and Israel signed their historic peace treaty. In a world plagued by intolerance, we proudly honor Enrico Macias, as his message of tolerance and dialogue amongst people mirrors our organization's ideology.

The Los Angeles Sephardic Film Festival brings the unique stories and culture of Sephardic Jewry to the big screen. Established in 1997 by the Sephardic Educational Center (SEC), the festival's diverse array of films promotes a positive message of tolerance, dialogue and understanding between people of different cultures.



JEANNINE SEFTON

Sephardic Legacy Award

Jeannine Sefton has been involved with the SEC since its early days in the 1980's when she connected immediately with the message of visionary founder, Dr. Jose Nessim. Ever since she has been an advisor and active participant in every major fundraiser sponsored by the SEC and promoted the organization to her many friends and clients. Jeannine wears the crowns of class, success and leadership with ultimate charm and style. Born in Casablanca, she has been in the travel industry for over 30 years and is the principal of Altour Travel Master in West Los Angeles.

While Jeannine has achieved great success in business, her proudest accomplishments are her children: David and his wife Paige, and Valerie and her husband Danny; and her five beautiful grandchildren whom she adores: Ashley, Andrew, Noah, Emily and Joshua. Her happiness is completed by a wonderful and charming significant other, internationally famed architect Herb Nadel.

Jeannine is always there to help, evidenced by her involvement in so many important causes, and she has always been passionate about preserving her Sephardic heritage.

The SEC is proud to honor Jeannine Sefton with our Sephardic Legacy Award at the 2016 L.A. Sephardic Film Festival.



RAE COHEN

Maimonides Leadership Award

Rae Cohen was born near the end of World War II, the daughter of Lena and Victor Cohen, of blessed memory, both from the Island of Rhodes. Like many of her friends and relatives, she grew up in Southwest Los Angeles.

The second in a family of three daughters, sisters, Sally Mann and Rose Benon, brother in law, Joe Benon, of blessed memory, nieces and nephews, Stacy and Michael Gray, Celina and Aron Benon, Ryan and Laurel Cooper, Holden, Max and Lucas Benon, all very dear to her.

Rae has spent her professional life in the insurance industry as a licensed agent but because "Rae can't say no", she has been actively involved in countless Sephardic organizations for more than 40 years. She was the first woman president of a Sephardic synagogue in L.A., the Sephardic Hebrew Center. Rae went on to be Board Member, Vice President and President of the Sisterhood of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, President of LASHA for 6 consecutive terms, and an active participant in so many of SEC's major events of the past 30 years.

It's the small things also that no one knows about that make Rae so special, from driving seniors around town, helping to bake whenever asked, and never turning anyone down for a favor. She just "can't say no!" The SEC is proud to honor Rae Cohen with the Maimonides Leadership Award.

13TH LOS ANGELES SEPHARDIC FILM FESTIVAL SCREENINGS



OPENING NIGHT

SUNDAY November 13

West Coast Premiere

The Midnight Orchestra (L'orchestre de Minuit)

Morocco 2015 (102 min) Arabic, French, Hebrew with English Subtitles

In 1974, the celebrated musician Marcel Botbol suddenly left his native land of Morocco under mysterious circumstances.

His disappearance led to the breakup of his beloved band, The Midnight Orchestra. Thirty years later, Marcel's son Michael is summoned to Casablanca by his father to arrange a reunion of sorts. The journey uncovers the special power that music has in the Sephardic world to bridge Jews and Moslems. The film is replete with hilarious scenes and poignant moments set against an unforgettable message of tolerance and coexistence that once was.

MONDAY November 14 • 7:30 PM *Los Angeles Premiere*



Dear God

Israel, 2014 (13 min)

This lovely wordless short depicts romantic Jerusalem, as seen through the eyes of Aaron, a simple man who guards the

Wailing Wall. One day a beautiful, mysterious woman puts a note between the holy stones of the Western Wall and Aaron decides to fulfill her deepest wish, while learning that love is all about communication.



A Song of Loves - R. David Buzaglo

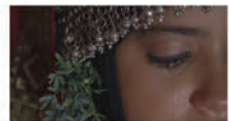
Israel, 2015 (63 min) Hebrew with English subtitles (Documentary)

Q & A to follow

Rabbi David Buzaglo was the greatest

Hebrew liturgical poet of the twentieth century. Born in Morocco in 1903, his literary output had a major impact on a community of hundreds of thousands of people. Buzaglo's poetry initiated an abrupt shift in Sephardic liturgical writing, but it also served as a vital link between the modern era and a tradition that dates back to Spanish Jewry's Golden Age.

TUESDAY November 15 • 7:30 PM *North American Premiere*



Child Mother

Israel, 2016 (90 min) Hebrew, Moroccan and Yemeni Arabic with English subtitles (Documentary)

"Child Mother" introduces us to the personal histories of now elderly women

born in Morocco and Yemen who were forced to become child brides. The memories of their tragic childhood never healed, they were simply suppressed for the sake of their children, their livelihoods, and their husbands. These brave women finally share their painful stories with their children.

WEDNESDAY November 16 • 7:30 PM *West Coast Premiere*



Encirclements ("Hakafot")

Israel, 2015 (98 min) Hebrew with English Subtitles

Thirteen-year old Aharon Ninio, the only child of parents who are unable to conceive again, is determined to win the honor of carrying the main Torah scroll on Simhat Torah. The belief that he who carries the

Torah may ask God for anything on behalf of others can elevate Aharon's status in the neighborhood and win his distant father's approval and love. But after Aharon wins the honor, his achievement brings ancient tensions to the surface. Encirclements ("Hakafot") uses cultural and religious rituals, with humor and drama, to depict the kind of private ceremonial traditions that exist in every family - which "encircle" us but can be ultimately liberating.

THURSDAY November 17 • 7:30 PM *West Coast Premiere*



The Venice Ghetto: 500 Years of Life (Il Ghetto di Venezia, 500 Anni di Vita)

Italy, 2015 (54 min) Italian with English Subtitles

2016 is the 500th anniversary of world's first ghetto in Venice. Lorenzo, a Jewish teenager born and raised in New York, leads us on a discovery of his Venetian roots with docu-fiction techniques that bring alive the paradoxical wonders of Europe's oldest Jewish ghetto and its integration into Italian society, in this edifying and heartwarming film.



U.S. Premiere

Back to Casablanca (Son of the Land)

Israel, 2012 (50 min) Hebrew, French, Arabic with English Subtitles (Documentary)

Israeli actor and director Ze'ev Revach was born in Morocco in 1940. He sets out on a journey back to Casablanca, in search of a Moroccan actor to star alongside him in his next film, which he dreams that he'll be able to distribute around the Arab world. He connects with his mother tongue, discovers the commonalities between the two cultures, but his mission is not a simple one.

SATURDAY November 19 • 10:00 PM



In Search of Israeli Cuisine

U.S.A. 2016 (100 min) English (Documentary)

The film's chef/guide is Michael Solomonov, a James Beard Award winning chef and co-owner of acclaimed Zahav in Philadelphia.

Mike was born in Israel and grew up in Pittsburgh and is inspired by the flavors and aromas from his Sephardic grandmother's kitchen. The filmmakers follow Mike into hot restaurants and home kitchens, wineries and cheese makers, he eats street food and visits markets. All over the country, he discusses traditions, ingredients, the origins, and the future of Israeli Cuisine, with a nod to the many Sephardic culinary tastes. This is a delicious film!

CLOSING NIGHT

SUNDAY November 20 • 2:30 PM *West Coast Premiere*



Cloudy Sunday

Greece, 2016 (115 min) Greek and Ladino with English Subtitles

Set in 1942 Salonika during the Nazi German occupation, the film, based on true events,

tells of the forbidden love between two members of the resistance- Estrea, a young Sephardic girl, and Giorgos, the brother-in-law of the famed composer Vassilis Tsitsanis. Much of the story takes place in and around the night club owned by the then 28-year-old Tsitsanis with beautiful bouzouki music throughout. The film's English title references Tsitsanis' beloved classic "Synnefisameni Kyriaki", one of the songs featured in the movie.

SUNDAY November 20 • 5:30 PM *Los Angeles Premiere*



On the Banks of the Tigris

Australia, 2015 (79 min) English and Arabic with English Subtitles

The film celebrates Iraqi music and the cultural ties that link Iraqis of all faiths. It

tells the story of Majid Shokor, an Iraqi-Australian from a Muslim background who seeks the source of songs he loves and discovers that many he grew up with were written by Iraqi Jews, but concealed by the regime. To uncover this hidden history, Majid embarks on a bold journey from Australia to Israel, Europe and Iraq to meet Iraqi musicians, hear their music and stories, and unite them in a concert for peace and reconciliation.



BENEFITING THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER



Selihat Concert

HOSTED BY KAHAL JOSEPH CONGREGATION WITH THANKS TO 2015 SPONSORS, RON NESSIM, MOUSSA SHAAYA AND ABE MATHALON

SEC's Annual Selihat Concert in L.A. is not to be missed. Merging the beautiful voices of professional "hazzanim" (cantors) in L.A. for the high holidays, mostly from Israel, together with the live oud, qanoun, violin, and drums of acclaimed Arabic musicians, this is a unique and extraordinary spiritual and musical celebration of favorite tunes from the Sephardic Selihat service.



New Classes

The SEC began a new weekly class with Rabbi Bouskila to delve into the writings of the Sephardic Sages. Titled "Hokhma Mikedem" (Wisdom from the East/Past) based on a recent book of the same title will explore texts of responsa of Sephardic Sages from the past 100 years.





May 2016 **Yom Ha'atzmaut**

Celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) with screening of "Mekonen" about an Ethiopian young adult's journey from his village to commander in the IDF. Reception following the screening was hosted by Nir Weinblut and La Gondola.

2016 **Lectures**



Yom Hashoa



Western Wall Debate



Passover



June 2016 **SEC BIDS FAREWELL to** **ISRAEL CONSUL GENERAL DAVID SIEGEL**

AT A GARDEN DINNER HOSTED BY **JACK AND JOELLE RIMOKH**

the Honorable Consul General was presented with a beautifully framed limited edition print embossed with the SEC name and logo. He then told the intimate gathering of SEC supporters what a special place we have in our Jerusalem campus which is truly at the "Center" of the Jewish world and how proud we should be that not only are we keeping alive ancient traditions but that today's Israeli soldiers are welcomed there as a base for their ceremonies at the Kotel. We wish David and his family good luck and blessings for their future and thank them for all they did on behalf of the State of Israel.





Albert and Leat Silvera

ANNUAL SHAVUOT RETREAT 2016

By Albert Silvera

Shavuot with the SEC is such a fantastic time for our family. Somehow it combines the excitement of getting away with the family with the warm and fuzzy "hominess" we like to have during the holiday. The villas are big enough to hold the whole family, the beds are very comfortable and we love the convenience of a full kitchen. The grounds are beautiful. My wife and I appreciate a peaceful cup of coffee in the morning on the porch overlooking the tasteful landscaping. Afternoon walks on the expansive grounds are a must. The kids are gone from the moment lunch is over until we go find them.

But the secret to this magical holiday is always the crowd. So many different people step up to make the tefillot beautiful and meaningful. Torah reading, hazanut, singing the holiday songs....all originating from this impressive group of SEC families. Who knew?! Important and relevant Divrei Torah from Rabbi Bouskila are sprinkled throughout each of the days reminding us why we are getting together.

When we get together for socializing you'd be easily fooled into thinking a professional event coordinator saw to every elegant detail (thank you Rachel S.!). I can't say enough how rejuvenating this weekend is for our whole family. It's truly a magical time.

-Albert Silvera





METIVTA 2016 R. NISSIM ELNECAVE



This past August, I with a number of Rabbis from all over the world, had the privilege to attend the second annual Rabbinical Seminar organized by the Sephardic Educational Center in the Old City of Jerusalem and it was a true learning experience. What was so unique about this seminar? Well, one might say, “Ya mos abastava dayenu”, just for the opportunity to be a few days

in the beautiful facilities of the SEC, in the Old City of Jerusalem. For being right next to the Kotel, right near to where the Temple once stood. Yet, what is more, today the premises of the SEC look better than ever, everything is state of the art, a real mix of the modern world, with wi-fi, air conditioning and all the present-day accommodations amidst the very old, beautified and very well kept buildings that were built over four hundred years ago by the Sephardic community of Jerusalem.

The thought of having a Rabbinical Seminar in these premises becomes more unique when one realizes that this structure once housed the Hakham Bashi or the Rishon Le-Tzion (Chief Rabbi) during the Ottoman Empire and also a number of rabbinical schools or Yeshivot throughout those previous centuries. Many of our great and famous Sephardic sages grew up and were edu-

cated in these buildings. Those thoughts add a distinct flavor to the one who opens a book of the Torah or when one meditates over the words of our Sages within these walls.

Our itinerary included meetings with a number of dignitaries and influential people of Israel today. We were able to experience Israel and its people from a new perspective, so much so, that even the fast of the 9th of Av had a different “taste”. Yet, an even more special touch was added by the dedication of the organizers of the seminar. Every lesson was well thought out and every lecturer was highly qualified. The topics that were examined were all essential and contemporary. We discussed history, medicine, philosophy, Zionism, old and modern issues and so much more. What is more, most lectures were taught from a Sephardic perspective, bringing back to life many of our Sephardic sages from the Golden Age of Spain and also those from a more recent time like Syria, Turkey, Morocco, Greece and so many other places, all with an excellent atmosphere of learning and camaraderie.

It was indeed a true learning experience. I’d like to congratulate and also to thank Neil Sheff and Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, the president and the director of the SEC, for their vision on organizing an outstanding seminar. For their hard work and their attempt to revive our old traditions and bringing them to the forefront. Those were truly inspiring days at the SEC this summer. May G-d bless their work and make them greatly successful.



METIVTA OPENING CEREMONY & MEMORIAL

for SEC Founder **Dr. Nessim** took place on August 8 in the beautiful and peaceful courtyard of the SEC Campus. Rabbis Benito Garzon and Daniel Bouskila both gave the official memorial prayers and dedicated their upcoming week of study to the vision of Dr. Nessim (z"l)

SEC METIVTA SEMINAR

"For from Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (ISAIAH 2:3)



MURRAY MIZRACHI (NY)

In our study of Judaism we often spend much time emphasizing Jerusalem. Through our relationship of Jerusalem we understand our affiliation to History and the Jewish People. The holy city has always been the focal point of our Nation. To be able to live physically in Jerusalem during the SEC seminar made the experience very unique.

From the earliest ages in grade school we learn the story of Aqedat Yisac (the Sacrifice of Isaac) in Genesis on Mount Moriah. As we progress in our studies we read of Deuteronomy's plan to establish a centralized place of worship and administration. In the book of Joshua we learn of the first conquest of Jerusalem. The books of Samuel, Kings and the balance of the prophets shed light on the city and the Temple throughout the monarchy. Ezra, Nehemia, Hagai, Malachi and Zecharia tell us of the rebuilding and return to Zion. All in all, Jerusalem is mentioned over 1,000 times in our Bible.

In the middle ages many of our greatest rabbis and leaders were also based in the holy city. Rabbenu Obadyah M'Bartenura gives us a commentary on the Mishnah, while Ramban gives us an exegesis on the Torah. Of course some of our greatest scholars such as Rabbi Yehudah Halevi wrote about Jerusalem and aspired to live there:

"My Heart is in the east, yet I am at the ends of the west"

The SEC Metivta seminar this summer gave us a window into Jerusalem in the modern period from a Sephardic perspective. The story of Sephardim in the late 19th and early 20th century and their relationship is rarely told. "Unfortunately, one myth of

modern Zionism that is still widely believed is the alleged absence of Sephardic participation in the Zionist revolution" To the average student of history, the names most associated with Zionism are Theodore Hertzl, Haim Weitzman, Max Nordau but rarely include any Sephardic names. This is surprising since Sephardim were the majority for most of this time.

In contrast to many European rabbis who were opposed to Zionism; "Sephardic rabbis tended to be supportive of Zionism from the outset, for the movement was a natural form of expression of Sephardic Judaism". The SEC made us proud to be a part of these Sephardic and very Jewish leaders. Personalities such as Rabbi Yehudah Alkali, Moses Montefiore, Chief Rabbi Ya'aqob Meir and of course Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.

So often we tell the story of Zionism and the contribution of the Ashkenazim and the expense of the Sephardic role. It was refreshing to hear about the personalities from leading scholars and rabbis such as Rabbi Moshe Amar, Dr. Yehudah Mimran, Professor Yaron Harel, Rabbi Shmuel Katz and many others. Most important was the source materials and teaching methods the SEC gave us to help teach these Sephardic narratives to our communities. To include the Zionist aspirations of Rabbi Yehudah Alkali, the physical building of Jerusalem of Montefiore, the revival of Hebrew in the Sephardic tradition and the Zionist activities of the Chief Rabbis Ya'aqob Meir and Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel is essential to share with Sephardic communities.

May we merit a fuller understanding of these contributions and provide our communities and students with a narrative which includes the involvement of the entire Jewish People.

METIVTA 2017: JULY 24- AUGUST 3 FOR MORE INFO email: info@secjerusalem.org

A Unique Experience and Opportunity to Stay in the Old City of Jerusalem at the Beautiful SEC Campus and Share Insights of our Sephardic Religious Heritage with Colleagues from all over the world as well as Commemorate Tisha B'Av at the Western Wall.



(l to r) Rabbi Nissim Elnecape (NY); Rabbi Refael "Ralph" Tawil (Brooklyn/Jerusalem); Rabbi Abraham Tobal (Monte Sinai, Mexico City)



Meeting with former Knesset Member and Sephardic Scholar, Rabbi Haim Amsellem (center)



(l to r) Rabbi Murray Mizrahi (Sephardic Community Alliance, Brooklyn); Rabbi Naftali Haleva (Istanbul, Turkey)



Rabbi Moshe and Yafa Benzaquen (West Coast Torah Center, Beverly Hills)



(l to r) Rabbi Eitan Ben David (West Side Sephardic Synagogue, NY); Rabbi Raif Melhado (Kahal Joseph Cong., L.A.); Rabbi Benito Garzon (Spain/Israel); Rabbi Naftali Haleva (Ets Ahayim, Istanbul, Turkey)



(back row, l to r) R. Daniel Kahana (Principal, Barkai Yeshiva, Brooklyn); R. Naftali Haleva (Ets Ahayim, Istanbul); R. Ben Hassan (SBH, Seattle); R. Yitzhak Chouraqui (Head of the Shaarei Uziel Beit Midrash); R. Raif Melhado (Kahal Joseph, L.A.); R. Murray Mizrahi (SCA, Brooklyn).
(seated, l to r) R. Benito Garzon (SEC Educational Director Emeritus); R. Abraham Tobal (Monte Sinai, Mexico City); R. Daniel Bouskila (SEC International Director); R. Moshe Benzaquen (West Coast Torah Center, B.H.)



Rabbi Benjamin and Sharona Hassan (Sephardic Bikur Holim, Seattle)





RABBI NAFTALI HALEVA

I want to thank Rabbi Bouskila, Neil Sheff and all of you organising such an amazing seminar. We learned, discussed, shared ideas and gathered new information of a rapid changing world together with Sephardic Rabbinic colleagues.

Sephardim: who are we and what makes us unique? The Sephardic vision of Jewish communal life is powerful. It provides a means of holding communities together by relying on traditional standards. It also shows tolerance to those who may not live of those standards in their private lives. If you ask Sephardim what they think is a basic characteristic of Sephardic life, most will answer: tolerance. Indeed, this has been one of our hallmarks. Sephardic communities throughout the generations have been devoted to Jewish law, kabbalah, ethical teachings and more. Our customs and traditions have given our lives stability within an idealistic religious context. Sephardim maintain traditional communities; we do not divide into factions and movements. Our People expected that the community would function according to traditional Jewish law. Sephardim were insightful enough and traditional enough to know that ideological separation destroys the fabric of Jewish life.

If the Sephardic point of view could have prevailed, then all the world Jewry would be much better off today.



“Who are those whose waters we drink from, yet their names we do not mention?” (Horayot 14a). This Talmudic phrase is apropos to so many of our Sephardic sages. Hakhamim whose waters have given us life for generations, yet we find ourselves in a time in which our communities lack an ample familiarity with our Sephardic sages and their unique world outlook and legacy. It is

for this reason that the SEC Metivta program is so enormously important. The program, under the leadership of Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, brings Rabbis from all over the globe together to study the unique approach and tradition of our Sephardi Hakhamim (Rabbis).

The Torah describes Rosh Hashana very briefly as a resting day of remembrance or awareness, achieved through the sound of the “teru’a” (of a shofar). Rabbenu Se’adya ben Yosef Fayoumi (882 – 942, Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Iraq) delineates no less than ten recognitions one should have when hearing the shofar. They range from a (1) recognition of God creating the world and thus manifesting Kingship, to (3) recalling the shofar sounds of the Sinai epiphany (ma’amad har Sinai) and receiving the Torah. Rav Se’adya includes (4) remembering the words of the neviim (prophets) which are compared to the sound of the shofar, (5) the destruction of the Bet Hamiqdash (shofar sound of war), and finally (9) the sound inviting Jews to return to Israel (qibbus galuyyot) and (10) Resurrection of the Dead (tehiyat ha-metim) which will occur in the time of geula (Redemption). It is clear to me that what Rabbenu Se’adya is expressing is that the “zikaron” (awareness/remembrance) represented by the shofar is not about any one specific recollection. “Zikaron” is a modus operandi and an approach of perceiving life. It is the ability to see all the isolated events of history as one common and clear progression. Each event has eternal meaning when understood in conjunction to the whole. (The basic monotonous note of the shofar is the smallest unit of music. The sound of the teru’a – a sequence of these basic notes, is the recognition of the infinite value and connectivity of each moment). It is to see the progression of history from the creation of the world until the days of redemption and the significance of each step. The ability to read the book that God and man have together authored called history.

The message of “zikaron” is indispensable to our identity as Jews and our unique Sephardic individuality. We do not see ourselves as individuals in isolation, but as links in the chain of the history of the Jewish Nation and links in a rich and illustrious Sephardic legacy.

May the SEC Metivta program, which took place at the end of the summer, serve to set the tone for the upcoming new year. May we have a year in which we expand our connection to our Sephardi heritage and identity. As such I wish to all my colleagues and their respective communities a wonderful Shana Tova! Tizku Leshanim Rabbot!

RABBI MOSHE BENZAQUEN

West Coast Torah Center

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September 12, 2016
9 Elul 5776

Dear Neil,

Our experience on the Metivta, a week before the 9th of Av, under the leadership of Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, a friend and a colleague, was memorable. From day one that we began our lecture series, waking up at 5:30AM followed by a great breakfast and lectures from 8:30AM until 11:00pm, became an experience that only Rabbi's could enjoy. Everything that we heard from top lecturers from Bar Ilan University and other venerable institutions, were all innovative!

The pleasure was felt by everyone during these lectures to hear the positions of great Sephardic Sages (I would not call them Rabbis) take positions on modern issues that no one from the other side would dare to touch. Their love for every Jew was beyond the call of duty and ruled in a lenient way to include as many members of the community. As Rabbis of Sephardic communities, we have to show a great love for the people of Israel, the state of Israel and the Israeli Army.

I personally want to thank the SEC and its administrators for lending to us a most beautiful place, and Rabbi Daniel Bouskila for bringing us together to what is becoming an annual event of major innovation in appreciating Jewish history, law, medical ethics and perspective in Jewish peoplehood.

Shanah Tovah Ve'tizku Leshanim Rabbot.

Best regards.

Congregational Rabbi



Gracias a D-os, este último verano tuve una vez más el privilegio de participar en el seminario rabínico organizado por el Sephardic Educational Center en Jerusalem llamado "Metivta", el cual tiene como propósito principal dar a conocer la verdadera formación, esencia y estructura del judaísmo sefaradí, así como sus aportaciones e influencias a lo largo de la historia.

Para empezar, quiero felicitar y agradecer al Rabino Daniel Bouskila, director mundial del centro y organizador principal del evento, así como a Neil Sheff, presidente del SEC y a todos los que aportaron para que este evento fuera un verdadero éxito.

La verdad sea dicha, el solo hecho de convivir con Rabinos de distintas partes del mundo e intercambiar con ellos puntos de vista, vivencias y enfoques... "Dayenu", ya habría valido la pena. Con más razón si a ello le sumamos diez grandiosos días de estudio intensivo



en los que absorbimos con ansia la aportación de grandes conferencistas, oradores profesionales que compartieron con nosotros, como el Rab Moshe Amar, el Rab Yitzhak Chouraqui y el Rab Toledano, solo por mencionar algunos.

Parte importante de lo que nos dejó este gran curso, fue el corroborar que nuestros

pilares Rabinos Sefaradim contaban con vastos y profundos conocimientos tanto sobre Torá como sobre ciencias y vida en general, lo que los ayudaba a poder entenderse y relacionarse con gente de todo tipo de nivel cultural o intelectual. De igual forma, el entender que la vision Sefaradi destaca por procurar facilitar la vida del individuo y ayudarle a enfrentar con éxito los diferentes escenarios que se le puedan presentar. Ya que mientras otras corrientes tomaron una postura rígida y distante, la filosofía Sefaradí siempre fue indulgente e incluyente, obviamente siempre fundamentada con gran solidez en nuestras fuentes milenarias. Es decir, la prohibición es el último recurso después de haber agotado todas las demás instancias. Y esto es algo que debemos conservar en nuestros tiempos.

Escuchamos también acerca de cómo temas actuales que parecen tan polémicos y truncados como trasplantes de órganos o determinación del tiempo de la muerte de un individuo, encuentran lógica en nuestra sagrada Torá, la cual contiene respuestas y soluciones para todo tipo de situaciones y va resolviendo las necesidades de la época. Valoremos nuestra herencia y atesoremos nuestros valores. Esos valores que se remontan hasta el sabio Maimónides y que deben continuar vigentes hasta nuestros días.

Por último, reitero mi más sincera felicitación a todos los involucrados en esta gran organización por esta extraordinaria labor.

Rabino Abraham Tobal

Rabino principal de la Comunidad Monte Sináí México



Metivta Rabbis met with the Women's Study Group, "Dorshot", the graduates of the "Tidreshi" program for Sephardic women exploring and seeking to recover the lost voices of Sephardic matriarchs of the past





(l to r) Rabbi Bouskila, Rabbi Chouraqui (head of the Beit Midrash) and Rabbi David Zenou



Former Chief Rabbi, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, honorary chairman of the program (seated center)

GRAND OPENING

THE BEIT MIDRASH SHAAREI UZIEL PROGRAM



Moshe Nissim, Chief Counsel to the SEC and former Minister of Justice (among other government portfolios he has held), addresses the assembly. His father was former Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim.



Rabbi Bouskila with Rabbi Sion Setton (l) and Rabbi Dr. Elie Abadie, both spiritual leaders of the Sephardic communities of New York attend the Opening

SHA'AREI UZIEL BEIT MIDRASH OPERATES TWO PROGRAMS:

by Debbie Snyder-Eliraz

MERHAV is a one-year fellowship training program, which meets for one full day, once a week for rabbis who are already working in their communities. The texts studied involve a deep analysis of the legal and philosophical writings of Sephardic scholars, touching on relevant contemporary topics: economics, labor relations, social welfare, modern and post-modern societies, ethnic and social diversity in Israel and abroad, Jewish identity and social history. In addition, the program features professional training seminars in public speaking, family counseling, addiction treatment, sexual abuse and community mediation. Each week, the rabbis share issues that have come up in their work within their own communities to discuss and brainstorm possible solutions. The seventh cycle of this program opened in September 2015 with 12 participating rabbis.

BEIT MIDRASH SHA'AREI UZIEL:

The Beit Midrash Sha'arei Uziel is a post-ordination fellowship program for a cross section of young, recently ordained Israeli rabbis, which focuses on the geographic and economic peripheral communities of Israel. Established in 2002, the Beit Midrash empowers Israeli rabbis to serve as agents of multi-cultural Jewish expressions and Tikkun Olam, promoting Torah learning with an emphasis on the writings and opinions of Sephardic Sages that is receptive to the complex social realities within Israeli society. The rabbinic participants represent a diverse spectrum of outlooks and opinions, including National Religious Zionists, Ultra-Orthodox Haredim, and Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Ethiopian rabbis - creating a microcosm of Israeli society open to dialogue from different perspectives, but also committed to a message of unity. These rabbis discuss a variety of social issues in their studies, and use what they have learned in their community work with at-risk youth and with disadvantaged families.

The first cycle of this one-year program opened in September 2015 with 11 participating rabbis, who met four full days a week. In addition to their Beit Midrash learning, once a week the participants discussed relevant issues in the news such as rising poverty, treatment of prisoners, prostitution, etc. The rabbis discussed the social ramifications, in addition to Halacha, and posited solutions to these societal problems and how to address them in their own communities. Once a week, they also participated in workshops designed to enhance their sensitivity and awareness to the needs of their community. The program brought in speakers to discuss issues such as: social exclusion, equal opportunity, the plight of Agunot, etc. One day a week, each rabbi was required to put their learning of social Jewish values into practice by volunteering in a variety of venues.



The rabbis who participated in the Sha'arei Uziel program this year are mostly young and inexperienced. Many of them are still learning, and have not yet become community rabbis. For many of these young rabbis, Beit Midrash Sha'arei Uziel offered a transformative experience, where, for the first time, they were exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking, inspired by our Sephardic Sages, that challenged their previously held beliefs. The safety the participants felt in the group enabled them to be open to various perspectives, and learned to respect each other's differences. The rabbis often shared a dilemma they encountered in their communal work, and received feedback from the group that helped them find new ways to handle the situation. The supportive learning environment, coupled with learning about relevant social issues vital to their work as rabbis in the communal sphere, offered them the opportunity to grow as individuals, and as leaders of their communities. As graduates, they will take what they have learned in the Beit Midrash, and teach within their communities, in their synagogues and in their homes. During the year, the rabbis of Sha'arei Uziel volunteered in a variety of venues: boarding schools, afterschool programs, individual and group counseling sessions, synagogues; and worked with a variety of populations: developmentally challenged children, youth at risk, pre-army youth, etc. The program participants reported feeling very positive about the program and how it affected their future.

GRADUATES OF THE SHA'AREI UZIEL PROGRAM

Rabbi Elazar Ben Eliyahu works in the “Neve Landi” Boarding School for at-risk children, many of whom come from disadvantaged families and/or struggle with hyperactivity and other developmental challenges. Rabbi Ben Eliyahu undertook an intensive training program, in conjunction with the Welfare Authorities, and guides and works closely with the children, plans activities for them, and acts as a positive role model the children can trust. Rabbi Eliyahu is currently seeking to lead a community or yeshiva of his own, and moved to Kiryat Gat in the South of the country to do rabbinic work for the local traditional moshavim. He also answers questions on the Kippah Internet site on the rulings of the Sephardic Sages. In his feedback at the end of the program, he said, “Even though I had heard of the Sephardic Sages before, I learned in the Beit Midrash about the incredible range of Sephardic rabbis representing different communities throughout the world. I also learned how to translate these values and implement their “Torah” to the modern reality in Israel. I learned to look at and deepen my knowledge of the classic sources through the rich lens of the Sephardic teachings.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Shamalov previously volunteered in the “Bat Melech” Women’s Center for Survivors of Domestic Abuse, as a Sports Counselor at a hostel for criminal youth, and as a counselor at an additional hostel for youth at risk in Ramat Sharett. Today, he continues to work with youth at risk and their families in his community. He is currently a leading candidate to become the rabbi of the Armon HaNatziv community in Jerusalem. In addition to his work with youth and children, he is involved in performing piyut and hazzanut, and specializes in couple’s counseling. His feedback: “I have undergone a process this year – I learned for nine years in a “Kolel”, but here I learned to think and internalize what we learned, and as a result learned to seek out a way to implement these values in life. The Rabbis we learned do not get enough appreciation, but they are so necessary for our society. Their “Torah” is not just laws, but ways to deal with the world as it is. When I started learning in the Beit Midrash, my father said sadly that, ‘You are not like the Sages of old that I remember. They didn’t behave this way or dress this way. You are very different.’ But today, after learning in the Beit Midrash, my father proudly said to me, ‘Now I see that you are beginning to act like the Sages of old - one who knows his roots, and who can change society for the better.’”

Rabbi Eliyahu Barkai works in Ramot with a group of religious and secular youth (aged 10-15), who usually roam the streets in the late afternoon and evening hours. Rabbi Barkai talks with each youth individually, and as a group. He has spoken to the Beit Midrash about how important it is for the rabbi to be a role model, and give warmth and support without pre-conditions, so that the youth will build trust and form a real connection, and will listen to the Rabbi’s guidance in making decisions, such as staying in school, going to the army, and choosing positive directions for their future. Rabbi Barkai also volunteers as a lecturer at four army bases, discussing social responsibility and Jewish values. He is also learning at a Kolel in order to write a book on the subject of “ketubot” (marriage contracts). He counsels young grooms before the wedding, and does couple’s counseling as well. As a result of studying in the Sha’arei Uziel Beit Midrash, he has decided to become a teacher. His feedback: “Learning about society and economics is absolutely also part of Torah learning, and the rabbi must know this. Today, because of my studies I am more open to the larger world, read the newspaper and pay more attention to the world around me.”

Rabbi Emanuel Pozilov is the Rabbi of the “Chaye Adam” Bukharian community in Neve Ya’acov. Rabbi Pozilov works extensively with disadvantaged youth. He meets youth from the local neighborhood and helps them define a sense of identity and offers them a direction for success in their studies, matriculation exams, and taking responsibility for their lives. Rabbi Pozilov, together with Rabbi HaLevy from the Merhav Beit Midrash, run a “Torah Beit Café” in their neighborhood for local at-risk youth and new immigrants, to offer them a warm, safe place to talk and feel at home. In addition, he is working together with Sha’arei Uziel graduate, Rabbi Shamalov, to create a Beit Midrash in the Sephardic spirit for the Bukharian community in Israel. Next year he will also be teaching in the local neighborhood school. His feedback: “Sha’arei Uziel placed an emphasis on learning together, active listening and being sensitive to other’s views. From this learning, I decided to start my own Beit Midrash for the Bukharian community.”

GRADUATES OF THE SHA'AREI UZIEL PROGRAM (Continued)

Rabbi Amir Biton is a certified counselor in Betar. He offers emotional therapy for children who are struggling with depression and learning difficulties. He works with them in personal conversations and through the use of animals (parrots, rabbits, hamsters), in order to strengthen their emotional connection and teach them to take responsibility for themselves and others. His feedback: "In the Beit Midrash program, I went through a journey that bridged my past and future. This journey opened my spiritual side that was stuck after years of learning in Haredi yeshivot. Today, I understand that Torah is not just about sitting and learning in the yeshiva. More importantly, it is about doing social work in the community and broadening your wider education. At first I didn't understand why the Sha'arei Uziel Beit Midrash didn't teach the normal halachot, but as the year progressed, I understood that here we learn about how the rabbi must live and work, and not just Halacha."

Rabbi Ya'acov Katz teaches the subjects he learned in the Beit Midrash at the Darchei Yitzchak Synagogue in Beit Shemesh, and works with youth at risk in his community. Rabbi Katz is currently studying laws of divorce to prepare for the Rabbinate abroad, and is finishing his B.A. degree in Special Education at Herzog College. His feedback: "My journey in the Beit Midrash was to look at the Torah in a new way. There are many Batei Midrash where they learn Gemara and Halacha, but here we learned about the Sephardic Sages as human beings, so that we can learn from their example to be better rabbis. As an Ashkenazi, I never knew that there was an entire world of Sephardic Sages, who have so much to say about our world. The approach of the Beit Midrash was not to compete or cancel out other ways of thought, but rather to see the uniqueness of each person and his potential contribution to the community. I come from a Haredi background, but despite this, I teach my students about Yom Ha'atzmaut and the flag of Israel (Zionism). Without Sha'arei Uziel, I might never have done this."



Rabbi Hanan Shukrun is on his way to becoming the Rabbi of a community in Nachlaot. This community is made up of many single young men and women. He initiated a learning program

and social events for his community to empower single men and women who seek guidance for their lives. Rabbi Shukrun invites speakers with a wide world view in the areas of science and history, and adds aspects of Judaism to his lectures for the benefit of his community. His feedback: "I felt that this year opened up for me a window to the world of the Sephardic Sages. They were the light of their communities, and dealt with many issues and not just learning Torah, but rather made sure that the way of the Torah would be present in all aspects of the social daily life of the community. It is clear that we must follow their example today."



Soldiers with Rabbi Shukrun

Rabbi Michael Darazi is finishing his final exams for the Rabbinate, as well as a Bachelor's Degree in Education at Herzog College. Once a week he gives lessons at the Or Israel Synagogue on subjects learned in the Sha'arei Uziel Beit Midrash. He is also in the process of obtaining his own community. His feedback: "Unlike the yeshiva where I learned Talmud and Halacha, in the Sha'arei Uziel program, we learned everything that completes the Talmud. Suddenly, you begin to look at things differently, and you feel better prepared to take on the challenges of communal work."

Rabbi Daniel Barda is planning on traveling to China to take a position in the Rabbinate of a large community of Israeli businessmen who live there. He was in contact with them before he started the program, and after completing his Beit Midrash learning, was invited to use his knowledge in his position there as Rabbi and teacher. His feedback: "I enjoyed learning about the Sephardic Sages, and especially Rabbi Yosef Masas. It opened up for me a "Torah" for new horizons that changed the way I used to look at things in the yeshiva world. I was unaware of the Sephardic Jewish traditions and its significance for the public, which will definitely change my role as a future rabbi."



Rabbi Yossi Hazan with Mechina students leadership tiyul



RAV BEN ZION MEIR HAI UZIEL, Z"L

The Rishon L'Zion,
First Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel

Our holiness will not be complete if we separate ourselves from human life, from human phenomena, pleasures and charms, but only if we are nourished by all the new developments in the world, by all the wondrous discoveries, by all the philosophical and scientific ideas which flourish and multiply in our world. We are enriched and nourished by sharing in the knowledge of the world. At the same time, though, this knowledge does not change our essence, which is composed of holiness and appreciation of God's exaltedness.

**Preserve with absolute care the peace of
our nation and of our state –**

**“And you shall love truth and peace”
(Zechariah 8:19)**

**-- because disputes and divisiveness are
our most dangerous enemies...**

**By contrast, peace and unity are
the eternal foundations for the national
sustenance of Beit Yisrael.**

**(Therefore) remove all causes of
divisiveness and disputes from
our camp and our state, and place
in their stead all factors that will lead
to peace and unity amongst us.**

RAV UZIEL, IN HIS OWN WORDS...

ON THE STATE OF ISRAEL AS
A FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

The first stage to redemption is removing the Jewish people's subservience to the nations of the world. This messianic stage is taking place before our eyes, as we well know that our past subservience to the nations has caused us great harm, but now, with the return of the Jewish people to their land and the building of our own state, we are no longer subservient to the nations. Despite all of the dangers we are encountering in realizing this messianic stage, we nevertheless see an awakening of God's will for the Jewish people to settle in their own homeland. This Divine awakening is what inspired us towards the Declaration of Independence of our own Jewish state. We live in an era where we are witness to the fulfillment and realization of the vision of our prophets.

ON HALAKHA
(FROM THE INTRODUCTION
TO HIS MISHPETEI UZIEL RESPONSA)

In every generation, conditions of life, changes in values, and technical and scientific discoveries create new questions and problems that require practical solutions. We are not permitted to avert our eyes from these issues and say Torah prohibits anything new, i.e., anything not expressly mentioned by earlier sages is automatically forbidden. We may not simply declare such matters permissible, nor can we let them remain vague and unclear, with each person acting with regard to them as he wishes. Rather, it is our duty to search all halakhic sources, and, based on what they explicate, to derive responses that address current-day issues. In all my halakhic responsa, I never inclined towards leniency or strictness according to my own personal opinions; rather, my intentions were always to search and discover the truth. Gathering all of my intellectual strength, I walked in the light of earlier halakhic masters, whose waters we drink and whose light enlightens us; with this holy light, which issues from the concealed Light of God, I illuminated my eyes...

ON TORAH AND THE MODERN WORLD

Our holiness will not be complete if we separate ourselves from human life, from human phenomena, pleasures and charms, but only if we are nourished by all the new

developments in the world, by all the wondrous discoveries, by all the philosophical and scientific ideas which flourish and multiply in our world. We are enriched and nourished by sharing in the knowledge of the world. At the same time, though, this knowledge does not change our essence, which is composed of holiness and appreciation of God's exaltedness.

HIS GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS AS A RABBI

To spread Torah among students, to love the Torah and its mitzvot, to love the Land of Israel and its holiness, to love absolutely every Jewish man and woman and the people of Israel in its entirety; to love God, the Lord of Israel; to bring peace among all Jews physically and spiritually, in their words and actions, in their thoughts and in the ruminations of their hearts, in all their steps and deeds, at home and in the street, in the village and in the city; to bring true peace in the house of Israel, to the entire congregation of Israel in all its subdivisions and groupings; and between Israel and their Father in heaven.

HIS PEACEFUL OVERTURE TO MUSLIM LEADERS

To the Heads of the Islamic Religion in the Land of Israel and throughout the Arab lands near and far, Shalom U'Vracha. Brothers, at this hour, as the Jewish people have returned to its land and state, per the word of God and the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and in accordance with the decision of the United Nations, we approach you in peace and brotherhood, in the name of God's Torah and the Holy Scriptures, and we say to you: Please remember the peaceful and friendly relations that existed between us when we lived together in Arab lands and under Islamic Rulers during the Golden Age, when together we developed brilliant intellectual insights of wisdom and science for all of humanity's benefit. Please remember the sacred words of the prophet Malachi, who said: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?"

ON RABBIS WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF AM YISRAEL

We must remove this divisiveness that plagues us, and instead make our work as a community a reflection of

peace and love. But who will stand and lead this change amongst us? This specific task belongs to the "Faithful in Israel," our rabbinic and spiritual leaders. This belongs to them, because the Torah is not an alienating force; rather it is a force that brings people closer together. The true announcement of the redemption and the coming of the Messiah will only happen when the hearts of parents are drawn closer to their children, and the hearts of children are drawn closer to their parents. It is about time that the "Faithful in Israel" (rabbis and spiritual leaders) unite forces in their sacred work, and unite the entire Nation of Israel around them. Such unity, of spiritual leaders working together, unifying our people as one, will serve as our greatest source of comfort and strength.

ON JEWISH UNITY (FROM HIS ETHICAL WILL)

Preserve with absolute care the peace of our nation and of our state -- "And you shall love truth and peace" (Zechariah 8:19) -- because disputes and divisiveness are our most dangerous enemies...they are like moths on Beit Ya'akov, causing our bones to rot. By contrast, peace and unity are the eternal foundations for the national sustenance of Beit Yisrael. Therefore remove all causes of divisiveness and disputes from our camp and our state, and place in their stead all factors that will lead to peace and unity amongst us.

AN INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGE FOR ROSH HASHANAH

Awaken, all sleepers, from your deep sleep. Let us come together as one family and gather around the grand ideas and ideals of our Jewish tradition. Let us, with our bodies and souls, be the Shofar that awakens us, and awakens the whole world. Our unified voice -- as one Shofar -- will help bring about the ultimate sound of the Shofar that we all await: the Shofar of the Messiah. This Shofar will enlighten the world with the knowledge of God, filling the world with truth, righteousness, justice and peace.



SEC JERUSALEM PROUDLY HOSTS IDF SOLDIERS

When violence began to plague the streets of Jerusalem last October, the IDF was called upon to provide extra round-the-clock security, especially in the Old City. With the SEC Campus being the only comfortable place to house the soldiers in the Old City, the IDF turned to the SEC, which gladly accepted the privilege of housing these brave young men and women. For more than a month, when things were very tense, the SEC Campus was home to 40-60 soldiers at a time. With the leadership of our Campus Director, Israel Shalem, the SEC provided rooms, meals, Shabbat hospitality, snacks, and an overall warm place for them to feel comfortable. It was our privilege to house them, while they spent their days and nights protecting us. SEC and IDF – a great partnership!



Jonathan Sher (Miami)



Eliana Raphael (LA)

SPOTLIGHT on Alumni

SEC Alumni now studying and serving in the Israel Defense Forces...

WE ARE PROUD OF YOU!



Adina Jalali (LA)



Anais Bertet (LA)

studying in Israel in her final year at IDC, majoring in Government and Cyber Terrorism

SPOTLIGHT on Alumni

Edward Sabin is an SEC alumnus from 1981 and 1982 and has served on the SEC Board for the past 3 years. Edward is also Managing Director, Americas, and Head of Commercial Operations, International, at A+E Networks. Before joining A+E, he was COO for Discovery and TLC Networks, as well Science Channel and Velocity. Prior to joining Discovery in 2007, Edward was with Fox Television Studios for seven years, where he served as Senior Vice President, Business Development and Operations, and before that as V.P. of Business and Legal Affairs.

Edward is married to Diana Galante Sabin, a licensed Marriage, Family Therapist, who graduated with a BA in Psychology from UCLA and a Masters in Marriage, Family and Child Counseling from Cal State Dominguez Hills. She currently teaches social and emotional literacy to children at Castle Heights Elementary School through The Maple Counseling Center's Community Circle Program. She also teaches these skills to students at Sinai Akiba Academy in Los Angeles.

They have 2 children, Aaron 21, is a senior at Stanford University, and Sarah, 18, a freshman at UC Berkeley.

Edward discussed his connection to the SEC in this brief interview:

SEC: What stands out as your most memorable SEC experience?

EDWARD SABIN: It may not have been my first, but it was certainly the most momentous one. A young and exuberant Neil Sheff persuaded a busload of boisterous teens to bundle up and head to the snow for a day of fun and frolic. Little did I know that I, 15 years old at the time, would meet and talk to a girl named Diana Galante, and that she would capture my fancy and start the process of winning my heart. Ten years later we married, a few years after that we were blessed with Aaron and Sarah, our two beautiful children... and most recently with our dog Oscar... and we have the SEC to thank.

SEC: Looking back, what was it like to be at the SEC Israel campus in those early years of the organization?

E.S.: I spent two consecutive summers with the SEC at the Jerusalem campus (1981, 1982). Those were critical weeks that left an indelible mark on me. I remember sneaking out in the middle of the night to walk to the Kotel to meditate and pray



silently. And I'm sure I didn't appreciate then how special it was to be located so close to the emotional and spiritual center of our great tradition. Thank God for the foresight and tenacity of Dr. Nessim (z"l) to pursue and obtain such a special location, and many thanks to the current leadership who have undertaken a beautiful upgrade of the SEC location in the old city.

SEC: What inspires you today about the message of the SEC and its programs?

E.S.: More than ever, it is critical that traditional Jewry rediscover its moderate voice. That is, a perspective that honors and carries forward the liturgy, practices and philosophies that our forefathers fought to protect and pass onto us, but that also demands respect for others – of our faith and otherwise – who choose a different path. Through my many experiences over the years with the SEC, I have come to learn that this appreciation of diversity is a hallmark of Sephardic Judaism; one can hold one's worldview with the deepest of convictions, but accept and even celebrate the fact that others don't share it. It only takes a brief look at the political landscape today to recognize this perspective is all too rare, with far too many urging the erection of walls between peoples, religions and nationalities. The SEC reminds us that our rich Sephardic intellectual history rejects this approach, and serves as a model for liberal, tolerant discussion on disagreements over even the most complicated and sensitive matters that separate us.

SEC: What are your hopes for the future of the SEC and its mission?

E.S.: The SEC is well on its way to educating today's Jews about the rich contributions Sephardic thinkers have made to matters of great philosophical and religious import. But an even greater, if more daunting, mission is within reach. Sephardic thinking can and should act as an inspiration for all people of faith and conviction of every kind. I look forward to the day when, with the proper platform, support and energy, the SEC successfully positions traditional Sephardic dialectic as a model for tolerant, thoughtful and rigorous debate about the critical issues that will determine the success of the career of our species.





Speaking at Cong. Shaare Shalom in Brooklyn, with members (l to r), R. Bouskila, Barry Mizrahi, Rabbi Avi Harari, Steve Levy, Moises Maya (SEC Alum), & Neil Sheff



(l to r) Rabbi Bouskila, Rabbi Shamah, Neil Sheff and Rabbi Ronald Barry



SEC Pioneers: (l to r) Solomon, Miriam, Rochelle, Alisa, Neil Sheff, Rabbi Moshe Shamah

NEW YORK SEC IN BROOKLYN AND DEAL

By Neil Sheff

Rabbi Bouskila was Scholar-In-Residence in the Brooklyn Sephardic Community February 26-28, 2016 and gave lectures at Mikdash Eliyahu, Sephardic Synagogue, Beth Torah and Sharre Shalom, 8 lectures in all over a 24 hour period! The SEC's message brilliantly and eloquently delivered by Rabbi Bouskila was so well received that he was invited back to be a Scholar-in-Residence in Deal, NJ over the summer.

It was amazing to also catch up with some of our SEC alumni from the 1980's who I had been counselor for and to now see them as presidents and leaders of their communities. Of course the high-

light of our trip was to visit with Rabbi Moshe and Miriam Shamah and their amazing family, including children Rochelle (Abe) Zami, Alisa (Isaac) Sutton, Leah (David) Harari and Solomon Shamah who were all part of the SEC history in the 1980's. They were wonderful hosts and SEC memories were relived with much joy. We wish the Rabbi and Mrs. Shamah many more years of health and happiness and thank them for being pioneers of the SEC. We also thank the Sephardic Community Alliance, Hymie Shamah (President) and Murray Mizrahi (Executive Director) for arranging such a wonderful program. We look forward to strengthening our ties with this important community.



Rabbi Bouskila and Neil Sheff visit with Rabbi Yosef Bitton, of Manhattan Beach Congregation and former counselor at the SEC Summer Programs where he met his wife!



SEC Couples in NY! (l to r): Moises and Sara Maya; Miriam and Steven Levy



(l to r) Moshe Maimon, R. Bouskila, Isaac Sutton, Neil Sheff

THANK YOU

The Estate of **Capt. Jack & Rita Scapa** for remembering the SEC in their will. The Scapa's were supporters and believers in Dr. Nessim's dream from the beginning and their presence at our events always made the room lighten up. May their memories be a blessing to us all.

Jack & Faye Shamoolian Family for donating all the beautiful rugs that grace the rooms, library and synagogue at the SEC Campus in Jerusalem.

The SEC is grateful to all those who support us, volunteer throughout the year, come to our programs and help us spread our message. If you are not yet involved, what are you waiting for? THERE IS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE AT THE SEC.



IN MEMORY

Adam Gindi left us at too young an age after a courageous battle with leukemia, on March 30, 2016. Adam was a past president of the SEC-NY chapter and as sweet a person as you could meet. He loved the SEC and worked hard to make its programs successful. He leaves behind a loving family and 2 children. We miss you Adam!



UPCOMING EVENTS Seattle

Look for more info on our upcoming SEC-Seattle Shabbaton Program,

JANUARY 13-14, 2017

Israel

Yom Yerushalayim Mission:
The 50th Anniversary of the Reunification of Jerusalem (adults)

MAY 17-29, 2017

(Want to come just for the week of Yom Yerushalayim? We will also have a May 21-29 option, where you can join us for the week.)

Hamsa Teen Trip to Israel
JUNE 25-JULY 20, 2017

Metivta Rabbinical Program
JULY 24-AUGUST 3, 2017



**JOIN THE NEW
"SEC FOOD" PAGE
ON FACEBOOK!**

IN MEMORY



President Yitzhak Navon, the 5th President of the State of Israel, and its first Sephardic president, died November 7, 2015 at the age of 94.

There are many SEC alumni around the world who had the honor and privilege to be invited as part of an official SEC visit to President Navon's residence at "Bet Hanassi" in Jerusalem in the early 1980's to

meet with him and describe their experiences in Israel. He would quiz the participants on the origins of their Sephardic names and was himself a champion of Sephardic and Ladino heritage.

His family had lived in Jerusalem since the 17th century, descendants of the Jews exiled from Spain in 1492. He was part of the old Sephardic community that had been living in the holy land for centuries. It is the story of people like Yitzhak Navon that we hope to keep alive in the upcoming Museum and Exhibit Center at the SEC in Jerusalem.



Dr. Salvador Sarfatti, of Buenos Aires, Argentina was the president and founder of the SEC Latin America Chapter and a dedicated member of the SEC global family. Salvador passed away on Shabbat, June 4, 2016. Dr. Sarfatti was very active in the SEC's Buenos Aires chapter, organized many successful youth and young adult conventions and programs for the SEC in Argentina and throughout South America. He volunteered countless hours of medical treatment and organized free medication, financial assistance and basic needs for members of the Jewish community during the difficult economic times. He was responsible for helping to introduce many young people to one another, leading to many marriages in the community. He is survived by his

two daughters, Erica and Jessica (and their husbands Victor and Gustavo); his 8 grandchildren and two brothers Morris and Henry.

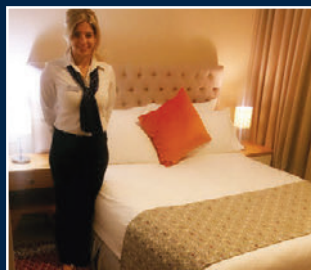
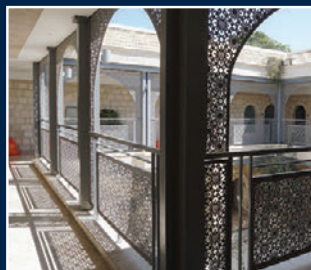
We will miss you, Salvador, thank you for all that you did for us!



Gila Cohen worked for the SEC for over 10 years since we opened our doors in 1980 and was the "house mother" and cook at our campus in Jerusalem. She looked after the participants and catered to all their needs. Gila died April 11, 2016 at the age of 84. Gila spoke fluent Ladino and enjoyed making "burekas" and other Sephardic delicacies for the participants. She loved the SEC and the entire SEC family. She is survived by her husband, Yitzhak, 4 children and 9 grandchildren.

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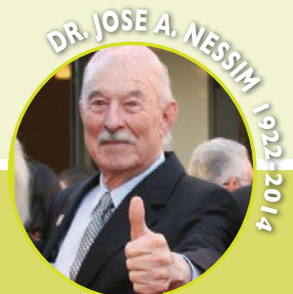
EDITOR:

Remembering the Sage Words of our Founder Dr. Jose A. Nessim (z"l)

**ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS INSPIRING US
TO DO MORE FOR THE SEPHARDIC AND JEWISH WORLD**

This past summer, we fittingly remembered the life of our founder, Dr. Jose Nessim (z"l) at the second memorial service held in the peaceful tranquility of the SEC Campus Spanish Courtyard surrounded by the beautiful structure he dedicate his life's work to. Once again this memorial coincided with the opening of the Metivta Rabbinical Program with a group of extraordinary Sephardic Rabbis from around the world. How proud Doc would have been to witness such a gathering, not only for the symbolic unity it represented but for the knowledge and study of our Sephardic Sages that was imparted to the participants.

I learned many things from Dr. Nessim that continue to direct my life, but possibly the standout lesson is to thank God every day for the blessings we have. And if we learn to share what we have been given "on loan" from God, Doc would tell us, whether in time, money or ideas, we will be blessed so much more in return. As I sat and listened to the assembled Rabbis at the Second Metivta Seminar, I couldn't help but think how thankful I was, just for this moment alone, and to say "Dayenu" - if this was our only success of the year it would be enough. As you can read in the pages of this Hamerkaz, I am not alone in appreciating the work and message of the SEC. If you agree with Dr. Nessim's advice, just stop and give thanks as we end another year and start a new one. Say "Baruch Hashem" as he loved to say. Share your blessings as he urged us all to do. For you cannot take them with you - they are given to you as caretaker in this world to do with them the best you can and to make God proud of you.



PEARLS OF WISDOM IN THE WORDS OF DR. NESSIM:

"We Sephardim must follow the course of our ancestors and not betray them by trying to impose foreign sects, mentality and culture into Sephardic communities. I implore rational Jews, and as Sephardim we were blessed and gifted by our creator with an open mind and our sacred writings, to do a lot of introspection and then voice our opinions in matters that concern the future of our culture, our synagogues, and in the strengthening and creation of more of our own institutions."

"Baruch Hashem, the physical headquarters of the new Sephardic movement we have since July 1, 1980, when the SEC was first established, is in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is proper that the new world headquarters for Sephardim and for all Jews should be the very place that was the headquarters of Sephardim for centuries in the holy city of Jerusalem. Sephardic Chief Rabbis lived in the premises. The rabbinical school that sent so many rabbis to Israel and to the Diaspora was located in the very premises where our center exists."

"The motto of the SEC is that we have nothing to worry about if we work L'Shem Shamayim (unselfishly) and G-d will provide. The task is difficult but extremely satisfying, for it gives you not only satisfaction but internal peace and longer life with good health. It will be another way of thanking our Creator for all his material blessings and for allowing us to be the custodian of material goods while we travel through Earth."

"Let us remember that we Sephardim always blended material, emotional and spiritual values into a way of life. We need a second Golden Age, brought about by a true renaissance based on education".

"Don't wait for something to happen, make it happen! The SEC is most concerned and interested in preserving Sephardim as Jews. If the Sephardim disappear as a culture from the Diaspora, this culture will no longer be alive and it will move from being something dynamic to simply a footnote in the pages of Jewish history, has ve shalom."

Neil J. Sheff, SEC President
(neil@sheffimmigration.com)