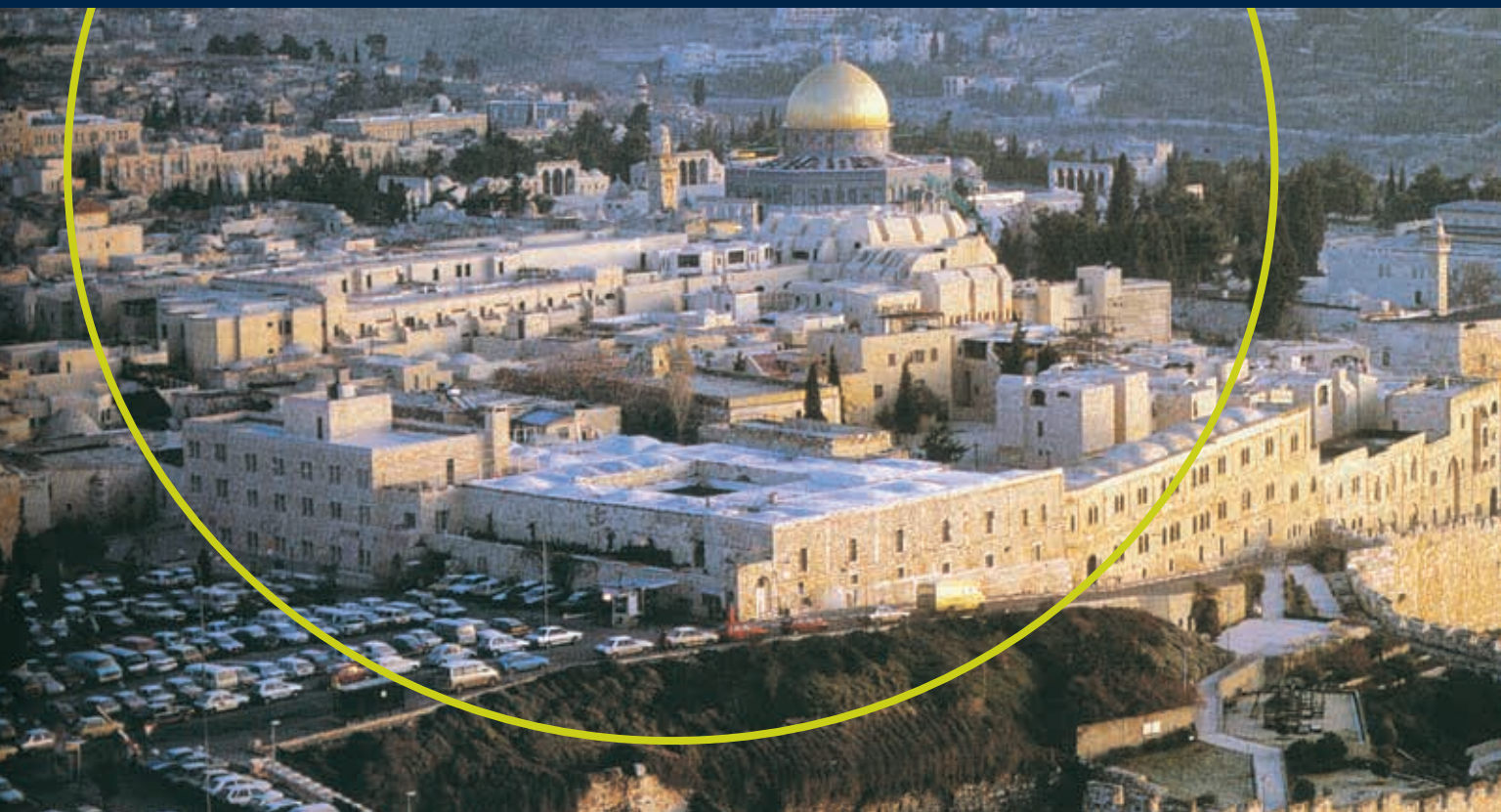


HAMERKAZ

A PUBLICATION OF THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER

A Center for all Jews



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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR

RABBI DANIEL BOUSKILA

Emma Lazarus: A Sephardic Reflection on America

In 1883, the Jewish-Sephardic-American poet Emma Lazarus was invited to write a poem for a literary auction. The proceeds of this auction would go towards building a pedestal for what came to be known as "The Statue of Liberty." Lazarus' entry, titled "The New Colossus," was eventually (in 1903) inscribed on a bronze tablet inside the Statue of Liberty for all to read. Its message about America, written by a Jew, captures the essence of what it means to be an American Jew:

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Recasting the classical Greek Colossus (a representation of the pagan sun god) as "The Mother of Exiles," Emma Lazarus turned the Statue of Liberty into an American version of a Jewish-Biblical matriarch standing at the door of her home, welcoming all those who yearn for freedom and shelter. No longer interested in the "storied pomp" of ancient empires, this matriarch seeks to house

and assist the world's "tired and poor" who "yearn to breathe free." Replacing the Greek sun god – the conqueror of the world – Lazarus' "Mother of Exiles" is now the nurturing and comforting symbol that welcome newcomers to a new and unique world: the world of American freedom and democracy.

It is not by chance that a "American-Sephardic Jew" would author a poem invoking the motifs of "exile and homecoming." Well versed in her people's long history of exile and persecution, particularly that of her Sephardic ancestors in Spain, Emma Lazarus fully understood what a privilege it is for Jews to live in the United States, the safe haven where they enjoy the blessings of American democracy. Lazarus expressed this in another powerful poem she wrote titled "1492":

*Thou two-faced year, Mother of Change and Fate,
Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword,
The children of the prophets of the Lord,
Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state,
The West refused them, and the East abhorred.
No anchorage the known world could afford,
Close-locked was every port, barred every gate.
Then smiling, thou unveil'dst, O two-faced year,
Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!
There falls each ancient barrier that the art
Of race or creed or rank devised, to rear
Grim bulwarked hatred between heart and heart!"*

For Emma Lazarus – an American Jew of Sephardic descent – the "two-faced year" of 1492 held a double-edged irony. In 1492, after a long, bloody and brutal inquisition, the Spanish Jews were forcibly expelled from Spain, "when Spain cast forth with flaming sword the children of the prophets of the Lord." In that same year – 1492 – Christopher Columbus discovered America (and later, in 1654, the first Jews to come to America were Spanish & Portugese Sephardic Jews, Emma Lazarus's own direct ancestors). In this poem, Lazarus also evokes the motif of America as a safe place of refuge – "Ho, all who weary, enter here." This theme resonated deeply with Lazarus, a descendant of a weary and persecuted Jewish people who ultimately found a safe haven of freedom and protection in America.

Emma Lazarus' "Jewish-Sephardic-American" poems evoke some of the core values that stand at the heart of classic Jewish teachings. Her poetic lyrics – permanently engraved in the Statue of Liberty – continue to both inspire and challenge us to live by the noble ideas she so eloquently expressed.

SEC MISSION

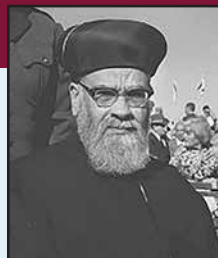
The SEC is dedicated to strengthening Jewish identity for youth and young adults, and to building a new generation of spiritual and community leaders. From our historic campus in the Old City of Jerusalem to our various diaspora branches, the SEC's philosophy of Classic Sephardic Judaism offers Jews 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.

SEPHARDI HAKHAMIM ON ZIONISM, HALLEL & YOM HA'ATZMAUT



*Hakham Bension
Meir Hai Uziel*

This day is like a "Yom Tov L'Yisrael" for all Jews in Israel and the diaspora, for our generation and for all future generations, a day upon which we must give thanks to God for His kindness towards us, where with a voice of song and joy we must declare (from the Hallel) "Ze ha-yom asah Hashem, nagila v'nismecha bo, Ana Hashem hoshia na, Ana Hashem hatzlicha na." This will uplift the crown of our state with honor and with peace.



Hakham Yitshak Nissim

These two great manifestations of the rise of the State of Israel – the first, the very return of Jewish sovereignty even in just part of our land, along with building and developing the land...and second, the ingathering of the exiles who have settled within the land – these are

both, according to our beliefs, the fulfillment of the vision of our Biblical prophets regarding the days of Geulah, redemption. This entire series of events, the return to our land, the declaration of our state, the war of independence, and the aliyah of Jews from Arab countries, are one miracle embedded within the next.



Hakham Haim David Halevi

It is a mitzvah to recite Hallel with a blessing on Yom Ha'atzmaut, the basis for this is rooted in the story of Chanukah, where the exact same thing hap-

pened, and our rabbis established Hallel with a blessing.... it is a highly negative trait for one who is witness to miracles from God, yet does not make a blessing and praise God for them... Question: Were there not many miracles in our history for which we did not establish days of Yom Tov and the recitation of Hallel? It depends on the nature of the miracle, and how far-reaching an effect it has on the entirety of the nation. If the miracle changes the whole face of the nation towards the better, not only are we permitted to establish for such miracles days of Yom Tov, it is indeed our halakhic obligation to do so. In light of this, how much more so the 5th of Iyar (Yom Ha'atzmaut) and the 28th of Iyar (Yom Yerushalayim), where the miracles on those days were double miracles: one, where (in both wars) we were saved from collective death and destruction to life, and two, where we: (1) Gained independence (2) Liberated the remainder of the Land of Israel, including Jerusalem, the heart and soul of the land. These days mark major turning points in the life of our entire nation, and affect the Jewish people everywhere - in Israel and the diaspora. Therefore, it is proper to establish these days as days of Hallel and thanks to God, as days of celebration and rejoicing for all generations to come.



Hakham Yosef Messas

I will now say a few words regarding Yom Ha'atzmaut. Let us give thanks to the sole performer of miracles, who has started to shake off the dust of our suppression and lowliness, and has made us witness to things that even our ancestor's ancestors did not see, yet we merit to see, namely Medinat Yisrael (the

State of Israel), a President of Israel, a flag of Israel, an Israeli currency, and army of Israel. Yesterday we were lost slaves, and now we have merited this entire honor, all due to the grace of God.

You asked me about Yom Ha'atzmaut, that there are some who on this day, nonetheless recite Tahanun, etc. Answer: Do not conflict or confuse yourself in this matter, as you are a devoted Sefaradi, so do just as we do, which is to make the day of Yom Ha'atzmaut a day when we recite the full Hallel and give thanks to God, a day when we eat, drink and rejoice. We have no business with "those others."



Hakham Abraham Shalem

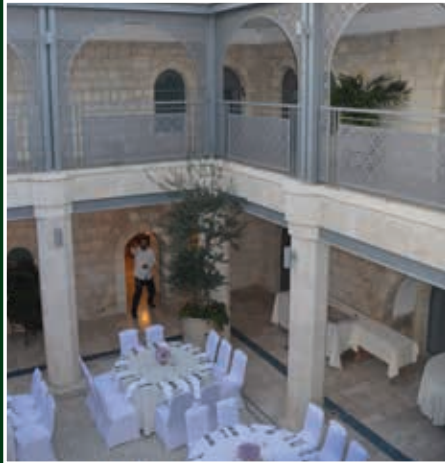
On the question of reciting a blessing over a miracle, the Shulchan Aruch rules that if the miracle affected only a small part of the Jewish nation, as long as it did

not affect the entire nation or even the majority of it, we do not recite a blessing over it. Let us look at what type of miracles we are talking about in 1948: (1) After the Holocaust, when the Jews of Europe were butchered and decimated, those who survived were weak of body and soul. By all accounts, they should not have survived. Their very survival is a miracle. (2) Our fight for independence in our land is a direct result and continuation of the dark and horrific period of the Holocaust. Did the Palestinian/Arab Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini not go to meet Hitler in 1941 to encourage him to extend the Nazi's planned Final Solution to Jews in the Arab world? Fighting the War of Independence was therefore the final chapter of the Holocaust. During that war 7 Arab armies attacked us from all angles, with the intention of destroying us. We were the few against the many, and we prevailed. This victory not only achieved independence and statehood, but symbolically marked the defeat of the remnants of the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers in the Arab world. The Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel are not episodes that affected individual Jews; rather, they affected and influenced the lives of the entire Jewish nation, all over the world. Surviving all of this, and coming out triumphant as we did, could only be the hand of God, and therefore a miracle. Let us therefore stop with the small minded and narrow viewpoints about all of this, and let us instead adopt a wider lens on the meaning of our own history, one that reflects a deeper understanding of these matters...and one that ultimately reflects Emunah - faith. What happened in 1948 is a miracle, one when we witnessed the revelation of the "Shechina" (God) in all of its glamour and glory.



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	Dedicated
Sephardic Library	\$250,000	Dedicated
Sephardic Synagogue	\$360,000	Dedicated
Synagogue Heichal	\$100,000	Dedicated
Synagogue Ner Tamid (Eternal Lamp)	\$180,000	Dedicated
Social Lounge	\$500,000	Dedicated
Multimedia Room	\$250,000	Available
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

PROGRAM ENDOWMENTS:

Shaarei Uziel Rabbinic Leadership Programs	\$1,000,000	Available
Hamsa Israel Experience Programs	\$500,000	Available
Metivta Rabbinical Seminar	\$360,000	Available
Young Professional Program	\$10,000/yr.	Available

MEZUZOT:

Main Courtyard Mezuzah	\$36,000	Available
Reception Lobby Mezuzah	\$18,000	Available
Residence Room Mezuzot	\$1,800	Available (36)
Residence Room Mezuzot	\$1,800	Dedicated (18)

For more information or to donate contact Rabbi Daniel Bouskila
TEL: (323)272.4574 E-MAIL: INFO@SECJERUSALEM.ORG

We will tailor any gift to your wishes.

Opening Gala
14TH SEC LOS ANGELES
SEPHARDIC
JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL



This Year's Honoree

JOE OUAKNINE

Maimonides Leadership Award

Born in exotic Morocco - Joe emigrated to Montreal, Canada where he attended the University of Concordia.

In 1977, he moved to Los Angeles where he built a three-store chain and became the first to introduce Charles David shoes to the United States. When Guess footwear merged with Charles David, Joe was the first sales manager for the newly re-branded company. Following his 13 year tenure, Joe co-founded Titan Industries Incorporated. Today, Titan is a fashion-forward powerhouse with brands such as Badgley Mischka and Splendid. Joe's love of philanthropy keeps him involved in various charities. He is a long-time supporter of the Los Angeles Sephardic community. Joe has a passion for golf and enjoys spending time with his wife, three beautiful daughters, and grandson. The Sephardic Educational Center is honored to present Joe Ouaknine with the Maimonides Leadership Award.

Opening Gala

NOVEMBER 5, 2017
PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

Screenings November 7-12
Laemmle's Music Hall Theater

2016 13TH SEC LOS ANGELES SEPHARDIC JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

Opening Gala

Paramount Studios

2016 Sold Out Crowd for Honorees:

JEANNINE SEFTON

RAE COHEN

ENRICO MACIAS

The 13th Los Angeles Sephardic Film Festival was another sold-out success with dinner under the holiday lights, exciting silent and live auctions and an evening of fun and entertainment emceed by the beautiful and talented Emmanuelle Chriqui. The honorees, Jeannine Sefton (Sephardic Legacy Award Recipient), Rae Cohen (Maimonides Leadership Award Recipient) and the world-renowned entertainer, Enrico Macias (Cinema Sepharad Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient), brought family, friends and fans to the Paramount Studios for a spectacular evening that included a surprise mini-concert by Mr. Macias. The guests then enjoyed the premiere of "Midnight Orchestra", a poignant and fitting film about the cross-cultural, healing bonds created through music.





SEC FILM FESTIVAL 2016





SEC FILM FESTIVAL 2016







SEC FILM FESTIVAL 2016





A special screening of
“Hummus: The Movie!”
 produced by *Mitch Julis*
 (left, center) was screened
 with a reception following
 at La Gondola on
December 18, 2016



TRIBUTE BOOK PRESENTATION

At a special private screening of the hit Israeli film “The Women’s Balcony”, the 2016 SEC Award Recipients, Jeannine Sefton and Rae Cohen, were presented with their beautiful Tribute Books.



SEC FOOD ON FACEBOOK!

SEARCH SEC FOOD UNDER GROUPS AND JOIN

Created and Hosted by Rachel Sheff

CANDIED QUINCE - “Maimonides mentioned that eating quince was a remedy for headaches. It was found in the “bembriyo” paste that Sephardim brought from Spain (where it is called membrillo) across the Mediterranean after the expulsion of 1492, the quince preserves North African and Italian Jews served at Rosh Hashana, or in the jam eaten year-round. Though traditionally thought of as a Sephardic dish, Ashkenazim in Hungary and Romania were often exposed to the fall fruit as well. By the turn of the twentieth century, quinces were being preserved and cooked across the Jewish world” Here’s a pretty simple way of making candied quince for the upcoming holidays:

6 medium quinces

2 cups sugar

6 whole cloves

2 cinnamon sticks

Juice of 1 lemon

Peel, core and cut in cubes or slices the quince. Put right away in a bowl of cold water with a squeeze of lemon juice so they don’t turn brown. In a heavy pot place sugar cloves and lemon juice. Melt sugar and then place the strained quince in it stir to cover with melted sugar and simmer. They will start to turn pink. You will cook them for approx. 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Once they are golden red and the syrup is thick, set aside and cool. Store in jars or container in refrigerator for up to a month. Use on your table for Rosh Hashana as a symbol of sweetness for the new year. Serve as a dessert alongside honey cake. Serve at your Yom Kippur break fast. Delicious alone or with ice cream!



Rabbi Bouskila presents the
 2014 Film Festival Tribute Journal to
Yehoram Gaon in Israel.



BEQUEST

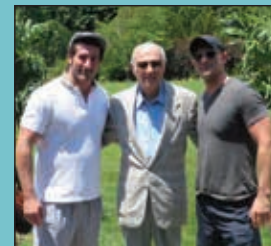
FROM THE ESTATE OF GLADYS BENBASAT



The SEC was honored to be selected among other Jewish organizations in New York and throughout the U.S. to receive a generous gift as part of the estate of Gladys Benbasat (obm). Gladys was born and lived in NY all her life and died at the ripe age of 104. She was a teacher in the NY Public School District which allowed its employees to invest up to 25% of their salary in a retirement fund, which she did for 50 years because she relied on her husband's income. Her husband, Hayim Benbasat's family came from Turkey and he pre-deceased her by 50 years. They had no children and her consistent investments into her retirement fund allowed her "nest egg" to grow to \$3.5 million. Over the years, she made regular small donations to countless charities, \$5 and \$10 at a time but never splurging on herself nor publicizing her sizable estate. She lived very modestly and was blessed to have the support and friendship of Oren Shulman, who she met in 1979 and would be the one to watch over her and assist her in her daily needs until her death. Oren did everything for her, taking her to doctor appointments and doing her market shopping. Oren himself comes from a very religious family though describes himself as the only non-religious member of the family. But Oren really did one of the biggest "mitzvot" in caring for this lonely elderly person as if she was his family. In the end, it was Oren who decided how to distribute her estate and made 40 gifts, large and small, to organizations she had supported with her \$5 and \$10 checks over the many years. When he saw SEC among the list, he decided to give one of those checks to our organization and we are ever grateful to him and Gladys for the very generous gift.

Contact us to learn how you can designate a special gift for the SEC in your will.

SPOTLIGHT ON SUPPORTERS



MARTIN ELIAS

"I didn't see people caring as much as he did". That's how Martin Elias describes what he found admirable in his friend, Dr. Jose Nessim (z"l). "I thought it was wonderful that the Center existed for all Jewish kids", Martin said, and this started a relationship that has lasted 28 years where the Elias Family has been one of the staunchest supporters of the SEC.

In 1989, Rabbi Marans of the Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst recommended the SEC Summer in Israel Program for Martin's son, Brett. Brett ended up going on the trip and remembers how Rabbi Shamah, the SEC's longtime educator on the summer trips, took him under his wings and made sure Brett would have an unforgettable experience. He did and he met so many friends on that trip that still stay in touch with each other.

Martin also met long lasting friends through the SEC, after joining Dr. Nessim and other supporters at the SEC conventions in Mexico City and Miami. Over the years, a mutual admiration and genuine friendship grew between Martin and Dr. Nessim. "I saw it for myself; Dr. Nessim wasn't just a dreamer."

Martin and his sons, Brett, Shawn and Ian, who we lost tragically a few years ago, along with his granddaughters, India and Paisley, will always be part of the SEC Campus. This past summer the SEC dedicated the Elias Family Social Lounge at the SEC Campus in Jerusalem. We have immense appreciation for Martin and all that he has done to support the SEC in his gracious and unassuming way and we encourage others to follow his admirable example.

LECTURES

Prof. Devin Naar of Univ. of Washington speaks in LA on his new book, "Jewish Salonica"



Elias Family Social Lounge

Dedicated by Martin Elias



Orientation with parents and participants



LAX Departure



SEC HAMSA TEEN SUMMER 2017

The Ultimate Israel Experience



TESTIMONIALS

REBEKAH SHEFF, LOS ANGELES

Ever since I was little I have imagined attending the Hamasa Israel trip. Both my brothers went on the trip and even my father was a counselor for the SEC. I have seen many pictures from the previous years and heard lots of stories about the many experiences, always waiting for it to be my turn to go to go on this program.

I made amazing friends from LA, Seattle and NY that will stay in my life for a long time. We speak almost every day since we got back. There is always a sense of community and family with the SEC, no matter what type of event or trip.





NOAH KRON GREAT NECK, NEW YORK

My mother, Vivian Mahlab-Kron, is an alumna of the SEC and the SEC has had a profound impact on her life in many ways. She met my dad at an SEC-NY event! She always told my siblings and me that she met lifelong friends through the SEC, such as Neil Sheff. He was her group leader when she went to Israel for the first time with SEC. She talks about conventions and all the great memories she has. I've seen the photos and heard her stories over and over.

My maternal grandparents came from Iraq. They were always proud of their Sephardic heritage. My grandfather, Salim Mahlab z"l opened the first Iraqi synagogue in NY. I'm a mix breed. My paternal grandparents come from Ireland. I've been lucky enough to spend a lot of time with them in Ireland and have seen my Ashkenazi side as well.

My favorite memory from being in Israel was when we went to the shooting range and we were able to experience Israel outside the bus. We were able to shoot forty rounds of an AR-15 at a target. I enjoyed the exhilaration and frightening power of the weapon. Learning to fire such a weapon showed me what the new IDF recruits have to master on entering the army.



ELI ALMO, SEATTLE

My name is Eli Almo and I live in Seattle. I attended the SEC Hamsa Israel program this summer and it was amazing! My experience on Hamsa was like none other. Each day was filled with fun, educational and unbelievable trips and activities. I had the best summer of my life bonding with new friends in the holiest place on earth. My love for Hashem was strengthened through meaningful lessons and events led by Rabbi Bouskila. We were so fortunate to visit the Kotel and the graves of many Jewish leaders.

I have always felt a deep love for Israel, yet this trip managed to enhance that love to another level. I will never forget Summer 2017 and the remarkable Hamsa experience. Thank you to all the supporters and people who made this trip not only possible but incredible.



MITCHELL HOENIG, LOS ANGELES

Three weeks was all it took. Three weeks to make amazing friends. Three weeks to completely enhance my view of Israel. Three weeks to make memories that I will never forget. Three weeks on the SEC Hamsa Israel trip was all it took to give me the best summer ever. The trip was so unique for several reasons. One reason is that Rabbi Bouskila planned the trip in a way that teaches lessons through all the activities. Another reason that the trip is unique is that we stayed in the Old City of Jerusalem for all the Shabbatot of the trip, which was a really amazing experience. Overall, the trip really is a once in a lifetime opportunity that shows you Israel from a different perspective and introduces you to amazing people.



DANIELA COHEN, LOS ANGELES

I am a 10th grade student at Yula Girls High school. I have been waiting for so many years to become a High School student in order to visit Israel with the SEC, Hamsa Program. I heard about this program from many friends. My parents also met through the SEC, and I feel it is important to visit Israel with a program that will teach me about my Sephardic heritage. I have attended a Jewish Day School all my life, but I never really learned about the land of Israel. I was so fortunate to attend this amazing program.





NATALIA SHABTAY, LOS ANGELES

The SEC Hamsa Israel trip is a trip that I will never forget. I luckily have been to Israel multiple times before with my family but I can definitely say that this time, it was different. Rabbi Bouskila made sure to not only show all of us the wonderful sights in Israel but also found a way to not make us feel like tourists. He didn't just give us the Israel experience but he gave us the "Life of an Israeli" experience. While we did do some tourist things like visiting famous museums and tours, he gave us a chance to live like Israelis in Israel. We visited the "Shuk Hacarmel" in Tel Aviv and we walked around the Jewish Quarter almost every night that we were in Jerusalem. We went to the beach and had ice cream. We also made sure to try the "shoko basakit" (chocolate milk in a bag), a truly Israeli experience! I really did get the best out of my time in Israel and I would do it again in a heartbeat. After all, we did ask Rabbi Bouskila for a "part two" next year.



MATTHEW CHRIQUI, LOS ANGELES

The SEC Hamsa Israel Trip is an experience I will never forget. The trip was truly amazing as we not only got to experience the State of Israel as tourists; instead we toured around Israel as if we lived there. The activities and hikes that we did all had connections to the "theme" of the day and somehow, our Sephardic heritage. I also had a family connection to this trip as my dad went on the same trip when he was my age.

Not only did I get to experience Israel myself but I am also continuing the family tradition. My parents both met with the SEC and I consider myself a child of the SEC. I have patiently waited my turn ever since I saw the picture in the airport of the kids wearing their SEC t-shirts in 2015. I have never been to Israel before and I am so happy I went with SEC to help me experience the wonders of this country for the very first time. I thank my parents for allowing me to come on this amazing trip and I thank all the people who helped make this trip take place including our counselors and Rabbi Bouskila. This trip was a wonderful experience and I am glad that I didn't miss out on it.

I feel honored to be part of the SEC family.





ISAAC KAHTAN, LOS ANGELES

The SEC Hamsa Israel trip was the most amazing and unforgettable trip. Going in, I didn't know many people but now I couldn't think of a better group. One of the memorable trips was hiking up Masada. Everyone was helping each other up to the top. Before this trip I didn't know much about the SEC or even what it was, but because of this trip I'm definitely going to get more involved.

This trip is something everyone should have the chance to experience and I highly recommend it to anyone. The friendships and connections made on this trip will last forever. The places we visited were only as good as they were because we had Rabbi Bouskila guiding us along with help from our amazing counselors Miriam and Itai. If there was a part two to this, I'd 100% sign up.



SARA AVRAHAMY, LOS ANGELES

Both my parents attended this program as well as chaperoned it. My sister, Miriam, also went on this trip and made amazing friends.

I am so glad that I had the opportunity to be a part of such a great experience and be amongst a great group of people. We went to so many different amazing places that I will always remember, like the Maccabi Opening Ceremony and the graduation of the Israeli air force pilots. These are experiences that I will cherish forever. We got to really learn the beauty of Israel by going on many hikes. And through many amazing museums we learned about the fascinating history of our homeland and the Jewish people.

One of my favorite activities was going to the shooting range and shooting a rifle. When I first heard about this activity I was scared to even hold a loaded gun; after leaving the shooting range I knew that this was one of the coolest activities I had ever participated in. I appreciated the responsibility that young Israeli soldiers have to defend the land.

The thing that really makes the SEC Hamsa trip special was having the SEC Center in Jerusalem as our home base. It was such a special experience living in the old city and being so close to the Kotel. There is nothing like spending Shabbat at the SEC. I am beyond thankful to Rabbi Bouskila and the SEC for having such an amazing trip and for allowing me this amazing opportunity.





ORI AMIEL, SEATTLE

The Hamsa Israel trip was an incredible experience for me because I was able to explore and enjoy all of Israel with many new friends and amazing leaders. From hiking to walking on Ben Yehuda to the Tel Aviv beach and so on, I had a great time with friends all the while developing a connection to the Jewish homeland. Spending much time in the old city made it feel like home. One of my favorite parts of the trip was Friday night at the Kotel, where we sang songs with other people, and we said Kabbalat Shabbat with the same tunes that I use at my own synagogue across the world in Seattle. This trip gave me many new memories, great friends and helped me expand my love for Israel.



SAM NAVON, LOS ANGELES

The best part of Hamsa for me was all our experiences with the soldiers and learning about the Israeli wars and how Israel came to be what it is today. It really opened my eyes to how much the soldiers do for us and risk their lives every day to protect us. It's impossible to pinpoint one special memory since there were too many. Just overall bonding with everyone, whether it be going to the Kotel late at night when no one's around and just having peace and quiet and time to reflect, going through the pitch dark water tunnels of the city of David or jeeping through the Golan Heights and the list goes on. I have never seen Israel through the eyes of a "tourist" before and this trip just showed me how amazing this country really is. Thank you to Rabbi Bouskila and Peni, the counselors Itai and Miriam, and of course our security guard Nayif.



MIRIAM ZAMI, BROOKLYN (COUNSELOR)

From the first moment of the Hamsa trip, I knew this was going to be unlike anything I've ever experienced. Under the leadership and guidance of Rabbi Bouskila, in only three weeks we were privileged to see Israel like I've never seen it before—north to south, east to west. We connected with the land, history, and society of Israel through hikes, museums, memorials, special speakers like IDF soldiers and government members, and of course by eating lots of Israeli food.

The kids were encouraged to document the trip through videos and photographs, which brought the experience of Israel to life. Each day spurred another meaningful discussion about Israel and Judaism, as we were constantly exposed to new ideas and places. Spending Shabbat in the Old City was unforgettable—dancing at the Kotel on Friday night, hanging out late in the SEC, and just being able to walk around the streets really brought the spirit of Shabbat and Jerusalem alive. And of course, the bonds that this group made with each other were incredible to witness. Working with Rabbi Bouskila and my co-madrach, Itai, made the trip all the more fun and fulfilling. I feel so lucky to have been able to grow and learn with this group as their madricha—I couldn't have asked for a better Israel experience.





METIVTA

The Best Way to Spend the Worst Nine Days of the Jewish Year

RABBI RALPH TAWIL (BROOKLYN-ISRAEL)

ISRAEL



By far, the first nine days of the month Ab are a low point of the Jewish year. They reach their nadir with a fast day equal in practice to Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Restriction of basic needs for more than 24 hours, while forcing us to take notice of our national shortcomings that brought about the temples' destruction, remains onerous.

The prophet Zechariah, predicts that these days will turn into holidays and days of joy, no less. We have not yet merited to see that full redemption. Yet, for the past two years, during these days, I have had a glimpse of that joyous transformation at METIVTA, the annual summer Sephardic rabbinical seminar of the SEC, the Sephardic Educational Center.

Sephardic rabbis from far and wide spending over a week at the beautifully-renovated centuries-old seat of the Sephardic Torah leadership, the Metivta (Sephardic House) in Jerusalem's walled city is enough to temper the sadness of the nine days. Yet, the real joy, the glimpse of Zechariah's transformation of this mourning period, was in the relevant, inspiring and varied learning program that Rabbi Daniel Bouskila planned and executed for us.

The program included main lectures by Rabbi Chouraqui, Rabbi Toledano and Rabbi Amar, focusing on Sephardic Torah and history, essential to self-understanding and to appreciating this frequently understated aspect of Jewish history and intellectual development. This was the mainstay of the program, the "bread and butter" (or perhaps the "pita and hummus") of the program. However, "Man does not live by bread alone," the program included inspiring tours (Ammunition Hill, Sephardic aspects of the Old City by Edna Assis), relevant films, social activism, the essential trip to Sephardic book store, the Azkara of the Rishon Lesion chief

rabbi Yitzhaq Nissim, and of course, lively (occasionally, heated) discussions and questions.

Did I mention the delicious and abundant meals?

Gan Eden!!! (Paradise).

I would like to focus on one aspect of the program, from many, that inspired me to further study. This year's Metivta focused on Sephardic reactions to Herzl's Secular Zionist movement. We explored the early roots of Israel's settlement, that preceded Herzl's movement by centuries. These facts have been ignored or even erased in the Secular Zionist narrative, which promulgates the idea that the generations of settlement, industry in the land of Israel, and centuries of immigration to the land were irrelevant. Even the term "hayyishuv hayyashan" (the old settlement) coined by the Secular Zionists, was a way of relegating all that preceded it as ineffectual and outdated, at best. That is not so. We learned about Donna Grazia, R. Hayim Abulafia, and the Shlush family, who all were very active in settling the land and in providing independent economic basis for living on it. While Herzl's movement was a monumental step forward, is was based on the earlier, centuries-old resettlement of Israel, done primarily by Sephardim. This was all new to me. I have been spending much time and study in deepening my understanding of these issues, and will do so in months to come.

The two years that I have attended Metivta have begun to fill a cultural, intellectual and Torah gap in my, mostly Ashkenazic, rabbinic training.

Thank you, SEC, for the annual Metivta program. I look forward to attending next year.

...and to my rabbinic colleagues: until we see the full transformation of these mournful days to Holidays, come and get a glimpse of the pleasure and joy at the Metivta seminar. Just as "From Zion, Torah goes forth," so From Metivta in Zion, Sephardic Culture, Torah thought and history emanate.



This is my third year studying at the SEC Metivta Program. I keep coming back because the learning and camaraderie is like nowhere I have ever been before. Only here can we spend 10 days studying in depth the writings of Sephardic Hakhamim from the 16th Century to the modern day. Only here do rabbis meet with experts in their fields to discuss the inclusive, and sensitive rabbis of the last 500 years.

As always I am left in awe of the scholars and my fellow participants their knowledge of these writings and their empathy and sensitivity to their communities and colleagues.

I am left feeling inspired and ready to share these teachings in Seattle and beyond. I look forward to continuing to develop relationships with my colleagues and to next summer's metivta program.



The theme of this year's Metivta Program was Sephardic Hakhamim and Zionism. There are a number of English Language Jewish History Books that present a skewed view of the Sephardic contribution to the Jewish world. In short, that after the Expulsion of the Jews of Spain and the writing of the Shulchan Aruch by Yosef Caro there is little that Sephardic Jews have added to the Jewish experience.

Many of us who learn about Zionism are taught that Zionism and Aliya to Israel began in the 19th Century. That before Zionism Israel was desolate and devoid of Jews for almost 2000 years. Herzl had a dream, Ben Yehuda brought back to life a dead language and that Ben Gurion molded the modern State of Israel in his own image. The truth is that Sephardim have had a strong unbroken connection to the land of Israel throughout and what started as individual Rabbis moving to Israel towards the ends of their lives changed dramatically in the 16th Century.

Following the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, many Sephardic Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire. The land of Israel was under the Ottoman Empire so for the first time making Aliya to Israel became more than just a dream for thousands of Sephardic Jews. Exiles from Spain settled in Turkey and some like Dona Gracia became very

successful. Dona Gracia used her influence and financial clout to allow Jewish centers in Tiberias and Safed to flourish in the 16th Century. It was in Safed in the 16th Century that Sephardic Rabbis such as Yoef Caro lived, wrote and published their great works.

Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries Sephardim continued to make aliya to Israel and Torah and Jewish life flourished. Indeed, they talk about the Old City of Jerusalem talking Ladino as the dominant language for several hundred years. But when Jews from throughout the world came to Israel they communicated not in Ladino or Yiddish but in Hebrew in Sephardic Pronunciation. This is one of the main reasons that when they were deciding how Hebrew would be pronounced they chose the Sephardic Pronunciation because the Sephardim were the vast majority.

Much of the Sephardic waves of Aliyah were led by the Sephardic Hakhamim. Rabbis who moved to study and teach in the land of Israel and to build communities. Names such as Rav Yosef Caro, The Ohr HaChaim, and The Chida and many others all moved to Israel to lead. I look forward to learning more about Sephardic Hakhamim and their impact on the world.

METIVTA 2018

The Metivta Program is fully paid for by the SEC; participants only pay for their flights. We want and need to expand this program, as evidenced by these amazing comments above. To become a program sponsor or even have your name dedicated to the program, please contact Rabbi Daniel Bouskila. email: info@secjerusalem.org



RABBI MOSHE BENZAQUEN West Coast Torah Center

Dear Rabbi Bouskila, President Neil Sheff and Board Members of the SEC.

I would like to express my gratefulness to all of you for the wonderful ten days well spent in Yerushalayim at the beautiful quarters of the SEC.

This is our third year that Rabbi Bouskila creates a program for Rabbis that is so special, that every year gets better. We cannot wait to meet again.

I have spoken to my community from the pulpit and our members are very interested to have a program for them to be at the SEC for next year, with God's help.

Thank you Rabbi Bouskila for being a close friend and a brother. You are bringing all of us to share Torah values with a Sephardi taste that is so sweet that all of us wish to implement Jewish Law according to the Sephardi approach, which always was all embracing and pleasant to the whole community, and a complete rejection of all extremism.

We were taught the rich history of Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi (1510-1569) whose influence saved thousands of Jews, and was the first Sephardic Lady who began to purchase land in Israel (Tiberias) with the blessings of the Ottoman Empire in order to create a Jewish state.

We were shown that all Sephardi Sages of the last 800 years were very Zionistic up to 30 years ago. Hacham Ben Tzion Hai Uziel, the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the new State of Israel was the last one, and we, as a group of Rabbis from different parts of the world, are adopting his writings, studying his approach and world views. Thank you again, Hacham Daniel for opening our eyes to this treasure.

The visit on the day of the 9th of Av to the Museum of "Ammunition Hill" (Givat Hatahmoshet) was extremely moving to tears.

Thank you Neil and the entire board of the SEC for making Tisha B'av so pleasant and eye opening.

*To all the SEC family,
TIZKU LESHANIM RABBOT NEIMOT VETOVOT*



RABBI ABRAHAM TOBAL Chief Rabbi, Comunidad Monte Sinaí México

La verdad sea dicha, somos dichosos nosotros los Sefaradim de que hoy exista un lugar como el SEC, el Sephardic Educational Center en Jerusalem, ya que desgraciadamente en la actualidad se está perdiendo el conocimiento de la

grandeza de los sabios Sefaradim que tuvo el mundo en distintas épocas y por eso es una suerte que exista "Metivta", este gran proyecto que tiene como propósito el dar a conocer las formas, la filosofía y el enfoque Sefaradí original que nos llena de orgullo y motivación dándonos un sentido de pertenencia sin igual.

Gracias a D-os, este es ya el tercer año en el que participo en este seminario y a pesar de mis muchas ocupaciones, le doy prioridad ante todo lo demás ya que conozco su gran aporte y además, me enriquece sobremedida. Quiero felicitar y agradecer a Neil Sheff, Presidente del SEC y al Rabino Daniel Bouskila por su entrega total para organizar formar y lograr el éxito en este proyecto tan ambicioso, agradezco y aplaudo también las pláticas del Rab Yitzhak Chouraqui y del Rab Moshe Amar así como los otros ponentes que nos impactaron con todo lo que conocen sobre historia judía Sefaradí.

No lo sabemos con certeza, pero quizá esta sea de las últimas generaciones en la que tenemos entre nosotros a esta gente que tienen esa conexión con nuestras raíces auténticas y que les importan nuestros valores y principios.

En esta ocasión, tuvimos oportunidad de ver temas tan importantes como la conexión entre los Sefaradim y la tierra de Israel, ya que erróneamente se cree que fueron solo los Ashkenazim o los Kibutznikim los pioneros en revivir los asentamientos en tierra santa, pero aprendimos que los primeros y más importantes asentamientos, fueron levantados por Sefaradim en la ciudad vieja siempre guiados con la visión de sus grandes Jajamim.

Parte del atractivo de este seminario, fueron las disertaciones que escuchamos sobre el enfoque que debemos tener hacia los jóvenes que se alejan de su judaísmo y sus valores y cómo atraerlos. Este es uno de los puntos más importantes que debemos tomar en cuenta en la actualidad, ya que el enfoque Sefaradí hacia las leyes judías, se caracteriza por tomar en cuenta la realidad y ésta se aborda tomando en cuenta también la delicadeza de la situación. La Halajá Sefaradí no es simplemente una ley seca obtenida de un libro, sino que cuenta con alma y sensibilidad para buscar soluciones a los diferentes y complicados escenarios que se presentan ante nosotros.

No puedo dejar de mencionar la participación que tuvimos en el día del aniversario del fallecimiento del Rab Itjak Nissim, otrora Rab Rashi de Israel y también lo que estudiamos del Rab Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel ocupante del mismo puesto, quienes mantuvieron el Sefaradismo en alto y lo profesaron con orgullo.

Maravilloso el documental presentado por Avi Dabbah sobre el keter aram tzoba y los misterios que conlleva, cómo lo rescataron y qué se pudo rescatar y muchas cosas más. Se abordaron temas cruciales para la sociedad como el de la homosexualidad y las visiones tanto Halájicas como médicas que nos dotaron de herramientas para saber cómo afrontar esta situación como rabinos en el siglo XXI. Vivenciamos también las conferencias de una historiadora experta y reconocida que nos habló sobre la ciudad vieja y sus sinagogas, en fin todas experiencias maravillosas.

Para concluir quiero felicitar y agradecer las magníficas atenciones que nos fueron brindadas por más de 10 días de estudios intensivos desde la mañana hasta la noche, como el excelente hospedaje, los alimentos y las grandiosas pláticas.

Felicito todo el comité que participa en dicha organización y desde lo más profundo de mi alma los bendigo para que D-os les dé fuerza y crezcan año tras año con mucho éxito y prosperidad.



RABBI NAFTALI HALEVA

Member of the Bet-Din, Turkish Chief Rabbinate Rabbi, Ortakoy Ets Ahayim Istanbul

I personally want to thank the president of SEC Neil Sheff and the director of SEC Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, for their vision on organizing an outstanding seminar, for their work and their attempt to revive our old traditions and bring them to the forefront. Those were truly inspiring days at the SEC a week before 9th of Av. May G-d bless their work and make them greatly successful. I was privileged to attend the Metivta Rabbinical Seminar for a second time. Every lesson was well thought out and every lecturer was highly qualified the same as last year. We discussed history, philosophy, Zionism and modern issues. Together with Sephardic Rabbinic colleagues we learned and discussed our Sephardic Hahamim of the past with their tolerance and with their "hashkafa" (world view) and their "halakhic" ingenuity and flexibility to keep everyone within the fold. This convention showed us the uniqueness of the Sephardic Hahamim and their teachings once again.

I realized through textual studies of our Sephardic sages that for centuries they showed great love for the people of Israel and the state of Israel. This convention proved to me that I am not alone and there are other Rabbis who are passionate and proud of their Sephardic heritage. I think we really have something special going on here and I hope we can build off of it moving forward. If we do our share, The Almighty will help us to succeed. Thank you again for hosting us and for invitation for a second time. I look forward to come back every year. I wish to all my colleagues and their respective communities a wonderful Shana Tova! Tizku LeLanim Rabot.

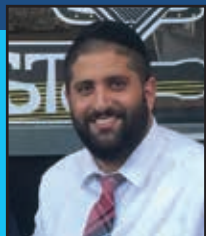
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TURKISH GROUP

Rabbi Naftali Haleva of Istanbul led a group of Turkish young adults who spent their Shabbat at the SEC this summer and had a special Shabbat "tefila" (prayers) with a young Turkish "hazan" (cantor) followed by classes with some of the Rabbis who were attending the Metivta program, including Rabbis Daniel Bouskila, Eli Abadie, Rafael Tawil and Moti Berger.





REFLECTIONS ON A RABBINIC SEMINAR

Our Sages have taught us that one of the forty-eight ways to acquire the Torah is with “Dibbuk Chaverim” – “connecting with colleagues”. Until I attended the SEC Metivta Seminar, I had no inkling of how truly lonely I was in the field of rabbinics. My greatest achievement was finding a group of colleagues, who hailed from variant backgrounds but who were likeminded in their desire to emulate and spread the teachings of Sephardic Sages.

It is on this note that I choose not to focus so much on what we learned formally at the SEC, but rather what we learned informally, from each other and from the leadership of the brilliant “Chachamim” who created this program.

TORAT CHAYIM (A LIVING TORAH)

Anyone who has attended any rabbinic conference knows that often we are judged based on our oratory skills, charisma, or even looks(!). It was clear and obvious at the SEC that what made a rabbi stand head and shoulders above the world was how steeped in the study and knowledge of our Torah of life. From the unbelievable brilliance of Rabbi Chouraqui, to the clarity of Rabbi Toledano and Rabbi Amar, we had the opportunity to study with and from world-class “Talmide Chachamim” (scholars), who taught us the power being firmly grounded in Torah sources. As the director of the program, Rabbi Bouskila always inspired me with his endless studying – no matter how busy he was or how intense the scheduling was, he always found time to attend each class, often surrounded by a heap of holy books, preparing for his own myriad of “Shiurim” (classes). Each and every participant of the seminar was a Torah scholar in his own right, enhancing the classes and lectures with the sweetest words of his own research and opinions. Ashrenu!

“ME'ORAV B'DA'AT IM HABERIYOT” (INVOLVED WITH LARGER SOCIETY)

Our sages were always known for their humility and their ability to mingle seamlessly with society at large with the same ease they did with Torah scholars of their own caliber. The level of culture at the SEC Metivta Seminar was unparalleled. Hearing some of the rabbis converse naturally with the staff of the hotel in native Arabic, listening to outbursts of French and Spanish, you felt that this was a multi-cultural group of rabbis who were proud of their identities and utilized them to advance the wisdom of Hashem's Torah to all the inhabitants of this earth.

I recall that one evening, when my wife called, I answered and said: “I will call you back soon, we are at the movies!” To her astonishment, our entire group joined together and filled the local Jerusalem theater as we watched a film on kidnapped Sephardic children in the early years of the State of Israel. At first, some of the movie-goers were surprised at seeing so many rabbis among them, but as we participated in a riveting panel discussion with the film's creators and the survivors of these hellish stories, it was obvious to everyone in the room that these were different rabbis – the kind that were unapologetic in their desire to mingle with their people and offer comfort, guidance and wisdom in even the most unconventional of places.

When among colleagues, I am often reminded of our Rabbis' narrative that Pharaoh was so adamant that he was a god, that he had to relieve himself in the Nile River so that the people of Egypt would not know that he was human. The rabbis of the SEC Metivta were exactly the opposite! When waiting for the memorial “hazkara” service of Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Nissim zt”l to begin, we sat around a table at a local coffeehouse and discussed matters relevant to all of our communities. The simplicity of such an action further reinforced that it was among these humble scholars that the “Shechina” (divine presence) surely rests!

LESHONENU RINA (OUR LINGUISTIC UNIQUENESS)

Perhaps the most inspiring of all the things that others may have taken for granted, was the way in which we studied. Rabbis from the United States, Mexico, Turkey – among others, sitting around a table with the rabbi who was teaching us at the head, exactly like the ancient Yeshivot of Sepharad!

One of our discussions was about the vibrancy of the Hebrew language in the Sephardic communities throughout the ages. Ben Yehuda may have breathed new life into some elements of Hebrew, our communities absolutely did not consider our mother tongue a “dead language”! Putting all the sources we studied aside, living proof of that was the way in which we all communicated with each other. The teachers from France, Morocco and the United States, alongside the rabbis from the countries above – did not speak in English, or French or any other language. Hebrew was the common denominator between us all – teaching, learning, speaking and writing!

IN CONCLUSION

My emotions run high as I realize that I had the immense merit of “connecting with colleagues”, real friends, in what may be the only place left on earth that the ways of the Sages of Sepharad are being preserved and rejuvenated. I have hope, that together with all those who support this holy endeavor, that we will once again lift the banner of sane, balanced and glorious Judaism – for the whole entire world! Chazak V'Ematz!

SEATTLE

The Annual SEC Shabbaton in Seattle took place January 13-15, 2017 as Rabbi Bouskila, accompanied by SEC V.P. Ray Mallel and Pres. Neil Sheff, were hosted at Ezra Bessaroth Cong. and Sephardic Bikkur Holim. The theme of the program was the 50th anniversary of "Yom Yerushalayim" (Jerusalem Day) with lectures by Rabbi Bouskila, a film screening from the SEC Film Fest Archives, and a live video chat with Jerusalem Post diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon. The program was generously sponsored by SEC V.P. Lela and Harley Franco.

"It was a wonderful SEC Shabbaton. The community was really buzzing this weekend with positive energy and excitement."

Rabbi Hassan of SBH
& Rabbi Meyers of Ezra Bessaroth both agreed



(l to r) SEC Board Member from Seattle, David Behar; Rabbi Bouskila; Rabbi Ben Hassan, SBH; David Maimon, Pres., SBH; Neil Sheff; Rabbi Ron-Ami Meyers, Ezra Bessaroth

"On behalf of Ezra Bessaroth Cong., and on my own behalf, I wanted to thank you for coming to Seattle last weekend and making possible a wonderful Shabbaton. I have heard so much positive feedback from fellow congregants who to a person appreciated the time to learn about and dwell on our Sephardic roots. I look forward to future contacts."

Art Lewy, President

"Thank you all for your hard work and commitment on behalf of the entire community! We anxiously anticipate our continuing partnership and your return!"

Lela Franco



Seattle community members come out to enjoy the SEC Shabbat at Cong. Ezra Bessaroth

TORONTO

SEC Pres. Neil Sheff tours Sephardic Kehela Center in Toronto with community leader **Maurice Benzacar**



KNESSET SUPPORT

Knesset Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg on a quick stop in LA meets with SEC Board Members.



MEETING AT THE KNESSET

with MK's Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg and Eli Elalouf who gave great support to the SEC mission



ISRAEL

SEC CAMPUS DEDICATIONS

On the 50th anniversary of Jerusalem Day (Yom Yerushalayim), the SEC appropriately dedicated the Jerusalem campus to the memory of founder, Dr. Jose A. Nessim. Members of the Nessim family, including Freda Nessim, Ron Nessim and Steve Nessim were present to unveil a beautiful photo and biography of Dr. Nessim that is now prominently displayed in the courtyard for all visitors to see.

Special remarks were delivered by Moshe Nissim, former Minister of Justice and SEC Counsel, Rabbi Benito Garzon, former SEC Educational Director and Freda Nessim.

In addition, Rabbi Bouskila formally dedicated the spaces that were graciously and generously dedicated by our sponsors, including the Marciano Family Sephardic Courtyard, Rhodesli Sephardic Garden, the Mallel Family Sephardic Synagogue, the Emquies Family Sephardic Library, the Elias Family Social Lounge and the Mezuzah Donor Scroll. The synagogue hechal, which was dedicated by Ron and Paulette Nessim, is being constructed and will have an appropriate dedication along with a dedication to the late Salvador Nessim of Buenos Aires, who was President of the SEC-Latin America Chapter. A celebratory lunch followed.

(In photo above, Knesset Member Manuel Trajtenberg addresses invited guests on the importance of the SEC mission.)



Marciano Family Sephardic Courtyard

Dedicated by Maurice Marciano

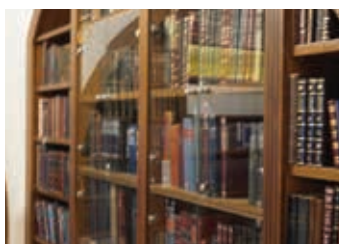
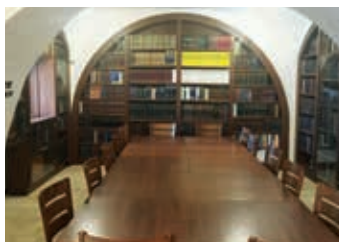


Rhodesli Sephardic Garden

Dedicated by Sephardic Hebrew Center, Los Angeles

Emquies Family Sephardic Library

Dedicated by Moise & Carol Ann Emquies



SEPHARDIC HOUSE
HOTEL

SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL
CENTER

THE JOSE AND FREDA NESSIM CAMPUS



Mallél Family Sephardic Synagogue

Dedicated by the Raymond Mallél Foundation



RABBI SHALEM LIBRARY BEQUEST

The family of the late Rabbi Abraham Shalem (z"l) dedicated his extensive library in a special ceremony and memorial at the Emquies Family Library. His children, grandchildren and extended family were present for the special evening, also attended by SEC Director, Rabbi Bouskila, President Neil Sheff and Rabbi Yitzhaq Chouraqui. Rabbi Shalem had been a rabbi in Seattle, Lima and Mexico City and spent his final years as a special scholar-in-residence to our Sha'arei Uziel Rabbinical Program. He was also fittingly the last surviving student of Chief Rabbi Rishon Letsion Meir Uziel, whose name graces our rabbinical program.



JERUSALEM 50

I had the pleasure of meeting Rabbi Daniel Bouskila last year at Kehila Kedosha Janina on Broome Street in New York. He met with the 4 of us from the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America (including Rabbi Nissim Elneave) during our pre-trip meeting to Istanbul. Rabbi Bouskila encouraged us to get the word out to the rest of the leadership at the Brotherhood regarding the Yom Yerushalayim trip to Israel. My wife, Patty and I had the pleasure of joining the group going at such an auspicious once in a lifetime moment to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem. From the moment we arrived in Israel, I felt such a sense of belonging in Jerusalem and especially at the SEC. The design and architecture of the SEC facility are both unique and reminiscent of many sites in the Sephardic world. We arrived a day earlier than the rest of the group. On the first day of our trip we were able to visit the grave of our beloved Rabbi Myron Rakowitz (z"l), of the Sephardic Jewish Center of Canarsie, who, after serving our kahal for 48 years had just passed away 3 weeks earlier. A somber time for us, but then followed up with meeting Rabbi Bouskila and the rest of our group to begin our Sephardic tour of Israel and specifically Yerushalayim.

We could not have asked for a more knowledgeable, engaging and energetic tour guide than Rabbi Bouskila. And then we got Ray Mallel as an extra bonus of a tour guide with all of his insights into the political history in Israel and his family history in Jerusalem. The trip was all at once invigorating, emotional and inspiring. The location of the SEC right in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and proximity to all of the many historic sites made it very convenient during all of our travels. We were so close to the Kotel that I sometimes walked there on my own during early morning hours or even in the middle of the night from our room at the SEC. I ended up visiting the Kotel 6 times during our trip.

After a few days into the trip, Neil Sheff joined us, following his trip to Istanbul visiting the leadership of the Jewish Community of Turkey. I had recently been on an 8 day trip to Istanbul representing the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America in December. Neil was able to share some insights with me regarding his expertise in immigration law that will help us in our efforts to acclimate those coming from Turkey living in the New York area that are seeking a path to residency and citizenship. My wife and I hit it off with everyone on the trip, including Nira, Jan, Isaac, Pini and everyone mentioned above. It would have been impossible to learn everything about our Sephardic history in Jerusalem with anyone else but Rabbi Bouskila. Ever energetic, Rabbi Bouskila and I spent a few late nights in the very comfortable seating area outside our rooms eating Israeli nuts, dried fruit and halvah reorganizing the itinerary as our travel plans had to be amended due to a visit from President Trump smack in the middle of our trip. Thanks to Rabbi Bouskila and the SEC for affording us the opportunity to partake of this once in a lifetime trip.

JEFF BEJA

Member, Sephardic Jewish Center of Canarsie, Sephardic Temple Cedarhurst, Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, American Sephardi Federation, Council of Sephardic Overseers, Yeshiva University.





*It was a pleasure to meet you and your colleagues at the Sephardic Educational Center.
A lovely place and a perfect project to mark our ancestry. – Izi Doenyas, Istanbul*



Visit from Turkey

A group of 60 Turkish Jews from the Bene Berit organization visited the SEC Campus on Jerusalem Day to join our group and celebrate the holiday together with a festive dinner and live music. The president, Yasef Tovya, presented Israel Shalem, SEC Manager, with a special award.



LOS ANGELES

SEC Young Professionals

BY CELIA LOMBROSO

The SEC has a long tradition of quality programs here in Los Angeles and around the world, geared toward young adults who are interested in learning more about their shared heritage and traditions and meeting others with similar backgrounds and interests. The purpose of the SEC Young Professional group is for young adults to meet, network and socialize in an interesting and inspiring environment.

The SEC Young Professionals is excited about the events we've recently sponsored in Los Angeles. We've had speakers on interesting topics such as: dating in the age of social media; film director Arnon Shorr discussing his fascinating film about a time when Jews escaped the Spanish inquisition; Rabbi Yaakov Cohen on whether one can choose their happiness. We had a great night full of laughter, hosted at the home of Freda Nessim, with comedian Tehran. We also enjoyed an evening of Painting with a local artist at a modern studio. Our committee is planning more events for the coming months and we encourage anyone between the ages of 21-30 to send us your email and join our group. We are thrilled to create and host many more Young Professional events to expand our network and have a space to meet new friends and connect more with our community.

TO SPONSOR the SEC Young Professional Programs, either individually at \$1000 or for the year at \$10,000 please contact Rabbi Daniel Bouskila.





Selihot Concert 2016

The Annual SEC Selihot Concert was a fantastic evening of spiritual and uplifting music performed by local and visiting Sephardic hazzanim accompanied by Arabic musicians. The evening is a special time to enjoy the wonderful Sephardic holiday tunes that get us into the mood for Yom Kippur. Special thanks to sponsors Jack Shamoolian, Ray Mallel and David Perez, and Kahal Joseph Cong. for hosting. Thanks to Cong. Em Habanim for hosting the 2017 Selihot Concert.



Yom Hashoa

The SEC screened the film "Trezoros", about the Holocaust in Kastoria, Greece. The film was produced by our long time supporter Martin Elias of NY and was preceded by a special candle-lighting ceremony by representatives of holocaust survivors from different countries followed by memorial prayers recited by Rabbi Bouskila





Annual Shavout Retreat 2017

BY ALBERT SILVERA, SEC BOARD MEMBER

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.





Thank you Neil, Rachel, Yossi and Esther, for another great Shavuot, my family and I had a such a nice time. It seems to get better every year. Your efforts don't go unnoticed. We appreciate it. Kol Hakavod!

- Karen and Avi Ashkenazi

We had the most amazing time!!! Friendships that have lasted over 20 years!! Thank you SEC!!!! SEC in Palm Springs "rocks"!!!

- Karen Cohen



Thank you so much for a wonderful Shavuot weekend. I know it takes a lot of time and work to put a program as this together, and wanted to express our gratitude. We meet wonderful families and our children made great friends. My older son told me he wants more weekends like this and felt at home with the new friends he made (I guess it's the warmth of our Sephardic culture).

Looking forward to our future with the SEC and to many more good times.

- Mickey and Haim Kahtan

I thought Rabbi Bouskila did a great job with the program and was really inspiring. I loved seeing the synagogue full of people. And seeing all the kids in the pool was incredible. Highlight: seeing the moon, Jupiter and Saturn. What a special touch. Thanks SEC for working tirelessly on behalf of the community and making our kids love being Jewish. Besides the great time and wonderful memories that were created in this retreat, I really believe that we enhanced the SEC brand name. Chazak Ubaruch to Neil Sheff, Rabbi Bouskila, Rachel Sheff and Esther Avrahamy for working so hard and putting together such an amazing event.

- Yosi Avrahamy

SEC Board Member



Annual Beach Day 2017



BEIT MIDRASH SHA'AREI UZIEL SEC RABBINICAL PROGRAM

BY RABBI DANIEL BOUSKILA

What is the larger purpose of a rabbi in society? Are rabbis only concerned with the kashrut of pots and pans, or does the kashrut of business practices also matter? Must a rabbi tend to a broken heart and soul as much as he tends to a broken Eruv before Shabbat? Is he a



caretaker of prayers and rituals alone, or does he also care about social issues? Does he see halakha exclusively in the realm of the kitchen, mikvah and synagogue, or does he also find halakhic expression in economic issues such as the high cost of living and

fair prices for housing? Does the rabbi deal with sensitive social issues such as drug abuse and domestic violence? These are the burning topics in Beit Midrash Shaarei Uziel.

This past year, the rabbis in the Beit Midrash at our SEC Jerusalem Campus engaged in a variety of intriguing studies and activities. Here are some highlights of a typical week...

A Conference on Economics and Halakha The rabbis attended a special conference at Machon Keter (The Keter Institute) in Jerusalem, on "Economics and Halakha." Attending this conference is in keeping with the words of Rav Uziel (Israel's first Sephardic Chief Rabbi, after whom we named the program), who said: "Jewish Law always dealt with public affairs and questions that dealt with wages and taxes, government tax policies, distribution of wealth and matters of social

welfare." Exposing our rabbis to such a conference that deals directly with the interface between economics and Jewish law is one of the core values of our Beit Midrash. In addition to the enlightening lectures, the rabbis were pleased to meet an alumnus from last year's class of Shaarei Uziel, who said that his decision to come to this conference was born out of what he studied in our Beit Midrash last year. The rabbis also met with Economics Professor and Knesset Member Manuel Trajtenberg for a discussion of monetary laws in rabbinic literature.



Rationalism: The Classic Sephardic Approach to Studying the Bible Rabbi Yitzhak Chouraqui, our brilliant Rosh Beit Midrash (Head of the Program) taught the rabbis how to read and interpret the Torah in a rationalist approach. One of today's major problems is the simplistic approaches taken by many rabbis in interpreting and explaining the depth and meaning of the Torah. These simplistic, literal approaches often lead to extremist religious positions, on the one hand, and alienation of many others who find these approaches silly and illogical. Rav Chouraqui's class focused on the approach taken by our classic Sephardic commentators such as Abraham Ibn Ezra — the rationalist approach — which brings the Torah's teachings in touch with one's rational intellect, thus allowing for one to incorporate the Torah's teachings into his/her own life in a sensible fashion.



Rabbinical Students meet with former Chief Rabbi Bakhshi-Doron

All Study and No Work?

Not the True Path of the Torah

Rabbi Chouraqui also taught a session on the Torah and Talmud's emphasis on the mandate to combine Torah study with a profession, because it is impossible to sustain a community on Torah study alone. This, of course, raised an interesting and at times heated discussion, as many rabbis and communities in Israel today do not uphold this principle, and indeed a lifestyle contrary to it. Rav Churaqui brought to the table a string of classic rabbinic sources that all point directly to combining work and Torah, strengthening the Beit Midrash's position as one that encourages the blend of tradition and spirituality with a practical lifestyle.

Practical Rabbis: Leadership in a Community Rabbi David Zenou, the Menahel Beit Midrash (Manager of the Program), also serves as the head rabbi of a Moshav in Southern Israel. As a professional leader of a community, Rav Zenou comes with a world of practical experiences in the rabbinate, and shares with our rabbis the many challenges of being a rabbi in today's world. Among other programs, Rav Zenou lead a workshop on the sensitive subject of the rabbi making changes in a community, and how delicate this can be. The rabbi often walks the balancing act of being an agent of change, and at the same time pleasing those who want to preserve things just as they are. Rav Zenou's workshop presented all sorts of real-life scenarios, making this an engaging and practical learning experience for our rabbis.

BECOME A SPONSOR

The program is integral to our mission in changing the "Jewish dialogue" in the religious world. If we are to bring back our Sephardi imprint on Judaism, we must be serious and professional. Shaarei Uziel is our path toward that goal. If you would like to name this important program or partially sponsor it, please contact Rabbi Bouskila today. You will indeed be making a lasting difference in the Jewish World.

The Rabbi's Roundtable: Economic Issues & Conflict Resolution in Impoverished Communities Rabbi Hanan Afilalo, one of the fellows of our Beit Midrash, who serves in his rabbinic profession as a Dayan (rabbinical judge) in a Beit Din (rabbinical court) for monetary issues shared the many challenges of dealing with economic issues in the rabbinate, especially because his communities are largely the periphery communities in Israel's development towns. Riddled with poverty and crime, these communities present the rabbi with complex and often dangerous challenges, including confronting members of the criminal underworld. Rabbi Afilalo discussed whether it was actually possible for a rabbi in his position to effect change in these communities, and he shared what he felt was one of his most important roles: conflict resolution in economic matters between families and business partners. All of this, of course, through the lenses of halakha (Jewish law).

Members of the Rabbinical Program meet with SECV.P. and program benefactor, Ray Malle (seated 3rd from right)



Rabbis participate in a radio talk show



Together with our partners Kol Yisrael Haverim, the SEC is proud to be training and educating a new generation of enlightened rabbinic leaders.



JEWISH UNITY VS. SEPHARDIC PARTICULARISM:

Rav Uziel's Sephardic Vision for the Jewish People

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Rav Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953) was a visionary rabbinic leader, a strong promoter of Jewish unity, and the 20th century's most authentic embodiment of the classic Sephardic rabbinic tradition. His leadership was characterized, on the one hand, by a burning desire to abolish divisions between Jews, yet at the same time he was committed to promoting Sephardic Judaism. How did he reconcile these seemingly conflicting agendas?

As the Haham Bashi (Ottoman-appointed Chief Rabbi) of Jaffa-Tel Aviv (1911-1939), and then as the Rishon L'Zion of the pre-state Yishuv (1939-1947) and of the State of Israel (1948-1953), Rav Uziel was officially the "Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel". But despite holding an official title and position that seems to have ethnic and particularistic overtones, Rav Uziel was an outspoken proponent of Jewish unity. He passionately sought to abolish the traditional ethnic divisions amongst Jews, especially in Israel. His push for Jewish unity was persistent and thorough, and he articulated his vision of Jewish unity in many forums, including public addresses, written position papers and halakhic rulings. From his earliest moments as a young rabbinic leader, all the way through to his famous "Spiritual Will to the Jewish People" written a few weeks before his death in 1953, Rav Uziel advocated Jewish unity as an ideal position.

If Rav Uziel so actively sought Jewish unity as an ideal, then what was his understanding of his own particular title and role as a Sephardic Chief Rabbi? What was Rav Uziel's definition of Sephardic Judaism within the context of a Jewish community that, in his own view, should no longer express these ethnic divisions?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to begin in 1911 when, upon being appointed Haham Bashi of Jaffa, Rav Uziel articulated a grand vision of unity for the Jewish people:

"It is my tremendous desire to unify all of the divisions that the diaspora tore us into, the separate communities of Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Temanim (Yemenites), etc. This should not be a difficult task, for unity is in our nature and our national character as a people. These divisions amongst us are not natural. The particular linguistic and communal divisions that exist amongst us were created due to our dispersion throughout the diaspora. As we now return to our natural homeland, there is absolutely no reason to continue living by these communal and linguistic divisions imported from the diaspora. Instead, we will be one unified community. Should I succeed in helping to quickly realize and fulfill this unity amongst us, great will be my merit."

This was Rav Uziel's "I have a dream" speech. Fully aware of the 1900-year history in which Jews lived as separate and distinct communities throughout the diaspora — with different rabbis, customs, languages, prayer rituals and halakhic rulings dividing them — Rav Uziel nonetheless believes that unifying the Jewish people "should not be a difficult task" because the divisions born in the diaspora are alien to the essence of the Jewish people. He does not consider his desire to abolish the diaspora's divisions into Sephardim and Ashkenazim to be a new or radical idea but a return to our true nature. He declares that unity "is in our national character," and by becoming "one unified community" we are returning to our original essence as a people.

Rav Uziel does not see his position as a Sephardic rabbi in the narrowly ethnic sense, rather as a potentially unifying force within the Jewish world. This being the case, what, if anything, did being a “Sephardic Rabbi” mean to Rav Uziel?

In 1930, at a gathering celebrating his 50th birthday, Rav Uziel addressed the apparent contradiction between preaching unity while maintaining Sephardic Judaism:

I have already expressed on many occasions that I do not relate to any distinctions or separations between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. It is not the countries of Spain (Sefarad) or Germany (Ashkenaz) that gave us great Torah scholars, rather the Torah itself—regardless of locale—that has inspired generation after generation of Torah learning. However, hand in hand with my love for unity, I want to draw the distinction between unity and self-belittlement. It is my goal to see unity amongst us in the field of work and in the field of literary creations. Therefore, may it come to pass, that from the descendants of the great rabbis from Spain, once again will emerge Poskim (halakhic decisors) and Darshanim (homiletical preachers), Hokrim (philosophers) and Meshorerim (poets), Parshanim (Biblical commentators) and Mekubalim (mystics/kabbalists). This is my goal, and this is my prayer. It is from this ideological worldview that I lent a hand to strengthen the World Federation of Sephardim, but from the very first moment, I told them that their most important mission lies in the areas of culture and Torah. More than once, I asked to create, under their umbrella, a Beit Midrash L'Rabbanim (a Rabbinical School), because I believe that Torah and higher intellectual education are the foundations for peace and unity amongst us.”

In Rav Uziel’s broad vision, Sephardic Judaism would no longer reflect an ethnic definition but instead would offer an intellectual-spiritual framework for the entire Jewish people. To this end, Rav Uziel envisioned the establishment of a Sephardic Beit Midrash that would

revive the unique curriculum that characterized the yeshivot and academies in Spain and, in turn, produce a new generation of Sephardic-style but universally Jewish rabbis. This would be a “Sephardic” Beit Midrash thanks to its approach to Torah study, not because of the ethnic background of its students.

What was that approach to Torah study?
Rav Uziel elaborates:

“Yeshivot were divided into two centers of learning, known by their general name of Sefarad (Spain) and Ashkenaz (Germany). This division does not only reflect a geographic divide, rather it primarily reflects a difference in curriculum and methodology. In addition to Talmudic studies, Sephardic yeshivot widened the spectrum of the yeshiva curriculum to include philosophical inquiry, as well as a wide range of sciences and general knowledge that they studied from non-Torah literature. The rabbis of France and Ashkenaz fenced themselves into the exclusive world of Talmud and Midrash, fearing that the penetration of external knowledge would create theological confusion amongst its students.”

Rav Uziel envisioned that all Jews, irrespective of their ethnic origins, would be able to study in such an academy, and its rabbinical graduates would serve the entire Jewish community. Far from being mutually exclusive, Rav Uziel believed that Jewish unity and the Sephardic intellectual tradition are complementary. He specifically wanted to open a Sephardic Beit Midrash, because he believed that its broad worldview would benefit the entire Jewish people. His unique philosophy presents an opportunity for today’s Jewish world to adopt and apply the teachings of Sephardic Judaism to a broad cross section of the Jewish community, with the goal of creating, in Rav Uziel’s own words, “peace and unity amongst us.”

THE ABOVE IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF RABBI BOUSKILA’S ARTICLE. THE COMPLETE VERSION CAN BE FOUND IN THE JOURNAL CONVERSATIONS (ISSUE #29). FOR MORE DETAILS GO TO **WWW.JEWISHIDEAS.ORG/CONVERSATIONS**



SEC Launches New Women's Beit Midrash Program

The SEC is pleased to announce the opening of Beit Midrash Arevot, a new Torah study program for women, to take place in the Emquies Family Sephardic Library & Beit Midrash at the SEC Campus in Jerusalem. The primary focus of this program will be studying the unique Halakhic worldview of Sephardic Hakhamim, the history of Sephardic Halakha, the philosophy and thought of Sephardic Sages, social justice in the writings of Sephardic Hakhamim, and Sephardic responses to modernity. All of this will be blended with studying issues related to the identity of the Sephardi-Mizrahi woman in Israel today, as well as gender-related halakhic issues.

This unique program is a testimony to the advanced level and confidence that modern Sephardic women have achieved in the field of Torah studies, as well as to the openness of Classic Sephardic Judaism to explore women's issues in halakha. There are already 20 women enrolled in the program, and the SEC looks forward to the wonderful energy, ideas and innovations that this Beit Midrash program will bring to the world of Sephardic Torah studies.



By: Rabbi Devin Maimon Villareal
Jewish Studies department chair / teacher,
deToledo High School in West Hills, CA

THE SEPHARDIC STORY BELONGS TO ALL OF US

For a long time, Sephardic studies and voices have occupied a place of "special interest group" in Jewish education. Over time, however, there has been an increasing awareness that the Sephardic approach to Judaism as embodied by its history, culture and great thinkers, is something that enriches all of the Jewish people. As such, an awareness that it must become an integrated part of a standard Jewish education has also grown. Towards that end, I, along with numerous other educators in the US and Israel, and organizations like the SEC, have been working to make Sephardic and Mizrahi voices part of the Jewish Studies conversation in as many places as possible. Part of that endeavor is making Sephardic works readily available for an English speaking audience since so much rich Sephardic material is in Hebrew, Ladino, Modern Spanish, French, Judeo-Arabic and more. The content of these writings, aside from contributing to the intrinsically valuable goal of recognizing Jewish cultural diversity, also contribute vital perspectives on themes of enduring importance such as social justice, halakha, Jewish philosophy and spirituality.

Below is an example from a work I translated over the summer, which also became the basis of a faculty development session at Los Angeles' de Toledo High School where I work. It is an article written by Rabbi Hayyim David HaLevy z"l, who served as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yaffo in the middle of the 20th century. In this work, which he



CONVERSATIONS JOURNAL FOCUSES ON SEPHARDIC TOPICS

If you've never read the journal *Conversations*, this would be a good time to begin. The Fall 2017 issue published by The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, is entirely devoted to Sephardic topics, focuses on aspects of Sephardic/Pan-Sephardic civilization, and on the need for all Jews to become more familiar with these components of the Jewish experience.

Edited by Rabbi Marc D. Angel (the rabbi emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, and the author of over 30 books and numerous scholarly articles).

To obtain a copy call the SEC office at (323)272-4574

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penned in 1967, he delves into the nature of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” in the context of rigorous social debate. He writes:

“Without a doubt, even when the people observe all of the commandments of the Torah, if missing from their observance is this specific commandment of “love your neighbor as yourself”, then in fact, the entire Torah is missing since the aim and goal of the Torah’s commandments is for our good and to give us life and surely there can be no goodness for a people and its life without love; a genuine love that dwells amidst all its sectors and facets...”

The implications of this statement are profound. In a few sentences, Rabbi HaLevy lays out two remarkable claims. First, that the value of observing the commandments rests upon the presence of love for one’s neighbor amidst it all. Secondly, that the aim of the Torah is for our thriving as human beings. Messages such as these restore a sense of positivity and relevance to religious life that easily gets lost in common religious discourse that too often focuses only on technicalities, reward and punishment, and guilt. Rabbi HaLevy then extends these notions further into the realm of the health of the broader state of Israel as a democratic society . He continues:

“...if a person does not love the other with a genuine love, he is then quite close to the boundary of hatred. The smallest difference of opinion or even of approach (to that same opinion) becomes sufficient to turn the other into an object of hate and enmity, all the more so if the matter at hand deals with conflict pertaining to the hard struggle for existence. This is even more true when the matter is about authority and governance. Yet again it is even more so if society, differences in philosophy and ways of living are the issue. All of these (disagreements) are

appropriate and permitted absolutely. Conflicts, differences in thought, the struggle for livelihood and governance, these are natural to every people and nation and to every democratic society and this reality is certainly not illegitimate for the Jewish people, however, it must all be on a single condition; that all of this is done from love and this is indeed possible.”

Rabbi HaLevy’s positive identification of Israel as a democratic nation in a halakhic article is significant in and of itself. For Rabbi HaLevy, democracy is a source of rights and obligations that is in constructive conversation with halakha. This is evident throughout his writings in which he approaches issues like social welfare, judicial systems and more by invoking both halakhic and democratic principles. Though writing in the context of Israeli society, the transferable messages to global Jewish communities are easily seen.

A fuller treatment of Rabbi HaLevy’s approach is beyond the scope of this column and I recommend readers peruse works such as those by Rabbis Marc and Hayyim Angel as well as the SEC’s own Rabbi Daniel Bouskila for more insight into this remarkable scholar. Rabbi HaLevy is just one example of the important voices many of us are attempting to bring into greater prominence in Jewish Studies curricula, and utilizing Rabbi HaLevy’s article for a staff development session is just one example of how some of us are going about it.

It suffices to conclude here by saying that we are witnessing an exciting time for Sephardic Judaism, in which there is a growing understanding that many of today’s urgent questions find profound responses in Sephardic voices. Furthermore, there are passionate and capable groups such as the SEC who are making those voices accessible to the broader Jewish world. In other words, through the efforts of many, the Sephardic story is rightfully becoming one that belongs to all of us.



MODELS OF SEPHARDIC RABBINIC LEADERSHIP

By: Rabbi Marc D. Angel

In this essay, I elaborate on models of Sephardic rabbinic leadership—models that have so much to say to contemporary rabbis and laypeople of all backgrounds. This is not an “ethnic study,” but an exploration of a vital aspect of Jewish religious life relevant to the entire Jewish people. I draw on my own observations as a Sephardic rabbi with over 41 years of experience, as well as on what I have learned from my years of research and writing in the field. The late Professor Meir Benayahu published a book on the nature of the rabbinate in the Sephardic world. He listed various titles by which Sephardic rabbis were known, and described the rabbinic functions and responsibilities.

One of the rabbinic titles was *Marbitz Torah*—a disseminator of Torah. The rabbi was expected to be thoroughly steeped in rabbinic literature, to be competent to serve as a decisor of halakhic questions, to serve on the local rabbinical court (*Bet Din*), to be responsible for matters relating to *kashruth*, *mikvah*, *eruv*, and so forth. He was expected to teach Torah to the community and to oversee the community’s education system.

Another title applied to Sephardic rabbis was “*Hakham*.” A *Hakham* was certainly expected to be learned in the sacred texts of Judaism—but the title implies more than mere erudition. It implies wisdom. The *Hakham* was a wise man who had keen insight into human psychology; he could draw on the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalah, and Mussar literature, but he also had the innate sense to know how to apply these texts to real-life situations. He had a rational bent and a mystical bent; he was aware of the larger problems and issues confronting his society. People knew they

could turn to the *Hakham* for proper guidance, for counseling on matters of deep concern.

Sephardic rabbis were also known as “*Haver ha’ir*,” literally, “friend of the city.” While “*haver*” has the talmudic connotation of someone known for punctiliousness in the laws of ritual purity and impurity, the word also reflects the popular usage—a friend. The rabbi was not to be an aloof scholar, but a person of the people and with the people. His life was bound up with the lives of his community. In a very real and direct sense, the rabbi was a friend to his community; he cared for them, looked out for their wellbeing, and identified with their needs and aspirations.



Rabbi Angel (center) on a recent book-signing talk to SEC in Los Angeles.

In recent years, the classic nature of Sephardic rabbinic leadership has lost much of its historic luster. For a variety of sociological and psychological reasons, there has been a sea change in Orthodox rabbinic leadership in general—and an even more profound change in Sephardic rabbinic leadership. The upsurge in the influence of extreme Hareidi religious authorities has dragged much of Orthodoxy “to the right.” The so-called Modern Orthodox or Religious Zionist rabbis have all but ceded total authority to the Hareidi rabbinate in almost every area of religious life. Modern Orthodox/Religious Zionist rabbinic figures have increasingly adopted Hareidi halakhic positions, styles of leadership—even Hareidi styles of dress. Israel’s Chief Rabbinate, long a bastion of Religious

Zionism, has become “hareidized” to a significant extent, and no longer can be said to represent a Modern Orthodox/Religious Zionist agenda. On the contrary, it constantly seems to seek approval from the Hareidi world, rather than strengthening and promoting its Religious Zionist base.

The Sephardic rabbinic world has been strongly affected by the general shift to the right. Indeed, many (most?) Sephardic rabbis have been trained in Ashkenazic yeshivot; have adopted Ashkenazic modes of Torah study and halakhic decision-making, and even have adopted Ashkenazic garb. They have moved more and more away from “hessed” (lovingkindness) and more and more toward “gevurah” (triumphalism). They have come to stress the rabbinic role of Marbitz Torah, and to under-appreciate the roles of Hakham and Haver haIr.

Over the years, many Sephardic rabbis from Israel have visited my community in New York in order to raise funds for their institutions. Often, these rabbis have come dressed in long black coats and black hats, in the Ashkenazic Hareidi style. When I have asked them about their garb, invariably they have responded: we wear these clothes because this is the uniform of rabbinic scholars; if we dressed differently, we wouldn’t be taken seriously. In the early 1990s, I met with the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordecai Eliyahu, and I asked him why the Sephardic rabbis in Israel tend to dress in the Ashkenazic style. He smiled benevolently, and said that this was the generally accepted mode of dress for rabbis. When I urged him to raise his voice on this issue and to encourage Sephardic rabbis not to capitulate to Ashkenazic fashion dictates, he indicated that the battle was already lost and it would be a waste of time to try to fight the status quo.

The Sephardic adoption of external Hareidi garb is a reflection of the adoption of Hareidi attitudes as well. This includes the glorification of the “Kollel” system, where students receive stipends to study Torah day and night rather than find gainful employment; where they receive little or no general education outside of Torah study;



SEC Board Members, Moussa Shaaya and Ron Nessim

where they avoid military service in Israel; where they become isolated from the life and concerns of the general public. I have been visited by Israeli Sephardic rabbis who have wanted donations to their Hareidi-type yeshivot, including one who asked for money for his “Sefardische Koylel.” To change the deficiencies in the status quo of Sephardic rabbinic leadership, the community as a whole needs to take action and responsibility. We need to support and encourage those rabbis who personify the best in our tradition, rabbis who fulfill the roles of Marbitz Torah, Hakham and Haver haIr. We need to give strength to those rabbis who stand for hessed, rather than gevurah; who devote themselves to the well-being of their communities in a loving and inclusive manner; who espouse an intellectually vibrant and compassionate Judaism. We ought not support those rabbis and institutions which seek to “hareidize” the Sephardic community, nor ought we donate our funds or lend credibility to wonder-working rabbis who foster a pseudo-kabbalistic, superstition-prone brand of religion. Are we up to this historic responsibility, or will we allow ourselves and our coming generations to continue the slide into an obscurantist, authoritarian, superstition-ridden Judaism?

When I was a young rabbi, I believed that the classic models of Sephardic rabbinic leadership provided a responsible and meaningful example for all of world Jewry. Nearly fifty years later, I still believe this to be true. In spite of all the negative signs that abound, I still believe this to be true.

The above is an abridged version of Rabbi Angel's article. The complete version can be found in the journal *Conversations* (Issue #29). For more details go to

WWW.JEWISHIDEAS.ORG/CONVERSATIONS



MY VISIT TO TURKEY EDITOR: NEIL J. SHEFF neil@sheffimmigration.com



On my way to join the SEC Jerusalem 50 Mission and Dedication of the remodeled campus on Jerusalem Day in May, I spent 3 days in Istanbul, Turkey as the guest of my friend Rabbi Naftali Haleva and his dear father, the Hakham Bashi (Chief Rabbi), Ishak Haleva. I travelled to Turkey amidst the fear of terrorist attacks and political unrest we have all heard and read about, not knowing what semblance of Jewish community I would find. But I was wonderfully surprised to find a vibrant and resilient community of 18,000 Jews that dates back centuries and has preserved its culture, religious traditions and language. The SEC had a thriving chapter in Istanbul in the 1980's led by Burak Gatenyo before he moved to L.A.

I had a short walk from my hotel on the Bosphorus Sea to the synagogue of Ortakoy, led by Rabbi Naftali Haleva. There I found a well-guarded synagogue where I did have to present my passport and go through some serious security until passing through two heavy metal doors which opened onto a beautiful glass-covered courtyard and garden (which I later learned was subsidized by the government to be bomb-proof) connecting to the sanctuary where a sizable daily minyan attended followed by a traditional Turkish breakfast and study group. Ladino could be



heard from the mouths of all the older participants and I immediately felt at home.



On Shabbat, there were over 100 congregants in attendance to celebrate a wedding, followed by a festive luncheon of borekas, olives and Turkish mezze. I was



invited to give a speech to the assembly about the work of the SEC in Israel and beyond and how we wanted the Turkish community to feel a part of our family, especially when visiting Jerusalem. I had the

choice to speak in English and have my words translated to Turkish but I thought I would only have one opportunity in my life to do something I couldn't do anywhere else in the world- give a speech in Ladino, which I did, peppered with the colorful Turkish words I knew from my youth in L.A. Surprisingly, most of those present over 40 understood my words and even laughed at my Ladino jokes. That was an experience of a lifetime, especially to be able to connect with this community that serves as the "mother" of all Ladino communities.

WE ARE ONE. "AM YISRAEL CHAI"

*LET US ALWAYS SEE THE JEWISH PEOPLE
PERSEVERE AND THRIVE.*

I was amazed to learn that the week before my arrival, the Jewish community had hosted a Lag B'Omer concert with an Israeli singer that attracted 1,000 people. For Yom Yerushalayim, when I would already be in Israel, the Ladino folklore troupe "Los Pasharos" would give a concert to a sold-out crowd. The Jewish school boasts over 600 students and there are numerous Jewish synagogues still in operation throughout the country.

On Sunday, I was picked up by Chief Rabbi Haleva in his Turkish version of a "Pope-mobile" as he and his son Nafi took me to the old Jewish Quarter and the Neve Shalom synagogue, site of 2





his People. There were sad reminders of the terrorist attacks that had occurred on the synagogue floor below us that had wiped out the entire local group of congregants that had kept Neve Shalom an active synagogue for so many years.



SEC President Neil Sheff with Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva, and Rabbi Naftali Haleva at the famed Neve Shalom Synagogue, site of 2 terrorist attacks

infamous terrorist attacks. The Jewish Museum is now housed on the upper floors of the synagogue complex where the school used to be. It is a modern wonder and depicts every aspect of the Jewish presence and life in Turkey for over the past 500 years. As Rabbi Haleva held my arm and showed me portions of the exhibit, describing in Ladino the photos, maps, publications and religious articles on display, it was moving to be standing with the living successor to a line of Chief Rabbis - "Hakham Bashis"- that had led the Turkish and Ottoman Jewish communities since their expulsion from Spain. And before us were photos and names of this long line of Rabbis all the way down to the sweet, humorous and dignified octogenarian Rabbi holding my arm as we strolled through the museum of



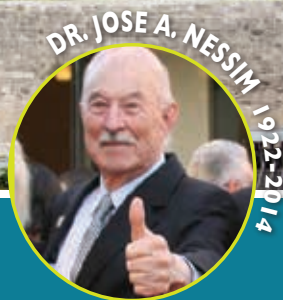
The fear and uncertainty have not dissipated; yet this stoic historical community continues to thrive, maintaining a strong Jewish presence in this ancient land, sending missions of adults and youth to Israel on a regular basis, its Rabbi joining his colleagues from around the world in study at the SEC Metivta, as you see on the pages before. I was proud to be able to join the Turkish Sephardic community and tell them that we strive to keep our common heritage alive and well for generations to come.



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