

26 Tevet 5775

17 January 2015

# KOL MEVASSER

The Board of Directors of Kahal Joseph is pleased to invite all our members to a special Shabbat service with **Rabbi Raif Melhado**

Rabbi Melhado will pray with us and give a Dvar Torah entitled **"OLD BEGINNINGS AND NEW ENDINGS IN TORAH"**

**Shabbat January 24, 2015**

Rabbi Melhado will also be speaking at our enjoyable and interactive LUNCH AND LEARN following the Shabbat Service where his topic will be "HALIKHOT OLAM; ETERNAL RULES IN A CHANGING WORLD"

*Rabbi Raif Melhado studies at Yeshivat Chovevai Torah and previously studied at Yeshivat Hakkibutz Hadati at Ein Tzurim and the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. He holds a BA in history from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he served as the executive director of the Cohen Hillel Center. Rabbi Melhado is currently earning his Master's Degree in Modern Jewish History at Yeshiva University, and serves as assistant director for the university network at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. In his spare time, he operates Ketershemtov.com, a website devoted to the works of Rabbi Shemtob Gaguine in documenting and explaining Sephardi customs and traditions. We look forward to having all our members meet this dynamic young Rabbi at our Shabbat service on January 24, 2015 and come and enjoy our "LUNCH AND LEARN" with Rabbi Raif Melhado following the service.*

LUNCH AND LEARN is FREE to MEMBERS ONLY

Please make your reservation for lunch by calling our synagogue office at (310) 474-0559 by Thursday January 22nd



## KJ Schedule Shemot

### Erev Shabbat

Friday, January 16th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am  
**Shabbat Candle Lighting..4:50 pm**  
Minha / Arbit .. 4:50 pm

### Shabbat

Parashat Va'era

Saturday, January 17th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer .... 8:30 am  
Mr. Joseph Miskabi, Guest Speaker  
Minha, Seudah, Arvit..... 4:30 pm  
Motzei Shabbat / Havdala ... 6:00 pm

### Weekdays

Sunday, January 18th

Shaharit ..... 7:30 am  
KJ Kids Talmud Torah..... 10:00 am  
Mon, Tue & Thurs, Jan 19, 20 & 22  
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am

### Erev Rosh Hodesh Shvat

Tuesday, January 20th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am

### Rosh Hodesh Shvat

Wednesday, January 21st

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:15 am

### Erev Shabbat

Friday, January 23rd

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am  
**Shabbat Candle Lighting..4:56 pm**  
Minha / Arbit .. 4:56 pm

Torah Reading Exodus/Shemot  
Parashat Vaera 232 to 244  
Haftara (from the Prophets)  
Yehezkel / Ezekiel 244 to 247

**Shabbat Shalom**



## Welcome

Board Member, Religious Committee VP  
& Shabbat Guest Speaker

**Joseph Miskabi**

who will give this week's  
Dvar Torah on the topic of

“Collective Punishment and  
Collective Responsibility”

Save the Date!

## Purim Baking for KJ Baskets

Sunday, March 1st 2015  
10:00 am

### JVS Scholarship Available

The Jewish Vocational Service Scholarship is a need-based program for college and graduate school for Jewish students who are permanent residents of Los Angeles County. The online application period for the 2015-2016 academic year begins January 15, 2015, and closes March 15, 2015. Since 1972, Jewish Vocational Service has awarded over \$6.5 million to more than 4,000 financially challenged Jewish students from Los Angeles pursuing higher education. Information is on our website [www.jvsla.org](http://www.jvsla.org).

## Shabbat Kiddush

is sponsored by  
In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of  
**Ethan Naim**

by  
**Lena and Mehrdad Naim**

## Congratulations

**Lena & Mehrdad Naim**  
on your son's Bar Mitzvah

### Mazal Tov

to siblings Michelle and Ariel  
grandparents Moussa & Helen Naim  
and Latif & Paricheher Samih



## An Evening of Cards & Backgammon

**Wednesday, January 21st**

**at 6:00 pm**

**Kahal Joseph**

**Errol Levi Social Hall**

**Refreshments will be served**

**Ten Dollar Donation**



## Seudah Shlisheet

is sponsored in memory of  
**Haim ben Yehezkel, z"l**

by **The Farhamy Family**

### Refuah Shlemah

Moselle Amron • Maurice Ovadia  
Abe Abraham • Michael Herzbrun  
Saul Sassoon • Sassoon Ezra • Tilda Levy

### In Memoriam

We remember these yearzeit anniversaries for  
January 17 to 24, 2015. It is customary to light  
a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, & attend  
services the preceding Shabbat.

**26 Tevet / Shabbat, January 17th**  
*Ronnie Assia Ronnie ben Naji*

**27 Tevet / Sunday, January 18th**  
*Sassoon Elias*  
*Stanley Feinberg Stanley ben Jesse*

**28 Tevet / Monday, January 19th**  
*Aziza Solomon Aziza bat Amam*  
*Maurice Zekaria Moshe ben seon*

**1 Shvat / Wednesday, January 21st**  
*Mozelle Solomon Mozly bat Haviva*

**2 Shvat / Thursday, January 22nd**  
*Aziza bat Salha*

*Joseph Haghghi Yosef ben Ezra*  
*Samuel Sheff Shlomo ben Binyamin*  
*Albert Zekaria Abdullah ben Sion*

**4 Shvat / Shabbat, January 24th**  
*Khorshid Farzaneh Farahi Rahel bat Esther*

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# Freewill

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

*Edited & reprinted from Covenant & Conversation*

The question is ancient. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then it was God who made Pharaoh refuse to let the Israelites go, not Pharaoh himself. How can this be just? How could it be right to punish Pharaoh and his people for a decision – a series of decisions – that were not made freely by Pharaoh himself? Punishment presupposes guilt. Guilt presupposes responsibility. Responsibility presupposes freedom. ... How then can it say, as it does in our parsha (Ex. 7: 3) that God hardened Pharaoh's heart?

All the commentators are exercised by this question. Maimonides and others note a striking feature of the narrative. For the first five plagues we read that Pharaoh himself hardened his heart. Only later, during the last five plagues, do we read about God doing so. The last five plagues were therefore a punishment for the first five refusals, freely made by Pharaoh himself.

A second approach, in precisely the opposite direction, is that during the last five plagues God intervened not to *harden* but to *strengthen* Pharaoh's heart. He acted to ensure that Pharaoh kept his freedom and did not lose it. Such was the impact of the plagues that in the normal course of events a national leader would have no choice but to give in to a superior force. As Pharaoh's own advisers said before the eighth plague,

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"Do you not yet realise that Egypt is destroyed." To give in at that point would have been action under duress, not a genuine change of heart. Such is the approach of Yosef Albo and Ovadiah Sforno.

A third approach calls into question the very meaning of the phrase, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." In a profound sense God, author of history, is behind every event, every act, every gust of wind that blows, every drop of rain that falls. Normally however we do not attribute human action to God. We are what we are because that is how we have chosen to be, even if this was written long before in the divine script for humankind. What do we attribute to an act of God? Something that is unusual, falling so far outside the norms of human behaviour that we find it hard to explain in any other way than to say, surely this happened for a purpose.

God himself says about Pharaoh's obstinacy, that it allowed him to demonstrate to all humanity that even the greatest empire is powerless against the hand of Heaven. Pharaoh acted freely, but his last refusals were so strange that it was obvious to everyone that God had anticipated this. It was predictable, part of the script. God had disclosed this to Abraham centuries earlier when he told him in a fearful vision that his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs (Gen 15: 13-14).

These are all interesting and plausible interpretations. It seems to me, though, that the Torah is telling a deeper story and one that never loses its relevance. Philosophers

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and scientists have tended to think in terms of abstractions and universals. Some have concluded that we have freewill, others that we don't. There is no conceptual space in between.

In life, however, that is not the way freedom works at all. Consider addiction. The first few times you smoke a cigarette or drink alcohol or take drugs, you do so freely. You know the risks but you ignore them. As time goes on, your dependency increases until the craving is so intense that you are almost powerless to resist it. At that point you may have to go into rehabilitation. You no longer, on your own, have the ability to stop. As the Talmud says, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison."

Addiction is a physical phenomenon. But there are moral equivalents. For example, suppose on one significant occasion, you tell a lie. People now believe something about you that is not true. As they question you about it, or it comes up in conversation, you find yourself having to tell more lies to support the first. "Oh what a tangled web we weave," said Sir Walter Scott, "when first we practise to deceive."

That is as far as individuals are concerned. When it comes to organisations, the risk is even greater. ... Within nations, especially non-democratic ones, the risk is higher still. In commercial enterprises, losses can be quantified. Someone somewhere knows how much has been lost, how many debts have been concealed and where. In politics, there may be no such objective test. It

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is easy to claim that a policy is working and explain away apparent counter-indicators. A narrative emerges and becomes the received wisdom. Hans Christian Anderson's tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, is the classic parable of this phenomenon. A child sees the truth and in innocence blurts it out, breaking the conspiracy of silence on the part of the king's counsellors.

We lose our freedom gradually, often without noticing it. That is what the Torah has been implying almost from the beginning. The classic statement of freewill appears in the story of Cain and Abel. Seeing that Cain is angry that his offering has not found favour, He says to him: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4: 7). The maintenance of freewill, especially in a state of high emotion like anger, needs willpower. As we have noted before in these studies there can be what Daniel Goleman calls an 'amygdala hijack' in which instinctive reaction takes the place of reflective decision and we do things that are harmful to us as well as to others. That is the emotional threat to freedom.

Then there is a social threat. After the Holocaust, a number of path-breaking experiments were undertaken to judge the power of conformism and obedience to authority. Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments in which eight people were gathered in a room and were shown a line, then

asked which of three others was the same length. Unknown to the eighth, the seven others were associates of the experimenter and were following his instructions. On a number of occasions the seven gave an answer that was clearly false, yet in 75 per cent of cases the eighth was willing to give an answer, in conformity with the group, he knew to be false....

The power of conformism, as [this experiment] showed, is immense. That I believe is why Abraham was told to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house. These are the three factors – culture, community and early childhood – that circumscribe our freedom. Jews through the ages have been in but not of society. To be a Jew means keeping a calibrated distance from the age and its idols. Freedom needs time to make reflective decisions and distance so as not to be lulled into conformity.

Most tragically there is the moral threat. We sometimes forget, or don't even know, that the conditions of slavery the Israelites experienced in Egypt were often enough felt historically by Egyptians themselves. The great pyramid of Giza, built more than a thousand years before the exodus, before even the birth of Abraham, reduced much of Egypt to a slave labour colony for twenty years. When life becomes cheap and people are seen as a means not an end, when the worst excesses are excused in the name of tradition and rulers have absolute power, then conscience is eroded and freedom lost ....That is what the Torah means when it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Enslaving others, Pharaoh himself

## JIMENA ORAL HISTORY EVENT

On Sunday, January 25, JIMENA will be hosting an Oral History Training Day, in conjunction with the Shoah Foundation.

Participants will learn how to interview their ancestors to ensure the preservation of Mizrahi and Sephardic culture and document stories of escape from their countries of origin. All interviews will be added to JIMENA's Oral History collection, which is archived at various museums and academic institutions throughout the USA and Israel.

The event will take place at Sephardic Temple from 12pm-4pm and a kosher lunch will be served. This event is free of charge. To RSVP or for more information, please contact Natalie Farahan at [natalie@jimena.org](mailto:natalie@jimena.org).

became enslaved. He became a prisoner of the values he himself had espoused. Freedom in the deepest sense, the freedom to do the right and the good, is not a given. We acquire it, or lose it, gradually. In the end tyrants bring about their own destruction, whereas those with willpower, courage and the willingness to go against the consensus, acquire a monumental freedom.

That is what Judaism is: an invitation to freedom by resisting the idols and siren calls of the age.

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