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-FEATURE STORIES-
ASK SITO
COMMUNITY CHEST
INSIGHTS INTO EDUCATION
KASHRUT ALERTS
LEGACY OF LEADERS
LETTERS
LIFE IN THE BIG CITY
MABROUKS
RECIPES
RIDDLES & TRIVIA
SY VARSITY
THE CROCS KIDS
THE LIGHTER SIDE
THE SHAATRA FILES
TO JUNIOR'S HEALTH
TO YOUR HEALTH
TOP 10 JEWISH LAWS

JEWISH AFFECTION

Past Articles:

SEDER TAWHID 5770

By: Pnina Souid



Braving near gale-force winds and torrential rain scores of faithful men, women and children attended the annual Seder Tawhid at Ahaba Ve Ahva on mossa'ei Shabbat, 28 Adar, March 13. With authentic music and beautifully appointed tables, the effort put into this year's rendition of the time-honored tradition was clearly immense.

On Erev Shabbat Parashat Vayakhel Pekudei, Eric Mizrahi sent out an email to the members of Ahaba ve Ahva, appealing to everyone to brave the elements of the impending nor'easter. In a testament to their strong tradition, a surprising number of people did, and participants excitedly packed the synagogue's social hall making the evening a resounding success.

In past years, Seder Tawhid was held in the synagogue's sanctuary, with the women observing from the *ezrat nashim* (women's section). This year, it was decided the ceremony would take place in the social hall, with separate seating, plenty of food, and full Middle Eastern musical accompaniment.

"Tawhid" means unification, and the Seder Tawhid is an event where the unity, or oneness, of Hashem is celebrated. Gd does not work together with another partner; He is the King of

all kings and the only one who rules the world and performs miracles.

The *minhag* (custom) of Seder Tawhid is particular to the Jews of Cairo, and usually takes place on the night of Rosh Hodesh Nissan, the day when the Jews were informed of their imminent redemption from Egypt. Tradition teaches that the custom was established by the Rambam's son, Rabbi Abraham.

The event at Ahaba Ve Ahba began with a special chant by Hazan David Chiro. Rabbi Alouf then began the chant of Perashat Hahodesh Hazeh (Shemot, chapter 12). Historically, this chant constituted the crux of the Seder, but over time other *pizmonim* (hymns) praising Hashem were added to the ceremony.

In his address to the crowd, Rabbi Alouf emphasized the holiness of this night. "This month is the birth of our nation. On Hodesh Nisan, Hashem broke all kinds of natural laws to save Bnei Yisrael. This is the time when we renew our relationship with *Borei Olam* and strengthen our study of Torah and practice of missvot."

Between each refrain, men approached the rabbi to dance. Mr. Felix Tourgeman, a *baal koreh* (Torah reader) and one of the building blocks of Ahaba Ve Ahba, assisted the Rabbi in the chanting.

As part of Seder Tawhid, according to a translation of *Nahar Missrayim*, written by Hacham Refael Aharon Ben-Shimeon of Alexandria in 1908 and translated by Joseph E. Mosseri, the actual Arabic translation of Seder Hayihoud is chanted following the *pizmonim*. A candle lighting ceremony is also conducted. Each candle is designated to commemorate one of our leaders from the Tanach. The first candle is dedicated in memory of Abraham Avinu, followed by Yizhak and Yaakov and then Kings David and Shelomo. The privilege to light a candle is auctioned off, and after each candle is lit, the band plays music for a short dance and photo.

Many children of all ages were in attendance, and for good reason. One of the primary goals of Ahaba Ve Ahva, as envisioned by the spiritual leader Rabbi Shimon Hai Alouf, is to bring the ancient customs alive for all, that they not merely be remembered, but be observed, cherished and passed down to the next generation.

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