



הג פסח כשר ושמה!

From your friends at

The American Sephardi Federation

In honor of Passover, the ASF's *Sephardi World Weekly* is pleased to offer the following "Letter from the Land of Israel":

A group of fourteen rabbis from the "Association of North African Sages in the Land of Israel" recently ruled that it is permissible to use Zoom during this year's Passover Seder. The immediate impetus of the ruling was the need to guarantee the emotional and mental health of those who, because of the novel coronavirus, would suffer from spending this year's Seder alone. Zoom softens the blow. The ultimate intention, however, was to articulate the voice of Classic Sephardic Judaism in Israel's public sphere.

Although the ruling received a large amount of publicity, in strictly legal terms there was nothing really extraordinary about it. Consider the "hot-topic" issue of using electricity on Yom Tov (holidays). It's well-known that many Moroccan Hakhamim (sages) have ruled that the use of electricity—in plainest terms, the ability to turn on and off a light—is permissible on Yom Tov, as did the first Rishon Le'Tsiyon, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of the State of Israel, Hakham Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Ouziel (1880-1953). Most recently, the Moroccan-born Rabbi David Chelouche (1920-2016), a student of R'Ouziel's and the Chief Rabbi of Netanya for 63 years, devoted an entire year to studying the intricacies of electricity with expert scientists and engineers. He then composed a forty-page ruling in which he reaffirmed that it is, indeed, permissible to use electricity on Yom Tov.

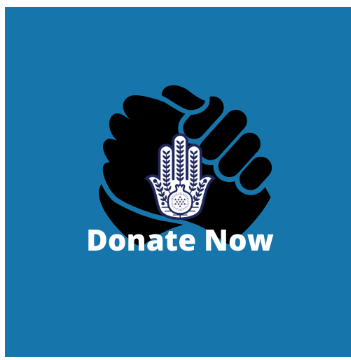
Nevertheless, the new ruling was viciously attacked in rabbinic quarters. Some Ashkenazi rabbis rejected the ruling by attacking the scholarly credentials of the signatories without bothering to investigate the merits of their arguments, or even acknowledging that a great 20th century Gadol like Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank also ruled that using electricity on Yom Tov was permissible.

More seriously, a former Chief Sephardic Rabbi publicly attacked the ruling by accusing one of the signatories (he didn't name names) of being a member of the Reform movement, a pejorative in Orthodox circles. It was a ridiculous accusation with no basis in reality, and unsurprisingly, it didn't stick. But the ferocity of the response was remarkable.

What lies behind the intense response?

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Since the passing of the monumental figure of Hakham Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a certain school within the Sephardi rabbinic establishment, basing itself upon R' Ovadia's notion that all Sephardim in the Land of Israel should uniformly follow the legal rulings of Rabbi Yosef Karo, has fortified its rule, stamping out

school is marked by a legal conservatism and an almost exclusive preoccupation with the study of legal texts that have little to do with Classic Sephardic Judaism. The response to the Zoom ruling was so intense because the ruling undermines this school's hegemony.

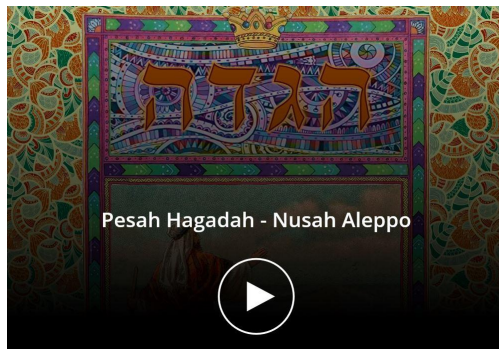
According to Rabbi Rafael Delouya, one of the ruling's signatories, the establishment school has invested a tremendous amount of effort in advancing the notion that only certain rabbis have the right to make their voices heard on halakhic matters. Consistent with this position, they have marginalized broad-minded and independent-thinking rabbis who don't toe the line.

There is a video on YouTube that illustrates what's at stake. The five-minute Hebrew-language video is entitled, "[R' Chelouche talks about his teacher and rabbi, R' Ouziel](#)." R' Chelouche, referred to above, begins by talking about how the world he grew up in was, "a completely different world." How was it different? It was, "a world in which there was a desire to learn, and to investigate." R' Chelouche continues by saying that, "it wasn't enough to learn Talmud, we wanted to think, to think." He tells a story of how he and his friends, overcoming the resistance of fellow students, organized the weekly study of Yehuda HaLevi's theological classic, *The Kuzari*. Who led the study? R' Ouziel, a model of broad-minded, thinking Judaism.

But R' Chelouche didn't only talk the talk. His 40-page ruling permitting the use of electricity on Yom Tov, based on his year-long study with experts, is one example of his commitment to investigation. So too was his work with Ethiopian Jews. A little-known fact is that R' Chelouche ruled that the Ethiopian Jews were, indeed, Jewish before R' Ovadia issued his more famous ruling. R' Chelouche then sat with Ethiopian *kessim* (priests) and systematically traced—researched, investigated—the family trees of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel. For a number of years, when members of Israel's rabbinic establishment persisted in doubting the Jewishness of Ethiopian Israelis, all marriages of Ethiopian Jews were overseen by R' Chelouche in Netanya.

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Halabi Haggadah



Click [here](#) to hear and see the presentation

Follow along in Hebrew and see simultaneous English translation as Hakham Rabbi Dr. Elie Abadie chants the Haggadah according to the Nusah of the Syrian Sephardic community from Aleppo.

Rabbi Elie Abadie, M.D., comes from a long and distinguished rabbinical lineage dating back to fifteenth century Spain and Provence. Born in Beirut, Lebanon, he grew-up in Mexico City before settling in the United States. Following in the footsteps of the great Jewish scholar and philosopher Moses Maimonides (the Rambam), he is both a rabbi and a physician. Rabbi Dr. Abadie maintains a practice in Gastroenterology and is fluent in English, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, French, as well as conversant in Italian and Portuguese. He serves on the Boards of the American Sephardi Federation and Beit Hatfutsot, as the Director of the Jacob E. Safra Institute of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University, Head of School of the Sephardic Academy of Manhattan, and Founder and Leader of the Manhattan East Synagogue – Congregation Shaare Mizrah. **Join Rabbi Dr. Abadie and Dr. Hos Loftus tonight at 8PM EST for "The Community & COVID-19."**

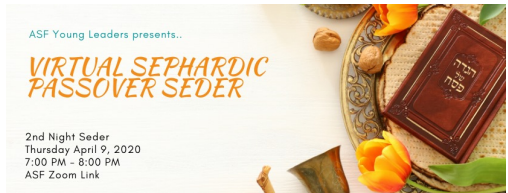
Echoing R' Chelouche, another one of the ruling's signatories, Rabbi Moshe Elharar, also champions R' Ouziel as a model of Classic Sephardic Judaism whose time has come. Classic Sephardic Judaism, claims R' Elharar, is a deeply rooted and comprehensive worldview that champions the willingness to investigate. R' Ouziel, he says, was a *hakham kolel*, a complete sage, a man with a phenomenal memory, a developed analytic capacity, and a refined and forceful personality, who was at home in the legal, philosophical, and poetic dimensions of the tradition. "There is," he says, "nothing like him today." But he remains a model for what a scholar should strive to be.

[Rabbi Daniel Bouskila](#), also a signatory, put the pieces together as follows: the tools used by the rabbis were mainly Moroccan, but the vision of fashioning a Torah that speaks to the needs of the nation as a whole was R' Ouziel's.

Passover is the [festival of freedom](#), but Passover is only the beginning of a process. Fifty days after Passover we celebrate [Shavuot](#) and the revelation of God at Mt. Sinai. From the perspective of Classic Sephardic Judaism, this process makes perfect sense: we are invited to emancipate all of our powers, and then to direct them to a Divine purpose.

This year, as we contend with the [coronavirus](#), we can take pleasure in knowing that, thanks to the willingness of a group of Sephardi scholars to face the human cost of this global plague, the vision of a fully realized Judaism is beginning to appear on the horizon in the Land of Israel.

The American Sephardi Federation



The ASF Young Leaders Present:

Virtual Sephardic Passover Seder

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Complimentary RSVP

Thursday, 9 April 7:00-8:00PM EST

Join the [ASF Young Leaders](#) for a 2nd Night Seder led by **Rabbi Haim Ovdia (Torah Ve'Ahava)**. In keeping with the teachings of Sephardic Sages, this Seder is designed to bring together on Zoom our elders and young people who are isolated because of the COVID-19 crisis.

With compassion and creativity, our community will stay connected this Passover!

Photo Credit: Ma Nishtana and Avadim in The Sarajevo Haggadah. Composed in 1350s Barcelona, Spain, the Haggadah journeyed with Sephardic Jews into exile after the Expulsion of 1492 (Image scan courtesy of [Arnold G. Reinhold/Wikipedia](#))

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