

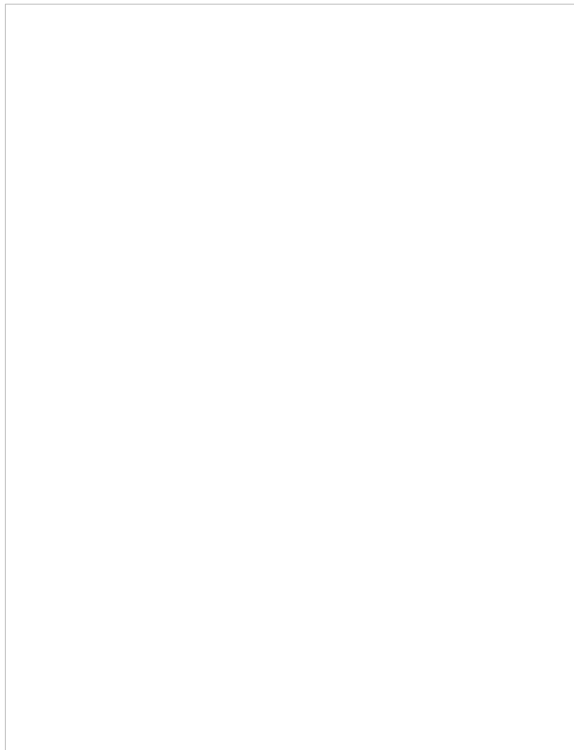


Shavei Israel launches interactive virtual course in Spanish 2013-02-14

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Brian Blum

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Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham conducts his virtual class

Spanish speakers can now get an hour-and-a-half dose of “live” Jewish study – entirely online – thanks to *Shavei Israel’s* emissary to Spain, Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham, who has developed an innovative, interactive video course on the Book of Joshua.

The Internet broadcast, which will air twice a month, is part of Rabbi Ben-Avraham's outreach to Bnei Anousim – descendants of Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism more than 500 years ago – who do not have easy access to Jewish content because they live far from the main centers of Jewish life in Spain.

And it's not just Spain. As a "virtual" class, the first session, which was held on January 17, had more than 150 participants from as far away as Spanish-speaking South America.

Rabbi Ben-Avraham is working with web-based software from a company called Wiziq. We first became familiar with the service after it was successfully used by another *Shavei Israel* emissary, Rabbi Elisha Salas, who has used it to teach in Portuguese.

Rabbi Ben-Avraham will be teaching not only the Book of Joshua, but other prophetic works. This complements a second virtual course that the rabbi teaches on the *Parsha* (the weekly Torah portion). That one, however, is not interactive.

The new interactive course allows students to login and see and hear Rabbi Ben-Avraham as live video. A chat window under the video allows participants to ask questions as text messages which Rabbi Ben-Avraham then answers on video. The technology allows Ben-Avraham to hear students' questions as audio as well, although in the first class, written queries took precedence – a sign of our increasingly texting times?

Each class is recorded – including the interactive Q&A – and can be replayed by students to catch nuances they may have missed, or watched by those who were unable to come to the computer during the live broadcast slot. Documents – such as Word, Excel or PowerPoint presentations – can be posted for all users to download in advance or after the classes.

Rabbi Ben-Avraham was born in Mallorca, Spain, and is a descendant of Chuetas (as Mallorca's Bnei Anousim community is known). He made *aliyah* in 1977 and studied in several yeshivas in Israel before formally returning to Judaism and ultimately receiving rabbinical ordination in 1991. He now spends half of every month traveling throughout Spain, where he teaches in the "old fashioned" way – face to face. His current subjects include Jewish law and the Kuzari, a celebrated set of impassioned dialogues between a rabbi and a pagan, written by the medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and poet Rabbi Yehuda Halevi.

Rabbi Ben-Avraham's virtual class is free and open to all. You can find out more about it on *Shavei Israel's* Spanish-language [Facebook page](#), on our special [Spanish-language website](#) exclusively for Bnei Anousim, or by visiting the Wiziq page for the course [directly](#).

Next Palma seminar scheduled for February

In other *Shavei* news from Spain, our next seminar in the Palma de Mallorca region will take place February 1-2, 2013, and will feature as a special guest the Chief Rabbi of Madrid, Moshe Ben Dahan.

The weekend *Shabbaton* will focus on the topic of “The Relevance of Judaism in the Modern Day” and will include courses on how to keep a Jewish lifestyle in the modern world. Dozens of Bnei Anousim are expected to attend from Spain and a few from other European countries as well. Rabbi Ben-Avraham will be teaching, along with Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, *Shavei Israel*'s educational director, and *Shavei Israel* Chairman Michael Freund, both of whom will fly in from Israel especially for the weekend. A full schedule can be found [here](#).

One of the highlights of the weekend will be a free Saturday night concert by loel Munjeh, a Bnei Anousim musician who now lives in the Israeli town of Safed. Munjeh will play a selection of traditional *Sephardi* Jewish music, much of it written and sung in the Spanish-Jewish language of Ladino. More information [here](#). Here is a [YouTube](#) clip of Munjeh singing the Sabbath hymn *Adon Olam*.

Shavei Israel's last seminar in Palma took place eight months ago in May, 2012.

http://www.shavei.org/communities/bnei_anousim/articles-bnei_anousim/shavei-israel-launches-interactive-virtual-course-in-spanish/