



## *World Aphasia Shabbat*

27<sup>th</sup> Sivan - June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Join shuls and communities around the world as we learn about aphasia and encourage increased connection and inclusion within Jewish observance.

The Koach Eitan Initiative in Israel is excited to be collaborating with the OrHatorah Shul in Atlanta in this upcoming special, and ever so important worldwide shabbat project.

Eitan Ashman of the Koach Eitan Initiative, and Jeff Weener of the OhrHaTorah community are both challenged with aphasia. Together they felt the important need for teaching Jewish communities around the world more about aphasia. It is a disability that affects so many people, but is not widely understood. As humans, the ability of having speech and language makes up so much of who we are, and is a tool that is so widely used in most all aspects of our Jewish culture. What if suddenly this was robbed from you, which changed in essence a huge part of who you are and how people interacted with you?

### **What is Aphasia?**

Aphasia is a language impairment. It is usually the result of damage to the left hemisphere of the brain which controls language. Aphasia can affect speech, reading, writing and comprehension. It can be brought on by stroke, head injury, brain tumor, or infection, and it can present in neurological diseases such as dementia.



There are many different types of aphasia. Most people with aphasia know what they want to say but cannot get the words out, or they are not able to say the right words (even though they think they are speaking correctly). People with aphasia may just have sounds for words or no sounds at all. Many have trouble with reading and writing (including spelling) and comprehension.

Aphasia is usually brought on by a sudden traumatic event and can change a person's physical capabilities. Often what the person was once able to do effortlessly, now presents as a challenge and it takes time for them to build up who they are now, both physically and emotionally.

Living with aphasia can be challenging, frustrating, and at times, very lonely.

**It is important to know that aphasia affects language and NOT intellect. The people and your friends who are now challenged with aphasia are the same people they once were, before the aphasia was brought on.**

### Objective of the Shabbat

The goal of World Aphasia Shabbat is to educate communities about aphasia. How it presents, the challenges of living with it within Jewish communal life, and what **we can do**, to help connect with and include those living with aphasia.

By learning about aphasia and practicing our tools and tips in order to be more inclusive, communities can lessen the feelings of loneliness that people with aphasia (and other disabilities) often experience.



## Why Shabbat?

On Shabbat, people have time to come together. The slower pace makes it the perfect time to increase our awareness of those around us - how they might be struggling, and what we can do to help.

Shabbat and holidays can present many challenges to those with aphasia.

Routine tasks like:

- Making kiddush,
- Participating in conversation at the shabbat table,
- Leading davening,
- Learning and discussion,
- Reading from a siddur,
- Leisure reading,
- Socializing

May be exceedingly difficult with them.

Because people with aphasia have trouble speaking, reading, and understanding conversations, just being in shul where everyone is reciting prayers, following the Torah reading, and greeting friends can sometimes be a painful and challenging experience. They simply cannot participate and engage like they used to. **By dedicating a Shabbat to learning about aphasia, we hope to ease this struggle and help make Shabbat a time of joy for all members of the community.**



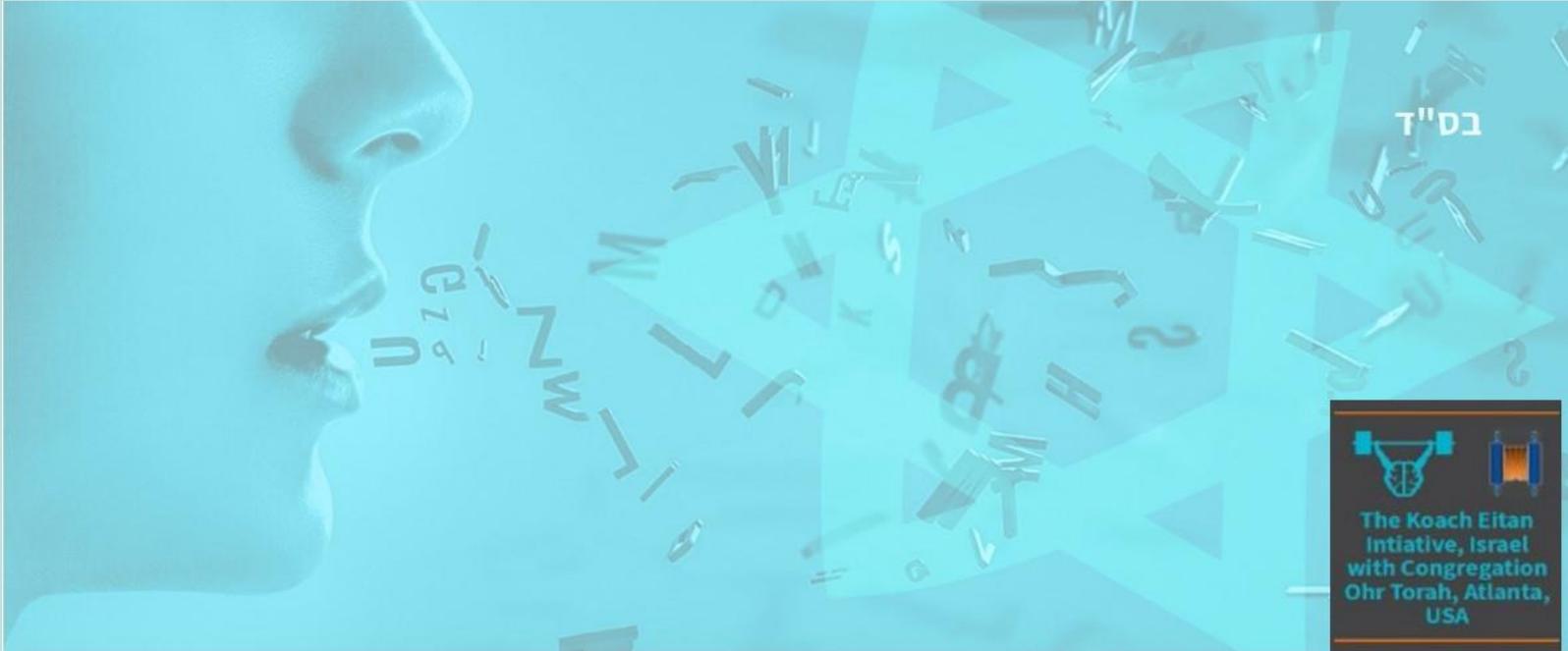
## What can you do?

Learning about aphasia can dissipate some of the fear or awkwardness we may feel in approaching those who have aphasia. It is our responsibility as individuals and as a community to try to learn, understand and become more aware, so that connecting, including, and communicating with those challenged is just as normal as talking to your friend or neighbor.

Leora and Eitan, and the Koach Eitan team, will provide educational materials to all participating shuls and communities. The materials will include explanations on what it's like to live with aphasia, and how to talk and communicate better with an aphasic person. **This will help you** to become more aware of those in your community who are challenged with language impairments. Increased awareness will hopefully lead to the creation of more opportunities for inclusion. Being included will reduce the loneliness and frustration in those with aphasia. It will enhance inter-communal connection and allow more people to participate in and enjoy Jewish life.

We hope that your community will ultimately learn to see past the limitations, and view people with aphasia as the individuals that they are, despite their loss of language.

This Aphasia Shabbat will not only teach about aphasia but will also give perspective on other disabilities that people are challenged with and how they too should not be ignored but understood.



There will be a zoom meeting with participating shuls and communities prior to the Shabbat. The Ashmans and the Koach Eitan team together with Rabbi Adam Starr of Ohr Hatorah, Atlanta, and community member Jeff Weener, Rabbi Johnny Solomon of Even Shmuel, Julie Shulman a speech pathologist and Ayal Shulman, where we will talk more about the importance of this shabbat and will answer any questions you may have.

Each shul/community will be encouraged to implement the tools that are provided, in whatever way works for them, to teach their members about the importance of including those with aphasia.

### Shabbat Ideas

- Koach Eitan will send a short video about the World Aphasia Shabbat that you can send to your congregation.
- Koach Eitan will send our “Let’s Talk” magnet template which you can print out into magnets, and the Aphasia Shabbat Pamphlet to print out as well. You can place them in the shul on chairs or hand out.
- The Rabbi, Gabbai or shul representative can use one of the Shabbat Divrei Torah we will provide in their Shabbat drashot/ sermons.
- Koach Eitan will also provide the different halachot/laws pertaining to those with language impairments, and these can be learned in case any questions do arise within the congregation or community.



- Invite a speech therapist in the community and host an evening/afternoon talk about aphasia and the importance of including those with language challenges.
- If there is an aphasic person in the community, invite him/her to try to speak about what it is like living with aphasia and possibly answer questions alongside a friend, spouse, or caregiver.
- Invite a guest speaker to address the topic.

Please reach out to [www.koacheitan.com](http://www.koacheitan.com) to register your community, to get involved or with any questions you may have.