ALEPPO CHRONICLES

The Story of the Unique Sephardeem of the Ancient Near East — in Their Own Words



JOSEPH A. D. SUTTON

Introduction by Raphael Patai

ALEPPO CHRONICLES

The Story of the Unique Sephardeem of the Ancient Near East — in Their Own Words

JOSEPH A. D. SUTTON

Introduction by Raphael Patai

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2025



THAYER-JACOBY
NEW YORK

Copyright © 1988 by Joseph A. D. Sutton

All rights including international rights are reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or manner without written authority of the copyright holder; except in the case of brief quotations in reviews for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

First printing

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. 87-82317
Sutton, Joseph A. D. 1907-
Aleppo Chronicles

ISBN 0-9606472-I-X

F129.B7S93 301.45 '24074723

Includes 16 pages of indexing
1. Sepharadi Jews in Brooklyn — historic, social, religious data. 2. Jews in Syria — historic, social religious data. 3. Jews of Syria — oral biographies. 4. Jews of Syria in countries of re-settlement. 5. Judeo-Arabic — proverbs — with English translation. 6. Judeo-Arabic — conversation and vocabulary — with English translation.

Cover drawing by Mireille Dayan
Editorial consultant Leon King

Printed in the United States of America

Published by Thayer-Jacoby
Editorial and business office: 1432 East Ninth Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230 — (718) 339-3278

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2025

Aleppo Chronicles

Gratitude and Tribute

A few friends gave much encouragement and support in the evolution of this work, I seize this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation.

A leader among them is Edmond Safra of Geneva, whose vision helped immeasurably the earlier *Magic Carpet*, as well as now — *Aleppo Chronicles.*

In the same category are the incomparable, brothers Saul and Ely Ashkenazi, and Joe Cayre and Trina, his wife. Eddie Antar ("Crazy"), and Sam Antar, his father, are notably helpful in community and overseas needs. Very active in traditional and religious interests was my nephew, the late Abe S. Sutton, his brother David S. Sutton and Stephen and Paul Sutton, David's sons. Very devoted and active are Abe's sons — my great nephews, Sam ("Sammy") A. and Dr. Jack A. Sutton. Yet another nephew, Albert D. Sutton, Fortunée Assin Sutton, his wife, and their sons David A. Sutton and Stephen A. Sutton are encouragers of my efforts.

Others also assisted effectively and quietly. I am happy to cite with many thanks Samuel A. Ades, Morris E. Cohen, Irving Franco; Abe M. Shamah, as well as his brother Raphael, along with the latter's sensitive and responsive sons, Micky R. and Steven R. Shamah. Still other supporters in this distinguished family are Abe ("Abbo") and Moses, children of Salḥa and the late revered Ḥayeem Shamah. Morris Setton and brother Joshua, were diligent in seeking support for the publication of this history. Others are Ellis Safdeye (in memory of his venerable and unforgettable father, Aslan); Morris Bailey, President of the Sephardic Community Center, Milton Shalom, in tribute to his long departed father, Mosé (the "M." of "I. & M. Shalom Co."). A set of Jemal offspring (Jack, Joseph, Abraham, Isaac, Lillian, Celia and Marilyn), helped in memory of their parents Samuel and Mollie Jemal. Others, too, the Jacob Hidary Foundation, Hyman, Vivian and daughter Miss Diane Esses, Joseph A. Esses, Charles S. Haddad and family, the three Nakash brothers, Joseph Ezra Maleh, Ralph S. Tawil, Ted M. Serure, Gabriel Shehebar, Willie Singler, Richard Mishaan, and Olympia and York, were also supportive, helpful.

Yet more friends deserve thanks for their encouragement: Jack Shalom, David Bibi, and dear friends in Europe, developed through their considerable liking for *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush;* I owe a lot to Flower Elias and Lydia Collins, both of London; each unexpectedly, sent me startling and valuable information, which connected Aleppo to Calculta soon after 1795, and my own family to India. Mr. Bobbie Bigio originally from Manchester, now living close to London, for his enthusiasm for my earlier history, and who encouraged additional research.

My thanks and indebtedness to the many scholars whose interest and confraternity helped to shape this volume, (any shortcomings uncovered are entirely mine). From the outset Professor Raphael Patai was most encouraging and helpful. He saw in my work values which I had little suspected. Professor Norman A. Stillman, a disciple of the great late S.D. Goitein who had also seen merit in my work, Norman, gave me warm encouragement, particularly concerning my Judeo-Arabic studies. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Walter P. Zenner for early inspiration, active and tacit long-time encouragement. My thanks to Sidney Rosenfeld, Director of the Theodor Herzl Institute, a cosmopolitan and renaissance personality, and a uniquely generous friend. My gratitutde too, to the erudite Dr. Menahem Schmelzer of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Heaps of appreciation to Rabbis Zevulun S. Lieberman, Ezra Labaton, Mosé Shamah, Ronald Barry; to other cherished friends, Marc D. Angel, and M. Mitchell Serles. To the individuals mentioned above, a rich bouquet of thanks and warmth.

My abundant thanks to Alicia Hanono Salem for her untiring and self-sacrificing help with a complex manuscript. Alice van Bolt also demonstrated the sweetness of her character, in the handling of parts of the manuscript. Thanks too, to Elizabeth Ewen, of State University College at Old Westbury; to Dina Dahbany-Miraglia, and to Lana Stein for her help and sparkling and vivacious encouragement; to Latif Khayyat, the Arabic authority of the Oriental Division of the New York Public Library; and to Dr. John Lindquist, Director of the Division, for patient assistance with my queries concerning the fabulous EBLA, 42 miles from Aleppo, 4000 years-old name, (*Yam-ḥad*), my birth-place.

My thanks to Elie Salem, formerly of Beirut, (now the husband of my niece Norma Sutton) for his scholarly aid in the Arabic language section of the book; and Prof. Isaac Maleh (my brother-in-law); for his help in the Arabic area. To Joseph E. Bijou ("Jo-bee") for friendship and counsel. To Mollie Zagha Sutton, thanks for her interest in the general text.

To the many collaborators who provided their life histories and thus helped to conserve the history and adventures of those originating in Aleppo and Damascus I offer my fulsome expressions of gratitude.

And lastly, a perhaps unprecedented word of appreciation; to Sam H. Fallas, who paid for several copies of this book, *Aleppo Chronicles*, before the text reached the printers hands.

As to any friends who have been inadvertantly overlooked, a new, another book is germinating in my mind. I hope that I will endure to accomplish it, and to express my thanks in it to those I may have regretfully omitted. *Shalóm, Saalam.*

This work is dedicated to my wife Sarah Maleh Sutton, our children, and their spouses. To Sally, wed to Elliot Heller, M.D., and their offspring, Deborah, and Joseph Sutton Heller. To Lisa, spouse of 'Jim' Smith, Ph.D. and newly-arrived Shoshana. To Naomi, married to Peter S. Neustadter, industrialist, and Sarah, Elana and Deena. To Ralph, ever pursuing education, knowledge and equity.

Contents

INTRODUCTION BY RAPHAEL PATAI vii

PRELUDE xv

Book I: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

CHAPTER ONE:	*A Perspective*	9
CHAPTER TWO:	*Ancient and Medieval Life in Syria*	17
CHAPTER THREE:	*Renaissance and Modern Era*	25
CHAPTER FOUR:	*Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Syria*	39
CHAPTER FIVE:	*Life in New York*	62
CHAPTER SIX:	*Life in Flatbush*	71
CHAPTER SEVEN:	*Within Flatbush Synagogues*	80
CHAPTER EIGHT:	*Religious Observance and Education*	86
CHAPTER NINE:	*Higher Education and Professions*	100
CHAPTER TEN:	*Sephardic Community Center*	106
CHAPTER ELEVEN:	*Jews in Present-Day Syria*	110
CODA		117

Book II: ORAL BIOGRAPHIES

INTRODUCTION		121
CHAPTER ONE:	*Early Aleppo, 1895-1929*	125
CHAPTER TWO:	*Later Aleppo, 1930-1986*	195
CHAPTER THREE:	*From Aleppo etc., Finally in New York*	240
CHAPTER FOUR:	*From and via, Beirut and Damascus*	
CHAPTER FIVE:	*New York, Born in or Long-time Residents*	
CHAPTER SIX:	*Residents in Other Lands*	434

Book III: A SEPHARADI MISCELLANY

A:	*The Aleppo Codex*	467
B:	*Pizmoneem, Their Creators, Their Singers*	478
C:	*Sepharadeem and Ashkenazeem; Sepharadeem and other Sepharadeem; Their Similarities; Their Differences*	486
D:	*The Search for My Great Grandfather — in India*	497

Book IV: *An Appendix*
AN EXCURSION INTO JUDEO-ARABIC

INTRODUCTION	505
VOCABULARY	510
TRAVEL VIGNETTES	526
PROVERBS	551

Introduction

The city of Aleppo, whose remarkable Jews are the subject of the present book, is one of the most ancient cities of the world, with a recorded history beginning in the 20th century B.C.E. when Hittite, Egyptian, and Akkadian inscriptions refer to it under names practically identical with its present-day Arabic name, Ḥalab, as "an old-established town"; with its acropolis still crowned by a citadel, it dominated the environment, and became the center of what was termed a "great kingdom." When the Arabs conquered Aleppo in 636 C.E. the city could look back upon a history of almost three thousand years.

Although Aleppo is not mentioned in the Bible, Jewish tradition identified it with Aram Tzova (Ṣobha), the biblical name of the powerful kingdom of Aram which was defeated by King David in a great battle near Hamat, and accordingly Aram Tzova became the name by which rabbinic Jews referred to Aleppo down to modern times. As for the Arabic name Ḥalab, a Jewish legend reported by the traveller Petaḥya of Regensburg in the 12th century, has it that Abraham pastured his sheep on the mountain of Aleppo and distributed their milk (*Ḥalav* in Hebrew, *Ḥalab* in Arabic) to the poor on its slopes. Actually, Jews have lived in Aleppo ever since Roman times, that is, some six or seven centuries prior to its conquest by the Arabs. From Byzantine times dates the Great Synagogue, built in the form of a basilica. In the tenth century, when Saadia Gaon came to live in Aleppo, he found numbers of Jewish scholars there. Still in the 12th century, another Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Aleppo, estimated the number of Jews there at 5,000. In the Middle Ages Aleppo was not only a city with a large Jewish community whose members engaged in intercontinental commerce, but also an important seat of Jewish learning.

In the 16th century, when Jewish exiles from Spain began to arrive, they established a separate minuscule Sephardi

community which, however, shared certain communal institutions with the long-established local *mustaʿrabim,* or "Arabized" Jews. Leadership gradually passed to the Sephardim who supplied a long line of outstanding scholarly rabbis to the community. Especially important was the Laniado rabbinical dynasty whose members were the spiritual leaders of Aleppan Jewry for several centuries.

In the early 19th century the community suffered a decline both economically and culturally. However, in 1866 Ḥakham Abraham Sasson and his sons established a Hebrew printing press in the city, and in 1869 the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* opened a school for boys, followed in 1889 by one for girls. Prior to World War I, when our author, Joseph A. D. Sutton, was a child in Aleppo, three or four small Hebrew presses functioned in the city, producing a total of some 70 books. Somewhat earlier the well-to-do Jews had begun to move out from the old, previously walled city's Jewish quarters, Baḥsita, the Śaḥa, Ḥarit al-Yahud ("Jewish Quarter") and the Illeh, to a modern quarter outside the city-wall limits, called Jamiliyeh, after Jamil Pasha. In the interwar years there were no less then four *Alliance* schools in the city, in addition to traditional *Talmud Tora* schools. Illiteracy, still rampant among the Muslims, had been practically wiped out among the Jews: every male Jew could read at least the common prayer-book. The number of the Jews in Aleppo was about 10,000, which grew to perhaps 15,000 by 1947.

This, in a nutshell, was the community into which Joseph A. D. Sutton was born in 1907, in which he spent his early childhood, which provided his primary cultural background, and to which now many years later, he devotes his second book. His first, entitled *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush,* was published in 1980, and is now in its third printing. My teacher, the late Prof. S. D. Goitein, wrote a foreword to it in which he remarked, "The United States, and New York in particular, prides itself on the diversity of its ethnic group cultures. The present book [*Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush*] is a most instructive and charming addition to this multi-colored spectrum."

I expressed my agreement with Professor Goitein's appreciation in the review-essay I wrote for the journal *Midstream.* In this article I stated, "The circumstances in which an ethnic group [the Flatbush Sephardim], cut off from its place of origin and living as a small minority in the midst of a vastly different majority (in the United States) manages to preserve its own identity, is one of the most intriguing subjects in the study of human culture. If, in addition, the culture of the majority is as pervasive, intrusive, and aggressive as that of modern America, the retention of any ethnic isolation and special qualities becomes a remarkable cultural feat."

The present book, *Aleppo Chronicles,* continues the fascinating history of the Near East Sephardim and comprises four parts. The first, presents the history of Aleppan Jewry from the founding of the New York community, including a picture of Judeo-Arabic life as the author remembers it from his childhood and from two subsequent sojourns in Aleppo.

Having only recently discussed Arab-Jewish relations in my book *The Seed of Abraham,* I was especially interested in the section "Good Relations with Muslims." It can serve as a useful corrective to other studies which over-emphasize the sometimes harsh attitude of the Muslims to the Jews.

Sutton carries on the story of Aleppan Jewry through the years of large-scale emigration and settlement in the United States where many became extraordinarily successful. They established synagogues, schools, and other cultural institutions, intent on preserving their own cultural identity and separatism vis-á-vis not only the non-Jewish world, but also the other Jewish groups. In this endeavor they have succeeded with extraordinary ability, achieving a remarkable cultural feat. This part of the book closes with an account of the sad situation of the present-day Jewish remnant in Syria.

The second part, which constitutes the bulk of the book, contains the oral autobiographies of close to fifty Syrian Jewish women and men, based on interviews taped in New York, conducted by the author in English and Arabic. The common features among most of them are the emigration and settlement

in several countries, and ultimately in New York. Other interviews are with early settlers on the Lower East Side, and with American-born individuals. Within this commonality there is an astounding variety of experiences, adventures, suffering, ambitions, and achievements. This rich collection of life histories will undoubtedly serve as source material for psychological studies of Jews in Arab lands, Jews in transition, Jews in the cauldron of adjustment to a new environment, to new life in America, as well as for creative writers who will weave stories inspired by the colorful lives of the interviewed individuals.

Part three comprises the author's research and comments on the famous Aleppo Codex, on traditional Near Eastern music, on Aleppan Jews in India, on differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Lastly, in section four, a large 'appendix', we find a collection of 150 Judeo-Arabic proverbs, illustrative of the mores of the region and its folk-lore, given in transliterated Arabic with an English translation, in addition to a brief Judeo-Arabic vocabulary- PRIMER. This brief enumeration in itself will show to what extent can readers with greatly varying foci of interest find Joseph A. D. Sutton's work valuable and instructive.

It is not every day that we can welcome an important study from the pen of an octogenarian researcher. This book is a precious birthday present in reverse: it is offered by Sutton on his eighty-first birthday to the large readership which enjoyed and profited from his earlier book on Aleppo, and to the prospective sizeable numbers of eager new readers.

Needless to say, I enjoyed reading *Aleppo Chronicles* tremendously; and learned a lot from it.

Raphael Patai

Forest Hills, New York
July 1, 1987

Prelude

This study deals with the Jews of Aleppo and Damascus, in Syria itself, those who migrated to New York, as well as some who settled in other countries. The focus is on the Flatbush (Brooklyn) Syrians, who are uncommon in more than one respect. Worldly and modern as they appear to be, it is remarkable that such a small immigrant ethnic group should so unswervingly, so uniquely, perpetuate ancient old-world customs and mores in the face of American assimilationist pressures. How can it continue to unyieldingly maintain rituals and customs in a form almost totally identical with those their ancestors observed in Syria?

Four significant factors have enabled the Brooklyn Syrian community to develop into the most cohesive, most vibrant and most important Sepharadi group in the entire world.

1. Attitude toward their ethnic heritage; family and community
2. Occupational specialization and interdependence
3. Maintenance of separate ethnic institutions and houses of worship
4. Attitude to the non-Sepharadic world

Their marriages take place in large numbers, most of them within the community; divorces remain remarkably few. Interreligious marriages are uncommon, estimated at perhaps one to two percent. Social scientists now see in some of the

community's characteristics, a defense against present-day weakening and disintegration of the social fiber. Yet, until the publication of *Magic Carpet, Aleppo-in-Flatbush* almost nothing was known of this phenomenal group in New York, stemming from historic Aleppo and Damascus.

Scholars turned to the study of Near and Middle Eastern Jewry only in relatively recent years, although it constituted the overwhelmingly largest sector of the Jewish world (including Spain), well into the late Middle Ages. Jews had come to Spain from the Near East, spoke its tongue, Arabic, and led a life characteristic of their countries of origin, in the Muslim environment of *al-Andalus*. To this day little work has been done on the more obscure Oriental Jewish communities; scholarly studies have concentrated on the world reflected in the Cairo Geniza (10th to 14th century), on Spanish Jewry, on the Messianic movement of Shabbetai Sebi ("Sevi") and on the anti-Jewish Damascus riots of 1840 and 1860. Other Oriental Jewish communities remained little known, for the greater part. With the establishment of the State of Israel and the huge influx of Sepharadi refugees from Arab persecution — sufficient to make them the majority in the country — their history in their native lands has begun to attract the interest of Judaic scholars, historians, and anthropologists. In addition, Jewish intellectuals who escaped from their native Arab lands have begun to write about their communities in the countries they had left behind, and some of them to produce important works.

Even earlier, the eminent late S.D. Goitein had begun his lifelong dedication to the study of Near/Middle Eastern Jews in medieval times. His magisterial multi-volume *A Mediterranean Society* is based on countless 10th to 14th Century Jewish documents and letters accumulated in the ibn ʿEzra synagogue of Fustat (Old Cairo), which present a fascinating panorama of Jewish life in the medieval Middle East. His preoccupation with the Jews of the Orient led to a deep interest and affection for the Jews of Yemen, about whom he wrote several revealing and colorful books.

The distinguished anthropologist Raphael Patai evidenced his interest in the people of the Near and Middle East in his numerous superb books, *Israel Between East and West, Golden*

River to Golden Road, The Arab Mind, The Jewish Mind, the fascinating recent *The Seed of Abraham* and a vast number of other widely varied compelling books and articles. Patai's student, Walter P. Zenner, made an intensive unpublished study (1965) of the Jews of Aleppo residing in Jerusalem and New York, and in several scholarly monographs. He co-edited with Shlomo Deshen, the invaluable *Jewish Societies in the Middle East* (1982) which provides a wealth of insights into many smaller Jewish communities previously neglected — unknown.

Bernard Lewis is the world's foremost Orientalist; his brilliant scholarship uncovered and analyzed important phases of life in Arab and other Ottoman-dominated lands. Lewis' many works include *Islam: Religion and Society* (1974), and numerous works affecting anti-Semitism and other Jewish issues. His book, the acclaimed *Jews of Islam* (1984), is a study of the symbiotic Judeo-Islamic tradition, an assessment and overview of the historic relations between Jews and Muslims. Nor may we overlook his astute editing of the magnificently illustrated, visually delightful *Islam and the Arab World* (1976). I am particularly indebted to Professor Lewis for information he kindly gave me about Rabbi Moshé Basola (early 16th century) and the latter's data on the Spanish refugees and other Jewish groups in Damascus. Norman A. Stillman, a disciple of the great Goitein, has contributed many scholarly monographs about Middle East Jewry — particularly in Morocco. His highly regarded *Jews of Arab Lands* (1979) includes a wealth of letters and documents over the centuries, from the pens of Jews, Christians and Muslims. *Bat Ye'or* ("daughter of the Nile"), the pen-name of Giselle Orebi Littman, an Egyptian-Israeli, wrote an engrossing study, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (English ed., 1984), a study with implications with *which we do not* unqualifiedly agree — discussing the conditions of life imposed by Islam on monotheistic minorities. Ada Aharoni of Haifa University, gave a revealing and moving picture of Jewish life in pre-Nasser Egypt in her *The Second Exodus* (English ed., 1984). Amnon Shamosh, an Aleppo-born Israeli, lives in *Maᶜyan Barukh,* a kibbutz he helped establish. Shamosh is much taken up with memories of Syrian life and produces novels, television scripts, poetry, and short stories, some dealing

with characteristics of earlier Syrian manners. His book of charming short stories, *My Sister, My Bride,* enjoys wide circulation, and has been translated (from Hebrew) into French, English, Spanish and other languages.

The present writer, a native of Aleppo, Syria, spent most of his life in the midst of the unique Aleppoan and Damascus Jewish community in New York. His interest and curiosity about his origins and exceptional community, impelled him to engage in years of study of the history and ethnic life of the Jews of Syria. The results were published in *Magic Carpet; Aleppo-in-Flatbush The Story of a Unique Ethnic Jewish Community* (1980, 1982, 1986), which contains data on Syrian Jewry never published before.

Professor Goitein who had kindly asked to see my manuscript — the beginning of a friendship over many years — was impressed with it and honored the book with a Foreword. He wrote me that he found *Magic Carpet* ". . . a treasure-trove. It will be copiously quoted in my current writing." Goitein expressed amazement at encountering in my book, Flatbush customs which are identical with those of the Geniza period, close to *ten centuries earlier.*

The anti-Israel upheavals following upon the successful Jewish settlement of *Eretz Yisraél* and the later establishment of the State of Israel uprooted many ancient Jewish communities in the Near and Middle East. The majority of Jews fled to safety when they could, but not before outrages and massacres took place. In Syria, oppressive measures were imposed, but without pogroms. Syrian Jews became prisoners — they were forbidden to leave the country — even being forbidden in one period to be more than three miles from their homes. Jailings and torture became almost commonplace; and death in some cases — for such as attempted escape out of the country. Nevertheless, thousands did escape. Aleppo had a Jewish population of some 15,000 to 20,000, which could look back on a history of uninterrupted orderly residence of two thousands years or more. Today no more than 400 Jews remain. Damascus originally with a like number of Jews, now has about four thousand left. Many of the escapees came to settle in Brooklyn; more continue to

come in small numbers. Their history and colorful and often dramatic accounts, form a substantial portion of this book, presented in oral biographies which follow.

The importance of recording contemporary everyday life in Syria, and in the several countries in which Syian Jews sojourned or settled, impelled the recording of their memories before the passage of time would irretrievably eradicate them. For several years I was engaged in interviewing Syrian immigrant Jews, newcomers and earlier settlers and their children born in the United States. The oldest informant was born in Aleppo in 1893, he had come alone to America in 1906, (and has since died). By taping sessions with some who had come in the early decades of the century and others who arrived later, we are accorded biographies which are consecutive and interlocking, to effect a chain of history brought to the present day.

The study of the Brooklyn community, now numbering perhaps 30,000 demanded an examination of attitudes and responses to the culture and mores of the American environment. It must be noted that *Aleppo-in-Flatbush* as I designated the community, includes refugees from Damascus, Egypt and Lebanon, as well as Syrians who had first lived in Israel. In addition, opportunities were seized to interview visiting Syrians now living in Latin American and other countries. Thus an insight was gained into their experiences and their community's adjustment in the lands in which they live — Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Peru, Mexico, Canada, as well as Israel and Manchester.

To provide a framework for a principal objective of this study — the presentation of oral biographies — new research and an overview of Jewish life in Syria — and Brooklyn, precede the biographies. These dramatic oral reports may prove to be a fruitful source of material for short stories or novels for some future writers. (A Syrian-Israeli writer is already at work on material from *Magic Carpet*, using my original data on the 'adventures' of the incomparable early 10th Century *Aleppo Codex*, of ben Asher.)

In addition, a variety of unfamiliar information is presented dealing with material of Sepharadi interest, typical of the Flatbush community:

1. Ashkenazeem and Sepharadeem; Sepharadeem and *other* Sepharadeem, their similarities — and their differences.
2. A discussion of *Pizmoneem,* the lovely Oriental non-liturgical Hebrew religious songs; their history, their creators and their singers.
3. The "Search for my Great-Grandfather" (*this writer's*), in India.
4. A sampling of pithy Judeo-Arabic proverbs, in Arabic and with a close translation; an amusing mini-course in the language — and mores.
5. Lastly, a small vocabularily and 'phrase book' in Judeo-Arabic, with a faithful English rendition; Judeo-Arabic, limited to the sense that it was the Arabic spoken by Jews of Syria; a popular version of the language of the street as it was used in earlier decades of the century — and in the form in current use in Aleppo-in-Flatbush by older people who still use the tongue. (As will be elaborated later, the inclusion of Arabic is prompted additionally by a perhaps quixotic urge for the perpetuation of the unique ethnic tradition.)

A few words about this writer and his qualifications for this study are in order. I was born in Aleppo and came to the United States at age of eight, in the third of three stages of family immigration. Because of 'ill-health' I was afforded only six years of schooling, to age fourteen. An omnivorous and curious reader I became self-educated. As a very young man I engaged in commerce and before very long I accumulated enough savings to permit me to realize my longing, to once again see my native Aleppo; to spend time in Egypt, Jerusalem — still "Palestine" at the time — and to linger for months in European capitals, for which I had developed a love through my immersion in world-literature and music. Two years later, in 1933, I repeated the trip, this time spending close to two months

in Ḥálab (Aleppo), the fascinating medieval Arabic large city, and then returning to my modest lace-importing business. With the entry of the United States into the Second World War, I volunteered for Army service, and in 1946 emerged with the rank of Captain. Soon after I won the hand of Sarah Maleḥ now the mother of our four children. Not far from retirement age, at the urging and encouragement of my wife, I applied — dubiously — for admission to Brooklyn College. To my astonishment I was accepted, (*on condition* — that I "study elementary algebra, etc.," which I had missed by my limited elementary school education). It was exhilarating during evening class-changes, to encounter my wife and one of my daughters — both students — in the crowded corridors. With a generous number of credits awarded me by interviews for my self-education (in languages, economics, history, art, and music), in due time I earned a degree in sociology. Soon after I completed all course work for a Masters degree, with only a thesis to follow. Difficulties with my thesis-adviser — so common to many candidates — discouraged completing this requirement. "Do I *need* the degree? Of what use will it be to me?" And so I dropped away, to pursue my research for many years into the history and character of my community.

Ten years later my *Magic Carpet* was published. Professor Egon Mayer of the Sociology Department of Brooklyn College was impressed with my study and helped arrange for its acceptance as a substitute for the thesis I still 'owed'. It was in the period when Mayer's acclaimed *From Shtetl to Suburb* (1979) was about to be published. (Mayer's most recent book is *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* (1985). Finally, some six years ago, on my 74th birthday I marched down the aisle to become a "Master of Art, Sociology."

A reviewer for a scholarly journal complained that *Magic Carpet* had not provided "enough primary sources." In defense, I though, "Surely, I am *myself* a 'primary source', having a lifelong history as a *"participant observer"* and in the sociological context — a *"marginal man"*, objectively, critically, studying the community, and being thoroughly intimate with the society in which my family played a leading role for

decades; that, and my two extended sojourns in Aleppo . . . " *Magic Carpet* is in its third printing. The present study may be deemed a companion-volume and extension to that earlier much more detailed work, presenting a totally diverse aspect of the history and mores of a unique community.

At age 80, I am happy to submit this book to the reader to weigh and judge the merits of the endeavor. I am hopeful that it will prove to be of interest and will be found to have added something of value to our knowledge of Jewish life.

An observation about the seemingly idiosyncratic use of *"Ashkenazeem"* and *"Sepharadeem,"* the *"ᶜayeen,"* the "Ḥet" etc. They represent the authentic pronunciation. Israel's culturally-dominant Ashkenazeem continue an Eastern European difficulty with the *traditional* pronunciation of Sepharadi Hebrew. But, as Professor Goitein remarked in noting my 'idiosyncracy', it is how Sepharadi Hebrew is pronounced by the *Jews* from the Near East, the cradle of the language.

Joseph A.D. Sutton

BOOK I

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Chapter One

A Perspective

AFTER centuries of virtual neglect, Sepharadi Jews are receiving increasing recognition for the importance of their historic contributions. This new interest is fueled by the presence in Israel of close to a million Sepharadeem who had migrated from Arab lands, and who now constitute a significant majority of the Israeli-Jewish population. Jewish residents in Oriental countries have now also scattered to many parts of the world, particularly to North and South America. They will constitute a major focus of our study.

The historic movements of Jews seeking to escape intolerable living conditions imposed on them is once again being repeated today. Continuing migrations of Jews from Aleppo and Damascus in Syria, seeking safe havens in countries where earlier migrants had become transplanted, echo the social convulsions which some Jewish communities underwent over the centuries. The largely economic reverses which had affected Jews in late Ottoman Syria, motivated the early peaceful immigration to New York's Lower East Side. Their ordeals have escalated today to neccessitate hazardous escapes over the frontiers, from the land in which Jews have lived continuosly for two thousand years or more. Everyday Jewish life in Syria since the early 1900's, and the recent tragic events and significant experiences there, form portion of this study. They are revealed in the oral biographies of these transplanted Sepharadeem ('Sephardim') from the Near East, related by

migrants who had settled in other lands before some came to join the colony of Syrian Jews in the United States.

The earlier colonizers in the United States, like the ancient Athenians who settled Sicily and Italy, were not refugees from persecution but rather, for the greater part from economic pressures and suffering. Present-day escapees from Syria are prompted by fear for their safety, and many who fled joined the Brooklyn Syrians.

A prosperous immigrant community which seems resistant, impervious, to the broad and enveloping assimilationist pressures everywhere around it, is indeed a rare phenomenon. This is a quality characteristic of the Syrian Sepharadic community in Brooklyn. It adopts enough of the general culture of American life to permit its members to function efficiently and successfully. It is here that a handful of formerly penniless early immigrants from Aleppo and Damascus established what is perhaps the largest homogeneous, and certainly the *most vibrant,* the most flourishing Sepharadi community in the world.

Outwardly, the Syrian Jews of Flatbush, numbering perhaps thirty thousand individuals, are not distinguishable from other New Yorkers of their class. They have acculturated to the extent of assuming the manners and life style of other New Yorkers, at the same time that most continue the customs and mores that were carried here by the early immigrants.

The first generation immigrants who settled in New York's Lower East Side circa 1900-1920, were preoccupied with the need to establish themselves economically, beset at first with the need to toil to meet everyday needs, to feed and clothe their families. With it came the initial widespread immigrant peddling of dry goods. The enterprises of the Syrian newcomers once almost exclusively in textiles, an oriental heritage, have expanded now to include electronics, imports and exports retailing of a variety of items, and to representation in the professions, as well as a few, in the arts. In a relatively short time, they succeeded in inching their way up the ladder. With the improvement in their economic efforts came geographic relocations, which reflected their ability to afford homes in

successively superior areas. Now these Near East Sepharadic Jews, most of them from Aleppo and Damascus in Syria, have settled for the foreseeable future in a pleasant residential section of Brooklyn, New York (the Midwood part of Flatbush) and in Deal, New Jersey.

From the earlier years of immigration beginning when the Syrian Sepharadeem landed on the Lower East Side, they formed a group apart, overwhelmed by the bewildering and unfamiliar teeming life of the East European Ashkenazeem into whose midst they settled. Where else could they live except among fellow-religionists? However, it was a painful experience because they were seemingly hermetically isolated. Most Syrians came with no knowledge of the English language, nor with Yiddish, the *lingua franca* of the Jewish Europeans from many lands. True that a very few had a working knowledge of French, which they may have learned in a branch of the French-sponsored *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Aleppo or Damascus, but who among the East Europeans knew French? For a Jew not to be able to speak Yiddish was tantamount for them to not being Jewish. Never mind that the Syrians were religious, Sabbath-observers, and that some attended week-day synagogue services in one of many Ashkenazic "shuls," but "not to speak Yiddish!" This writer's father was religious, observant; for reasons of perhaps extreme piety, he wore two sets of *tephillin*, phylacteries, during week-day prayers (to conform to the views of both Rashi' and Rabbenu Tam). One day, wrapped in a *tallit*, the ritual prayer-shawl, and the two sets of phylacteries, he was approached in a "shul" by a man who jabbered at him in Yiddish. Not understanding what was said, he was unable to reply. His interlocutor looked at him in amazement and burst out, "*Bist du a Yid?*" ("Are you a Jew?") Similar episodes have been reported repeatedly. In every area of life on the East Side, the Syrian-Sepharadic immigrants were beset with difficulties. They were looked upon as a bizarre breed, with "uncivilized" manners and customs. "Arabs!" It is not to be wondered that they felt emotionally compelled to huddle together, to cling to their own small group.

Economic opportunities that were seized by these Syrian Jews during the years of World War I enabled many of them to

move to the less densely inhabited Williamsburgh, directly across the East River from the Lower East Side. A few years there and once again they made the *hejira* to a still more attractive residential location — the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, with its more open spaces and modestly priced one-family row houses. It was only in the late years of the 1930's that the yet more attractive section of Flatbush slowly began to draw some, and ultimately virtually all Syrians. Here indeed they took root, many of them acquiring the fine homes that are much like small mansions. Those without the $25,000 to $35,000 (of that period) for these spacious homes settled on more modest residences, purchased or rented.

The new community expanded. First one handsome and impressive synagogue and then others a short distance away were constructed — not that there was a lack of existing synagogues (Ashkenazi) in the area. Their houses of worship had to follow the Syrian-Sepharadic ritual, in a Hebrew pronunciation to which they were accustomed.

By dint of hard work the Syrian Jews prospered. Not only had some acquired the homes of wealthy Ashkenazeem and others in Flatbush, who themselves moved on to more luxuries areas in Long Island and elsewhere. A number of Syrians had in time also fallen heirs to the summer homes formerly owned by the enormously wealthy German-Jewish banking families in New Jersey — in Deal, West End, Elberon, and the other nearby areas described in Stephen Birmingham's "Our Crowd." In earlier years nearby Bradley Beach had been the Syrian summer center, but so much more modest than Deal and its surrounding areas. Withal, prosperity, fine homes, and other marks of American success could not seduce these Near East Jewish immigrants to abandon their traditional patterns. Almost inexplicably they continue to replicate the religious and social customs and mores of faraway Aleppo and Damascus to which they cling.

Many millions of East European Jewish immigrants flocked to the United States from 1881 to 1914. The first generation of these new-comers strove to earn their living, with some difficulty. Nevertheless, they sacrificed to give their children the

education and opportunities they had hungered for and that were denied them in their native Poland, Russia, the Baltic countries and Central Europe. The children did acquire education and achieved economic progress and some, slowly, limited entry into some professions. With this advance they moved away from their parents, their lowly residential areas and their mode of living. In effect, the parents had sacrificed for their children — to *alienate them,* to separate them from themselves and the old-world heritage and memories. The children moved to the suburbs, and to Reform and Conservative forms of being Jewish, almost totally cut away from their parents, their circles, and ethnic traditions. When not anchored in local established enterprises, some in the second and third generation succumbed to "mobility," the urge to move on to areas considerably distant from the location of their parents. They established nuclear families, sometimes with non-Jewish mates, with little or no interaction with the parents and relatives.

Most Syrian immigrants, however, even to the third generation, for reasons we will examine, choose to stay in New York, in the midst of a community where they are in close communication with relatives and friends. Young children and their parents share close ties with grandparents and cousins. In effect they lead the life of an extended family just as their forefathers had done in ancient Aleppo and Damascus. Their elderly are shown great respect; and rather than consign them to old-age homes, they are maintained in private residences of their own. A widowed grandfather or grandmother will sometimes share the home of an off-spring. In cases where this is highly impractical they rent small apartments for them, if available, in one of several low-rental subsidized buildings sponsored by the Damascus group, where fellow-residents are almost all Syrians, perhaps friends or old acquaintances, if not relatives. When necessary, they arrange to have a home-care attendant look after their needs. Since these senior-citizen apartments are located in the heart of what I have called Aleppo-in-Flatbush, it is convenient for these elders to mingle with others in the community, to attend religious services, to partake in festivities connected with rites of passage celebrations

— Bar Mitzva, circumcisions, weddings, and the like. They continue to function as part of the community, able to share in the life of the family, surrounded by cherishing relatives and old friends. Rare are the children who do not visit them, with their offspring, several times each month and some with unfailing visits every week.

In a recent review-essay by the eminent Israeli-American anthropologist Raphael Patai, of this writer's *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush,* Professor Patai stated that until he had read this study he did not know of any groups other than ultra-orthodox Jews such as the cult-like Hasidim, or else non-Jewish communities such as the Amish, which were able to erect an effective barrier to the almost total assimilation that overwhelmed most other ethnic immigrant societies. The Syrian unconscious resistance to assimilation carries with it the urge to nurture traits, customs and mores of the old country, a perpetuation of the ancient Jewish culture of the Near East Side over many centuries.

We speak of *Aleppo-in-Flatbush* because most of the families of the community had originated in Aleppo, *Hálab,* the Arabic title of the city. Those from *Il Shaam,* Damascus, (the *Shaw-wam*) had also been early emigrants, though far fewer in numbers. There had been large numbers who had fled from the lovely oasis that is Damascus. However, for a variety of reasons which will be unfolded, most had made their way to other countries in the Americans — Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and elsewhere, where some constitute populations as large as that in Flatbush, and equally if not more economically advanced. As always, the Damascus emigrants continue to constitute a minority in New York.

Until 1950 the population of the community in Brooklyn was stable, numbering perhaps 15,000. With the violent increase in anti-Jewish activity in Syria, due to the growth of Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews in Arab lands began to flee; they feared for their safety, their lives. A few then made their way to join relatives and friends in New York and elsewhere where Syrian Jews had settled. This was the beginning of waves of emigration, the outcome of the increasing hardship on Jews in all of the Near and Middle East. The Suez

War in 1956 saw the large number of Jews expelled by Nasser and the Egyptian government. While some went on to settle in Israel, France, and South America, a substantial number came to New York to form a part of Aleppo-in-Flatbush — those Egyptians whose ancestors had *originated in Aleppo.* Other Egyptian Jews without the same roots and less wedded to strict religious observances and ethnic heritage settled elsewhere in New York and appear to have little interest in perpetuating themselves as an ethnic group.

Many of the large number of Jews who had escaped the uncertainty of life in Syria in the late 1930's and 1940's had settled in Beirut, Lebanon, where they flourished and prospered. In conversations with immigrants who had lived in Lebanon, invariably they spoke with nostalgia of the unqualified delight of their life in Beirut. With the increased entry of the P.L.O. in 1970, however, Lebanon was torn with strife — and possible danger to the safety of its Jewish inhabitants. Once again they decided to migrate, many of them to New York. Others stayed until 1975-1976.

Some of the Jews who had initially settled in Israel after their escape from Syria found life there difficult, perhaps because of hardship in establishing themselves economically, and perhaps, too, because of the *unfamiliar dominant* Ashkenazi culture. Some had a tradition as traders, but some, without sufficient capital, found adjustment a taxing trial. Sepharadeem in Israel, Jewish immigrants from Near and Middle East lands, were treated with "benign neglect" if not covert hostility by the dominant European - acculturated Ashkenazi authorities. Some of these Sepharadeem adjusted and led a viable and comfortable life. A few, like the Aleppoan Gindi family became large-scale builders, and amassed sizeable fortunes. Since many of those who were unable to adjust easily had well-to-do relatives and friends in New York, a significant number sporadically made their way here.

By 1950 Syria had slammed shut its borders to the emigration of Jews. To permit emigration of Jews out of Syria purportedly to strengthen "Israeel" (Israel) was unthinkable and insupportable for the Syrian government. Nevertheless, considerable numbers of youth, older men and some women

made their way out of the country, smuggled across Syria's frontiers at considerable risk. New York became the destination of hundreds, who came to stay. Later we will read oral testimony of the early East Side, as well as of recent life in Syria and the hardships, the cruelty, imposed on the Jewish population.

But now let us return to the earliest wave of Jewish emigration from the Near East. Why had they come? What historic and cultural factors influenced the settlement of this self-sustaining community in Brooklyn? To find the answers, we must turn to the past.

Chapter Two

Ancient and Medieval Life in Syria

TO understand a culture it is imperative to know its history, its customs, its folklore. In order to explore the roots of the dynamism actuating Syrian Jewry in Brooklyn, New York, we must look into Syria, into Aleppo and Damascus, the native soil which nurtured the communities originating from these cities and the history of the Jews who lived there uninterruptedly for at least two thousand years.

It is a source of fascination to trace Sepharadic Jewry — which for many centuries was virtually most of the Jewish world, from the period of the destruction of the First Temple, to Babylon (later, Baghdad), Egypt and its *Geniza*, the seven-hundred-year sojourn in Spain and the return of the many Sepharadi Jews to their original sources in the Near East.

Ancient and Medieval History

The life of the early Syrian immigrants on the Lower East Side, how different from the life they had left in the Near East. There they had led an orderly existence, over many centuries, part of self-contained Jewish communities, and while a small minority in the midst of the Islamic Arab populace, it was largely a respected one; harmonious, courteous, traditional and structured. The immigrant Syrian Jews felt a deep nostalgia for the mode of living that they had regretfully felt compelled to abandon — unlike the *shtetls* and *dorfs* — the towns and villages of Eastern Europe from which Jews had fled to escape abuse

and pogroms — ["devastations", in Russian]. The Jews of the Near East left behind a peaceful life, family and friends, a self-ruling unmolested Jewish community — and on the whole, a pleasant existence. Why had they emigrated?

Even older Syrian immigrants to New York knew little of the history of Jews in Aleppo and Damascus. The more scholarly among them may have read mention in volumes of *Responsa* (rabbinic writing, asking and "answering" questions on Jewish ritual problems) of the coming to their towns of Spanish "Sepharadeem" after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. The younger generations here asked, "Since we are 'Sepharadeem', is it true, then, that all Jewish Syrians had come from Spain?" Damascus is ancient; we know of it from Genesis, where Abraham's slave-companion and putative heir was known as "Eliezer from Damascus" close to 4,000 years ago. Aleppo dates from pre-biblical times (although residence of Jews there is difficult to date). *Ḥálab* — Aram Soba, its ancient Hebrew name, was the center of the many kingdoms of ancient times, Hittites, Aramites and others.

It is hoary Aleppo legend, both Jewish and Muslim, that the patriarch Abraham had settled for a period in Aleppo in his wanderings from his native Ur. He is believed to have "milked" his cows there. *Ḥálab*, the Arabic name of Aleppo, is the Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic for "milked." The Great Synagogue there is believed according to legend, to have been constructed by King David's General, Joab ben Seruya (circa 950 B.C.E.), after his conquest of the city; it is still sometimes referred to as "Joab's Synagogue." He is believed according to rabbinic *aggada*, legend, to have participated in the construction work physically. In a dream Joab was reassured about the permanence of his structure. "Two Temples are destined to be destroyed, Joab. Yours will endure." The sanctity of Aleppo is compared to that of Jerusalem in rabbinic literature.

Cuneiform clay tablets judged to be perhaps 3,500 to 4,000 years old, make mention of *Ḥálab* the former home of the Flatbush immigrants. These sensational discoveries were unearthed circa 1975 in Ebla, some 35 miles from *Ḥálab*. (The Ebla language is a Semitic one, somewhat related to early

Hebrew and other languages of the area. How wondrous to this writer to recognize ancient words written perhaps four millenia ago.) With the destruction of Judea in 586 B.C.E. large numbers of upper-class Jews were taken in captivity to Babylon. Their exile was relatively short-lived, a matter of about 50 years. They were freed to return to their homeland by the extraordinary Persian King Cyrus II who had conquered Babylon. Despite the Psalmist's lyric laments for their exile by the rivers of Babylon, "there we sat, there we wept . . .", most Jews *chose to stay.* They had taken root and prospered. Babylonian clay tablets are now thought by some scholars to indicate Jewish enterprises in "imports and exports," in the crafts of the huge city and large agricultural holdings. Jews fleeing from their overwhelmed Judea in 586 B.C.E. had flocked to neighboring countries, too; many to Egypt which already had sizeable Jewish settlements. Surely, we may suppose that others fled to nearby Damascus, and to Aleppo further north, some 2,500 years ago.

About 600 years later, Jews were again scattered to the winds with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by the Roman legions. Aleppo could well have received refugees from Judea then; Jews who were to remain natives of the city for almost twenty centuries. Like the Jews who had chosen to remain in Babylon, they too can be assumed to have entered into the very active economic life of the city. Aleppo, it will be recalled, had been a vital center of the caravan trade which is almost timeless. Traders between the Eastern Mediterranean areas and the countries to the east, Babylonia, Persia, India, and still deeper into China had found the "Silk Road," the northern caravan routes, setting out from Aleppo and returning there, the less taxing route. This 'road' avoided the need to cross the grueling Syrian Desert, the Damascus caravan route. We must conclude that like their Babylonian co-religionists, Aleppo Jews, too, soon enjoyed measures of prosperity. How else can we explain the construction in Ḥálab of the Great Synagogue — *Knisit/il-Kibbireh?* This very large structure ("Joab's Synagogue") — still standing today although neglected and in a state of disrepair — has a stone wall-plaque dated 241 C.E., although some authorities read the date as several hundred years later. We may assume that like Jewish communities in

other cities their rabbinical authorities were in communication with important centers such as Safed, Tiberias, Babylonia, and Bene Berak.

The Arab Conquest

The Muslim Arab conquest which almost unbelievably swept through more than half the populated world in less than a century beginning some 1,350 years ago (632 C.E.), brought with it Arab rule, religion, and some customs. The imposition of Islam and the developing culture of the one-time people of Arabia was reflected in the several brilliant dynasties which followed the original conquest. Their capital was at first in Damascus, later in Baghdad, and for a time in North Africa, and then, in Spain and in Cairo. This did much to homogenize the pattern of everyday life, influencing by their domination features which became common throughout the Near and Middle East. At the same time many customs which we see in, and close, to the Fertile Crescent had earlier native origins. The Near and Middle East became a mosaic of similar cultures with small regional distinctions. The climate, the agricultural yields in so many ways akin one to another, provided the bases for the somewhat varied but related culinary patterns seen throughout. The Arab culture was enriched by the contributions of Persia — itself influenced by India's culture in the periods when the Iranians were politically and militarily dominant. ('Arabic' numerals are the creation of India. Arabs contributed the decimal and zero, a critical addition). Persian and Indian poetry and music bore significant influence on much of what is known as Arabic art, and on Jewish poetry and music. The whole of the Near and Middle East after the seventh century, became a Muslim world, the world in which enclaves of Jews had lived long before the rise of Muḥammad and Islam.

After the 12th to the 13th century the astonishing brilliance of Arab scholarship had faded, and along with it came a decline of secular Jewish eminence. Great Arabic and Jewish works in medicine, astronomy, philosophy and poetry and the introduction to the West of the wealth of Aristotelian and other Greek scholarship, after the 12th and 13th centuries this

brilliant erudition had all come to an end. These great works had gone through the hands of the Spanish and Iraqi Jewish savants whose translations from Arabic into Hebrew and then into Latin had first made them accessible to the European universities, the institutions of Scholasticism. Islamic and Jewish thought again receded to purely religious areas. Only *taqleed,* "imitation," became the dominant principle, permitting *no change.* Century after century, generation after generation found virtue only in doing what forefathers had done before. In a like manner Jewry, too, reverted to tradition and precedent. Throughout the Late Middle Ages and to the late 19th century Jewish life and customs in the Near East were unchanging, much like those of the followers of Muḥammad.

Through the centuries Aleppo apparently had a well-established and important Jewish community, attractive enough to draw Saᶜadia Ha-gaon, the prodigious Saᶜadia, the young Egyptian rabbi from Fayoum, who came to make his life there around 910 C.E. The call to become Head of one of Babel's (Baghdád's) huge Academies — the most prestigious in the entire Jewish korld, could not be resisted. When it came after only a few years in Aleppo, Saᶜadia went on to establish his reputation as one of the most important teachers in the annals of Jewish religious life. In 925 C.E. Saᶜadia returned to Ḥálab to visit the city and its rabbinical luminaries. It was Rabbi Saᶜadia's vigorous and scholarly efforts which broke the sweep of the threatening *Karaite* schism, a movement that was dividing the Jewish world. The Karaite sect, an anti-Rabbinic movement, accepted as Jewish law only the *written text of the Torah* (*Kara,* "as read"), discarding the "Oral Law," the teachings, interpretations and modifications of the Talmud and its creators.

Rabbi Zekharia ben Barkel was a native of Aleppo who had also migrated to Baghdád. In 1191 he had come to Ḥálab to solicit funds from the wealthy Aleppoans for support for Baghdád's important Academies. Soon after Zekharia rose to be "Gaon" of one of the great Academies. In some periods later, Baghdád supplied Chief Rabbis to Aleppo, *and vice versa.*

The ubiquitous import and export businesses of present-day New York Syrian Jews resonate the trade of ancient Aleppo and Damascus as well as Cairo, Baghdád, Fez, Kerouan, Aden, and other commercial centers of medieval days. The Fertile Crescent had sent Asian products coming from as far as China, west to Italy, Spain, France and Germany. Centuries before Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire of the 8th and 9th centuries the Syrians and others had exported the products of their own countries to Europe, as well as goods they unloaded from the caravans of perhaps 2,000 to 5,000 camels, laden with spices, silks and jewels from India, Malaysia and China. We have the testimony of Khoradadbeh, the great Muslim geographer (circa 800 C.E.) that an international Jewish conglomerate of merchants of the Orient, the Radanites (Radhanites), were engaged in wide-scale trading. Khoradadbeh tells us: "They speak Arabic, Greek, Frankish, Andalusian, and Slavonic. They travel from East to West and from West to East, by both land and sea. From the West, Slovak-lands they bring slave girls and boys, brocade, beaver pelts, sables, and swords. They sail from the West on the Western Sea [Mediterranean]; and set forth to Al-Faramah [on the Nile], after which they proceed to Sind [Lower Indus valley], India, and China. From China they bring musk, aloeswood, camphor, cinnamon, and other products from those regions . . . . Sometimes they choose to take their merchandise from the Land of the Franks . . . to Antioch [? close to Aleppo] and then overland . . . to Baghdád, to Oman, Sind, India, and China — in that order."

The Radanites were an association of Jewish merchants with *entrepots* in every land, transacting their business through confidence in their fellow-Jews, often by means of *taḥweel*, letters of credit. Surely the merchants of Aleppo and Damascus, the most important terminals of the caravan-shipments, would have participated in these international transactions. The eminent modern scholar,the late S.D. Goitein, to whom we are indebted for his profound study of the Cairo Geniza fragments (the Geniza period covers the several centuries from the 10th to the 14th), provided invaluable detailed material on the traffic of merchandise to and from Cairo. There are numerous references to shipments coming to Cairo from Aleppo of silk and other

commodities. Professor Goitein had remarked to me that *Ḥálab* had been a banking center of considerable importance. It is an inescapable conclusion that Jews in Aleppo were enterprising and prosperous.

They continued to exchange religious opinions with Baghdád and *Eres Yisraél,* with a developed reputation for learning and religious observance. How else are we to explain the choice of Rabbi "Yoséf ben Yehudá — il Mughrabi" the North African better known as Ibn ᶜAknin, for the choice of Aleppo as his home? Ibn ᶜAknin had been the pupil and friend of Maimonides — *Ha-Rambam,* from his youth in Fez and Cairo, having shared with him the agonizing trials caused by the fanatic Al-Mo-aḥad Muslim sect. Despite the presence of Maimonides in Cairo to whom Ibn ᶜAknin was deeply attached, he migrated to *Ḥálab,* where he was warmly received. After one caravan trip he made, which appears to have been highly remunerative, (was it to India?) he opened his large home to the city's scholars and devoted himself to study.

A regular correspondence from Ibn ᶜAknin to Cairo kept Maimonides fully aware of Jewish life and learning in Aleppo. Nor was Ibn ᶜAknin the only source of information about *Ḥálab's* piety and scholarship. Surely, it was its widespread reputation as a highly important center of Jewish study and religious devotion which prompted Maimonides to write to the Jews of Lunel in the Provence in Southern France, lamenting that, except for Lunel and nearby towns " . . . *In all other places true Torah study is lost among the inhabitants, great and small. In the Holy Land and in Syria there is one city alone — and it is Ḥálab — in which there are those who are truly devoted to the Jewish religion and study of the Torah.*" [Italics added].

Ibn ᶜAknin was host to that brilliant and picaresque scholar, poet, and traveler, Rabbi Yehudá, Al-Ḥarizi, when he made an extended visit to Aleppo in the year 1225, following up by some fifty years the visit of Rabbi Benjamin, of Tudela in north Central Spain. It was in 1173 that *Benyameen Ha-no-sé-aᶜh* ("Benjamin the Traveler") as he is called in Hebrew, came to Aleppo to tell us of its beauty and to praise its several eminent rabbis, its poets and musicians. Its Jewish population he reported as 5,000. Al-Ḥarizi's best known work is the 50

chaptered *maqamat* poem, *Al-Taḥkemoni*, (maqamát are described elsewhere in this work.) In one of its chapters Al-Ḥarizi describes *Ḥálab's* beauty, its important Jewish life, and provides brief rhymed lines on leading individuals (some who were "stingy"). Indeed, Jewish travelers throughout the centuries visited and praised Aleppo's community.

Maimonides wrote his "Guide for the Perplexed," *Moré Nebookheem*, his great philosophical work, for his dear friend Ibn ᶜAknin, to whom he sent it. *Thus, this monumental pillar of Jewish philosophy first saw public light in Aleppo.* Like many of his works, Maimonides wrote it in Arabic, significant of the pervasive Arab culture,among Spanish Jews as in the Near East. Al-Ḥarizi; a prolific scholar and linguist, rendered "The Guide" into Hebrew. But it is Ibn Tibbon's translation that is the version in common use. (Alas for Al-Ḥarizi, Maimonides had written to Ibn Tibbon that had he written the work in Hebrew, Ibn Tibbon's translation is how Maimonides would have written it.)

Over the centuries, not only Jewish scholars came to see the Treasures of the Jewish community. Christian scholars, monks and priests came too, speaking Hebrew; some disguised as Jews in their eagerness to gain access to the ancient texts of Aleppo — and the *Aleppo Codex* in particular, as we read later in the oral memoirs of Aleppoans who finally made their way to Flatbush.

Chapter Three

Renaissance and Modern Era

SOME Spanish Sepharadeem, refugees, made their way to Aleppo and Damascus early in the 16th century; and many more to Constantinople, Salonika and Izmir (Smyrna) where most refugees had settled. In Damascus, where they had arrived in larger numbers than in Aleppo, they established their own synagogues, houses of study, and burial grounds, alongside colonies of Karaites, Samarians, Iraqis, and the native Jews, the *Musta-ᶜArab-een*, we are told by Rabbi Moshé Basola of that period. With time, they abandoned the use of the Spanish language and before long became acculturated, an integral part of the native Jewish community. Their more worldly education saw many of them in a prosperous state and in the leadership of Jewish life, positions they maintained for centuries. Aleppo's Spanish refugee Sepharadeem, fewer in number, had also been received with cordiality and the respect due their scholarliness. A separate section of the Great Synagogue was reserved for them. This too passed away as the *'Spaniol* became embodied in the Jewish life of the city, although they continued to be distinctive. Among them were members of the Kassin *(Qaaseen)* and Laniado *(Langiado)* families, who contributed leading rabbis to the city for hundreds of years *and to the present day*, in Aleppo-in-Flatbush and other Syrian colonies. The Dayán family, also distinguished scholars in Aleppo for centuries, had originated in Baghdad and lay detailed claim, generation by generation, to

descent from King David. It was the Dayáns who established the revered House of Study — and prayer — *Bet Nasí*, "The House of the Prince." It functioned in Aleppo until the "days of trial" in 1947, a harrowing period which the testimony of refugees now in Flatbush will reveal to us.

Yet another wave of European Sepharadeem came, a small one, mostly from Italy, who were to be continually distinguished and prestigious in Near East Jewish life. Perhaps among the first of them to come was a maternal forebear of this writer, Signor Isaaco Silvera from Livorno (Leghorn, Italy), earlier from Gibraltar and Spain.

His presence in Aleppo was uncovered to me by Gershom Scholem in his biography (1973) of Shabbetai Sebbi (Sevi), the false Messiah. Scholem relates that among the foremost advocates of Shabbetai prior to 1666 the date of enunciation of Shabbetai's 'Messiahood', were " . . . Signor Ḥakham Shelomo Laniado and Signor Isaaco Silvera." To Ḥakham Laniado, Shabbetai had awarded the "Kingdom of Aram Soba" (The Hebrew term for Aleppo, Psalms 60:2), and to my ancestor Silvera, the "Kingdom of David." No doubt Silvera had contributed importantly from his considerable wealth to the Messiah's mission. With Silvera's presence in Aleppo, other wealthy Italian Sepharadeem had followed, to form a small but eminent group.

Soon after the Crusades Aleppo had become increasingly important in commerce with Europe. Earlier, such trade had been small although continuous for many centuries. Thanks to the sharpened appetite for Oriental spices and silks and the like, brought back with them by the returning Crusaders, and with the advancing decay of the feudal system, the rise and the influence of the Towns, and the revival of a money economy in place of barter, European trade with the Orient began to grow and to become a source of great wealth.

It was largely to Ḥálab that the early Venetians, the Dutch, and the French had arrived to establish trading colonies; "Alep", as the French 15th and 16th century traders had labelled it; the Italians had transposed it to "Alep-po," the name used by the English. The high-handed treatment accorded these earlier Europeans by the arbitrary and greedy Muslim officials,

often brutal and sometimes murderous, discouraged such traders, despite treaties effected early in the 1500's. It was only by the Capitulations Treaties between Queen Elizabeth and Sultan Murad III in 1580 that the safety of Europeans was (largely) assured, their personal safety, and that of their goods. With this treaty the Levant Company of English Traders established "factories" in the Near East, beginning in 1580, the most important of them in the souks of *Ḥálab*. (These "factories" were operated by traders who were referred to as "factors".)

How to negotiate this trade with Aleppo's merchants, since the English spoke no Arabic and the Aleppoans no English? Through local Aleppoans with a knowledge of Italian, French, or Spanish, largely the Spanish Sepharadeem and the Italian Jews. In addition to the Jews, Armenians and native "Byzantines" (Greek Orthodox Catholics) also participated. Immediately upon the conclusion of the Capitulation Treaties — the Ottomans "capitulated," surrendered to the Europeans' demands for guarantees of their safety, England was prompted in 1580 to establish a Consulate in Aleppo (in addition to "factories,") with Wm. Barret, as its first such official.

Other nationals sought to resume their earlier abandoned trading; none but the French made much headway. They too established "factories" but their considerable trade, the value of the merchandise they shipped home, was but a fraction of the huge English import and export. Shortly after the establishment of English trade, France's trade with Aleppo and the Near East had reached the sum of 30 million *gold francs* annually. The religious wars in France brought about a steady decrease in this trade and by 1635 it had shrunk to 14 million gold francs annually, and to 2.5 millions by 1660. France's trade through Aleppo continued into the 18th century, when Chevalier D'Arvieux was the Protector of Italian and other Franj/Francos.

The consuls were kept occupied in enforcing the rights embodied in the Treaties. These granted the Europeans the absolute privacy of their property — it was foreign soil — with diplomatic immunity for their persons and property. English activity began to diminish around 1740, although still large enough to sustain their own physician, Dr. Alexander Russell,

author of the engrossing *A Natural History of Aleppo.* 1756, and his brother and successor, Dr. Patrick Russell who wrote *A Treatise of the Plague, 1760, 1761, 1762, in Aleppo.* The Treaties were intended, as well, to shield the Europeans from the imposition of local taxes, the *Avanias,* set at the caprice and greed of the local pashas which the latter unjustly sought to exact from the "uncircumcised foreigners." In the disordered and corrupt administration of the Ottoman Empire, pasha-offices were sold to favorites who paid enough. The interest of the pasha then, was to extract as much money as he could from his unfortunate subjects in the province, but providing little service in exchange. Unjust accusations against natives were common, whereby a third of the accused's resources were often exacted in return for his release. The Consul defended his subjects, acted as judge in local disputes, guided and comforted his fellow countrymen.

The English Levant Company

Consul North tells us of the importance of the Aleppo Jews in their relations with the English and others. Said North: "The factoring trade is in the hands of the Jews, dominated by them." Further, he states that, "When a European began to trade through a Jew, no other would take his 'commission,' for by a compact among themselves no other was permitted to accept the client." The Jewish agents earned the esteem and confidence of their clients, they were highly spoken of and their reputation spread in England for their uprightness and trading skill. One dissenting opinion was held by Reverend Henry Maundrell, Chaplain in Aleppo to the English Factors in the period around 1695—1699. Was Maundrell a die-hard Tory anti-Semite (an adherent of the forces which had continually opposed granting re-settlement rights in England to the Jews?) He does not agree " . . . with the universal opinion honoring . . . the *exact justice, veracity* and *other moral virtues* upon account of which I have sometimes heard them mentioned with *extraordinary commendations.*" He does, however, concede respect for" . . . the outward decency of their carriage, the profound respect they

pay to religion and everything pertaining to it . . . ." (Italics added).

Maundrell provides an illuminating account of the cheerful life of the English and other European traders. He describes the bowling matches, their galloping on Arab stallions over the countryside, the lion hunts they embarked on (lions are now extinct in an around Aleppo), and the gaiety of the parties they held at Carnival Time before Lent, in the company of other Europeans. "As for living with them [the Aleppoans] it is with all possible quiet and safety, and that is all that we desire, their conversation being not in the least entertaining." [Maundrell spoke no Arabic.] "Our delights are among ourselves and there being more than forty of us [Englishmen], we never want a most friendly and pleasant conversation. Our way of life resembles in some measure the academical. We live in separate squares, large caravanserais [or KHANS], shut up every night after the manner of colleges. We begin the day as you do, with prayers, and have our own set times for business, meals, and rcreation. In the winter we hunt in the most delightful campaigns twice a week. In the summer we go as often to divert ourselves under our tents, with bowling and other excercises."

Almost all testimony coming to us before and after Maundrell bespeaks Aleppo Jews as outstandingly honorable, able, and faithful agents. John Lewis Burkhardt, the eminent historian, had spent three years in the Near East, mostly in Aleppo, as he wrote in his *Travels* (1794). He quotes the French consul there, Chevalier D'Arvieux"... The Jewish residents of Aleppo are the gentlest, most tractable in the vast Ottoman Empire; able in business and of *bon foi* [good will — good faith]." It is believed through research into the period circa 1660, *that Aleppo was the most important commercial center in the world.*

The Fame of Aleppo, and the Franj

Aleppo's name became so well-known in England to the extent that Shakespeare's casual references to "Aleppo" needed no further explanation. Thus, "Her husband's to Aleppo gone . . ." on the vessel, the *Hynde,* (Macbeth Act 1, Scene 3), and,

"In Aleppo once where a maligned Turk [an Aleppo Muslim] beat a Venetian . . ." (Othello, Act V, Scene 5).

The privileges of their foreign patrons sometimes rubbed off on to the Jewish agents, who were thus placed in particularly high regard in their community. They became *Nafs Firmanli,* an Ottoman-Decree (Protected) Individual. In some few instances their patrons bestowed on them full foreign national status, including *Extra Territorial Rights,* endowing them with greater prestige. "Joe" Dweck/Duek, member of a local Aleppoan family in the earlier years of our century held English nationality, as did a few others. Was this an inheritance from the bounty of the Levant Company patrons some hundreds of years earlier? More likely from descent from Rabbi Moshé Shimᶜon Duek, whose family had partly settled the Jewish community of Calcutta, India, an English possession. This writer's father and grandfather had both laid claim to English nationality, as we will read.

In addition to the migration into Aleppo of the refugees from Spain as was noted, there were the Italian Jewish merchants. Since the English had established a relatively safe climate in Aleppo, why continue to trade through Aleppo agents, who required a commission when they shipped to them in Italy? The Italians sent younger sons to serve their needs at first hand. They came on buying 'visits', but instead stayed, and soon married the daughters of Spanish and Musta-ᶜArabeen (indigenous) Jews. They become known as "Francos" (French) and "Franj," enjoying the rights and privileges of Extra-Territoriality. They were always referred to as *Signors,* ("Sir, in Italian; "Signor-eem" is the Hebrew plural term for this Italian title). Through their wealth and aristocratic status they became the most distinguished of the local Jews. Their piety, scholarliness and generous support of community organizations placed them at the pinnacle of their co-religionists' esteem. The leading family among them was that of Picciotto; who were to become *De Picciotto* when they received titles of knighthood from the Austrian Emperor Joseph II, whom they served as consuls. Picciotto, Belilos, Bigio, Farḥi, Ancona, Silvera, Altarás and a few others constituted the Franj group in Aleppo. In Damascus it was the families of Angel — ("Shemaᶜya), Pinto,

Mólcho, Farḥi, ᶜAttieh, Lisbona and others, who were the elite Franj. The Farḥis were distinguished in the financial service of Government for many generations. Branches of the Farḥis were found in Aleppo, Damascus, Salonika, and in the Balkans, particularly Bulgaria; as were members of the Altarás family. One, Farḥi Pasha (Baron Farḥi), outstanding in the financial administration of Damascus province in the 18th century, drew the envy of the Governor, who effectively incapacitated him: he caused the gouging out of his eyes; a later Governor had him assassinated. As in Spain, as in Egypt in some eras, and in Baghdad, some Jews rose to great eminence in court circles. This drew the envy of Muslim rivals who sometimes brought about their assassination. (In the Near and Middle East, noblemen at the Ruler's court cultivated friendliness with his Executioner. In the dread possibility of a decree of their being blinded, the courtiers hoped for a 'benign' slitting of their eyeballs rather than brutal gouging.)

In both Damascus and Aleppo the Franj prospered. In Aleppo after a 1775 dispute with the Chief Rabbi, they continued to exert a discreet but removed influence on the life of the community. Except in philanthropic circles almost none of the Franj actively participated in the machinery of religious or organizational life; none became a Chief Rabbi; only one or two are believed to have accepted a post in the Bet Deen, the religious court. Their social life was among themselves, the outstanding rabbis, and the wealthy *tidjar*, merchants, and bankers, who were the most highly regarded in the economic and social life of the Near East, those with "true (q)'adam-iyeh," gentility, great respectability. This required a three-part quality: (1) piety, (2) outstanding philanthropy, and (3) an unblemished family reputation for some three generations. The same criteria were the standard almost 1,000 years before, as we read in the Cairo *Geniza* fragments (Goitein), and which continues to this day in Aleppo and Damascus. Franj qualified for eminence by this standard.

The economic life of Jews in Aleppo depended on trade as we see, a pattern which continued for centuries with little change. A few merchants travelled and traded with India, as did Maimonides' own brother earlier, and Ibn ᶜAknin from Aleppo,

who in the late 12th century had made one trading trip, to return very wealthy. In the 17th century a Rabbi Ezekiel Raḥabi (1694-1771) — from Aleppo, made his way to India to become the Trading Agent for the Dutch East India Company and to amass great wealth. He decisively influenced the *Bene Israel,* the native Jews of India, bringing them knowledge of rabbinic Judaism of which they had been in ignorance. They claimed to have settled in India subsequent to the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

Late in the 18th century Shalóm Ha-Cohen of Aleppo ventured into India and with the assistance of others from Ḥálab,members of the Shᶜaib, Tebele, Duek, Laniado families, two Settons/Suttons, as well as several Baghdadians, served to found the Calcutta Jewish community. It flourished for almost 150 years, until the British left India in 1947. Shalóm (Ha-Cohen) from Aleppo had initially come to Calcutta in the company of Jacob Setton/Sutton, a qualified *shoḥet* (slaughterer of animals), according to Shalóm's diary (unpublished). Its first entry, written in *Nus-Alam,*the Rashi-like script, but with Arabic text, was dated 1789. It began: "With the help of God, I left Ḥálab to go to Baghdad." The colorful story of the establishment by Aleppo Jews of the Calutta Jewish community is seen in an ensuing chapter "My [this writer's] Search for my Great-Grandfather" — in India (!)

Everyday Jewish Life

From the many recent spoken histories of individuals who recounted to me memories of life experience in Aleppo/Ḥálab, the northern city and in Damascus, we are further able to reconstruct the everyday life of the Jews there from some years before the beginning of this century. In many ways it was typical of Jewish life throughout the Near and Middle East. Arabic was the universal language (except in Turkey, and some European countries under Ottoman rule, until historically a relatively short time ago.) Arabic was the common language from Iraq (Mesopotamia) on the East, to Morocco, facing the Atlantic Ocean. Culturally, too, there was broad commonality characteristic of almost all Fertile Crescent lands.

At the crest of Aleppo and Damascus population early in this century, each city had perhaps 15,000 to 20,000 Jews. In Aleppo, everyone Jewish lived within the confines of the old and virtually invisible city-wall lines (the inner city), until about 1900-1905, when a small movement began to the-then outskirts of the city, to the Quarter called the Djamil-iyeh (named after Djamil Pasha), with broad streets and fresh air. (In the last three or four decades almost all Jews had moved there, except the direly poor.) They continued to form, except for commerce, an almost separate life which they led with customs similar to those of Muslims around them. The community was firmly ruled by the *Bet Deen*, the religious Court, supported by the *Comité* (Fr.), the community committee, formed of leading individuals, — *ah-kah-behr*, "notables" which administered the Jewish institutions. It was self-ruled, as was previously observed, in accordance with Ottoman and earlier, Roman and Arab regulations, which gave due recognition and respect in most periods, to each of the religious communities. This permitted an orderly and stable life over the centuries, one in which the Aleppo and Damascus Jewish populations led a generally satisfying life — constrained only by personal economic limitations.

The *Ḥakham Báshi* was the Chief Rabbi, an institution established in Istanbul/Constantinople some four hundred years ago, largely a political one. The local Ḥakham Báshi was appointed by the Chief Ḥakham Báshi, an influential Ottoman Empire official in the Capital — with the consent of the city's Jewish elders. He was frequently a non-native of Aleppo or Damascus, hailing from Smyrna, Istanbul, or Salonika. Often he did not match the scholarliness of the cities' native rabbis or their religious authority, although his Office was held in much awe by the populace. The *Bet Deen*, the religious court, set the rules and standards for rigid religious and civil observance for the mass of Jews. They ruled in disputes between Jews, and so universally and highly were they regarded, that a Muslim with a civil complaint against a Jew preferred to have it adjudicated by the *Bet Deen*. He was confident that the ruling would be unbiased and just. Leading rabbis were highly respected by the Muslim leaders and their counsel was often sought.

Rabbis of the city were also highly esteemed by fellow Jews in Palestine, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and other parts of the Ottoman Empire; respected for their learning and devoutness, from the days of Saᶜadia, Maimonides and earlier. Over the centuries only a few had succeeded in having their scholarly religious works published. Some with valuable texts did not possess the means and know-how to achieve publication in one of the principal Sepharadi centers, in Livorno, Istanbul, Amsterdam. Only now are some of these early works being uncovered and published. Joseph Eliahou Shamah of Jerusalem is outstandingly active in this endeavor to rescue significant *Ḥálabi* and other Near East rabbinic manuscripts from continuing obscurity. (In Appendix VI to *Magic Carpet* many unpublished Aleppoan manuscripts are mentioned by name.)

In Syria, relations with Islamics were amicable, but formal. A state of inward uneasiness always marked the sentiments toward those of the dominant religion. The Muslims were generally friendly, but "no one put complete trust in goyeem" (Hebrew maxim) or in their continuing peacefulness, since not all Muslims were educated, or well-mannered.

It appears that Damascus Muslims are more volatile, more inclined to violence, while those of Aleppo continue to be of a more peaceful nature. The historic Muslim uprisings in Damascus had caused the deaths of thousands of Christians in 1840 and 1860. As terrible as were the difficulties for Jews in that city, fortunately these did not approach the devastations visited on the Christians. The latter later turned on the Jews, to cause the deaths of innocent individuals, both in 1840 and 1860, creating fear of widespread massacres. These did not materialize, but *only* because of world-wide agitation in defense of the beleaguered Jews.

The Dhimmis: *'Protected' Jews and Christians*

With the growing awareness concerning Sepharadeem who lived in Islamic lands, there is increasing interest in conditions under which they existed. A recent book, the *Dhimmis* by Bat Ye'or, an Egyptian Jewish writer, attracted considerable attention in its depiction of Jewish life under Islam. It appears

to this writer that the conclusions suggested by this interesting work are somewhat tendentious if not perhaps prejudiced. What is the reality of conditions under which the *Dhimmi* the so-called 'Protected' people lived? Jews, Christians and Zorastrians who believe in one God, had special status following the teaching of Muḥammad. They were known as Ahhl il Dhimmi [correctly pronounced "thzimmeh"], *People of Faith, Conscience.* They were to be protected, allowed to lead a self-ruled life, following their religion, unmolested both in their faith and in their civil rights. However, because they would not accept the Truth of Islam, they were to have measures of humiliation shown to them, they were to regard themselves as "inferiors." A special small tax was imposed on them, a *jizya* (a penalty). In other ways too in some periods, they had to have their inferiority made evident — through dress, restrictions on the height of their houses of worship, the lowly animals (donkeys, etc.) they were permitted to ride, the need to give way before a Muslim, and similar means of indicating their inferiority. In everything else their rights were to be protected. The harsh spelling out of "marks of inferiority" was contained in the "Covenant," *unilaterally imposed,* of Caliph ᶜUmar (or ᶜOmar), soon after the death of Muḥammad. ᶜUmar's terms demanded much harshness and arbitrary abasement, but were *not* universally applied.

The Covenant' could be annulled *at will* by Muslims when they alleged violations on the part of a minority, to be replaced with still greater severities, sometimes demanding conversion to Islam, on pain of death. In backward and fanatic countries and areas, ᶜUmar's 'Covenant' was rigorously carried out: in most periods, in Yemen and in many parts of Morocco, Iran, and other locations distant from the cosmopolitan and scholarly Islamic setting, such as Mesopotamia (Baghdad, etc.), Syria and Egypt. In such developed countries and their cities, Jews were made to feel their decreed status as "inferiors," but very lightly in most periods.

Muḥammad's sometimes-attacks on Jews (the "need to humiliate them," etc.) as well as the harshness and implacable hatred exemplified by the 'Covenant' of ᶜUmar may well be regarded as the authority by which Fundmentalist Muslims

regard Jews and Israel to this day. It foreshadowed the fanaticism of Ayotallah Khomeini, Arabia, the Gulf States, the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and all activist Fundamentalists. It is such Muslim claim to *superiority over all,* that motivates the dream of renewed conquest — the holy Jihad — as in the seventh century, some 1350 years ago.

Good Relations with Muslims

The Muslims of Aleppo were indeed of a more peaceful character than those of Damascus. No uprisings, no massacres of Jews in Aleppo have ever been uncovered by this writer. Jews accepted their role of submissive inferiors, but with dignity. They knew their own worth, and their economic importance in the metropolis, a bustling city of traders. Their upright character won the good will of most Muslims (despite the abuse of Jews in the later sections of the Koran [il Kor-ahn], and the Covenant of ᶜUmar). Aleppo Jews seldom had to submit to more than petty abuse, and only from individual ignorant and fanatic Muslims. Such elements had created riots and massacres in Aleppo in 1859-1860, but directed *against Christians,* with no major disorders since that time.

In earlier periods, prior to the advent of surging nationalist Zionism in Palestine, many commercial Jewish partnerships existed with Muslims and Christians, often in enterprises involving agricultural products; Jews were partners with herders, in large-scale operations involving sheep, etc. The Jews had confidence in the integrity of their Muslim partners, their courteous friendliness and their faithfulness to their religion. Sometimes the partners were *bedu* (bedouins), nomads, usually of the nearby ᶜAnazeh tribe, (not of the disreputable Shawayas), taking their flocks afar in search of good grazing, while others were settled villagers. Jewish Murad Faḥam and members of the Jemal/Djmal families owned huge herds consigned to Muslims, or were partners with them; both were important manufacturers of cheese. Faḥam is the hero who was later to rescue the ancient and sacred *Aleppo Codex:* the Codex of ben Asher, spiriting it out of the country to Israel at considerable risk to his safety.

Knowledgeable Jewish Aleppoans repeat the assertions that

Aleppo's Christians and Muslims were inept in commerce, although some were rich through inherited holdings of huge agricultural tracts. They were eager to be accepted as partners by Jews. Commercial establishments owned by Muslims and Christians depended on Jews for expert management. Non-Jewish establishments would surely have a trustworthy *Ya-hoo-di* (Jew) to manage their finances.

Aleppo is the largest city in northern Syria, the commercial center for a large part of the country and parts of southern Turkey. In the early decades of this century the city was said to have a population of 350,000 to 400,000 — and Jews (some) were able to prosper. Now with a population of perhaps one-and-a-half millions, Jews no longer benefit. Because of current anti-Jewish persecution Aleppo can no longer be considered a 'Jewish' city of importance.

Peaceful relations between Muslims and Jews were the rule, it is to be repeated; particularly with the more educated and affluent Muslims, and with other Islamics with whom Jews were in close communications — through commerce, as occasional neighbors, and the like. The sometimes-alleged massacres, and riots against them in Aleppo have found no authentication among elderly Jews of the city. That there may have existed an underlying inactive prejudice against Jews can be traced to *Koranic* sources (in contrast to Muḥammad's sometime-praise of Jews and the command to protect them). Christian sentiment and bias against 'Christ-killers' was superficially concealed, and in Damascus it found active expression in 1820, 1840, and 1860, in the blood libel attacks on Jews. Such deadly assaults date from the Middle-Ages in Christian Western Europe where frequent massacres of Jews took place. Charges that Jews killed Christians prior to Passover to use their blood in Festival rituals may have traveled to Syria with numerous French priests, to whom the Damascus episodes may be ascribed. Padre Thomas ("Badry Tooma") was a victim allegedly slain by Jews. Blood-libel charges may have traveled to Aleppo and become imbedded in Muslim lore there.

Matilde Mishᶜaniyeh a recently-arrived Aleppo Jewish-refugee, told me of conversations with educated Muslim women-friends concerning the "bug-a-boo" of *sreer il shohk,*

"a bed of thorns" with which Muslim children were supposedly threatened. "Be good, or else you will be exposed to the Jewish "bed of thorns." This horror was supposedly practiced on Muslim children by Jews prior to Passover in order to secure blood for the holiday ritual. "But this is impossible," our informant protested to her friends, "Jewish law repeatedly forbids consumption of *any* blood!" The Muslim friends suggested that perhaps only a drop was necessary, "symbolically?" This report was the first that this writer encountered in a lifetime of close association amidst Aleppoan Jews. Nevertheless, it indicates the existence of latent anti-Jewish bias among the superstitious and gullible Muslims. Similar Christian threats to their unruly children may have been inspired by New Testament anti-Jewish sentiments.

With educated Muslims a cordiality, somewhat formal, could exist, formed perhaps through commercial transactions. However, intimate friendships with Muslims were not common. Despite cordiality with some, there was little social interaction, Jewish and Muslim families did not exchange visits; men customarily socialized in cafés. Nevertheless, on respective holiday occasions the men would sometimes pay courtesy calls to their friends of the other religion. The Governor, too, the Pasha, would pay such a courtesy call to the Chief Rabbi. In turn, the Ḥakahm Bashi would acknowledge an Islamic or governmental holiday by a visit to the Pasha. (A similar custom obtains in Panama, according to a later oral biographer. Panama's president visits a synagogue on High Holy Days).

Chapter Four

Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Syria

EVERYDAY activity in the early years of the twentieth century in Aleppo and Damascus continued the traditional and unhurried life in the midst of the countless minarets and the many large and important *souks.* Earlier, Jews lived — by choice — in their separate Quarters, the Saḥa, il Illeh, Baḥ-seeta, and Ḥarrit il Yahood, the Jewish Quarter and other nearby neighborhoods, sometimes neighbors of Muslim families, but *never* of Christians. They occupied *ḥohsh* residences with an inner courtyard; a *ḥohsh,* with chambers around it, rooms not interconnected in most instances. Outhouses provided the sanitary facilities (which were periodically — sometimes tardily — emptied by the *muᶜaz-zehl,* the cesspool cleaner). Wealthy families occupied a private *ḥohsh;* other *ḥohsh* had contained two or three families, each occupying one or two rooms to accommodate their usually large numbers. [*Ḥa-wa-shi* is the correct plural for *ḥohsh.*]

The rooms necessarily served as living quarters by day and as bedrooms at night. They were sparsely furnished. In the poorer homes the furniture consisted of a low table with a *mansaf,* a large tray, and cushions, *dishaks,* on which they sat, close to the floor. One or two large armoires, chests, held their clothes and household wares. A *deewaan,* a sofa, was found in most homes, reserved for visitors. Except for the wealthy where beds were

used, bedding consisted of mattresses placed on the floor. These were aired in the morning, then piled in a corner of the room, freeing it for daytime use, as in Japan. For those in modest circumstances and the poor, heating the chamber was by means of braziers in which a few sticks of charcoal were burned. Illumination was provided by one or more *wan-a-seh,* a pan filled with oil, with lighted wicks, or by kerosene lamps. Some rooms had a small raised alcove, a *m'rah-baᶜh* which added to the useable space. A small deep cellar, *m'gha-ra,* usual in every ḥohsh, provided an area where perishable food was kept somewhat fresh. Milk was always very fresh, secured occasionally for frail children from the goats brought to the *ḥohsh* door. A floor covering was a necessity. Those who could afford them had rugs on the floor, from *il ᶜÁjam,* (Persia), or from Turkey. Others laid down a *ḥaseereh,* a large woven mat of vegetable fibers.

Housewives whose husbands had means could employ domestic help. For the majority — the poor and the near-poor — the houswife in the shared *ḥohsh* was responsible for restoring the sleeping room into a sitting room, airing the bedclothes and storing them in a corner. She washed the clothes of the family, cooked the meals, drew water from the cistern for the family needs, and sewed or repaired the clothing. In addition, of course, she attended her many young children. She saw to the grinding of her wheat at the local mill and prepared the dough for the bread, a large part of every meal. This was sent out usually twice a week — to a nearby baker, a *soo-sahnie (s'was-neh,* pl., tribesmen from 'another' geographic district, who in Aleppo were bakers, traditionally).

Those in the middle and upper classes usually retained a Jewish female domestic worker, who went to her own home at the end of a demanding day. She, too, washed, cooked, kneaded dough, and looked after her other household chores. Servants were often, but not always, married women. The poor provided the wet nurses for those who could not nurse their own children. It was a sad, wearying life for these women. Such was the dire need of the poor that, as related by an oral informant whom we will meet later, it was as a girl of twelve that she was sent out to sleep away as a servant. "At what wages?" we

asked. Her wages for several years — *were the food and shelter provided her.* When she was offered a tiny money-wage by another family she leapt at the opportunity. Many women did more than look after their homes and children. When these housewives were not compelled by necessity to become servants, they sought other means to supplement the family income. Since clothing factories did not exist, tailors and dressmakers often gave sewing work to be performed in the home — at niggardly prices. Some women were skilled seamstresses; others, makers of wigs and hair-pieces, etc., who spent individual days working in the homes of patrons, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. (This contradicts the popular belief that wives of Oriental Jews did not work gainfully like Jewish matrons in Eastern Europe; there, it was not uncommon for some women to be actively *engaged in commerce.*) Dire plight in working-class families in Syria was not common to all, be it said; they led a variably difficult existence, but courageously made the best of their circumstances.

For the poor, breakfast usually consisted of bread and white cheese; some could afford only bread and inexpensive *zaᶜtar,* a combination of tangy herbs. (Bread was dipped into oil and then into the *zaᶜtar.)* A piece of *ḥaláw-eh* (ḥalava) served as 'dessert.' Lunch and supper often comprised the leftovers of the food of the previous day or else of an omelette, prepared with cheese, potatoes, eggplant or other available vegetables. *Laban,* yoghurt, was a staple, widely consumed, in addition to cereals and beans of every description; they were cheap. [macrobiotic] The principal meal was in the evening. Few meat dishes were available, they were too expensive for most, but were served at the Sabbath meals. Chicken was also a luxury. When it was bought on rare occasions neighbors would ask, "Who, *min gherr shurr* ("may there be no evil") is ill?" Chicken soup was a cure-all, among Syrian Jews as with Ashkenazeem elsewhere.

Most Jews were either lower-middle class or (the greater number) — were poor. They were craftsmen, stall-keepers, cobblers, clerks, peddlers, porters and others without skills.

The life of the middle-class Jews and the wealthy permitted comfortable homes and enabled them to live well in all respects, enjoying a wide variety of foodstuffs, meat, fish, seasonal

vegetables and delectable fruits. They escaped the hot summer months with vacations in the mountains near Antakeh (Antioch) to the west, or in ᶜAleh, Sofar or B'ḥamdoun, the Lebanese mountain villages above Beirut; or else in Killez or ᶜAntab (now Gaziaintab) in nearby Turkey.

Aleppo and Damascus did not offer much entertainment; cafés for men, movies in later years, and card parties which were very popular. The wives of the well-to-do Jews in Aleppo, as I witnessed, were addicted to their card games, meeting with their friends in the late mornings and in the afternoons. Later they would visit with their spouses at the homes of friends or relatives for an evening of (again) card playing. Cultural lectures, concerts of Western music, and the like were unknown to the Jewish and Muslim residents, and perhaps to the Christians as well.

Marriages

Jewish marriages in the Orient were almost always arranged by the parents, usually with the aid of a semi-professional, part-time broker, a *khat-ahb*. He knew most families, and thus could recommend suitable mates; it was important to find spouses of suitable lineage — those of the same social class. A marriage could sometimes be arranged with another, but only one class level above or below. All this after many lengthy negotiations concerning the marriage financial settlement, the *dota*, the dowry, usually given the bridegroom. Among the poor, marriages were more expeditiously arranged, without the need of an intermediary — and negotiations. (Several informants give us considerable details later of pre-nuptial festivities and wedding ceremonials, as well as examples of courtship — in the Silvera and Shamosh biographies).

A Self-Contained Community

That the Jewish community was "self-contained" is evident by the fact that not only did it have craftsmen and sellers of food, etc., but also, as I heard it in Aleppo, the community had its "own" Jewish burglars as well. When a burglary had taken place in a Jewish home, the individual who was the recognized

Jewish "chief of the burglars" was sent for, and with the promise of a reward for 'finding' a stolen object, often it was soon produced. Even when the burglary had been perpetrated by Muslims, this amiable, respectful Jewish head of the burglars recovered the stolen object. He was a "conformer" to religious life, despite his night-time activity. Additionally, I had heard almost-brushed-away remarks that, "Well, yes, one or two Jewish women were registered prostitutes," living in the segregated brothel area of an earlier period, in the *Manzool.* Some, angrily, vigorously, denied such shameful gossip.

As is common everywhere, Jewish-Aleppo also had its variety of individuals, not all of whom fit in to an implied stereotype of true religiosity; but few dared to flout the stereotype of conformity. However, there were some known to be non-religious, others, suspected of being — "God forbid" — agnostics or the like. Some were recognized "womanizers," and carousers in the company of Muslim friends. Others, as we stated, were legally or morally out of bounds.

Entertainment

Rich and poor delighted in the Sabbath, a day of complete relaxation. Some relished the occasional *Sabt,* the festive mid-day elaborate celebratory Sabbath breakfasts after synagogue service. These often were accompanied by the singing of traditional *pizmoneem,* non-ritual religious songs. Dr. Alexander Russell wrote in 1756 of observing these repasts accompanied by the singing, which he found to be — *unmusical.* Russell, a (usually) meticulous reporter, had written: "On the Sabbaths they remain a considerable time at the table . . . and on occasion they may sometimes be heard singing in chorus [*pizmoneem*], but their songs have nothing gay or festive." Russell adds, quoting Sandys, a contemporary writer, about the singing of these Aleppo Jews: "He observes that they *fing* (sing) in tunes that have no affinity to *mufic* (music)."

Aleppoans are very fond of music, outstandingly so. As we will read in an oral history elsewhere, the most renowned Arabic singer of recent times, "Professor" Muḥammad ᶜAbd il Waháb, acknowledged to our informant his gratitude to the

people of Aleppo and especially to the Jewish music-lovers, who first acclaimed him. With this accolade, he was received with warmth by audiences everywhere, particularly in Egypt, his home.

Entertainment in earlier years — 70 or 80 years ago was quite limited. Apart from visits to cafés, family and friends, public entertainment was narrowly circumscribed. Once or twice each year there was a gala concert of Arabic music, which featured a visiting performer such as Muḥammad ᶜAbd il-Waháb. Some fifty or sixty years before him the renowned singer *Shaikh Yousef Il Milinawi* had visited Aleppo and Damascus: to be followed by the most famous singer of his generation, *Shaikh Salámeh il Ḥijjazi.* Few now living have heard him in concert; however I have a scratchy phonograph recording of *Shaikh Salámeh* in the death-scene of Shakespere's Romeo and Juliet, in an Arabic-opera version, *"Ah, Juliet, wa ma háza il seekoot?"* (Oh, Juliet, what is this silence.) *Shaikh Salámeh's* beautiful powerful voice and musical genius are revealed on this ancient record.

A little music was available publicly in some cafés, mostly by means of phonograph records. The "Shahh-bandar," a large café on what was then the outskirts of the city — it has since been absorbed by the exploding city — featured vocalists and a live musical ensemble. Those who could afford it thronged this green oasis in a city denuded of trees (cut down for fuel during World War I, and never replanted). On a pleasant evening, one of the ḥohsh residents, usually among those in humbler circumstances, would produce a *ᶜood,* a lute, to be joined by neighbors in his courtyard, and often by those of a adjoining ḥohsh, who would enjoy and contribute to the quiet entertainment.

Card-playing was endemic among rich and poor . . . most popular games were poker and solo (solo whist). As I witnessed as a visitor to Aleppo when a quite young man, the wives of the well-to-do met with their friends late mornings, and again in the afternoon for card games. In the evenings they went visiting with their husband for card playing. Almost sixty years later the pattern remained the same. A recently arrived refugee from Aleppo relates to us in an oral biography, that "as soon as the

housewife has thrown together the evening meal, by 11 o'clock she was out to visit and to play cards."

Prior to the introduction and popularity of moving-pictures, a form of "theater-going" was attendance at a performance of *Karragos (Karakoz) and ᶜAiwaaz, and* a form of comic shadow-play, with marionettes seen through a back-lighted white curtain. Another common "amusement" was called *ᶜAjay-ban Gharayban.* This was a large box on wheels, which circulated through the streets of the city. It had three peep-holes through which the patron could see illuminated scenes of foreign countries, newspaper photographs of unfamiliar views. "Come see men riding through the air" — airplanes, or else, "Approach and view our great Sultan sitting on his golden throne," etc. The viewing cost a copper or two.

As was previously noted cultural events, lectures and concerts of Western Art and music and the like, were unknown to Syrian Jews and probably to the Muslim populace, as well; likely too, to the Christians. Activity in the purely Christian Quarter, the *Jdaydeh,* etc., was largely unknown to most Jewish and Muslim residents.

Aleppo is set on the high plain, with low humidity. Thus, walking with an uncovered head under the summer sun is known to cause sun-stroke; while, sitting in the shade of a tree (or under the roofed *souks*), is a delightful, cool experience. Picnicking in the *basateen,* the orchards, at the outskirts of Aleppo, is available to all with the payment of a very small fee; which includes apricots, figs, and other fruits in abundance, as well. Mulberries (*toot,* cultivated for the ancient silk manufacture), pistachio nuts, walnuts (so very sweet and tender when plucked off the trees), all available free to the picnickers. Springtime and autumn were the best seasons. On a rare cloudy day in the summer, Aleppo residents would exclaim,"What a beautiful day for a *bistan* party!"

Frequent Muslim religious celebrations would see the city festooned with lights; streets were crowded with the celebrants commemorating some Islamic saint. Like street festivals everywhere, there were foodstuffs to be bought, and entertainment, jugglers and acrobats performing. One such

commemoration I remember as a boy, was in honor of Ḥásan and Ḥusain, martyred grandsons of the Prophet, successive caliphs (?) murdered by their enemies. Free drinks were offered, "ᶜala roḥh Ḥásan wa Ḥusain," for the soul of Ḥásan and Ḥusain. The delicious *soos,* licorice drink, free ,and freely imbibed, caused one six year old child a night of almost intolerable (and unforgettable) stomach ache.

Aleppo's Surrounding Towns

Some Jews dwelt in small towns within a radius of perhaps 50 to 200 miles of Aleppo: Tedef, Killez, ᶜAintab, Antakeh (Antioch), Urfa, and Dyarbakr which are in not too distant southern Turkey. Each had a few hundred families, who considered themselves an out-post of Aleppo Jewry. They traded with Aleppo, it was the source of their merchandise, and looked to it as their religious capital; they were spiritual "settlers". Difficult religious questions were submitted to Aleppo's *ḥakhameem.* They spoke Aleppo-Jewish Arabic among themselves, Turkish with the Muslims and Christians.

Oral histories which appear later reveal small numbers of Aleppoans who had originated in other Sepharadic centers such as Istanbul/Stamboul, Egypt, Rhodes, North Africa, etc. A number of Aleppoan family-names suggest Moroccan origin: Rabeeᶜh, Zaᶜfarani, Maleḥ and others.

The presence of Ashkenazi residents in Ḥálab was somehow acknowledged, by the derogatory term applied to them — "shlecht-iyeh"(German—Yiddish for "dirty"?), although Ashkenazeem were very few in numbers and were largely unknown to the masses of native Jews. Aleppo's rabbinic scholars were familiar with some Ashkenazi religious works, which were highly regarded. They had infrequently received Ashkenazi rabbinic visitors, who had written later with great commendation of their scholarly hosts.

Later Residences

In the earlier period of life, within the confines of the no-longer visible city-walls, some of the well-to-do had elegant

large homes, private ḥohsh with carved stone figures on the walls of the courtyards, etc. (Illustrated by photographs in *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush*). The homes of some Christians and Muslims were indeed even more elegant, some with beautifully painted walls and ceilings. But every one had drab walls facing the streets. This was to keep away envy, *il ᶜehyn* (the "eye," the evil eye), and the attention of the tax-collecting authorities. Homes of rich Jews in Damascus far exceeded the beauty of co-religionists' ḥohsh in Aleppo. They too had drab exteriors and for the same reasons.

Jews in Damascus were more given to show their means, particularly through the stylishness of attire and adornment of their wives. A popular apocryphal story is told of a visit of a Rothschild to the Jewish community of Damascus. Elaborate receptions were held for him, at which the ladies showed off their beautiful gowns and their magnificent jewelry. Jews in the Orient were accustomed to having their foreign visitors make substantial contributions to the city's needy, as they were about to depart. When it was hinted to Rothschild to make such a contribution, the storyteller relates, Rothschild purportedly said: that in view of the wealth he saw among the Damascenes it was more fitting that *they* make a contribution to *him.*

When Aleppoan Jews moved later to the Djamiliyeh area, their homes were no longer inner-courtyard residences; these were usually two-family buildings. The homes of some continued to be large and commodious. Since the wealthy had residences with huge *salons,* drawing rooms which could sometimes accommodate 100 to 150 guests or more, wedding ceremonies and receptions were occasionally held there. One informant relates that when a relative contemplated the wedding of his son he approached our informant's father inquiring as to the availability of his large *salon.* The gentleman was reluctant to undertake the trouble and inconvenience of the festivity, but with customary Oriental courtesy, felt compelled to say, "Of course, dear cousin, with the greatest pleasure."

Healing and Superstitions

Except for the well-to-do and the middle class, most of the

sick consulted homeopaths, herbalists — untrained healers. The few existing physicians were resorted to only in the case of the gravest illnesses by those without much means. Jewish hospitals were non-existent, beds were unavailable, except at *Sedaqa u Marpeh,* described below.

Muslim belief in *jin-niyeh,* "genii," which transferred to ignorant Jews as well, is illustrated in the following story from the annals of my family 'recollections'. A respectable but poor Jewish woman, a some-time midwife, was frequently in the domestic employ of a wealthy 'Franj' Signora. She was her intimate and knew among other things that the Signora owned a beautiful cashmere shawl, which was stored at the bottom of a large chest. One dark night there was a knock on the door of the midwife's home in the lowly *Ḥarrit-il-Yahood,* the Jewish Quarter. Two unknown men were at the door, the husband and brother of a woman in labor. Would she please come with them immediately? She did so, and helped with the successful delivery. While in the house she noted with alarm that the bare feet of some of the residents were *webbed* — an unmistakable indication that they were not the feet of humans, but those of *jin-ni-yeh,* genii, under-world creatures! Curiously too, there on a table was a cashmere shawl strikingly similar to that of the Signora. With that, while her hands were still wet with blood, unnoticed she managed to place her palm on the shawl. With the payment of a small sum for her services, she was escorted to her home, with many thanks. Early the next day she made her way to the Signora and asked to see the cashmere shawl. "Why this curious request?" Nevertheless the shawl was produced — to reveal a red palm mark!

Many among the poor and less educated Jews sought out the blessings of "saintly rabbis" and were fervent believers in the power of (kabbalistic) talismans and amulets to ward off evil. Some shared Muslim superstitions, beliefs in the existence of under-world spirits, *jin-ni-yeh* and their ability to harm humans; they had to be "propitiated." Sometimes they resorted to Muslim *shaikhs* for fortune telling and "cures." Jews (and Muslims) greatly revered saintly rabbis and visited their graves to pray for their help. Many such rabbis are buried in the "Cave of the Just," *Meḥᶜa-raht ha-sadi-(q)'eem,* near the gates

of the Great Synagogue in Aleppo, and in the *Johbar* and other similar sacred locations in Damascus. Nor is it only the ignorant who maintain such views. In a conversation with a very pious resident of Aleppo-in-Flatbush inquiries were made about business conditions among Syrians in Mexico where he had previously resided and which he visits frequently. The Syrians there, he related, blame de la Madrid, the current President of the Mexican Republic for the hard times the country is undergoing; *"adamo boom"*, his 'luck' is bad. Never mind the world-wide slump in the price of oil, the natural phenomenon of devastating earthquakes, world-wide economic conditions, etc., de la Madrid — *"adamo boom!"*

Some of the poor availed themselves of the very skillful Dr. Pepper, a Scottish missionary doctor, "Ḥakeem il Inglizi," the English doctor. He treated the poor for little money, or without charge when they attended a weekly sermon that he gave. Alas for the excitable and well-meaning Dr. Pepper, he is not known to have converted a single Jew in the many years of his missionary efforts in Aleppo. He had a popular private practice as well and treated my eyes in 1914-1915 — before the remaining members of my family joined my father and brothers in "Amerika" — in anticipation of the dreaded trachoma eye examination at Ellis Island. Fortunately, my eye infection had not been grave; the presence of trachoma a highly communicable disease, would have resulted in deportation.

Community Organizations

The community had several social institutions in addition to the *kteh-teeb*, the Hebrew Schools. *Móhar u-Mattán* was concerned with facilitating marriages for the poor. A few gold pounds were made available to a poor couple, to permit them to buy the minimum household needs, two mattresses (for religious consideration), a chest, a few dishes and kitchenware. Without the means to buy these articles, marriages could be delayed indefinitely. *Sedaqá u-Marpéh*, "Charity and Healing," looked after the needy sick. It maintained a clinic and a couple of 'hospital' beds, the part-time cooperation of a trained doctor, as well as a drug dispensary. (An oral informant touchingly

relates later the difficulties of poor patrons.) *Mattán ba Seter* was a fund which assisted the genteel poor who would not openly accept charity. A large Fund saw to the needs of the many poor families who were regularly alloted small sums to keep them from starving. A pittance was doled out, too, to dozens of poor rabbis, to allow them adequate Sabbath meals.

There were many orphan children, numerous offspring of impoverished, undernourished parents who died young; outbreaks of tuberculosis or cholera, plague, typhus or diphtheria, were common in some earlier years. A sizeable orphanage was maintained, whose support was made barely adequate by appeals to Syrians living in New York, Manchester, Egypt and Buenos Aires. "Joe" Duek, a successful businessman, retired early to devote his time and efforts to the needs of "his" orphans. Every Jewish visitor to Aleppo was called upon, welcomed by Duek, insisting on a visit to the orphanage with the expectation of impressing the individual and hoping for a generous measure of support. A visitor to Aleppo later relates to us the assemblage of the orphanage's school children in honor of the "Distinguished Visitor," with a speech by a bright student extolling the guest and demonstrating the needs of the institution. The orphanage had a brass band which also performed for the visitor. The orphanage school, in addition to religious studies, taught the boys some crafts at which they could hope to earn a living; girls were taught sewing, embroidery, and household routines, to permit them to earn some means of surviving. Duek's daughter Rachél was saintly in her efforts and solicitude for the orphans and the poor. (After marrying, and settling in Sao Paolo, Brazil, to beget two sons and daughters, she has since died in Jerusalem.)

Poverty, making for undernourishment and disease, is centuries old in the Near and Middle East. The cities suffered from not infrequent droughts which drastically reduced crop yields. In such years, bread, the mainstay of large numbers of the country's inhabitants, was difficult to obtain, particularly in the towns. Even when natural droughts did not take place, artificial ones induced by manipulation of grain stocks by large-scale speculators, some of them Jewish, severely reduced the availability of basic foods. The maintenance of large numbers of

Jewish families on the dole, the community's charity, was common and continuing. Subservience to employers was critical for those who had work, the possible loss of a position was a constant *threat to survival.*

A few of the wealthy merchants and bankers who headed the welfare institutions were untiring workers in the community and were leading donors to charity. Some however, contributed *only minimally* in relation to their considerable fortunes, always discreetly held. To cover constant deficits the community committee resorted to — letter-writing. They sent urgent appeals for money to the recently-arrived immigrants overseas. Since the struggling immigrants had known dire need while in Damascus and Aleppo, they responded with self-sacrificing generosity.

Jewish Commerce and the Souks

Aleppo's merchants, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian, are traditionally serious-minded men, in a city which lacks the heady, irresponsible effervescence of Damascus. Ḥálab had less politics and less fanaticism. The people, like the barren slopes that surround the town, have a certain restraint, a determination which is quite unlike the spirit of most Arabs. Here is the geographic latitude where near-by Turkey and the rough dialects of the Turkish hinterland of Asia Minor are first spoken. While Damascus is the town of the "Arab," Aleppo is the city of the merchant. It is the product of a working economy — which only 'yesterday' began to create new fortunes, as when Jacques Le Coeur came to Ḥálab on a commercial mission in the *fifteenth century.* Withal the inhabitants of the city are civil, courteous, and friendly, while at the same time serious — if not somber — as they carry on their affairs in the *khans* and *souks.*

A large part of trade and commerce was dominated by the Jews of Aleppo. A small number were private bankers, called *sir-eh-feen,* 'changers', money-changers (sar-raf, sing.). In a country and city where its residents had no faith in paper-money — their confidence was in *dahab-at* — gold pieces!. Some of their trade in silver and gold pieces was international in

scope. Their activity and that of the many Jewish merchants dealing in textiles and a variety of other important commodities permitted them the acquisition of impressive fortunes, very discreetly held, and most 'modestly' spent.

The merchants of Aleppo carry on their activities in the *khans* and *souks*. A khan is a caravanserai (a "palace," a *serai-a,* for caravans). A souk is a trading street or lane, in some countries referred to as a "bazaar." But not all souks are alike. Those who visited Jerusalem and its souk ("shouk," in Hebrew) can little imagine the size and scope of Aleppo's souks. The latter are roofed, and constitute a *sizeable "town" extending for many miles*; souks which are deemed more important than those of Damascus and Cairo. Off the principal souks are found the many khans. In several of them our Jewish merchants carried on their trade, principally in the huge Khan il Gimrog — "the Customhouse Khan" and the vast Khan il Qassabiyeh — the "Khan of the Gold Threads." There they maintained their offices, attached to which were their sizeable warehouses. The khans are square in shape, around which the merchants have their businesses. Khan il Gimrog, for one, houses more than forty-five such enterprises (see the to-scale diagram in *Magic Carpet*). Some of the khans have spacious apartments above them, no longer occupied as they had been by the Gentlemen Traders from Holland, France, Italy and England of the 16th to the 19th centuries. Few Jews lived above khans and in recent years all moved to the Djamiliyeh district from the Saḥa, the Illeh, Baḥsita, Ḥarrit-il-Yahood, inner-city quarters where the Jews had lived for countless centuries. It is particularly these souks and khans, separate from the shops and boulevards of the modern city, that retain the atmosphere and contrasts of a long-ago world. Each craft, in traditional fashion, is established in its own "street" and thus the visitor progresses from the leather workers to the smiths, to the merchants of silks and cotton cloths, or to the souks which sell spices, with their curious haunting fragrances. Aleppo has more than 150 *hammams*, 'Turkish baths', whose beauty and luxuriousness were highly praised, by European writers who had visited them as well as by visiting Orientals who praised them to the sky. The ancient souk areas have now been declared Historical National

Monuments. "Even a nail may not be driven in without official permission" [to this writer's satisfaction].

Jewish Schools

In Aleppo as in Damascus, in the unhurried and traditional life of old, few influences of the Age of Enlightenment had penetrated or were available to the people of the cities and to the Jewish population. Exceptions were the relatively small but important number of Jews who were able to attend the schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle.* With the self-esteem and self-satisfaction with which they lived, Jews (and Muslims), lacked the quest and thirst for secular education, which characterized the Jews of Europe. Jewish education, except for Alliance students, was in the *ktehteeb* (*kittáb,* sing.) primitive elementary Hebrew schools, for boys. When boys "graduated" at about age thirteen "they went down to the *souk*" to seek gainful work. Children of families with some means remained in the Alliance until they achieved 'senior' graduation at ages 17 to 20 with a "Bacho" (a baccalaureate diploma, 'of sorts'), after having achieved the earlier "Brevet" certificate.

Traditional early Jewish schooling taught the male children prayers, and the Bible — which was taught in Hebrew of course, but with some chapters memory-instilled in formal (archaic-classical) Arabic translation, very likely the translation of Saᶜadia Ha-Goan, achieved almost one thousand years ago. The boys became familiar with *ᶜAin Yaᶜacob,* a simple recounting of rabbinic *aggadah* (parables, legends), and other similar works. Most students, with their bar mizva, went out to seek work; but children of wealthy parents, if not at the Alliance school, continued their studies, going on to instructions in the Talmud and other rabbinic works, in *batteh midrash,* halls of study. They attended there for a few years, before going on to the serious business of gaining money, in order to permit them to marry and to establish their own families. Newlyweds without much means lived with "his" or "her" parents, depending on their relative means, for a few years. A few wealthy men with large homes maintained several married sons and their families in a patriarchal pattern, as a truly "extended family."

In addition to study of religious texts in the *kittáb*, the traditional Hebrew elementary school, an hour or so every other day was devoted to learning to read and write Arabic and write the customary cursive Hebrew Script known as *nus'alam* ('half a pen') somewhat similar to Rashi script. This is an medieval form of the written Hebrew coming down to us in the Cairo Geniza fragments of the 10th to 14th century. The men of ancient Cairo, like present-day Jews in Aleppo and Damascus, used the Hebrew script to write letters whose texts were often in Arabic. The students, particularly those whose learning years were limited by the need to work, left the *kittáb* without much ability to write either Hebrew or Arabic — but, were of course, able to read Hebrew *printed* texts.

The overwhelming majority of both Jews and Muslims — particularly the latter, had no mastery of writing, although every Jewish child submitted to some schooling with the consequent ability to read (Hebrew), and perhaps to read and write some Arabic. Limited writing lessons introduced into "senior" classes in the *kittáb* left the boy little time to master writing before he left school at age thirteen. So few in the whole of the population had mastered the ability to write that an Arabic rhymed proverb, described its value:

Il khitt, ᶜand if fa-(q)'eer, maal
ᶜand il akahbehr, jamaal

(Writing, for the poor is a source of wealth,
for the 'notables' a source of grace)

Games which some of these children may have played? They were much like those in the United States: marbles, tops, leap-frog, hide and seek — which they called "peep"(!), some 'foot-ball' (soccer), and cycling among those with well-to-do parents. One oral history informant (closely questioned), reluctantly (obligingly?) included a hand-held ball game, *"tahb-u-dic"*. I have no recollection of this game as a boy, nor was there mention of it in my two visits to Syria as an adult. It was popular in 'olden-times' and was fully described in Dr. Russell's book published in 1756.

The Alliance Israélite Universelle and other Schools

Alliance Israélite students did acquire the ability to write French, some Arabic and Hebrew. They received a Western style education which included a few hours every week of Hebrew prayers and some Biblical texts. Very religious parents provided private tutors for additional religious studies. Otherwise, most Alliance education was in French. Advanced students who deviated by speaking any Arabic in the school were made to pay a small fine for infractions; each classroom had a *rapporteur,* monitor, responsible to report such backsliding. The aim of the Alliance Israélite schools, — established by French Jews in the 1860's — was to bring the Jews of the Near and Middle East into the modern 19th, and 20th centuries. Students were given *intensive instructions,* in higher grades in what is the equivalent of American junior-colleges, with an emphasis on French culture — language and literature.

The Paris-based Alliance had its European-trained Sepharadi Jewish teachers. "Sophisticated" and "not very religious," they were looked at with some suspicion by the ultra Orthodox. "They are Masons.," tantamount to "heretics." Most teachers at the Alliance schools everywhere were thoroughly secular. They had little regard for the religious element, although they were careful in Aleppo not to flout the orthodoxy of the community. In Morocco under total French rule — contrasted with the traditional society of Aleppo — many graduates of the Alliance schools identified themselves with the widespread secular European culture, and many there parted from the traditions and customs of their fathers. Despite some mild disapproval on the part of some unsophisticated Aleppo rabbinics, parents continued to send their children to the Alliance. Commercial advancement was impossible without the education the Alliance Israélite was able to provide — in a community of merchants.

The brightest Alliance graduates were offered tuition-free advanced study in the Alliance schools in and near Paris. (The school for young women which I visited in 1933 was in

Versailles.) These were teacher-training schools, which required graduates to take teaching posts for a period of several years at the discretion of the Alliance in any Near/Middle East country where the Alliance had schools.

Not enough can be said, or is acknowledged, of the benefactions that the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools brought to the Jews of the whole of the Near and Middle East, Turkey and Greece, (and some Balkan countries), where schools for native Jews were established. This blessing is taken for granted, even by many who gained immeasurably by attending. The Aleppo school was established in 1869 for boys, a school for girls (!) was instituted few years later. As we see, not all Jewish children were fortunate enough to study there; some for only a few years, others until they graduated with a *Brevet*, or later, a *Bachot*. The lives and careers of Alliance students were affected, to benefit them for many years, in the Near East, and when many went to distant lands and new endeavors.

In later years some Jewish families eager for more intensive education for their male children enrolled them in the superior school operated by the monks, the *"Fréres"*; girls; at the convent schools of the *"Soeurs,"* the Sisters — the nuns. Jewish and (the fewer) Muslim students there were excused from attendance at Mass and from classes in Christian theology. Attendance at Catholic schools was the rule for many, if not most Jewish families in Egypt. Cairo and Alexandria were cosmopolitan and strict religious observance among Jews was limited to a minority. Very few Jewish students there with a *Syrian background* converted to Catholicism, or married non-Jews. In Aleppo, *no* Jewish children were ever known to have converted to Christianity. A recently-arrived reliable informant stated that in the late 1930's and early 1940's, 20 percent of Jewish families had given their children such Catholic school education — families which were regarded as of 'normal' Jewish observance.

With the installation of French Mandatory rule in 1922, the French authorities had established the *Mission Lycée, the Laique*, the secular school of high caliber. The curriculum began where the Alliance *"bachot"* ended. Graduation from the Laique

school enabled students to qualify for college or university education in Beirut or in Paris, for such as wished to pursue a career in law, medicine, or other professions. A few Jewish Laique graduates did so, to become lawyers and physicians. They became known, as for example, *Maitre* Azrak, Master of Law Azrak, and one or two others. They later became Deputies to the Syrian parliament in Beirut, as had Raḥmo Neḥmad much earlier. Neḥmad, a skilled and subtle individual was the Jewish community head for several decades. (Highly successful in commerce "Raḥmo Effendi" was repeatedly reported to be worth more than a million gold pounds — *of that era*, in the 1930's, when I made my trips to Aleppo.)

A-political Jewry

Jews in Syria and in most other Ottoman countries were entirely a-political. They could not participate in partisan politics because of the delicacy of their situation in a Muslim world. Content to lead their separate community life without molestation, they were grateful for the privilege of being left to live in peace. Thus they did not have the urge of fervent Zionism, like the oppressed Jews in Czarist countries. As I witnessed in a 1933 visit to Aleppo, the Jewish community leaders were required by the Muslim authorities to publicly "disavow any sympathy with Zionism." Distasteful, but they acquiesced. It was ony in the mid-to-late 1930's that Zionism, active pro-Palestinian Jewish sentiment began to grow in Aleppo — although not to flourish. Zionist-influenced sports and cultural activities on a small scale began then, manifested by the "Maccabi Football (soccer) Club" and small Zionist discussion groups. Jewish recruiters from Palestine visited Aleppo in the late 1930's and early 1940's; they influenced a small number of young people to move to the Holy Land — *Eres Yisraél*. The majority, however, were satisfied to continue their accustomed pattern of life, although they became increasingly uneasy. (Some Aleppoans and Damascenes who later located in Egypt and Lebanon tell us in their oral memoirs of bustling but discreet Zionist interest and activity there.)

Beginning Migrations

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, some Aleppoan and Damascene Jews migrated to Egypt seeking better economic opportunities. Others, merchants, had gone to Manchester, England to represent their partnerships and family enterprises which had been importing English cotton goods through commission merchants. The earliest such Aleppo merchant to travel to Manchester was Abraham Btesh (born 1814), originally from Killez — a "satellite" city of Aleppo. The *London Drapers Record* of November 1908 noted his death at age 94; and that his first visit to England had been in 1843. This journal added that "two sons and three married daughters" were residents of Manchester, "the sons operating their business as M.A. Btesh and Co." Like the earlier Italian and other "Franj" immigrants to Aleppo, these travelers to Manchester sought to purchase textiles in England at first hand, and stayed in Manchester to establish a small model of today's Flatbush community. A British consular dispatch to London dated December 31, 1874 stated: " . . . report that there are 30 firms in Manchester established by Native Jews of Aleppo." (Foreign Office Document 195/302).

Among the large number of Aleppoan families in Manchester — a cross section of Ḥálab's enterprising textile importers — we find Abadi, Anzarut, Bigio, Btesh, Cattan, Dwek, Picciotto, Shalóm, Silvera, Sutton,Tabboush, Taweel, and many more. Other Sepharadeem, from Egypt, Morocco, Corfu, Baghdád and Turkey, lived alongside the Syrians. All were well-to-do, none in the working class. Their children studied in the universities — and became alienated from the culture that their parents perpetuated. Most second generation offspring became thoroughly assimilated later, and many intermarried. They migrated to South America and elsewhere where their future appeared to offer a more glowing prospect than that of declining England.

Toward the end of the 19th century, a few intrepid pioneers set out from Syria, seeking the opportunity to earn

enough money to provide them with a small capital, and to return to their native cities. The incentive for travel were World Fairs, the Expositions in Paris in 1889 and the Columbian Exposition in 1893. At the end of the Expositions, alas, none had made their fortune. Some returned to their native city; others stayed on waiting for the *next* Fair — the Pan American Exposition of 1901 in Buffalo, or the St. Louis World's Exposition of 1903. Except for one individual, none had settled in the United States before 1903, when several Aleppo and Damascus Jews decided to stay and make their home in New York. Ezra Sitt was an enterprising, dapper young man employed in Aleppo's city treasury department. For whatever the reason, he left Aleppo abruptly to make his way to Manchester, and soon after, in 1892 to settle in New York. Sitt came with some means, worldly in his outlook. We will read more about him in the oral testimony of one of his two sons, the first offspring of a Jewish Syrian to be born in the United States.

The World Fair merchants were among the few destitute Aleppoans and Damascene Jews with a pioneering spirit, who had yielded to the need to go out to a new world in order to improve their economic standing. *Upward mobility was virtually impossible in the static society of the Near East. Those with wealth continued in their prosperity, the poor had no means ever of substantially improving their lot.*

The Nucleus of Mass Migration

Dire need in many Jewish families in Syria was aggravated by the several economic crises, worldwide depressions which affected Aleppo's commerce as well. 1903 saw such slack in trade, to be repeated in 1907. Commercial houses went bankrupt or were compelled to discharge employees — who were left destitute, with no income or the means to secure food. Having heard of the few Jews who had migrated to the Americas, pioneers who wrote back reporting their ability to work and earn in New York, Mexico, and Buenos Aires, an emigration trend, a small tide set in, inducing men with hungry homes to leave their cherished families and friends and the

accustomed orderly Jewish life, to seek a livelihood elsewhere. Most of them left with little more than the clothing on their backs to go to distant and strange lands where they arrived like deaf-mutes, unable to speak the new languages, to understand and to be understood. Since an alternative to the helpless misery of their life in Aleppo and Damascus presented itself, they had seized it, those with courage enough to embark on the unknown. Still another factor encouraged emigration.

Conscription

The "Young Turks" movement of army officers had forced the abdication in 1908 of the despot Sultan ᶜAbd Il-Ḥamid II, who had clung to the politics of an earlier and antiquated era. Turkey was humiliated by defeats in several small wars, because of the archaic and thoroughly corrupt official government structure. With the overthrow of ᶜAbd il-Ḥamid the Army sought greater strength — and large numbers of soldiers. This was a calamity for Jews under Ottoman rule. Under the old regime Jews and other minorities were "not desired" to mingle with the Muslim soldiers; with the payment of a *f'kehk*, a "release," a small tax, non-Muslims were considered to have made a substitute contribution. The need for a new and larger army ended this exemption; every able bodied 'young' man was made subject to conscription. A calamity indeed. As soon as conscription appeared imminent, Jewish men quietly disappeared, to make their way to a new and strange land. As we will read later in the oral testimony of his daughter, the pious Jewish *mukhtar* Seleem Sasson, the official local government representative in the Jewish areas, was responsible to help the military recruiters round up those selected to serve in the Army. These Muslim recruiters were naive, illiterate, and ill-paid individuals. When they came to Sasson with their lists he shouted at the top of his voice, "Yes, 'Shalom Gindi, Abraham Azar' (etc., etc.), how can I produce them *instantly*?" This information was immediately passed on to the "nominated" by passers-by; furtively, they quickly made their way to Beirut where they became "lost," or promptly boarded a ship to "Amerika." While not as drastic as the forced-recruitment of

Jewish twelve-year old boys into the Czarist army for 25 years, it was equally dreaded and equally avoided if ever possible.

Early Immigrants

Encouraged by the reports from New York from the early immigrants who were sending money to their impoverished families, many more made their way to New York's Lower East Side. Buenos Aires, Mexico, and New York were equally known in Damascus and Aleppo as the "goal" for those compelled to emigrate. (Some who were denied entry at Ellis Island also turned to Argentina or to Mexico.) The years 1908-1913 saw the nucleus of a Syrian community in Mexico as well as in Buenos Aires and New York. Life in the Latin American countries must have been somewhat less stressful than in New York. There the Jewish immigrants, though they knew no Spanish when they landed, were in the midst of an undeveloped country with an ill-educated populace. Knowledge of some French learned at the Alliance helped in learning Spanish. They did not meet with the handicaps of New York, a huge modern city with a vast number of Yiddish-speaking co-religionists who had become firmly established, if not yet integrated.

Chapter Five

Early Settlement in New York

THE Syrian immigrants on the Lower East Side were at the bottom of the social and economic heap, huddling together defensively against the strangeness of the environment, and *their nonacceptance.* (Vestiges of their nonacceptance were still evident in the attack in the 1970's on the dedicated Sepharadi president of the Yeshiva of Flatbush High School [Ashkenazic], "An Arab!"). The Syrian immigrants met with lack of understanding, if not hostility, because of their unfamiliar culture and inability to communicate. This inhospitable climate contrasted with their memories of the peaceful and pleasant, self-contained Jewish life in Aleppo and Damascus and served to draw them together even more closely.

Some of these poor who emigrated to New York, Buenos Aires, or Mexico, ultimately achieved some small financial success — others, significant wealth. The striking, dramatic contrast between the poor of Syria and the poor who had emigrated is illustrated in an oral biography. A member of the Toubal family which had emigrated early to Argentina returned to visit Ḥálab, in 1930-31. Walking through the Jewish Quarter he heard two sidewalk 'merchants' in conversation, with their entire stock offered to the public on small boxes. Said the seller with a basket of eggs, to his fellow: "Do you see that man, (Toubal) he has ten million dollars!" Toubal jostled the basket of eggs, which fell, and smashed the stock. "Sir," said the

devastated egg-seller," you've smashed my eggs!" "I am very sorry. How many eggs were there?" "I don't know!" replied the ruined merchant. "Well," Toubal said, "you don't know how many eggs you had, but you know how much money I have?" In fact, however, the emigré Toubal family may well have possessed the "ten million dollars," or more, according to common belief. Did he recompense the egg-merchant? The story does not tell. Interestingly, this Toubal's father (or grandfather?) had been, himself, an egg merchant on the streets of Aleppo! (Freudian?)

The handicaps under which the early Syrian immigrants to New York struggled were manifold. They could not communicate with their Ashkenazi co-religionists since they spoke no Yiddish and little more English. Even their Hebrew prayers were mutually unintelligible; they were pronounced very differently by Sepharadeem and those from Eastern Europe. The Near Eastern Jews suffered also with the unfamiliar cuisine of the Ashkenazeem, with its emphasis on cabbage, preserved fish in its many forms, and other unfamiliar Slavic dishes. They led a Spartan, miserable life as boarders in crowded Ashkenazi homes. In the early days of their life on the Lower East Side there were few Syrian *families*, to whose homes they were infrequently invited to spend a Sabbath and to partake of their accustomed food. This situation was somewhat relieved by the establishment in 1910-1911, of a Jewish Syrian restaurant. It was not easily accessible to many, the Syrian "merchants" wandering around the city as peddlers. With the later arrival of their wives and families, the now-happy immigrants coalesced as a viable community and achieved small measures of prosperity. Soon after World War I many had moved to Williamsburg across the East River from the Lower East Side. After a few years there amost all then moved to Bensonhurst where many bought homes and developed a structured community. (Note: *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* contains considerable details of early Syrian New York life.)

Commercial Progress

From the early peddling days on the Lower East Side the

Syrians went on to retail stores selling merchandise somewhat similar to what they had offered door-to-door. When the later vogue for fancy embroidered linens and handkerchiefs subsided, their retailing turned to general-merchandise, bargain-store, discount store operations. A few began to specialize in apparel, in electronics, and gift items, some in large stores which courted the patronage of tourists. Others, less visible, had entered into the wholesale importation of articles similar to those of the retail establishments of their fellow Syrians. Wholesale activity was much sought after — but required substantial capital. It freed the merchant from violating Sabbath laws though the economic necessity of opening his store on Saturdays, the best day for shoppers.

There is considerable success in the retail fields, in which able operators repeat the pattern by opening chains of similar stores. [Now their discount stores are found throughout New York City for the greater part — and in the large cities across the country.] They require a minimum of fixtures — some shelves and many tables covering the floor. Every article is price-marked making for a self-service operation, and so they require small numbers of employees. Managers are usually fellow-Orientals and thus known to the owners, ensuring reliability. Many of the business enterprises are family operated. What is more practical than to have relatives as associates? As is possible they will be brothers, sons, and some in-laws; they are reliable and zealous. If relatives are not available, Syrian merchants favor the employment of others from the community. They know them, their capacities and their devotion to succeeding in their work, since they too aspire to an ultimate standing of importance in the economic (and social) world. After a few years of experience as store manager, the employee leaves to open his own business. Equally, and perhaps even more successful are the wholesalers, many of them importers of textiles, wearing apparel, electronics and other items for the Far East.

Williamsburg residence which followed East Side life was a matter of only a few years, when somehow a more attractive and less densely populated area in Brooklyn was discovered! Soon all moved to establish themselves in Bensonhurst.

Bensonhurst

In the period of Syrian-Jewish life in Bensonhurst (1920's, 1930's) — where the community had first come into firm cohesion, there was little other than religion-connected organizational life. The Magen David Synagogue on 67th Street was the Aleppoan center. Apart from the small *Aḥi Ezer* synagogue which served the "Shaw-am" — the Damascenes, soon there were two other small congregations founded and maintained by wealthy individuals, that of Shaul Betesh on 64th Street and the synagogue/*bet midrash* established by Abraham David Sutton — the latter, a private family chapel in effect, not unlike similar houses of private worship in the homes of some Aleppoans and Damascenes in Syria. Why Shaul Betesh established his own synagogue is not clear. As to the Sutton *knees* (synagogue), thereby hangs a revealing story.

At the beginning of the 1920's the community was still largely composed of the recently poor of Aleppo. They felt greatly honored by the visit of the former Ḥakham Báshi of Aleppo, the recent Chief Rabbi, Ḥizkiya Shabbetai. Most congregants knew only his exalted office and nothing of his contentious, egotistical character, during his period as the Constantinople-appointed Chief Rabbi. A native of Greece or Turkey, he had been appointed many years earlier by the Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire — with the tacit consent of the Aleppo community committee. With the defeat of Turkey in 1918, the Chief Rabbinate as it had been constituted appears to have dissolved; no longer a government-imposed rabbi, Shabbetai was soon "released." Ḥakham Ḥizkiya came to New York in 1920-1922 to the Magen David Congregation, and was soon seeking to exert his former authority, and "creating dissension in this Aleppoan community," as some have related.

Alexis de Tocqueville the French sociologist's observations in 1827 on his extensive travel in the United States, provide a clue to understanding an unprecedented event in Bensonhurst — the expulsion of a synagogue member. De Tocqueville wrote, "In the United States . . . men are seen on a greater equality, in point of fortune and intellect. There is a passion for equality

which excites all men to wish to be powerful and honored . . . a *taste for equality which impels the weak to lower the powerful to their own level . . . . Whatever transcends their own limits appears to be an obstacle to their desire, and there is no kind of superiority, however legitimate it may be, which is not irksome in their sight.*" [Italics added] In New York, as the immigrants who had been very poor in Aleppo began to rise from poverty they began to feel the spirit of "equality" as had the early enfranchised citizens in the young United States. "*I am as good as anybody!*" was their attitude (reported by Mrs. Fanny Trollope, another visitor of the early period, circa 1830). In Bensonhurst some of the less educated and least informed often raised their voices loudly and insistently in the synagogues, merely to assert their new "equality." In Aleppo they had not had the remotest approach to the Ḥakham Bashi. Now they were his hosts, "as good as anybody," and thus they stood forth as champions of the Grand Rabbi in Abraham David Sutton's dispute with the former Ḥakham Báshi. Sutton declared to him "you sought to destroy order in Aleppo and now you seek to sow dissension here!" In his Aleppo years, Sutton had been prominent in the community's leadership and thus was familiar with Ḥizkiya's shortcomings and "trouble-making." Sutton (1865-1938), an importer of chemicals in Aleppo, had twice suffered severely from major worldwide economic depressions, in 1903 and 1907. Soon after (1910), he had left for America. For the recently lowly immigrants in Bensonhurst, the former Chief Rabbi's visit was of historic importance; they felt gloriously honored. "How dare Abraham Sutton dispute with this lofty individual?" Without any public discussion Sutton's *koracha,* the bag containing his *tallit* and *tephileen* was sent home to him; he had been expelled. Awesome regard for the Ḥahkam Bashi on the part of those recently in the lower ranges of the Aleppo's economic life, had brought about Sutton's "disgrace."

In that period Sutton was perhaps the most economically successful in the community, documented as the foremost philanthropist; and recognized as an outstanding Talmudic and rabbinic scholar. Without hesitation, he purchased a private house one block from Magen David Synagogue and converted

it into a small synagogue, open to all. Its worshipers were largely relatives and close friends, a family chapel in effect. Soon after, on a visit to the Near East he purchased in Damascus an important library of religious texts, many in manuscript form, which were to be used in the daily study-sessions of the scholars of the community in his *bet midrash.* After his death some fifteen years later the synagogue was dismantled. Duplicate copies of books were sold, with the proceeds going to religious institutions in the Near East; a partial completion of a full circle. The bulk of the library was placed for safekeeping in the library of *Sha'are Zión* Congregation, where it is little used and is virtually inaccessible. (The Synagogue now claims ownership.)

In addition to synagogues in Bensonhurst, there were Talmud Torah schools, too. A remnant of Syrians had continued to live on the Lower East Side for a few years, where they maintained the loft at 48 Orchard Street which had served as the first "large" Aleppoan synagogue and afternoon religious school for boys. Soon, in the "Sea Beach" Bensonhurst [served by the "Sea Beach" subway line], the building of a spacious synagogue in 1921 was followed by a Talmud Torah, which was attended by almost 'all' Aleppoan boys and a few girls.

The "Shawam," from Damascus, had their own small house of worship and Talmud Torah. Later in the Bensonhurst era, under the dedicated leadership of the Bibi brothers — David and the late Reuben, and Isadore Nouri Dayan, and inspired by the much-loved late Ḥakham Murad Maslatón, a sizeable Damascene synagogue *Aḥi Ezer* was built on 71st Street. They were subsequently to build in Flatbush the handsome synagogue on Ocean Parkway, and an impressive elementary grade Yeshiva. The Bensonhurst structure boasted a social hall, the first such Syrian synagogue-attached social gathering place in the community. It became very popular for small weddings and many Aleppoan festivities. This earlier Aḥi Ezer Synagogue is still much used — as a non-sectarian publicly-funded Center for Senior Citizens. It provides hundreds of low-priced meals daily, as well as social activities. No like enterprise is evidenced by Aleppoans.

"20th Avenue"

Bensonhurst's souk, its Syrian marketplace, was located along 20th Avenue near 65th Street, the hub of the Community. It had perhaps half a dozen oriental food shops, grocery and butchers — stores operated by Aleppo and Damascus-born individuals, such as Ḥayeem Lévi, a butcher; much-loved Abu-Yomtob Salem (known as "Neckchari;" even his daughter, now Milo Bibi, cannot tell me why) was a grocer whose shop was crowded with goods, scattered helter-skelter. Shaʿya Shalóm was also a grocer but with an orderly neat shop. So too was Abraham Salem, who spent much time in community service. Tawfiq Serour (whose three grandsons are also "Tawfiqs," but answer to the name "Ted") was a master tailor, a partner of Ḥayeem Yúseph Chabbót, in one period.

A Community Center/Yeshiva Day School

The Bensonhurst community's interest in the development of its youth was exclusively in the religious area. Little or no thought was given in that period to the *social needs* of the young — nothing of that sort had ever been considered in the old country. Large families produced many soon-to-be adolescent children. Where were they to congregate for their leisure moments? At Meyer's Ice Cream Parlor on Bay Parkway at 68th Street. But since the sweets-shop had a limited, small capacity, the meeting place for the youth was in front of the store — a crowded sidewalk meeting place. In the mid-1930's it began to be recognized that a sidewalk was not a proper gathering place, and the idea of a community center began to emerge, in a vague, an imprecise manner. With the advancing years the responsible community officials could no longer ignore the now-insistent demand; yet months, even years, of talk produced no movement. The suggestion of an interim clubhouse of some sort to get the youth off the street was ignored, while talk of a costly building to-be, continued unabated. Since a marked movement to Flatbush residence had begun, where should a community center be located? If the small trend to Flatbush residence became a general, a sweeping

one, of what use an expensive undertaking in Bensonhurst? A "solution" offered itself. When plans for a nearby site for a Syrian community center were being formulated the "JCH," (Jewish Community House), supported by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and located close to the site of a comtemplated Syrian community center, had approached the leadership with a view to having the Separadeem join the "JCH" to locate their activities there. An additional floor could be constructed for them. The "JCH" would benefit from the additional sizeable membership; the Syrians would be provided with everything the proposed center could conceivably have, in addition to the rich cultural activity of the existing organization. The "JCH" is an "Ashkenazic" institution, it is to be noted. Whether this was the reason for the rejection of the offer — or was it the *undeclared intent* to use part of the proposed community center as a Sepharadi yeshiva, it is impossible to determine.

Ultimately, in the late 1930's, a community center was built on the large piece of land at Avenue P and 75th Street, close to the "JCH" but at a distance from the center of Syrian residences in Bensonhurst — even more so to Flatbush. The social center area contained a social hall, a bowling alley and a gymnasium; no room could be found for a swimming pool. (Perhaps half the space was unexpectedly allocated to a newly conceived Sepharadi Yeshiva.) Despite initial individual enthusiasm, the center, *qua* center, soon lost its early popularity and was engulfed by an enlarged yeshiva.

The Magén David Yeshivá

The Magén David Yeshivá was created through the vision of Isaac Joseph Shalom, influenced no doubt by his close association with Ashkenazi rabbis. (His notable achievements are recounted in the oral biography of his son Joseph, which appears later in this volume.) A few hours each day in an after-public-shcool Talmud Torah were perceived as inadequate, insufficient to foster the development of young men and women who would perpetuate the Syrian community's accustomed pattern. A Syrian day school was a revolutionary

innovation; none had ever been remotely conceived of in Aleppo and Damascus. The inception of a yeshiva reflected increasing affluence, which fostered a growth of self-confidence and self-esteem.

A monthly *Magen David Bulletin* soon made its appearance under the brilliant editorship of Fortunée ("Tunie") Kassin Goldman, assisted by an enthusiastic body of young reporters and contributors. In addition to containing school information it was a source of lively social news and chit-chat, and served as a powerful vehicle in raising the social consciousness of the community. Recently, the *new* Sephardic Community, Center reprinted in book form the admirable issues of the *Magen David Bulletin,* covering the years of World War II and the Brooklyn-Syrian community's substantial participation in the conflict. With a change in editorship the Bulletin's news reporting languished and the publication soon became merely a school house-organ.

In the same period a B'nai B'rith chapter and lodge were formed, each with a youth section, each of which grew to have several hundred members. A Syrian branch of a national fraternal organization, The Odd Fellows, was also formed. These organizations languished after only a few years and now little is heard of them in Syrian Brooklyn. They were frowned upon by leaders of the community; they did not fit into the pattern of tradition.

Before long the community had moved to Flatbush.

Chapter Six

Life In Flatbush

THE ability of the Syrian Sepharadeem to maintain the culture that they brought with them from Aleppo and Damascus, without the cult-like protective isolation of the Hasidim and the Amish, has been a source of wonderment. What are the customs and mores which set the Syrian Jews apart? What is the mortar which holds them together, insulated and distinct from the social and religious world around them? Functioning in a huge modern city, even today they indicate a "folk" existence, a "face-to-face" society, a network of connections through blood-ties and marriage. There are few who cannot uncover a family relationship, however distant. In effect, the community may be compared to a large "extended family."

The American anthropologist Robert Redfield, in his classic study of a Mexican Indian tribe in Yucatan, wrote: The members of the folk society have a strong sense of belonging together, surrounded by hostile elements. Communicating intimately with each other, each has a strong claim on the sympathies of all others. . . . They emphasize their own mutual likeness and value themselves as "we" against all others as "they". . . thus. . . small, isolated, non-literate [inapplicable] and homogenous with a strong sense of group society. . . a little world by itself, in which recurrent problems of life are met by members in the same conventional ways so long practiced as to form a coherent and self-consistent system. Such a system is

what we mean in saying that the folk society is characterized by a culture. . . though in the end the activities of the society, seem at a moment in time as *diverse, whole, independent and consistent*". (emphasis added)

Redfield could well have been writing on Aleppo-in-Flatbush. The "we" as opposed to "they" he refers to, has its metaphor in the Syrian in-group reference to themselves. "Is he an S-Y? they may ask, "or is he a 'Jay-Dub?" Is he a S-Y-r-ian? 'Jay-Dub' is not quite so simple an appellation. 'Jay-Dub' is short for J.(E.)W. — Jewish. "But are not these Syrians also Jewish?" For the Syrians an Ashkenazi is "Jewish" because Ashkenazeem speak Yiddish — "Jewish." "Each has a strong claim on the sympathies of all others" (Redfield); mutual help is a quiet but powerful characteristic of the Sepharadi Syrian community. Should a fellow Syrian find his business in financial difficulties, many will band together to relieve the situation. The following episodes will illustrate this strong claim on the sympathies of others. An importer with a large business found himself unable to meet the payments due a commercial banker. A group of friends quietly joined together to rescue him from insolvency. With time he was able to reconstitute his operation and to go on to the highly successful business he conducts. Once again he has become a leader in philanthropic contributions. In another instance, this writer walked in to a midtown electronics shop operated by Syrians. I did not know them well but they addressed me by name. When I selected my purchase the shopkeeper went to his records to determine his *cost* at which price he insisted on giving me his purchase. He would feel embarrassed to take a profit from one in his own community, his own family in effect. A little world by itself. . . "The Jewish population of America constitutes a minority; thus the Syrian Sepharadeem form a minority within a minority," a full and distinctive *sub-sub-culture.* It is indeed "diverse" in its economic activity, while it is "interdependent and consistent." "Diverse," just as in Aleppo and Damascus there had been a few who strayed from the straight and narrow paths, a few wayward women, the band of Jewish burglars — so too in New York there is a handful of individuals whose retail commercial activities are frowned upon by their fellow-Syrians as well.

They are not unlike a few Ashkenazeem, such as the convicted fraudulent operators of huge chains of nursing homes; and other 'rabbis' whose transactions unfortunately, garner wide negative publicity. The peccadillos of the few Syrian tourist-shop operations are comparatively insignificant.

Community Attributes

What are the community's cultural characteristics, some of which have been touched upon, which set it apart? In essence, we must look at *social homogeneity* coupled with *religious insularity*. Apart from the acculturated traits previously mentioned — (bowling leagues, the entertainment world, modern education and the like), one may very cautiously compare much of the life of the community to that of old-world *Ḥálab*/Aleppo and Damascus, of seventy or more years ago. Brooklyn's clinging to customs and mores of past generations has succeeded in perpetuating many characteristics reverting to the recent pre-industrial society of Syria. Some recent immigrants who had spent years in Lebanon and Israel are astonished — amused, to discover a replication in many ways of the life and culture they had lived many years before; although they appear to be comfortable with what they find in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. There is much Syrian social intermingling; a very few have close Ashkenazi friends; the majority's intercourse is with others in the community with whom they choose to live. Small measures of Near East intergroup mingling are encountered; marriages between members of the several constituent groups not infrequently take place. Despite fairly firm separate social group ties there is an overlapping of boundaries among the young, which encourages intergroup marriages. Most Syrian businesses are located in mid-Manhattan, and some men, part of social cliques, travel together in car pools on their way to work. Thus they set out from a small area in which all live, continuing en route the social chit-chat of the community and its members.

The class organization of the Old World had not carried over to the Lower East Side. Social-class life in Aleppo and Damascus was structured, embracing three traditional characteristics. But Syria's social class order did not travel with the immigrants, since almost all were poor (and with limited

education). Thus class lines had little meaning since all were in the same circumstances, striving to provide for their families. Considerable piety, wealth, measures of religious scholarliness, and outstanding philanthropy served in time to reproduce some measures of social distinctiveness as the colony of immigrants grew and began to advance economically. However, the old-world family boundaries within which one married had ceased to be important; the poor family could well become affluent tomorrow and rise in social esteem, and because of cross-marriage alliances, there are no considerations of class distinctions. Socially, the wealthy choose their friends from among other successful individuals, many of them close associates in their business or in organizational leadership. Thus strict class lines have been succeeded by groups of cliques which socialize largely among themselves.

Life Away From Flatbush

It must be noted that not all Syrian Jews live in Brooklyn, nor that all live in New York, nor in Deal, New Jersey, and its environs. Los Angeles is the only city distant from New York with a "sizeable" Syrian-Jewish community (1,000-2,000 persons?). San Francisco and Washington, D.C., have a small cluster of families. However, Los Angeles with its huge geographic dispersal — and with its Syrian families spread out over the city — does not command the face-to-face life as in Brooklyn. There is a Sepharadi school and synagogue, but without close geographic community relationship it is conjectural as to its ability to survive as a "Syrian Community," particularly in the light of much interreligious marriage reported. A few Syrians are scattered in other larger cities; none are said to maintain the old traditions. Some of their children — and some of the parents, have married Ashkenazeem or else have intermarried. It is their businesses that keep them there. Those who prize the traditional life return to New York. How else will their children marry — *other Syrians?*

The Community in Deal, New Jersey

Away from New York, the largest Syrian colony in the United States is unquestionably that of Deal, New Jersey, some 60 miles from Brooklyn. We may correctly term it *"Aleppo-in-Deal"*, since it is a small replica of the Syrian settlement in Flatbush, with close social and religious homogeneity. At first it was only a seaside summer resort, an elegant successor to the nearby more modest Bradley Beach where "all" Syrians had spent summers. The area of Deal was found to be so attractive that close to five hundred Syrian families now make it their permanent residence. Summers see a huge influx of Brooklynites, some who come to occupy the often-elegant homes they own there, others to rent residences within Deal or in adjoining small areas. Deal becomes a Syrian-Jewish enclave; with seven synagogues (or more, now), scattered over the small adjacent area. The summer daytime meeting place is the Deal Municipal Casino, whose membership is restricted to property owners or tenants. The high rental fee for membership and cabanas deters none. "Outsiders" — those who reside in adjacent towns, gain admission to the Deal Casino on weekdays by payment of a fee, and are made welcome to the use of cabanas by their relatives and friends. With Syrians constituting more than half of the membership, the casino is transformed into a large and spirited Sepharadi club — especially for the youth. Some of the latter are flamboyant, to the discomfort and annoyance of the non-Syrian members. The Casino is crowded on weekends, and on Wednesdays when many male members attend to break up the work week. In the evenings, they will surely join their friends again for dinner in nearby fashionable restaurants. Because of religious scruples many — perhaps most — limit their orders to fish.

Syrians of every economic level consider it their duty to summer in, or near Deal, despite financial hardship for some. There, their adolescent children can mingle with other Syrian youth and thus develop relations which will, hopefully, culminate in marriages to Syrian mates. This hope is frequently fulfilled, as we see in the many betrothals which result from

summers spent in Deal. The parents, too, relish the summers with their many festivities (tennis tournaments and so on.) and the often elaborately catered engagement, bar mitzva parties, and the like, to which large crowds are invited. Youth parties also attract massive numbers to "open-house" weekend gatherings. These are encouraged by open-handed parents, eager to further the Syrian "social" life of their children. ("Get married" — *to a Syrian.*)

Many year-round residents are relatively young, and are sometimes owners of newly-successful enterprises. They live well and spend generously. Some of this bounty spills over in liberality to their adolescent offspring, in large pocket allowances, gifts of sports cars, and so on. These add to the temptations common to rich suburbs, to which some of these youngsters succumb. They have created uneasiness and concern among the parents because evidence of drug abuse has surfaced. As a means of partially combating this, parents in Deal now believe that an attractive Sepharadic-Syrian community center in which their children can mingle with other Syrian youth may do much to keep them within wholesome traditional patterns. Hasn't the new Flatbush center proven itself "successful" in drawing the Brooklyn youth together? A plot of land was acquired and contributions for building a "Deal Sepharadic Center" are being generously subscribed to.

Perhaps a dozen or more Syrian families settled in Great Neck on Long Island, an elegant suburb of New York, where on the Sabbath and Holy Days they contrive to hold traditional Sepharadic religious services. Among the leaders in this activity are Abe Hedaya, and three brothers, Jack, Albert, and Morris Nasser, Norman Irani, Parvis Soufeh and Fred Ephraim — the latter two from Iran. A like number live in Westchester County, where they hold regular Sabbath and Holiday services in the newly established Magen David Synagogue, under the guidance of Rabbi Mitchel Serles. Among leaders in his congregation are Raphael Abada, B.J. Douek, Leon Ḥalfon, Jack Ben Dweck, and Ben Jamil, all with Middle East backgrounds. [*But let us now return to Brooklyn and its tens of thousands of Syrian Sepharadeem*].

Location of the Flatbush Community

The geography of the Flatbush Syrian Sepharadic community is confined to an area of little more than a mile, with Ocean Parkway as its spine. Residences extend from Avenue I to perhaps Avenue Y. With the exception of the relatively few families which remain in Bensonhurst and continue to worship in the old Magen David Synagogue on 67th Street, almost all the community structures are located on or near Ocean Parkway. Another small group is now on Bedford Avenue where there is a cluster of commodious Syrian residences (A substantial synagogue structure is close to completion there).

It would be an exaggeration to state that Aleppo-in-Flatbush is self-contained, since many Syrians have non-Syrian neighbors. Aleppo and Damascus had all-Jewish areas — Damascus continues so; now the remaining Jews in Aleppo, Syria, almost all live in the Djamilieyeh section, a middle-class area containing many Muslims and some Christians as well. Aleppo-in-Flatbush has no Muslims, but does have Ashkenazeem and Christians living side by side with Syrian Jews. Some streets — East 5th, East 4th, East 3rd Streets between Kings Highway and Avenue U — are "predominantly" Syrian. This is where the best residences are located, and where everyone with enough means chooses to live — if they can secure homes. Those non-Syrians who could be induced — (seduced, by high prices) to sell, have already done so. With a strong demand and an almost non-existent supply, prices for property on these blocks have reach awesome heights.

Some who had earlier settled the year-round in lovely Deal, New Jersey, have abandoned that area except for 'compulsory' summer residence, although 500 families continue to reside there all year. The one and a half hours-to-two hours trip each way to their enterprises in New York were found to be too taxing for some of who had previously settled there. With the completion of the Sephardic Social Center in Flatbush many were eager to have their children grow up in the midst of a large Syrian "Mecca"; they returned to Flatbush. Others, some of whom have become spectacularly successful, they too wish to join the lively life of the central community. It is in this setting

that there is conspicuous evidence of the Syrians and their children on the streets, particularly on Saturdays and Sundays. Saturdays reveal a stream of strollers, some on their way to the synagogues, or returning from services.

The Souk [Suq] in Flatbush

Present-day Flatbush boasts of no less than ten or more shops specializing in culinary needs, supplying delicacies ranging from truffles, artichokes, a large variety of cheeses, to burghol (cracked wheat), and yogurt in several forms, and much more. A fancy oriental pastry shop is well patronized. Most of these food purveyors are to to be found on Kings Highway close to East Fourth Street. A little distance away, Farah Sasson have their butcher shop, and Khasky, a grocery store on Avenue U. Kings Highway is the *souk*, the marketplace, for the Near East residents, where the visitor will hear the customers chatting and ordering in Arabic, Hebrew, French and, yes, a few in English as well. The street draws large numbers of customers to the food, gift and other specialty shops. A popular shop on nearby Avenue M, is the "Yellow Door," where Sallee Bijou (Bigio) offers fine jewelry and gifts at advantageous prices. "The Yellow Door" is run by a pioneering Syrian-descended witty young matron. She was the incentive for numerous small businesses now operated by young married women, some out of their homes, some from offices in Manhattan, where they operate travel agencies, etc. (as do enterprising Syrian men). The *souk* on Kings Highway has a popular travel agency operated by the affable Sam Zalta, with the assistance of his wife and children. Several modest restaurants specialize in Oriental dishes, serving mostly Israeli ("Sabra") customers. Most Near East householders prepare their own Oriental dishes at home; when they dine out it is in more prestigious (non-Oriental) restaurants. The "younger set" frequent the Caraville Restaurant on Avenue M, which is like a popular café for them.

The *souk* grocers are for the most part immigrants who came to the United States in the 1950's or later. Most are not of direct Aleppoan origin as were the merchants on 20th Avenue Bensonhurst. Kings Highway's present-day merchants hail from

Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel — with Syrian roots. Morris and Joshua Setton, expelled from Cairo in 1956 by Nasser stem originally from Damascus. Intelligent and enterprising, these young immigrants earned Master's degrees in Business Administration while they nurtured their tiny groceries business (*"Rutta's"*). Now, in addition to the thriving establishment on the Kings Highway *souk* their "Five Continents" shops of popular and exotic gourmet specialties are found in many busy shopping-centers in and around Metropolitan New York. Recently they established a large warehouse and roasting plant to distribute a variety of basic and exotic foods, nuts and spices. These are sold under their own brand name, *"Earthly Delights"* (how else?) and are distributed by huge supermarket chains throughout the country. "Bat Yam," "Ḥolon" and "Phoenicia," grocers, as well as others, have almost side-by-side shops on the *souk*, each with its own set of customers. "Bat Yam," named for the town near Tel Aviv where its owner had spent several years, is operated by Moshé Lévy and his family, and is very popular with many customers from Lebanon; Lévy's father was a genial rabbi and teacher in Beirut. Moshé too, is amiable and well-liked, *eager to retell lengthy anecdotes.*

The *souk* shops, including the oriental eating-places are all tightly shut on the Saturdays. (What are not tightly shut on Sabbath, of course, are the numerous synagogues.) On Sundays in particular, Kings Highway's *souk* has large numbers of shoppers, both local and from other nearby sections. Occasionally some shoppers will be heard speaking Arabic, punctuated with *"buenos."* They live in Latin American countries and at the end of visits to relatives whom they may have joined in the celebration of a family festivity, will want to stock up on oriental foodstuffs which are either not easily available in their countries, or are perhaps considerably higher in price there.

Chapter Seven

Within Flatbush Synagogues

THE geographic and religious center of the Syrian-Jewish community is the *Sha'are Zión Congregation* — an architectural masterpiece, almost entirely Aleppoan. It is under the spiritual leadership of the aged *Ḥakham Bashi,* Jacob Kassin, Chief Rabbi, originally from Aleppo. Rabbi Abraham J. Hecht is the zealous "executive" Rabbi, with Ḥakham Baruch Ben Ḥaim, Adjunct Rabbi. Edward Farḥi (whose dramatic history we will read later), is its talented Chief Cantor, assisted by Yeḥiel Naḥári, a gifted young vocalist with Yemenite roots, recently arrived from Israel. The Synagogue is located on Ocean Parkway between Avenues T and U. Only one block distant, at the corner of Avenue S is the impressive Damascene *Aḥi ᶜEzer* Congregation headed by the devout Ḥakham Sion Maslatón (Tarrab), of a long line of distinguished rabbinic ancestors. The gifted popular Meyer Lévy is its cantor. Nearby is the community *mikveh,* the meticulous and even luxuriously appointed ritual bath. (Peter S. Neustadter a member of Manhattan's *Midtown Board* of Kashrut which is responsible for the *mikvehs,* the ritual baths, remarked that the Syrian *mikveh* in Flatbush is frequently mentioned at Board meetings with admiration — and some envy.) Avenue S at the corner of Ocean Parkway is also the location of the imposing new Sephardic Community Center, which shares importance with *Sha'are Zión* Synagogue, as a focal Syrian hub.

In addition to formal houses of worship, there are daily and Saturday public prayer services in the Sephardic High School, founded and headed by the dedicated and scholarly Rab Moshé Shamah. A service was held in a rented part of an Ashkenazic synagogue on East 4th Street, by *ʿAteret Torah,* school and synagogue, but is now installed in a handsome large structure, built by the dynamic ultra-Orthodox Ḥahkam Yosef Harari-Rafful. Another brother, Ḥakham Abraham, is the spiritual leader of *Kol Yisrael* Synagogue on Bedford Avenue.

There is full attendance at Sabbath services in all the community synagogues. More than that. In *Sha'are Zión,* the main sanctuary, the "Dome," cannot accommodate the large number of worshippers, and so the social hall offers services for perhaps an additional two hundred; the bet midrash, a study hall, hosts a service for young teen and pre-teen youth, which is conducted *by the young boys;* the "Crypt," a smaller hall, receives a considerable number of worshippers in the later-teens and early 20's age-groups. This is not to overlook the 'early-bird' Sabbath morning service. This begins at six-thirty and concludes just as the regular service is about to commence. It is attended by early risers (and by a few who will not miss services before they feel compelled to go on to their shops).

A few paces from the famous Ashkenazi *Mirrer Yeshiva* at the corner of Quentin Road, (established in New York by Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz, a hero in saving thousands of Jews from the Holocaust), one may attend services at the Egyptian Congregation *Ahava Ve-Aḥva,* now headed by Rabbi Shimʿon Alouf, originally from Baghdád. The Egyptians conduct prayer services in the synagogue which they built recently and which bears the same name as their former synagogue and Talmud Torah in Cairo.

Most (?) Lebanese Jewish immigrants to the United States have settled in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. They, too, have established synagogue quarters, *Har Ha-Lebanon* (Mount Lebanon), headed by Rabbi David Jemal. Many Lebanese Jews had originated in Damascus where adherence to religious practice and learning was not, for most, as widespread and deep-rooted as in Aleppo. While in Lebanon many were devout Jews, a large number influenced by the cosmopolitan culture of Beirut, assumed the

broader — and less religious, or non-religious, life of the city. Thus Lebanese prayer-services in Brooklyn are small, the reflection of old-world lesser religious devotion. Although their house of prayer is in a makeshift space, plans are under way to build a synagogue of their very own.

To accommmodate residents in the area of Avenue J, we find the *Beth Torah* synagogue, a handsome structure between Avenues J and K, whose members are largely, but not exclusively, Aleppoan in origin. The scholarly Rabbi, Dr. Zevulun S. Lieberman is its spiritual leader; Isaac Cabasso its musically erudite cantor. We must not overlook the imposing synagogue on Ocean Parkway at Avenue P — *Congregation Bené Yosef*. It was built and is almost wholly supported by Bené Yosef — "the sons of Joseph" Sitt; Eddie and Jack Sitt, headed by Rabbi Chaim Benoliel, with the devout and musically knowledgeable Gabriel Abraham Shrem as its cantor until his recent death. It houses a congregation of modest, heterogeneous individuals, including some Moroccans, Iraqis, Yemenites and others.

In the majority of non-Sepharadic synagogues everywhere, there is often difficulty in assembling a "minyan" (a quorum of ten male worshippers) for *mid-week* morning services; Syrian synagogue services, however, do not, as was observed, suffer this difficulty. Each of these houses of worship has one or more mid-week morning prayer services; *Sha'are Zión has four* or *five such successive services* to accommodate the convenience of the worshippers. Late afternoon/early evening mid-week prayers, as well, are to be found in every synagogue.

Deal's Synagogues

A glance at religious worship in Flatbush's colony, Deal and its environs, the nearby Elberon, West Deal, the West End section of Long Branch, etc.: since the "Deal Synagogue" requires a somewhat long walk for many for Sabbath attendance, and to discourage getting there by car (forbidden on the Sabbath), there are now at least *seven* synagogues functioning in the area, several of them within the confines of Deal itself. All have well-attended services on Saturdays, with

mid-week morning, and in Deal, evening services as well. Those who cannot conveniently attend synagogues before they make their way to their New York businesses during the week *can participate in prayer-services on the Syrian chartered buses which carry them to New York.* (In other parts of the bus, riders may be busy with their card-games.) Rabbi Isaac Dwek and Rabbi Ezra Labaton devotedly oversee the Syrian religious life in the area; some say, "over-zealously."

Ashkenazi Visitors

Rare indeed is the unfamiliar face of an Ashkenazi visitor at Syrian Sabbath services in *Aleppo-in-Flatbush.* He is readily recognized as a stranger, curious to witness a Sepharadi prayer service. Many visitors are pious young Askenazeem, who are particularly conspicuous. In a large assembly in which all congregants are wearing *tal-leh-teem,* prayer-shawls, some Ashkenazeem do not don a *taleet* (if unmarried? only on the Sabbath?) They insist on wearing a *hat,* while all other worshippers wear skull-caps; and thus in their visit to the Sepharadic synagogue they stand out as "strangers." While textually prayers are almost exactly the same as in their East European houses of worship, Ashkenazi visitors find the Sepharadim service exotic and bewildering. It may well be that the visitor, with prayerbook in hand, can not easily follow the cantor. He finds the prayer melodies totally unlike those of any service he has ever attended. His principal difficulty is with the pronunciation of the Hebrew texts, which to him — if he is something of a linguist — may sound more Arabic than 'Jewish,' since authentic Sepharadic Hebrew is much like Arabic in its phrasing and accentuation. Equally exotic and unfamiliar are the cantor's and worshippers' sung sections of parts of the prayers. Yes, Arabic, in flavor and melody, since traditional Arabic melodies are often used. (See the section on *Pizmoneem,* later in this study.) This writer's observation is that well before the end of the service the visitor will also have discreetly withdrawn. He will have felt isolated in the midst of worshippers who will often exchange friendly words with their neighbors in parts of the service which are ritually relaxed. It is to be remembered

that Orthodox Saturday morning services require more than two and a half hours, everywhere; (although every worshipper does not come at the beginning of the service.)

Intermarriage in the Syrian Community

A very small percentage of local Syrian-Jewish young men and women are known to have married non-Jews. In such event they are lost to the community's social configuration and not infrequently to communication with their own families. Some families relent, however, and resume *secret ties* with the errants.

In February, 1935, the few Syrian rabbis in the community of Bensonhurst issued a Decree against interreligious marriages, and repeated it in 1942 and 1946. Such marriages would not be accepted under any circumstance, even when the non-Jewish partner had converted to Judaism; even if the conversion was *not* for the purpose of facilitating the marriage. The male would never be eligible for honors of "going up" to the Torah, the offspring would not be admitted to Syrian religious schools, nor would they be accepted as legitimate mates for Syrian-Jewish individuals. Moreover, such individuals could not be buried in the community's cemetery. The present day rise in the rate of intermarriages among Ashkenazi Jews in the United States is declared to be approximately 40 percent of recent marriages. (In the period 1921-1927 Jewish intermarriage in Germany was reported at 44.8 percent) The heads of every Syrian institution — synagogues, schools and welfare organizations — convened June 3, 1984 to re-state and re-affirm the community edict of 1935. (See pages 84-A to 84-D.)

Had this pact of fifty years ago been effective in holding down Syrian intermarriages? An informant at the sessions revealed to me that since 1935 there had been an average of three intermarriages yearly in the *previous fifty years.* However, fifteen such marriages had taken place in the course of the *past* year, a number that had caused consternation among responsible community leaders; a five-fold increase over the average of the previous half century. While only one or two percent intermarriages compared to the Ashkenazi American world's 40%, every effort is exerted to halt the intermarriage threat.

"Reaffirming Our Tradition"

Whereas, throughout the history of our Community, our Rabbis and lay leaders have always recognized the threat of conversions and the danger of intermarriage and assimilation; and have issued warnings and proclamations concerning these evils in February 1935, in February 1946 and in May 1972; Now—

THEREFORE, WE, the assembled **RABBIS** and **PRESIDENTS** of the **CONGREGATIONS** and **ORGANIZATIONS of the SYRIAN** and **NEAR EASTERN JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF GREATER NEW YORK and NEW JERSEY** do now and hereby

Reaffirm

these proclamations, and pledge ourselves to UPHOLD, ENFORCE and PROMULGATE these regulations. We further declare that שבת שובה Shabbat Shuvah of each year be designated as a day to urge our people to rededicate themselves to these principles. IN WITNESS whereof, we have caused this document to be prepared and have affixed our signatures thereto, at a special convocation held on this third day of Sivan 5744 corresponding to the third day of June, 1984.

Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin

DR. JACOB S. KASSIN, CHIEF RABBI

A RABBINICAL PROCLAMATION – Adar 5695 (February 1935)

FREE TRANSLATION OF THE ORIGINAL HEBREW DECREE

HAVING OBSERVED the conditions prevailing in the general Jewish community, where some youth have left the haven of their faith and have assimilated with non Jews; in certain cases they have made efforts to marry Gentiles, sometimes without any effort to convert them, and other times an effort is made for conversion to our faith, an action which is absolutely invalid and worthless in the eyes of the law of our Torah.

WE HAVE therefore bestirred ourselves to build and establish an Iron Wall to protect our identity and religious integrity and to bolster the strong foundations of our faith and religious purity which we have maintained for many centuries going back to our country of origin, Syria.

WE, the UNDERSIGNED RABBIS, constituting the Religious Court, together with the Executive Committee of the Magen David Congregation and the outstanding laymen of the community, do hereby DECREE, with the authority of our Holy Torah, that no male or female member of our community has the right to intermarry with non-Jews; this law covers conversions, which we consider to be fictitious and valueless. We further DECREE, that no future Rabbinic Court of the Community should have the right or authority to convert male or female non-Jews who seek to marry into our community. We have followed the example of the community in Argentina, which maintains a Rabbinic Ban on any of the marital arrangements enumerated above, an edict which has received the wholehearted and unqualified endorsement of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel. This Responsa is discussed in detail in Divre Shaul, Yoreh Deah, Part II to Part VI. In the event that any member of our community should ignore our ruling and marry, their issue will have to suffer the consequences. ANNOUNCEMENTS to this effect will be made advising the community not to allow any marriage with children of such converts. We are confident that the Jewish People are a HOLY PEOPLE and they will adhere to the DECISION OF THEIR RABBIS and will not conceive of doing otherwise.

SIGNED: CHIEF RABBI HAIM TAWIL

Rabbi JACOB KASSIN, Rabbi MURAD MASALTON, Rabbi MOSHE GINDI, Rabbi MOSHE DWECK KASSAB

WHEREAS, throughout the history of our Community, our Rabbis and
and assimilation; and have issued warnings and proclar

THEREFORE, WE, the assembled RABBIS
of the SYRIAN and NEAR EASTERN JEWISH COMMUN

these proclamations, and pledge ourselves to UPHOLD, ENFORCE and
of each year be designated as a day to urge our people to rededicate themsel
and have affixed our signatures thereto, at a special convocation held on

Rabbi Ja

AHABA VE AHVA of Ocean Parkway — RABBI / PRESIDENT

AHI EZER Congregations — 71st St.: RABBI; Avenue S: RABBI; Avenue X: RABBI / PRESIDENT

AHI EZER Yeshiva — RABBI / PRESIDENT

ATERET TORAH Center — RABBI / PRESIDENT

ATERET TORAH Yeshivah — PRESIDENT

BETH TORAH Congregation — RABBI / PRESIDENT

BNEI YOSEPH — RABBI / PRESIDENT

CLUB 26 — PRESIDENT

CLUB 100 — PRESIDENT

HARAMAH Yeshivah — RA

HILLEL Yeshivah — RA / PRESI

KOL ISRAEL Congregation — RA / PRESI

MAGEN DAVID 67th Street — RA / PRESI

MAGEN DAVID of Bradley Beach — PRESIDE

MAGEN DAVID West Deal — RA / PRESID

MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH — RA / PRESI

MIKDASH Melech Yeshivah — RA / PRESI

OAKHURST Minyan — RA

OHEL YAAKOV — RA / PRESI

A SUBSEQUENT CLARIFICATION of the Original Proclamation

Adar 5706 (February 1946)

FREE TRANSLATION OF THE ORIGINAL HEBREW DECREE

ON THE NINTH day of Adar I, in the year 5706 corresponding to the tenth day of February, 1946 the Rabbis of the Community and the Committee of Magen David Congregation once again discussed the question of INTERMARRIAGE AND CONVERSIONS. The following Religious Rabbinic Decisions were promulgated and accepted. —

I. OUR COMMUNITY will never accept any converts, male or female, for marriage

II. THE RABBI will not perform any Religious Ceremonies for such couples – i.e. marriages, circumcisions, Bar Mitzvahs, etc. In fact, the Congregation's premises will be barred to them for use of any religious or social nature.

III. THE MESADRIM of the Congregation will not accord any honors to the convert or one married to a convert, such as offering him an Aliyah to the Sefer Torah. In addition, the aforesaid person, male or female, will not be allowed to purchase a seat, permanently or for the Holidays, in our Congregations.

IV. AFTER DEATH of said person, he or she is not to be buried on the Cemetery of our community, known as Rodfe Zedek, regardless of financial considerations.

SEAL of the BETH DIN of MAGEN DAVID CONGREGATION
SIGNED: CHIEF RABBI JACOB S. KASSIN

ways recognized the threat of conversions and the danger of intermarriage
these evils in February 1935, in February 1946 and in May 1972; Now—

TS of the CONGREGATIONS and ORGANIZATIONS
EATER NEW YORK and NEW JERSEY do now and hereby

---

hese regulations. We further declare that שבת שובה Shabbat Shuvah
les. IN WITNESS whereof, we have caused this document to be prepared
ivan 5744 corresponding to the third day of June, 1984.

BEL

PARK AVENUE Synagogue — RABBI / PRESIDENT

RODFEH SEDEK — PRESIDENT

Sephardic BIKUR HOLIM-MA'OZ LA'EBYON — PRESIDENT

Sephardic COMMUNITY CENTER — PRESIDENT

Sephardic Cong. HAR HALEBANON — RABBI / PRESIDENT

Sephardic Cong. of LONG BRANCH — PRESIDENT

SEPHARDIC HIGH SCHOOL — RABBI / PRESIDENT

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE Cong. — RABBI / PRESIDENT

SEPHARDIC TORAH CENTER — RABBI / PRESIDENT

SHAARE TORAH YESHIVA — RABBI / PRESIDENT

SHAARE ZION Congregation — RABBI / RABBI / RABBI / RABBI / PRESIDENT

SHORE Country Club — PRESIDENT

SYNAGOGUE OF DEAL — RABBI / PRESIDENT

SYNAGOGUE of W. Long Branch — RABBI / PRESIDENT

YOUNG SHAARE ZION — RABBI / PRESIDENT

ZVI LASADIK of SOUTH DEAL — RABBI

AHABA VE AHVA of Ocean Parkway
Jacob Israel, *Rabbi*
Joseph Harari, President

AHI EZER Congregations
71st Street
Harry Rubin, *Rabbi*

Avenue S
Sion Maslaton, *Rabbi*

Avenue X
Hayaḥia Elbaz, *Rabbi*
Marvin Azrak, *President*

AHI EZER Yeshiva
David Massry, *Rabbi*
Seymour Escava, *President*

ATERET TORAH Center
Irwin Shamah, *President*

ATERET TORAH Congregation
Yosef Harari-Raful, *President*

BETH TORAH Congregation
S. Zevulun Lieberman, *Rabbi*
Harry A. Tawil, *President*

BNEI YOSEPH
Haim Benoliel, *Rabbi*
Eddie J. Sitt, *President*

CLUB 26
Leo Picciotto, *President*

CLUB 100
Abe Laniado, *President*

HARAMAH Yeshivah
Elie Elbaz, *Rabbi*

HILLEL Yeshivah
Bezalel Elazary, *Rabbi*
Morris Franco, *President*

KOL ISRAEL CONGREGATION
Abraham Harari-Raful, *Rabbi*
Stanley Cayre, *President*

MAGEN DAVID 67th Street
Benjamin Seruya, *Rabbi*

MAGEN DAVID Bradley Beach
Abe A. Haddad, *President*

MAGEN DAVID West Deal
Ezra Labaton, *Rabbi*
Elliot Dweck, *President*

MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH
Moshe Greenes, *Rabbi*
Moe Maleh, *President*

MIKDASH MELECH Yeshivah
David Lopian, *Rabbi*
Abraham Dwek, *President*

OAKHURST Minyán
Jack Mevorach, *Rabbi*

OHEL YAAKOV
Baruch Ben-Haim, *Rabbi*
Albert D. Sutton, *President*

PARK AVENUE Synagogue
Shemouel Chourba, *Rabbi*
Abe H. Shamah, *President*

RODFEH SEDEK
Moses Hidary, *President*

Sephardic BIKUR HOLIM LA'EBYON
Robert Matalon, *President*

Sephardic COMMUNITY CENTER
Morris Bailey, *President*

Sephardic Cong. HAR HALEBANON
David Djmal, *Rabbi*
Leon M. Levy, *President*

Sephardic Cong. of LONG BRANCH
Sam Catton, *President*

SEPHARDIC HIGH SCHOOL
Mosé Shamah, *Rabbi*
David Hidary, *President*

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE Cong.
Ronald Barry, *Rabbi*
Joseph Bijou, *President*

SEPHARDIC TORAH CENTER
Shelomo Diamond, *Rabbi*
Ronald Ashkenazi, *President*

SHAARE TORAH YESHIVA
Hillel Haber, *Rabbi*
Isaac Sutton, *President*

SHAARE ZION Congregation
Abraham B. Hecht, *Rabbi*
Saul J. Kassin, *Rabbi*
Yomtob Yedid, *Rabbi*
Shelomo ben Yosef Yedid, *Rabbi*
Mordechai Maslaton, *Rabbi*
David Elihu Cohen, *President*

SHORE Country Club
Isaac Gindi, *President*

SYNAGOGUE OF W. LONG BRACH
Reuven Semach, *Rabbi*
Gary Joseph Gemal, *President*

SYNAGOGUE OF DEAL
Isaac Dwek, *Rabbi*
Joseph D. Bibi, *President*

YOUNG SHAARE ZION
Raymond Harari, *Rabbi*
Charles Mizrahi, *President*

ZVI LASADIK of SOUTH DEAL
Isaac Farḥi, *Rabbi*

Fund Raising

Fund raising within synagogues is limited to the needs of the Magén David Yeshivá, Sephardic High School, Hillel, Deal's Yeshiva, Bikoor Ḥolim, United Jewish Appeal, the Jerusalem [Aleppoan] Porát Yosef Yeshivá, and the Near East Relief Society, founded by the late Isaaco Silvera. (Contributions to the latter take the form of giving x number of "packages," symbolic now, at $26. each.) The many reverend fund-raisers for (mostly) "Sepharadi" Israeli schools are a common feature on the scene, but their solicitations are not permitted in the synagogues. Those deemed most meritorious are given recognition by inviting the scholarly rabbi who is their representative to give a brief lecture. This provides a mark of approval of the individual; when he makes his solicitation calls at the offices of prospective donors his cause will be recognized as having the tacit approval of the community leadership.

The International Sepharadic Educational Fund (ISEF) is now also the recipient of substantial aid. A meeting in April 1985 was convened by Edmond Safra at his Republic National Bank office, attended by some leading local Syrians and a few Ashkenazeem. The Fund finances 400 scholarships for pious Israeli Sepharadic youth to permit them to study in universities. In addition to tuition fees it provides stipends to finance them during their years of education. The fund-raising meeting drew pledges of close to half a million dollars in the space of ten minutes. Among those present at this fund-raising meeting were David and Joseph Braha, Sam Catton, Joseph and Stanley Cayre, Stanley Chera, Jack Dushey, 'Sonny' Gindi, Manny Haber, Isaac ("Ike") Hidary, Jack Nasser, Ted Serure, Natalie Shalom, Stephan Shalom and his brothers, Abe S. Sutton and brother David S. Sutton, Albert D. Sutton, Mayer (Miro) Sutton, and several Ashkenazi philanthropists who have begun to support this program generously. Mrs. Nina Weiner, originally from the Middle East is a driving force in this innovative endeavor.

Chapter Eight

Religious Observance and Education

IN their social, religious and commercial life the Near East Sepharadeem in Flatbush appear to be almost totally alike. Outwardly almost all appear to embrace the common attributes of the community. However, a small number resent the "all-enfolding rigidity" and cultural limitations of the folk-society in which they live; they are "marginal," unhappy with their community, yet unable to establish themselves within the general society. Nevertheless, they cling to Syrian friends and continue to share the close ties of their traditional upbringing, as we read in oral testimony later. Some in this category choose to live away from Flatbush — for some periods. Still others who seek freedom of activity choose to live in Manhattan. Young men and some young women jointly rent expensive uptown apartments in the company of other Syrian young men or other young women. Significantly, it is with other Syrians that they socialize — but not exclusively. It is usual for them to return to their parental home for the weekends, for social activities in which they can more readily participate, hopefully, with prospective Syrian mates.

Religious training, whether intensive as in some homes or more casual in others, is pervasive; to be part of the community is to confront religiosity in some measure. This partially

explains the large Sabbath synagogue attendance. The religious attend for purely devotional ends. Other congregants with strong early inculcation of religious training attend services out of habit, if no longer because of conviction. At the synagogue services they are certain to meet their many friends, to exchange news and perhaps to arrange social activity later. It is usual to sit next to a good friend with whom they will chat during parts of the long service. ("Synagogue" is Greek, it means House of Gathering, "Bet-Ha-kenesset" in Hebrew); thus not only do they discharge religious obligations, for many it is additionally a somewhat social meeting place. Some Syrian Sepharadeem attend only on the holidays, while a supposedly minute number may dispense with attendance on these occasions as well.

Among Ashkenazeem the Syrians have the reputation of being "very religious." Formal observance, whatever its degree of fervor — or lack of it — constitutes a part of the community's profile and self-awareness. Those whose attendance at religious services is minimal — or non-existent — are persons whose attitude to the community and its life may be a negative one. They chafe at the alleged self-satisfaction and unquestioning acceptance of the community customs which they declare to be medieval. It is such individuals who strive to make themselves distant — at least psychologically, from the Flatbush community. Their education and subsequent careers may see them in activities markedly differing from the customary activities in which most Syrian Sepharadeem are involved. They may be in journalism, theater, television production, education, etc. Their social life may be largely with non-Syrians, and consequently their marriages reinforce their separation from the family pattern of inter-Syrian mating for the greater part.

Schooling

Most Syrians of Flatbush are intent on giving their children a thorough Jewish education. They send their offspring to day schools, yeshivot, where instruction time is divided between secular and religious studies. This accounts for the sizeable enrollment at the elementary-level Magén David

Yeshivá, overwhelmingly Aleppoan in patronage, and the Damascene Ahi Ezer Yeshiva. Each has a student body in excess of 800. In both, students are rigorously inculcated in the Jewish rituals of Syria including classes in *Pizmoneem* [traditional nonliturgical Hebrew songs]; important reasons why their parents choose these schools. However, a glance at the names of prize winning students at Ahi Ezer as seen in the school's monthly Bulletin reveals many Ashkenazic names. The school's fees are more modest than other area-yeshivot and thus it draws some non-Syrians as well. (Additionally, we can only speculate about an unresearched possibility: do more females of Damascus roots take Ashkenazeem for husbands?) A number of graduates of Magén David and Ahi Ezer attend the Sephardic High School, which has an enrollment of three hundred boys and girls.

Some less traditional parents, and those who seek "still better" quality yeshiva-education turn to the Ashkenazic Yeshiva of Flatbush which has an outstanding reputation. Such parents, while many are quite orthodox, are broader in their outlook and (perhaps reluctantly) accept the Ashkenazi character of the school. The school makes an effort to accommodate Sepharadi Syrian students; in some semesters they encourage "all-Sepharadi" prayer services for the young men. In addition, the school's "official" Hebrew pronunciation is modified "S'fardi" (Sepharadi) similar to that of Israel — but with less dialect-like aberrations. Some Syrian children are students at "Flatbush" from kindergarten days until they are graduates of the High School. There, many are imbued with the traditional Ashkenazi emphasis on secular learning, and when they graduate are almost sure to seek college education.

Yeshiva of Flatbush is quite selective in its enrollment; it seeks students who will fit its rigorous teaching standards. Having qualified and gone through its elementary education, most students will seek to enter the High School, again requiring challenging tests and examinations to succeed in being accepted. Syrians comprise about a third of the student body in elementary and high school, each with 850 students. Classes are co-educational, despite a frustrated attempt by a very Orthodox Ashkenazi faction to separate girls and boys. (It was this very

Orthodox group whose attacks on him brought about the withdrawal of the dedicated late Edward Silvera from the presidency of the school; he was a "S'fardi," an "Arab!". The impressive High School building had been constructed under his self-sacrificing leadership.)

The Sephardic High School under the guidance of Rabbi Moshé Shamah has separate boys/girls classes — but yet appears to be "not orthodox *enough*" to satisfy some ultra-orthodox rabbis in the Syrian community. Its Board of Directors is comprised of highly regarded and quite Orthodox figures who are deeply devoted to the school in its goal of providing quality education with emphasis on Sepharadi ritual and community. Fewer graduates go on to college compared to Flatbush Yeshiva.

Yet another Sepharadic institution, a small one, is *Mikdash Melech,* under the guidance of Rabbi Chaim Benoliel, a 'Ladino' Sepharadi from Seattle. Here we find a wide variety of Sepharadi students, some from Iraq, Morocco, Iran, Yemen, etc., pursuing a seminary-like curriculum with emphasis on Talmud and other advanced religious texts — a "Kollel." Still other students were in classes in the dynamic Rabbi Yosef Harari-Rafful's after-school sessions; the Talmud Torah classes — ultra-Orthodox — have been succeeded by a formal day-school, Yeshiva ᶜAteret Torah. It should be noted that before accepting a student, Rabbi Rafful subjects some parents to a rigorous examination to determine the degree of their orthodoxy. "To what avail is it to train a child, only to have the home environment undo the schooling?" Homes with television sets are frowned upon; less fervent parents must *remove the TV before the child will be accepted.* The school had two small classes for boys in 1980. In the following year a girls' school was added, with a total registration of 105 students in six classes; boys and girls study separately. By 1983-84 200 boys and girls were enrolled. No longer was it practical to continue in rented basement quarters. A 20,000 square foot parcel of land was acquired at Quentin Road (Avenue Q) and East 9th Street and the drive has been completed to finance this building venture. Paul Reichmann of Toronto and his brothers, pious Ashkenazeem, (owners of Olympia and York a fabulously

successful conglomerate), pledged to match the largest donations to the school. [With incredible speed, the three-story school building was already completed October 1986.]

In addition, ᶜAteret Torah classes in religious texts are currently given for young and mature adults, early each morning and in the evenings. Some attend them before and/or after going on to their secular schools or work. They can participate in the prayer services held every day of the week.

Congregants at ᶜAteret Torah prayer-services on Saturday mornings are participants in a novel practice. At the end of the reading of the Torah section of the week (with yet another section of the service to follow), in place of a sermon those at prayers quietly disperse to reconstitute themselves as *study groups* of five to ten individuals. A variety of religious materials are pursued, ranging from Talmud tracts, laws, Psalms, to perhaps an intensive perusal of the Torah Reading of the Week. Groups are led by a more knowledgeable member. Promptly at eleven o'clock the scene is transformed once again to a synagogue for completion of the prayer-service. Study time varies, depending on the length of the week's Torah reading, allowing twenty minutes to a half-hour (before 11 o'clock) for study. This innovation instituted by *Ḥakham* Yosef Rafful is the only one I encountered in a Sepharadi synagogue anywhere in the world.

Rabbi Yosef Rafful is in the forefront of the so-called Right Wing — ultra-Orthodoxy. Unhappy with the lack of "sufficient" orthodoxy in Sephardic High School, he has instituted another high school. Begun in 1982, it now has an enrollment of some eighty boys; at this time there is no provision for girls. Another ultra-Orthodox high school, *Yeshiva Shaáré Torah* is under way, under the direction of the ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Hillel Haber, American-born and Jerusalem-trained. It is operating now for boys only, on the premises of the Mikdash Melech seminary-kollel; with classes for 85 boys; and 60 girls, elementary level at another location. Enlarged activity will be held in an existing commercial building which is to be converted, and will accomodate large numbers of students. Several adherents of Rabbi Haber are successful businessmen, thus financing the new school holds no problems.

A small high-school for *girls only* will begin functioning soon, it is reported. The newly acquired fairly spacious building for boys is awaiting vacating by its present tenants, after which conversion work will begin.

Another Sepharadi school, a small one at this writing, is *Yeshiva Ha-Rama* under the leadership of the enterprising and resourceful Rabbi Elbaz, teacher and journalist.

A few ultra-Orthodox Syrian parents had not been satisfied with the quality of *any* local yeshiva until the present time. They sent their children to Torah Va-daat or Torah Temima or other similar Ashkenazi yeshivot. Later such students pursued "post-graduate" studies in Lakewood, N.J., or the renowned yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore, or elsewhere. They emerge as ultra-Orthodox leaders closely following Agudath Israel "black-hat" or Hasidic-like Ashkenazi patterns, at some departure from popular traditional Sepharadi custom.

Early in 1984 the community leaders serving as the Board of Directors of the Magén David Yeshivá, an elementary school, once again felt the need for their own Sepharadi high school. It had been considered some years before but was not acted upon, perhaps because of the existence of the Sephardic High School and high regard for its founder, Rab Moshé Shamah. Now there is a critical need, and new determination, to establish a large Magén David Yeshivá High School, a sizeable one to accommodate the increasingly large number of graduates of the Magén David and Ahi Ezer elementary yeshiva schools. A vigorous building fund campaign is led by Moe Maleh president of the school, and Abe J. Esses. Money for a building-fund has begun to be collected, towards a goal of 6 million. The pledges are to be fulfilled over a period of time, as the need arises. A large plot of land was acquired on Kings Highway and Bay Parkway; building plans, construction, and completing the school may require up to two years. Rabbi Abraham Kahana will be the principal, with the collaboration of Rabbi Shimón Alouf.

Rabbi Dr. Jose Faur, originally from Damascus (via Argentina) gives an independent weekly evening class for adults, based on Biblical and advanced religious texts. Purportedly because he had taught Talmud classes at the Jewish

Theological Seminary, a *non-Orthodox* [*!*] rabbinic institution (Conservative), community leaders exclude Rabbi Faur from official rabbinic participation. Some hierarchical religious-political opposition has been suspected as well, in his repeated ouster from the successive Ashkenazi synagogues in which he had been giving his classes. Rabbi Faur is a scholar and writer, with a book on Maimonides' philosophy as well as others. His latest book is a work on rabbinics, *Golden Doves with Silver Dots* (1986) a somewhat obscure, recondite study. Rabbi Faur is also a collector of rare rabbinic books. His passionate belief in the superiority of Sepharad-ism is virtually boundless. He is articulate, charismatic (said to be perhaps absolutist and authoritarian), and has developed a devoted following, among whom are some Orthodox community leaders. They rallied to Rabbi Faur's aid when he was denied classroom space and have raised funds to buy and re-furbish a residential building to serve as his teaching quarters. Recently a vigorous campaign was undertaken to have Rabbi Faur included in the official rabbinate of Sha'are Zión synagogue, where he has influential supporters. While it appeared that the Executive Committee would vote for his acceptance, outside ultra-Orthodox persuasion was decisive in narrowly defeating this proposal. (This may not be the last word on the issue, however.) Some traditional Syrian leaders have expressed uneasiness at the possibility of his establishing a separate religious center — "perhaps at some variance with accustomed traditional Orthodoxy." Rabbi David Salem is unaffiliated, perhaps not by choice. He is ever ready to counsel and serve families and individuals.

Who then send their children to the city schools? Those with perhaps several children of school age, since tuition fees at yeshivot of approximately $4,000 annually may be financially taxing. Nevertheless, many exert themselves to place *male* children in the yeshivot; the girls, some say, do not need rigorous religious education. Others are themselves not well-educated religiously, or are not religious. The children of some such parents are enrolled in the city public schools from early childhood. Status, too, however, enters into consideration, and

sometimes their male offspring will be enrolled in day schools in any case.

Jewish Education in Deal

With several hundred Syrian families living in Deal, N.J. and its environs throughout the year, where would their children study? As was related earlier, the Hillel School, an existing Ashkenazi yeshiva, soon had large numbers of Sepharadí students. Thanks to the vision, enterprise and dedication of two brothers, Saul and Ely Ashkenazi, when an enlarged school became a necessity, the "Brothers Ashkenazi" bought and donated to the school a sixty acre plot where a new Yeshiva was constructed. With a now-majority of Sepharadi students the new school's curriculum was molded increasingly to Sepharadic religious studies (in addition to the secular). At first on an elementary level, it had added a first-year high school curriculum and plans to add an additional level of high-school studies each year. Six hundred Syrian students (offspring of 370 families) are now enrolled in the Hillel School. Saul Ashkenazi remarked to this writer that additional classrooms are needed, and so an important building program is making headway under his supervision (and at considerable personal sacrifice for this important merchant). Like yeshivot everywhere, tuition-fees do not suffice and so spirited fund-raising activities — community-wide — are an integral and enthusiastic part of the Deal Syrian social scene.

To satisfy the need of parents who lean to ultra-Orthodoxy a small school was recently established by Rabbi Isaac Dwek. He was also instrumental in founding the "kollel" in Deal, a "house-of-study" dealing with advanced Talmudic and rabbinic studies.

Views of The Ultra-Orthodox

Very Orthodox groups argue that it is foolhardy, suicidal, to disregard the menace to the continuation of Jewry and Judaism. Most alarming is the secularization with its accompanying high rate of intermarriage. An *average* of more than 40 percent of marriages of Jews in the United States take place with non-Jews. In some cities distant from New York (where the intermarriage rate is lower), intermarriage rises to 60

percent or more; in Denver, to cite one example among others. Offspring of such marriages yield children who are brought up most frequently with little or no active affiliation with Judaism; and will likely wipe out any identification with the Jewish world. In a discussion with Professor Egon Mayer concerning his longtime study of intermarriage, the writer expressed some concern over the future of Judaism. Professor Mayer sought to reassure me. However in his recent book *Intercom* dealing with the offspring of intermarried families, even when the non-Jewish mate had converted to Judaism, the evidence Mayer adduces supports the uneasiness over Jewish continuity in such families. (As we see elsewhere in this study the officially the Syrian Sepharadi community accepts no converts.)

The ultra-Orthodox point to the exceptional low birth rate among Jewish couples. While the statistical average in the general population in the United States is a little more than 2 offspring per couple the average in Jewish marriages is 1.7 or 1.8 children — not enough to demographically reproduce the parents. The ultra-Orthodox press on to cite a new trend that is becoming increasingly widespread. Some young Jews (as well as non-Jews), are electing not to marry; or else they marry at comparatively advanced ages, thus ensuring a very low birth rate.

These very-Orthodox seek to defend the faith from secularization, "by putting up fences around the Torah." They insist that thoughtful and concerned Jews must take cognizance of the enemy, and fortify religious practice and life as a necessity for Jewish survival. Instances of some ultra-Orthodox demands have been cited earlier; no T.V. in homes, no mixed-sex dancing or seating at weddings, and other practices which were restricted to followers of a *small number* of rabbis in the old country.

Respect for rabbis

Traditionally religious Syrians harbor much reverence for "rabbis"; the more devout the greater the respect for them. Of the rabbis we have referred to as "zealous" or as "very-Orthodox," most had studied in Jerusalem or in American

Ashkenazi very orthodox (ultra) yeshivot. But because of the Syrian community's traditional respect for orthodoxy, these zealous rabbis have developed a small but growing following. To protect Judaism from threatening dangers, they insist on practices more stringent than is traditional among most Syrian Sepharadeem. Because of the reverence with which *all* rabbis are held, few traditionalists choose to, or dare to oppose them in ritual instances, although there exists quiet but unorganized resistance. Such latent opposition is based on apprehension that centuries old Near East traditions are threatened and are being aggressively supplanted by extreme almost Ḥasidic-influenced ultra-Orthodoxy.

That religious polarization has already appeared is illustrated by recent events in the (Egyptian) *Ahava ve-Aḥva* Congregation. A young rabbi was engaged without a contract to teach adult-education classes of religious texts. He assumed to himself the role of congregation rabbi, unresisted, there being no official rabbi. Before long he was delivering weekly very long sermons to which the Egyptian congregants were totally unaccustomed. No pleas could get him to shorten his fierce admonitions. (In Egypt and Syria sermons were delivered perhaps *twice a year,* on holidays.) Increasingly, it was complained, he was imposing his ultra-orthodox doctrines and demands, on a reluctant and increasingly resistant congregation. When members began to stay away because of dissatisfaction, a vast majority decided to retire him. He refused to accept this ouster as rabbi although self-appointed, despite the offer of a generous contract to serve *only as adult-teacher,* and persisted in his role as rabbi and continued to deliver long sermons. It was sought to exclude him physically, to no avail. To exclude him, the synagogue remained closed for several weeks; the congregation was *determined* to keep him out. With the participation of the ultra-orthodox rabbis of the community he and his followers picketed the synagogue; but the congregation continued in its determination. Finally he yielded — but only to establish with his few followers *another* 'Ahava ve Aḥva' synagogue only a few feet removed, in rented space at the Young Israel Congregation. A large sign erected on the Young

Israel premises announces the existence of a *second* "Ahava ve Aḥva Synagogue," a militantly ultra-Orthodox one.

Rabbi Isaac Dwek, head of the important Deal synagogue in New Jersey, is dedicated, zealous, in his religious leadership of the community. Here too there was unspoken resistance. Rabbi Dwek was active in the growing Hillel Yeshiva in that area and became Chairman of the Hebrew education section, engaging the Hebrew teachers and formulating the curriculum as well as teaching some classes. After a number of years active parental rebellion developed. An independent examination of the students revealed, it was claimed, that the overwhelming emphasis had been on Talmudic material, taught by individuals largely recruited from the Ashkenazi Agudath Israel-type ultra-Orthodox seminary in nearby Lakewood. Traditionally-religious parents were dismayed, alarmed. They promptly retired numerous teachers of Hebrew subjects, and the Hebrew Chairman resigned. Rabbi Dwek promptly rented quarters in Deal to establish a new school which will conform to his exacting doctrines.

This trend, some fear, may bring the Syrian very Orthodox to closer identification with Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox counterparts. This, some feel, can draw the Sepharadi community away from accustomed old-world middle-of-the-road Orthodoxy and consequently increase polarization.

The abandonment of traditional religion by large numbers of Ashkenazeem in the United States was the result of cultural assimilation, widespread secularization, and the loss of *ethnic consciousness and identification.* The decline of Yiddish with its rich background and the history attached to it served additionally to deal a powerful blow to the Jewish world.

Arabic, the tongue of the early Syrian immigrants to New York, although not spoken by later generations, remains perhaps symbolically, a cherished heritage. (In this connection we include in this volume Judeo-Arabic proverbs and some common vocabulary.) Old world customs, so jealously kept alive, along with traditional Sepharadi religious observances in a distinctively pronounced Hebrew, as well as resentment at being looked-down upon by the Ashkenazeem, served to maintain the

separateness in which they appear to have a feeling of pride, of eminence. To the degree that the Syrian Sepharadeem lose their sense of distinctiveness, their assimilation, whether to secularism, or to "black hat," the Hasidic-like Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodoxy, they will cease to be the "unique ethnic Jewish community;" one which has been regarded as extraordinary — phenomenal. Most traditional Syrians appear to be intent on maintaining their distinctiveness with its accompanying attributes. They appear determined to perpetuate their accustomed social and religious traditions, whose continuing particularism, separateness, they view as crucial to the community's future. But as increasing numbers of parents uncritically enroll their children in yeshivot established by the ultra-Orthodox, the characteristics of the present-day community, some assert, may ultimately, imperceptibly, become diluted and altered.

The rise of ultra-Orthodox religious views is a world-wide pheonomenon. It is exemplified by Christian Fundamentalism, by Islamic reversion to *Shari-ᶜa* ("Law"), seen in Khomeini-Iran and to a lesser extent in the Persian Gulf States and elsewhere in the Middle East. The Jewish religious conflicts in Israel also reflect a rise in Orthodox militancy, which is beginning to assert itself in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. The somewhat distant future in Flatbush is uncertain. What is evident is the possibility of polarization with its unknown, but potentially significant alteration of the character of centuries-old religions practices — and perhaps social traditions of the Syrian-originated Sepharadeem.

Change and Polarization

The unity of religion among Syrian Sepharadeem in New York appears to be solid, monolithic. They are spoken of as being "very religious," totally united, totally conforming to community adherence as it was practiced in the old country and for the several generations of life in the United States. However there are critical indications of change and variations, new elements, differences which in time may produce significant alterations in the religious and social profile of the community.

Tradition-bound Syrians have largely resisted the pressures

of assimilation until this time. But some of their numbers show signs of being increasingly influenced by the world in which they find themselves, beleaguered from the "left" — secularization, and set upon from the "right" — ultra-Orthodoxy.

The attack from the "left" — secularization — is general, worldwide, and embodies a departure from traditional modes of living, and an increasing abandonment of religious practice, and even, of religion. The youth among Syrians are not immune to the trends around them, and increasingly some are quietly, imperceptibly turning away from the accustomed pattern of their homelife and its traditions. Among some, marriages take place later in life, and some do not marry. (Many more, however, continue to marry, and at a young age.) In some instances, still very few compared to the general population of Ashkenazeem, they marry outside the Jewish faith.

The assault on the accustomed moderate religious life of the Syrian community from the "right-wing" — ultra-Orthodoxy, is a subtle one, in that it has some roots in the traditionally-minded Aleppo and Damascus pattern of observance. These roots reflect the Kabbalism, "accepted-received," mysticism, of some of the rabbis in Syria, confined to a small number, who were perhaps blindly and very highly revered as *me-qub-aleem* ["received" into the folds of mysticism]. While the Syrian-Jewish population at large follows middle-of-the-road orthodoxy, nevertheless Rabbi Yiṣḥaq Luria (1534-1572) in Safed, "Rab Ha-ari," the Lion, the foremost Kabbalist, had an influence on many rabbis of Syria, and kabbalistic components are incorporated — unrecognized as such by most — in the prayers and religious doctrines of Sepharadi (and Ashkenazi) communities. A few, long-ago ultra-Orthodox mystics, *me-qub-aleem,* formerly fasted *from one Sabbath to the next* with a consequent death of some. This is mentioned in rabbinic Responsa, as well as by Dr. Alex Russell in his *A Natural History of Aleppo* (1756). Such fasts were forbidden later, to be succeeded by three-day fasts. Among a miniscule number of the very pious, it is now customary to regularly fast every Monday and Thursday. [Salḥa Silvera Sutton (1869-1942), this writer's mother, had sometimes been

among those who followed this practice.] Kabbalism is a component of the curriculum of Aleppoan *yeshivá ʿelyona'* (higher yeshiva) in Jerusalem, *Porát Yosef*, and its earlier Aleppoan predecessor yeshiva in the Holy City. Graduates of this rabbinic school are dispersed in every country with a Syrian colony, where they quietly seek to introduce their ultra-Orthodox myticism-laden doctrines. American-Syrians inclined to ultra-Orthodoxy may have also attended Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox schools in Baltimore, Lakewood, NJ, or Skokie, IL., as was stated, since there were no Sepharadi counterparts here. It is to Syrian rabbis who studied in such schools as well, that we can attribute the recent establishment of the several ultra-Orthodox Sepharadi yeshivot in Flatbush.

[The term "Hasidic" must be explained. *Ḥesed* (Heb.) from which *ḥasideem* derives, means "compassion". To practice *ḥasidoot* is to be extremely religious (associated, usually with kabbalistic theories and practices). However "Hasidic" is a term applied to some religious mystical sects of central and Eastern Europe, which have a fervent attachment to their group's charismatic leader, a supreme authority among them. This movement sprang up in 18th century Europe to meet the need of sections of severely, tragically, persecuted Jewry. Deep piety, *ḥasidoot* and its practioners, *ḥasideem* should not be confused with Hasidim attached to a sect, such as Lubavitch, Satmar, etc. Our references to "Hasidic-like practices" etc., applies to ultra-Orthodox groups, but not necessarily associated with sectarian ultra-Orthodoxy.]

Chapter Nine

Higher Education and Professions

ALIENATION from community life is sometimes the outgrowth of attendance at colleges and universities distant from New York, at schools where there are relatively few Jewish fellow-students. Is it the chance attendance at such schools which brings about the distancing from the accustomed family traditions? One may speculate that the choice of school is perhaps the reflection of latent or active dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the folk-society pattern of life within the parental families. Some parents question the wisdom of permitting their children to attend college *anywhere*, because of the fear of possibly alienating influences. With the realization of the risks attendant on college education far from home, most parents do their utmost to place their college-bound children in local or nearby schools. The offspring will be close to home and its influence, and thus kept within the orbit of the community and the extended family. Additionally, in and near New York, the students will continue to be surrounded by other Jewish students. The first choice of schools is Brooklyn College, a part of the New York City university system, which is located less than fifteen minutes distance from the Syrian residential area. Yeshiva University is equally favored, by the religious; it is in New York City and their children will be in the midst of an all-Jewish environment. New York University is also well favored.

Higher education, attending college, is a reflection of social upward mobility, as in the general population. Thus while some parents see little to be gained from a college education, they will nevertheless acquiesce. Young people with a determination to acquire a profession will meet less resistance from parents, who are proud of the prestige that will result from such education. Others are content with the status attached to *some* college education. Daughters usually earn a degree; their brothers do not as regularly complete college studies; "a couple of years" at college satisfies the prestige-demand. With perhaps thirteen or fourteen years of schooling, why expend more time on book learning? The "drop-out years" will be more rewarding in commerce, since parents of college-age youth are often in their own — and often successful — enterprises. They are eager for their sons to join them in business, just as the offspring are equally eager to enter as well-rewarded participants, and later, as successors in thriving economic activities. A few students go on to take M.B.A. degrees, Masters of Business Administration, to the benefit and advancement of their parents' enterprises.

As has been noted, many of the business enterprises are family operated. What is more practical than to have relatives as associates? As is possible, brothers, sons, sons-in-law are reliable and zealous. Relatives not available, Syrian merchants favor the employment of others from the community. They know them, their capacities and their devotion to succeeding in their work, since they too aspire to an ultimate standing of importance in the economic world. By drawing the children into their work parents see several advantages. With their hold on the business purse-strings, the fathers command influence with their children. Through attractive financial arrangements they succeed in keeping them close to the family — and to the close-knit bonds of the community and its accustomed pattern. *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* described the difficulties encountered by the few Syrians who achieved professional status in the 1930's. Solomon Isaaco Silvera, a brilliant physician, and two attorneys could not draw the custom and confidence of the Syrians. Ultimately the physician went on to practice successfully away from New York; the attorneys felt compelled to abandon their practice and revert to becoming dry-goods

retailers at a distance from the Syrian community. Was it lack of confidence *in themselves*, and consequently in the young professionals, that caused Syrians to shun the lawyers and the physician? Syrians of that era were struggling to achieve some financial advancement in a time of general depression. However, the former lack of self-confidence and defensive distancing of the earlier periods has been supplanted by a sense of achievement, and confidence in the ability of the young professionals.

Some time had been needed to settle comfortably in Flatbush and to construct the several handsome synagogues there. Syrian youth have taken professional degrees, in medicine, law, accounting, dentistry, and some earlier, in theoretical science. Professional training has not alienated most of them from their families and the traditional life of the community. They achieve community acceptance now, and impressive success. They are highly regarded, sought after socially as well as professionally. Earlier, several had earned doctorates in physics, but with the end to former bountiful governmental subsidies for the physical and theoretical sciences, these youths after several years of teaching found themselves without work. Those who were astute enough to have selected successful businessmen as fathers were rescued by responsible positions in their fathers' enterprises, with salaries they could not dream of, even as mature, tenured professors. Without a going business to fall back upon, one physics professor with two textbooks to his name accepted a modest accounting position in the California city where he had studied and taught. He was and remains separated — alienated from his parental community and its traditions. Now, the vast majority of Syrian new professionals practice happily in Flatbush and New Jersey, centers of fellow-Sepharadeem.

Other Syrians have earned recognition in fields removed from community life and services. Moshé Safdie is a world-renowned architect born in Israel; his parents had originated in Aleppo. Joseph Churba is a political and military commentator of international repute. Some are recognized photographers, painters, in other areas of plastic arts, and in the news media. Fritzi (Frieda) Abadi Ginsberg (daughter of the late much-

revered Ḥakham Matloub Abadi), is perhaps the most successful of the several painters. Her "one-man" shows in prominent New York galleries meet with almost total sell-outs. Ms. Altoun Sultan is also an artist of distinction, as are Mozelle Tawil and Gillie Safdeye, both talented photographers. Danny Hedaya is a film and television star. His current role is in the critically acclaimed film *Blood Simple.* Bob Dishey is a leading Broadway performer. Susan Ades and William Shebar ("Shehebar") are on the reporting staff of the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour. Susan Chira is a by-line writer for *The New York Times.* Victor Felix Zonana writes for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times.*

Isaac F. Silvera, the son of an Aleppoan father and an American-born mother of Syrian parents, a physics professor with his own laboratory at Harvard University, is considered a potential Nobel Prize candidate. His cousin Susan Dweck is also at Harvard, a Professor of Education. Still another cousin, Joseph Nahem, Ph.D., is connected with Maimonides Hospital in the Mental Health Department. Both he and a brother, Samuel, had been attorneys (and earlier, both had been Big League baseball players for few seasons.). These individuals are totally separated from the Syrian Sepharadi scene.

Lawyers are numerous in the community, as are Syrians in health care: physicians, dentists, psychiatrists, etc. In a questionnaire from Down State Medical Center seeking cancer data within the community, fifteen Syrian physicians participated in the survey. These health professionals live within the fold where most have their thriving practice, in Brooklyn and on the Jersey shore.

Syrian Enterprises

Outstanding for their modesty as for their devotion and brilliant leadership of Sepharadi Syrian education particularly in Deal, are Saul and Ely Ashkenazi. Their ability in commerce matches their other talents, and created the *Soundesign* brand of popular electronic audio products. They set an example for others with their generous support of Jewish, Syrian and other organizations.

Another member of the Flatbush community is known

throughout the metropolitan area, and even internationally. Eddie Antar, a relatively young man with little formal education created and operates the "Crazy Eddie" chain of thirty or more electronic/audio discount stores. His dramatic publicity has made "Crazy Eddie" virtually a household word. He is referred to in newspaper articles and in editorials of *The New York Times* and other news media. In a listing of "must" locations that a foreign visitor should visit, "Crazy Eddie" stores are recommended, along with the World Trade Center, the Empire State Building, and other such attractions.

Eddie Antar is characteristically family-oriented. Thus his father, Sam Antar, as well as uncles and other relatives are officers and operating executives of his highly successful corporation whose shares are vigorously recommended and which are actively traded on the stock exchange. There are few Sepharadic (and some Ashkenazic) charities and educational institutions to which he does not contribute generously.

In the financial world, patrons use the Republic National Bank with its many branches, both in the United States and internationally. This institution is the creation of Edmond Safra, whose father, Jacob, a private banker in Aleppo, had re-settled in Beirut some fifty years ago, where Edmond had been born. [See the oral biography of an aunt, Selma Dwek Sutton.] The Republic National Bank is globally deemed to be among the foremost in profitability, and commands much respect in the banking and financial world. Until recently Edmond Safra was the largest individual stockholder in American Express-Shearson.

Every New Yorker will have shopped in one of the 25 or 30 stores of Duane Reade Drugs, an expanding retail chain with perhaps "the best values." The "Century-21" department stores (2), the "Strawberry" shops, "B-D Stores," "American Discount Stores," the 30-store chain of "Rainbow Shops," "S & A," and others, are lively chains of discount merchandise.

Equally, and perhaps even more successful than retailers are the New York wholesalers, most of whom are importers of wearing apparel, electronics, and the like, from the Far East. Many of them sell their merchandise to the huge national retail

chains, among which are Sears, Woolworth, K-Mart, J C Penny, Wal-mart, and others.

When these Syrian merchants are seasonally in Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong, their Sabbath prayer-services there may count from thirty to sixty individuals in attendance. Often the services are followed by elaborate *Sabt* (Saturday) brunches, with exotic Syrian delicacies they flew with them from Flatbush. Seasonally too, a horde of these merchants may be seen crowding up to the open Sefer Torah at a Saturday morning prayer-services in New York to offer Thanksgiving Prayers for a "Safe return from a perilous journey."

Jeans? Hair-care? Jordache, Jou-Jou, Sasson, Bon Jour and others, are also Syrian-Sepharadi owned.

The Jordache enterprise is an example, *par excellence,* of the American Success Story. The progress of the three brothers who established this conglomerate has left them modest and unassuming. Joe (Yossie), Avi, and Raphael (Raffi) Nakash, ("Jordache") are Israeli-born sons of an Aleppo-Baghdad union. They began with a lowly retail store in Brooklyn upon their arrival here less than fifteen years ago. Their franchised name is on a wide variety of products, which retail in very impressive quantities. Edmond Safra, Saul and Ely Ashkenazi, Eddie Antar and 'Jordache' brothers, with others, are outstandingly solicitous about Sepharadi educational institutions and markedly generous in their general charitable contributions. Safra and others, each employ a bursar, charged with overseeing their charities.

Women's Emergence

Obscured until very recent years by the commercial activity of the male merchants of the community, Syrian females are increasingly demonstrating their ability and independent enterprise, as was noted. Withal, they lead conventional lives involving marriage and home-making. The oral testimony of Rae "Ezra" Cohen elsewhere in this study, provides an example and a group-portrait of the activities of Syrian women in Flatbush.

Chapter Ten

The Sephardic Community Center

IT was not until 1981, more than thirty-five years after the abandonment of the Bensonhurst social center to a yeshiva, that the Sephardic Community Center was constructed under the driving and dedicated leadership of Morris Bailey, Isadore "Nouri" Dayan (members of the Damascus group), Morris E. Cohen, Irving J. Franco, "Eddie" Catton and many other devoted and self-sacrificing individuals. Now for the first time there was a gathering together in one enterprise embracing all Syrians of the community, including the Syrian-related Egyptians and Lebanese. The impressive structure cost 7.5 million dollars, financed through bountiful donations and formidable membership initiation fees. A mortgage of a million dollars remains, (perhaps less by now,) which is being collected quietly, "privately." Thanks to a large contribution by Edmond J. Safra, the structure bears the name Safra Building. The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies helped financially and organizationally, supplying the veteran director of the Bensonhurst Jewish Community House to the Sephardic Center. Since his demise, Michael Witkes, an experienced administrator, has succeeded him. The Center is almost entirely staffed by trained Ashkenazeem, from the Director downward, except for the semi-autonomous "Archives" — although several Sepharadi women are employed as directors of some youth activities, and as office assistants.

The Center offers its members a broad variety of cultural activities, classes in Jewish history and religion, language instruction in Hebrew (Ulpan). The arts offer instruction in painting, sculpture and ceramics. Psychology and several Yoga courses teach family management, behavior modification, self-awareness and offer consciousness-raising sessions; some, led by the talented Barbara Massry in particular, are very popular. (Classes in computers were offered but were discontinued due to lack of popular interest.) A book club and an investment club draw considerable numbers to their monthly meetings.

The magnificent swimming pool and gymnasium are well patronized; as is the Health Club, equipped with the ultimate in exercise machines, for which there is an additional substantial fee. Sports activities reflect a very powerful emphasis, many requiring a fee.

The youth section is very active, very lively. It offers programs for all ages, ranging from toddlers to youth of high school age. There is enthusiastic participation on the part of the youngsters, particularly in sports, and in excursions to professional and school basketball and baseball games.

Senior citizens receive much attention at the Center. Their annual membership fee is $52, which is reduced or waived in some instances. Facilities are reserved for their use, where they hold their many popular card games during daytime hours. Arts and crafts classes draw a modest attendance. Occasional Arabic and Israeli motion pictures and concerts are offered, as well as lunches on Purim, Hannukah, and other holidays. There are continuing programs for activities away from the Center, such as trips to New York to see designated films or musicals or to visit museums. Trips to Washington, D.C., Niagara Falls or other scenic locations are available from time to time at a moderate cost. Repeated trips to Atlantic City are popular among the senior citizens. They love the slot machines. Ruth Hefter, in charge of the Senior Citizens Division, is ever-busy planning interesting activities for them.

The Sepharadic Archives

A semi-autonomous division of the Center is the "Sepharadic Archives" which came into being through the

stimulus provided by the publication of *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush.* (It uses a variation of the cover design of *Magic Carpet* as its logo.) The "Archives" is the inspiration of Morris A. Shamah, M.D., and Linda, his wife, who jointly direct its activities, with the collaboration of Miss Diane Esses. The "Archives" is dedicated to the gathering and recording of Jewish Near East history and customs. Countless oral biographies were gathered by its members, with a heightened sensitivity to Jewish and Syrian ethnic history. Hundreds of *pizmoneem,* the Syrian religious non-liturgical songs, have been recorded with the assistance of cantors in the community, and other Oriental-music lovers. Exhibits of photo-history and artifacts, highlighting the background of the several regional component groups in the Near East, have been offered. One festivity was devoted to Lebanon and its Jewish life, another dealt with the recent history of Egypt's Jews.

December 4, 1983 was a notable day in the development of the "Archives," a day when several hundred individuals, scholars and students, gathered from everywhere, along with community members, attending lectures and workshops ". . . to explore a traditional community," in its striving to perpetuate its identity in the face of the pressures of assimilation. The keynote speakers were the distinguished Professor Norman Stillman, and Joseph A. D. Sutton, the writer of this text. Stillman dealt with "the saga of Syrian Jews since ancient times." I was privileged to speak on the history of Syrian Jewry in more recent epochs. Among the workshops which engaged the participants for half a day were "Problems of Intermarriage and Assimilation," led by Professor Victor Sanua, an authority on Oriental life, and Mrs. Gita Sultan, a veteran leader of community activities. A knowledgeable community figure, Sam Catton, led the examination of "Syrian Custom and Ritual." Stephan Shalom and Rabbi Mitchell Serles, Director of The Safra Institute of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University and spiritual head of the newly-established Sepharadic synagogue in Scarsdale, led a discussion on "The Impact of Religion on Higher Education." A Torah-scholar and musicologist, the genial David A. Tawil, gave a talk on Syrian religious music and its origins in Arabia and Persia, illustrated with musical

examples on the lute ("ood"), played by Abraham H. Tawil. Liturgical songs were given by Maurice Shoueka, a many-talented cantor. The scholarly Rabbi Dr. Ezra Labaton with Rae "Ezra" Cohen, a 'pioneer' woman in the community, headed the workshop on the "Changing Roles Within the Community." The day saw lively participation on the part of the several hundred who were deeply interested in the study of the problem of a traditional community grappling with the challenges of an assimilative society in which it is imbedded.

The event was deeply stimulating. Similar future activities will surely harness the keen interest and enthusiasm of the participants into enduring and productive channels.

Additionally, while there is great community pride in its handsome Sephardic Community Center, at the same time a small measure of concern has developed among some — that the Community Center needs to exert greater initiative to draw in the post-adolescent youth in colleges and universities, who should be providing role models and future leadership. Equally needed is a community monthly publication to carry local news as well as articles on Sepharadi culture and history, to which students at colleges and universities as well as others, can contribute and develop, like the *Sepharadi Voice*, in Montreal, and the early *Magen David Bulletin*..

A highly ambitious Sepharadic Archives event took months of preparation for the ten-day exhibit "The Spirit of Aleppo, Syrian Jewish Immigrant Life in New York 1890-1939," which was held May 18 to June 1, 1986. Countless photographs, documents and memorabilia illustrating life in Aleppo and in the early years in New York appeared to hold the visitors fascinated. The lavishly illustrated catalogue to the exhibit contained considerable historical information, much of it based on *Magic Carpet, Aleppo-in-Flatbush* and its author, who was *nominally* Historical Consultant to the Exhibit.

Recent immigrants "transplanted from Aleppo" contributed their sometimes harrowing memories. Accordingly it is timely to consider their recent history in Aleppo and Damascus and their suspenseful arrivals as would-be-immigrants in New York.

Chapter Eleven

Jews in Present-Day Syria

RECENT arrivals from Aleppo — many more than migrants from Damascus — who are now increasing in number, recount the disturbingly changed atmosphere that began with the period approaching the establishment of the State of Israel. Syria saw its complete independance as a sovereign state in 1944, and with it came an energetic rebuilding and modernization of Aleppo and Damascus. Hospitals and public schools were built, large universities were established. Streets were widened, the cities beautified and the economy stimulated. But the Jewish population was afforded few benefits. Anti-Zionist activity encouraged by Damascus the capital in the throes of anti-Israeli nationalism, began to be felt by the Jews in discriminatory edicts. The culmination came November 1947, the day when the United Nations voted the division of Palestine. In Aleppo, government-organized groups invaded Jewish institutions — synagogues, schools, a few stores and some homes — their contents were piled in the courtyards where gasoline trucks arrived to soak them. Then, books, Sepher-Torah scrolls, equipment, and furnishings were set ablaze. The ancient Great Synagogue was not spared; its contents, including the priceless Aleppo Codex were set on fire. Seeing this desecration, a prominent rabbi, Ḥakham Mose Mizrahi sought to fling himself into the blaze. Two Muslim youths gently carried him out. "We were ordered to burn property, *'Khakham,'* not to take lives,"

they said to him. A nearby Jew seeing the Codex in the flames seized it and ran off with the partially burned manuscript. (This episode and the thousand-year history and 'adventures' of the sacred 9th century text is related elsewhere in this study.) Jews were in alarm, fearful of an impending massacre. Many fled on the first train to Lebanon. Others huddled together that night behind barricaded doors and windows. By nightfall the Army appeared to patrol and quiet the city. The feared massacre did not materialize. Many who ultimately made their way to New York recalled to me with gratitude, the concern and help of Muslim and sometimes, Christian friends and neighbors, some who gave them shelter in their homes that night.

Repression

This was the beginning of a period of persecution, beatings, imprisonment and torture for Jews suspected of pro-Israel sympathies and those who sought to flee the country. It became difficult for Jews to earn a livelihood. Jewish employees were dismissed from government service and a boycott of Jewish businesses was imposed. Those who sought to flee Syria secretly were imprisoned and subjected to torture; not a few Jews lost their lives at the hands of the Secret Police, the *Mukhabara,* often staffed with Palestinian zealots. Not only were Jews forbidden to leave the country under threats of dire punishment, they were forbidden the right to be more than three miles from their homes, — and even, for a short period, to appear on the balconies of their residences. Jewish schools were closed, and later when the terror abated they were permitted to reopen with *Muslims as principals.* In ensuing years, many, including young people, girls as well as boys, had the courage to make their way out of the country, to nearby Turkey or Lebanon, from where many were smuggled to Israel. The once respected and sizeable Jewish population of Aleppo has shrunk to a little more than 400 — those with young families and the elderly. (Damascus still has '4000' Jews.) Thus there are none left in Syria whose families are not grievously broken up, disrupted by the flight of fathers, sons and daughters, and close

relatives. A sad plight for those who remain behind — and for those who succeeded in escaping.

For reasons best known to the Syrian authorities now, they no longer persecute the Jews. In July, 1977, they permitted fourteen young unmarried women to migrate to the United States as "proxy-brides" since there were no prospective Jewish husbands left in the country and they would marry no others. However, additional permits for "proxy-brides" like the first batch, were not issued as promised. The Syrians now permit Jews to travel abroad purportedly for medical treatments, or else to visit relatives in Western countries — travelers who must return. This is conditional on posting security of several thousand dollars per person — and only if the traveler leaves behind close relatives, spouses, parents, or children — hostages. Most travelers evince no intent to return. They cannot escape fears of possible renewed and violent outbursts, although new arrivals speak of a 'comfortable' and undisturbed Jewish existence in Aleppo and Damascus.

Jewish Life in Syria Today

Conditions of Jewish life in Syria now have indeed improved considerably over the harrowing period of persecution following the establishment of the State of Israel. Oral informants we will read later, relate that except for the woeful separations due to escape of close relatives, Jewish life in Aleppo and Damascus has once again become tolerable. Once again, Jews have resumed accustomed commercial activities, some on a sizeable scale. Many in Aleppo are successful dealers in gold and the manufacture of jewelry. Recent arrivals speak of the respect accorded them by the general population and the governmental authorities.

On a televised Damascus reception for visiting President Mitterand of France we were recently informed by a Jew visiting from Damascus, Ḥafez al-Assad, head of Syria, was questioned by a French newspaper correspondent regarding the mistreatment of Syrian Jews. Assad indignantly denied such charges and insisted that Jews were afforded full freedom, and opportunities to develop. He cited free university education that

was also available to every Jew. In proportion to their population and to the number of physicians in the country, Jews, he said, should statistically have *one-and-a-half* graduates of medical schools. Instead, 70 Jews in Damascus have medical diplomas, and an additional seven in Aleppo. The country, President Assad stated, has twenty-eight Jewish-owned pharmacies and seventeen licensed engineers. For whatever the reasons, our informant related that only a handful of Jews practice medicine in Damascus and in Aleppo.

The informant, a yarn dealer of some importance in Damascus, was about to return to his home after a social visit here of six weeks. He reported that relatives of Jews who had been given permission to go abroad "temporarily" and had not returned are now unmolested. Offered a gift of a copy of *Magic Carpet*, he politely declined to accept it, uncertain about its entry into Syria "without raising suspicions of possible espionage activity." Small wonder that perhaps every Jew in Syria, according to informants, regardless of current easier circumstances, would unhesitatingly abandon the country if it were possible.

Assad is a complex individual, difficult to fathom, but his undeclared consideration for "his" Jews now, is manifest in the improvement of their lot — a 'normalization.' It may explain permission for Jews to leave Syria however temporarily, without reprisals against their relatives. But — what if Syria and Israel were to clash, as seems possible, or that relations may become still more tense?

Refugees Entering the United States

It would be remiss to leave recent Syrian refugees to New York without speaking of their immigration problems. The U.S. government is benign, friendly, to Jews able to quit Syria. In most instances the State Department and Immigration are ready to accord them asylum, refugee status, and with it, permission to seek work even prior to receiving the cherished Green Card, which may require some months. However, many refugees encounter problems which could result in failing to achieve refugee status, and are in dread of being deported. They require help beyond that of HIAS.

When such agonizing problems arise they hurry to Sylvia Wurf in their desperation. Sylvia is Congressman Stephan Solarz's immigration specialist stationed in his district office. She has a broad knowledge of immigration regulations, and friendly relations with both State Department and Immigration officials. Her unhesitating assistance to the distressed applicants reassures them and calms their nightmares of possible rejection. As I witnessed several times, without ceremony she picks up the telephone to communicate with officials in Washington, Jerusalem or Athens where so many Syrian escapees await "good news" concerning their immigration to the United States. Syrian refugees who have been accepted to refugee status through her assistance speak of her with deepest appreciation and affection. Few are their family festivities, circumcisions, bar mizvas and other occasions to which she fails to receive an invitation. They think of her as a guardian angel ready to help them in time of distress.

It is to be remembered that Congressman Solarz in whose district large numbers of Syrians reside, is deeply interested in the situation of the Jews who are locked-in in Syria, forbidden the right to leave the country. He has reached Secretaries of State and President Carter in seeking help to free Syrian Jews. On more than one occasion he traveled to Syria to plead with the Syrian Government. The result of one such trip was the release of fourteen unmarried no-longer young-women eager for Jewish mates — who were no longer available, since they had smuggled themselves out of the country.

Congressman Charles E. Schumer in whose District there are many Syrians is also very helpful to the new immigrants. His office is unstinting in its efforts to smooth their road in overcoming technical difficulties.

Immigration Contrasts

The arrival of Syrians in New York now, how different from the difficulties encountered by the earlier immigrants to the Lower East Side, who came "speechless" and bewildered by their immersion into an alien world. The new arrivals today are greeted by well-established relatives and friends who afford

them every assistance. They come to a developed community which closely replicates their life in the old country in language, customs, and traditions.

The new immigrants seem to form distinctive colonies of their own. Some who are recent escapees from Aleppo, Damascus, and Egypt, others who had sojourned in Israel and Lebanon, still others who are here as "visitors", appear to huddle together. Their social life is a continuation of closeness to recent fellow residents abroad and to relatives here for many years. Even in Sha'are Zión Congregation where most Syrians worship, they sit together, apart from long-settled immigrants and their offspring.

Once they are officially recognized as refugees, they are quickly processed as legitimate immigrants, and soon granted the cherished "Green Cards" which declare them legal residents and able to seek work. HIAS and NYANA as well as the Sepharadic Bikoor Ḥoleem aid them in their proceedings. Since many succeeded in secretly exporting some means, and with considerable commercial experience in the home of the ancient caravan-trade, they seem quickly to establish a satisfactory life in Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

Coda

THE Syrian Sepharadi community under study has succeeded in perpetuating the mores and customs of old Aleppo and Damascus in an exceptional manner. In the midst of an insistant assimilative society it has succeeded in maintaining its distinction decade after decade in the three-quarters of a century since it first coalesced. While it has absorbed much of the culture in which it is located, it continues to perpetuate a folk-closeness, and its customs. Fresh enterprise in the economic world has brought its members impressive advancement. Its youth have increasingly taken to secular education, some to professional careers. Withal, the majority appear to cling to and luxuriate in their traditional environment, although they may have been expected to assimilate to the larger society around them, like most immigrant ethnic groups.

Concern for religiosity is on the increase, among Syrian Jews as in the nation, even worldwide. In Flatbush much of this can be attributed to the enlarging ultra-Orthodox yeshiva education (but not exclusively). Students are often more observant than their Syrian traditionally-religious parents and thus affect the attitude of some of the elders. Such ultra-Orthodoxy is somewhat influenced by 'almost-Hasidic', 'Black Hat' Ashkenazeem and appears to manifest a possible future schism from the normative Syrian religious orthodoxy as practiced by the majority. In this we may foresee a religious polarization which may affect the mores of the community; the ultra rabbis appear increasingly to associate themselves more closely with 'Black Hats' or Hasidic-Ashkenazeem. And while the majority in the community cling to traditional religious

observance, its members do not have the singleminded zealousness of the ultras who seek to influence fellow-Sepharadeem.

While there is some loss to the traditional community because of secularization by some, it appears to be perhaps more than compensated for by the newly evident religious zeal on the part of the young; nowhere more visible than in their impressively large percentage of attendance at religious services and classes.

Even when they lived comfortably among themselves in Bensonhurst they continued to bear the Lower East Side stigma of "primitiveness" thrust upon them by the Ashkenazeem for their unfamiliar culture of the Near East. Today Ashkenazeem will repeat a stereotype of Syrian Jews not only as "very religious" but additionally as "very rich." Many Syrian Sepharadeem have met,through hard work and enterprise, with considerable success in their enterprises. Their mode of living in a choice area of Flatbush and the beauty of their houses of worship have not gone unnoticed by the Ashkenazeem who had looked down upon them (previously "bizarre," but now, "curious"). Nor do they overlook the outstanding philanthropy of the Syrians, their generous support to Israel and its religious institutions, their contributions to local Ashkenazi yeshivot, and other religious enterprises. Ashkenazeem who know them indicate their respect and admiration.

For the foreseeable *near future* it is our view that the community will continue its closeness, its adhesion to customary tradition, its exceptional personality. An additional factor making for a continuation of the close-knit community life is the presence of the popular and impressive Sephardic Community Center. It reinforces the folk-society social life — and traditional culture.

❦

BOOK II

ORAL BIOGRAPHIES

Period and Place Guide To The Oral Biographies

I *Early Aleppo, 1895-1929*

Yadaʿh "Jack Cayre 125
Eli Hedaya Pt.I 129
Murad Shʿayo 138
Pauline Grazi (Garazi) 149
Isaac Goldman 158
Mr. "S.S." 163
Marie Toussie 170
David Sasson 177
Mary Hedaya 187
Yvette Mizraḥi 192

II *Mid-To-Later Aleppo, 1930-1986*

Latifeᶜikehs 199
David Shamah 203
Eduard Farḥi 208
Mrs. "G.S." 215
Aslan Bawabe 222
Morris Antebi 227
Margo Silvera 232

III *From Aleppo, etc. Finally in N.Y.*

Sofie Ashkenazi, (Mex.) 240
Esther Abadi, (Palest.) 253
Eli Hedaya, Pt.II (Lower East Side) 258
Gabriel Sheḥebar, (Cairo, Cuba) 267
Seleem Esses (Cuba) 281
Murad (Max) Ancona 283
Sonia Cohen (Paris, Ethiopia, etc.) 288
Aharon Laniado (Palestine/Israel) 296
Jacob (Jack) Shrem (Killez in Turkey) 303
Neḥemia Ezekiel (Baghdád) 306
Victor Zakay (Panama) 313

IV *From, And Via Beirut, Damascus*

Basil Cohén 322
Natan Lati 326
Selma Duek Sutton 338
Fred (Faraj) Anzarouth 345

V *N.Y., Born In or Long Time Residents*

Harry Zebede 355
Rachel Sarway 363
Max, "Mac" Haddad 366
Joseph Isaac Shalóm 372
Max Isaac Sutton 377
Allan Ashear 380
David E. Cohén 389
Rae "Ezra Cohén 396
Joseph Abe Sultan 406
Eli Basil Cohén 414
Ronald "Ronnie" Weinisch 417
Yvonne Tabboush 425
Isaac Dabbaḥ (de Ashkenazi) 434
Niseem Laniado 441
Ralph Ezra Sitt 446
Amnon Shamosh 454

VI *Residents In Other Lands*

Isaac Dabbaḥ (Mexico) 434
Nisseem Laniado (Israel) ... 441
Ralph Sitt (Lima, Peru) 446
Amnon Shamosh (Israel) ... 454

ORAL BIOGRAPHIES

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus, the ancient Greek, set the pattern of oral history some 2400 years ago — although the Bible had led the way earlier. He reported the testimony of eye-witnesses and participants in historic battles and events. Moreover he travelled widely and reported on the peoples and customs of many countries. In the oral biographies which follow, his ancient technique is employed, but by means of modern technology — the tape recorder. Such biographies serve as a link from the immediate past to current time, in a human way — one that can give the reader the means to identify with the contemporary community through the individual interviews. Thus, biographic memoirs stand by themselves as a singular means of contributing to history.

The object in collecting these Syrian Jewish biographies is as crucial to history as were Herodotus' narratives — to secure the memories which would otherwise have been lost to us for all time. Jews lived in Syria for two thousand years or more. Now, with the anti-Israel (and anti-Jewish) disorders in Arab lands Jews have been compelled to flee. Written history among them has always been sparse — almost nonexistent. To capture the experiences of life in the Near East in this century from individuals who are still available, to record them, it was necessary to interview them, to have them relate their memories; some, the story of their recent tribulations under Islam, and their efforts to seek safety. The memories of early old-time immigrants and their offspring illustrate some of the qualities which contribute to make the Flatbush community unique.

Oral history involves numerous narrators, sometimes covering the same events or experiences. A few seeming

repetitions of similar experiences were not edited out of the text. Even when a story is of doubtful veracity such memories become another kind of historical source, which sophisticated researcher can put to good use. Human memory, fragile and biased as it may be sometimes, is a vital means of contributing to history. Thus it is important to bear in mind that all primary historic sources are subject to factual errors. Memory is a historic source, but subject to lapses, errors, distortions and even fabrications, whether wilful or not. Few distortions or fabrications of significant events were observed in these interviews: in which case the Editor's remarks appear as follows, "[*there are contradictory views*]" and the like.

To quote Herodotus — who is called "The Father of History" (484-425 B.C.E.). "For myself, my duty is to report all that is said; but I am not obliged to believe it alike." We subscribe further to Herodotus when he remarks that "the above reservation . . . applies [as well] to my whole History."

The selection of individuals for interviewing was a subjective one, based on the chronology which was sought, on the varieties of experience, the assumed reliability of the interviewee, and a representation of differing walks of life. Except for the relatively new immigrants, the majority [?] were known or well-known to this writer. With long-time residents and the American-born, interviews began in English, but often among the elderly, lapsed into Arabic. Newcomers' interviews were in Arabic; they interposed French and Hebrew at times. The Arabic of younger newcomers from Syria employed words which were unfamiliar to me. Unlike their fathers and early immigrants, they had benefitted from formal Arabic studies in schools, mandated by the Syrian Government. (The colloquial Judeo-Arabic of the 'market-place' that I speak is that of the early immigrants, which I acquired in my parental home.)

Most newcomers were receptive to me, having been given reassuring reports about me by reliable friends. Nevertheless, given the secretiveness of the Arab culture, (fear of the *ʿayn* — the evil eye, etc.), it was a slow process to put them at their ease and to induce them to speak freely. Preliminary chats in familiar colloquial Arabic, and establishing my connection to distinguished relatives known to them in Syria, served to

reassure them further as we sipped the ubiquitous Turkish coffee. It was important to establish a good, friendly relationship in order to nourish trust and interest in the undertaking.

Crucial to the success of gathering historical material is a thorough familiarity with background history — to know *what to ask* and *in what context.* Empathy and discreet encouragement were required, too, as well as care not to influence the responses. When the object of the interviews was outlined to them — the importance of preserving the history of Near Eastern Jews before time erases it, the fact that future generations will cherish knowing about the narrator's life — this further opened their memory banks to me and produced a wealth of recollections. It may have intrigued them to know that I had published a well-regarded objective and sympathetic history about Syrian Jewry, and that their own histories would possibly appear in another book in preparation. There were a few among the individuals approached who declined to be interviewed. A very few preferred to remain anonymous, fearful that any information they gave me could somehow adversely affect members of their families who remained in Aleppo and Damascus. Only two individuals requested that their finished interviews be suppressed.

To avoid presenting a seeming "interrogation," the many questions necessarily asked are subsumed in the answers given, thus achieving a running narrative. For example, we will read, "You ask me about my father's trade, well . . . ." Sensitivity to the individual's personality was a requirement; to indicate lively curiosity, to show an interest in his or her role, these were requisites.

The oral biographies which follow cover many decades and many locations, in the sometimes varied countries in which some interviewees had lived prior to coming to the U.S. In addition, the life of the Brooklyn community is depicted from early immigration days to the present.

And now, to revert to earlier times for the greater part, to immerse ourselves in what was virtually a medieval, a pre-industrial society and culture; bringing to a sad close two-thousand or more years of continuous Jewish life in ancient

Aleppo and Damascus; the Ḥálab purportedly of the Patriarch Abraham, and of King David's conquest, and the Damascus of the Prophet Elija.

Biographies overlap, and so a guide is provided, divided into places and periods to avoid what would otherwise appear to be a geographic maze, an historic labyrinth.

> *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* contained biographies in a Chapter "Six Families." (pages 109-135). Each was given a pseudonym, alphabetically, for reasons of what was thought to be discretion. The biographies evoked considerable interest, and curiosity as to the true identities of these families. "Now it can be told": (A) "Antebi", the late Sam (Saleem) Sutton, brother of this writer. (B) "Berecha" is Al Hamony (C) "Chira" is the late Edward Isaaco Silvera. (D) "Dayan, is Raphael Ades who continues to live in Manhattan. (E) "Eliachar" is the late David Attie. (F) "Franji" is the oral biography of this writer.

Chapter One

Early Aleppo, 1895-1929

Yadaᶜh "Jack" Cayre [Kairy] — Born in Aleppo
Interviews in English and Arabic — circa 1900

"IF ONE OF YOU JEWISH BUTCHERS DARES TO APPEAR, I WILL CUT HIS HEAD OFF!"

I came here to America sixty-four years ago, in February 1915 at the age of fifteen, to Philadelphia. It was the *second* time that I had arrived in America. The first time, I was in Ellis Island for eight days but they sent me back to Europe. I came with a young woman by the name of Dally who said that I was her brother — in order for me to come at half-fare. When my uncle came for me to the immigration authorities he asked for "Kairy," even though I had written him to say that I was coming as "Dally." I was ordered to go back to Europe — Miss Dally, too. My uncle engaged a lawyer but he was not able to help. Dally was frantic, she cried and pleaded, that she had come to be married to a friend in America. She said that they must not send her back; her mother had sold her only piece of jewelry, a gold necklace — to pay for her passage. No luck. We were both sent back.

When I returned to Marseilles I got a job as a 'runner' for Bassoul's, a small Syrian-owned hotel. I would go meet every ship coming from the Near East and would recommend "my" hotel to the new arrivals, who were going on to America or South America. I would speak to them in Arabic, recommending the hotel owner to whom "they could speak in their own language." Bassoul was very good to us, Miss Dally and me. He gave us nice rooms and good meals, as well as so much money a day. I made other money, too, working as a guide, and helping the newcomers in their shopping for clothing in preparation for their modern appearance in the new country. I earned a commission in every store to which I took them. Whenever the shopkeeper saw me in the company of the shoppers he knew that he would have to pay me, 10 percent

commission. Even if it was only for a loaf of bread I would return later to collect. I was able to get around easily, since I spoke French well, which I learned in the Alliance School in Aleppo. I stayed in Marseilles three months and with the money I earned I bought a ticket to America.

I took an English ship from Liverpool which tied up in Philadelphia. This time I took the name of Yadaᶜh "Cohen," the name of a family friend there (Abraham Cohen, brother of Azoova Mishaan's wife). My uncle arranged with Cohen to receive me as his son. My uncle Yiṣḥaq, brother of Abraham, had come to Philadelphia from New York, to receive me. This time I had no trouble with the immigration authorities, and we were soon on a train to New York. We arrived in snow and cold when I was delivered to my uncle's home on Ludlow Street, next door to *Allah Yirḥammo* [God pity his soul] Mosé Ashear [a well-known hazzán and song arranger].

I entered into a poor flat, with a piece of linoleum on the floor, a table, with 25-cent broken-down chairs. They put a 25-cent coin into the gas meter, to get light. I was very discouraged with what I saw. "Is this the great America we hear so much about? *Wehly!* [woe], better that I return to Aleppo!" Life there had been comfortable for my family. We had a private *hohsh*, a dwelling with an inner courtyard, my father was well-to-do. I burst into tears at what I saw of America. "Be patient," I was told, "you haven't seen anything. America is nice, beautiful." I stayed, and went to school from February when I arrived in the United States until the end of the term. That was all the schooling I had in New York. When I was enrolled in school, I was placed in the lowest class, learning "two plus two," since I could not speak the language. This made me miserable, which the teacher could see. I was taken to the principal who saw that I had had some education before (in the Alliance School in Aleppo) and so I was transferred to class "3-A," on quickly to "4-A," "5-A," "6-B" all in one month. I had a lovely teacher, Mrs. Grant, who took an interest in me. She would work with me after class teaching me English, in exchange for teaching her French. Later, when I had dropped out of school, Mrs. Grant saw me one day on Grand Street where I was peddling shawls. She scolded me, and pleaded with my uncle to compel me to

continue my education. No use. I had made up my mind to earn money, especially at the end of the summer when I got word that both my mother and father had died [through cholera?]. I saw no value in more education; I would learn through experience; isn't that the best way? My uncle Shaul Tawil had a store on Grand Street, he permitted me to peddle in front of his store. ... Where I lived? With my maternal aunt Shafiah Nasser who lived on Essex Street. Her husband — my 'uncle' — had a small grocery store, with two rooms in the back of the store, which housed them, their son Freddy and me.

My recollections of my life in Aleppo . . . . We lived in an area called the *Jalloom,* a Muslim neighborhood near the Central Souks. We were perhaps the only Jews there. My father's practice — he was a doctor [herbalist?] — was almost entirely with the Muslims, and some Christians, who lived there. We lived in the Jalloom area for more than ten years and always we were shown respect and affection. I grew up with the Muslims, almost.

Don't believe that the Muslims didn't like the Jews, in Aleppo. They treated us with courtesy and consideration; the Muslims of Aleppo were very nice to the Jews. Don't let anyone tell you differently. The night of the *ḥommés* [bread, etc. at the end of Passover], we would receive gifts from Muslim friends — twenty or thirty trays of delicacies — which had been forbidden to us for eight days. My grandfather — and my father, *Selim il-ḥakkeem* (Selim the Doctor) were highly regarded. *Ka-noo yi-ḥit-tu-na ʿala rahs-on* ["they placed us above their heads" — regarded us highly]. Near our *ḥohsh* there was the residence of the Muslim Chalabi family, with a huge home and a stable with perhaps twenty horses. They owned dozens of villages and enormous acreage where their *fallaḥeen* [peasants] cultivated wheat and other grain and cereals. When my father wished to ride he sent me to the Chalabi home — and soon I led a splendid Arabian stallion to him.

Let me give you one of my recollections of those days. For some reason, the Muslims, the owners of *all* slaughterhouses, quarrelled with the Jewish ritual slaughterers, and would not permit them to process kashér carcasses. For almost thirty days

the Jewish population could not eat meat. Several efforts at a reconciliation were not successful. Finally Chief Rabbi Dweck-Khalousie appealed to my grandfather to use his influence with the Muslims. My grandfather arranged a huge party for his Muslim 'notables' — friends, *ahkah-ber,* with a musical ensemble, a story-teller and other entertainment. During the course of the entertainment, my father took the leaders aside and pleaded with them to lift the ban on Jewish slaughterers. One of them, a hot-head, said to my grandfather, "*Abu Selim* [Selim's father], I would yield my wife to you, sooner than permit a Jewish slaughterer to function. The first of your slaughterers who appears, I will chop his head off with my own hand!" A more influential and older man said to my grandfather with an affectionate look, "Whatever you wish, Abu Selim, it will be done. Let them come tomorrow at dawn." They had respect and faith in my grandfather as in the Prophet Muḥammad!

My father treated his patients regardless of ability to pay; he would give a little money to the needy ones. He was a [homeopathic] 'doctor', dispensing herbs. In some instances, he would refer the sufferer to a traditional physician when he could not handle the sickness.

I was eager for adventure; restless, and ambitious to succeed in life. America was the land of the future we heard. Just past the age of fourteen I began to plan to go to the "new land" and despite my family's pleading. I soon left Ḥálab, never to see it again.

We will talk later and I will tell you of my later activities and my adventures. As you see I am married, to Grace [Garaz] daughter of Sarah and Joe Shamie. Thank God I was blessed with wonderful children. They have all married and have given me many grandchildren; *Allah Yiḥ-faz-hom* ["God protect them," in effect]. The oldest son is Stanley, who married Frieda ᶜAdjmi; Joe married Trina Haddad, Ken *akh-ad* ['took'] Lillian Mamiye. I have three daughters as well as three sons, *Allah Yish-Mir'hom* ["God protect them"]; Barbara is Mrs. Jack Beyda; Shirley married Louis Franco, and Renée, is the wife of Ted Serure.

Promises of further interviews were not realized in subsequent years before Cayre's demise a few years ago.

Jack Cayre had retired from business. His sons operate a successful popular music record and videotape manufacturing company.

Eli "Eliahou" Hedaya — Born in Aleppo, 1893
Interviews in Arabic and English

"I LEFT MY FAMILY IN 1905 AT AGE ELEVEN, TO MAKE A LIFE IN AMERICA"

PART ONE

My grandfather was the great Ḥakham Shaʿya Dayan. *Zekhuto yaggenᶜa-lenoo* [*may his good deeds "shield" us*], for sixty years he was the father, *Ab, of the Bet Deen* [the Court of Torah Law], one of the greatest rabbis in the whole world! He is buried in The Cave of the Just, *Meʿarat-ha-Sadiqeem.* He also judged in the Muslim *serai'a, il-Maḥ-ka-meh,* the Palace [courts of Government]. He had a separate office there, a small room that was his own. When he was needed in the Court House to help the government "quaadi" (judge) determine a point of law affecting Jewish tradition between Jewish contenders, he came there riding on a white donkey they sent, with two soldiers clearing the way before him, with another soldier at the rear. As he passed to the Court through the "Sweh-a," district, everyone, Muslims and Jews, would rise to his feet in honor of my grandfather. His word of judgment was final. He would say, "This one is liable, that one is free of the complaint brought against him." Later, when there was more investigation it was

always found that my grandfather's judgment was correct; the "qaadi" would pass governmental judgment just as my father had decreed. My maternal uncle Ḥakham Yiṣḥaq Dayan — a son of Ḥakham Shaᶜya, The *Ab Bet Deen*, was also a great man. I didn't know my paternal grandfather, he died when I was four years old. I'm not sure what he did; we were a family of merchants.

We dealt in "Karasta" which we imported from Chesson(?), France. We were the only ones among the Jews (*and* Christians) who brought in "Karasta," the leather material used to make European-type shoes [contrasted to the manufacture of local, common footwear]. There were eight establishments making such shoes, and we supplied all of them. At one point I told my father that I wanted to immigrate to America; I was eleven years old. What year was that? It was 1904.

We lived in *Bab 'Jnehn*, opposite "Midrash Magen Gibboreem," in the *ḥohsh* of Yúsef Hwehreen. We made a *mashkinta* [Hebrew, *mishkan* — dwelling, a lease] and took the house and the "leewan" [balcony], it also had an "ibbeh" [a large alcove]. How many rooms? About three and a half rooms. Somewhat crowded, yes, My father was *mabsoot kteer* ["very happy," very wealthy], even so he did not rent a private *ḥohsh;* he wouldn't do it, "it cost too much, too, too much", for the *marḥoom* [deceased, 'compassioned']. The *marḥoom*, my grandfather, lived in a *ḥohsh* of Abood Harari, he was very, *very* 'happy' [rich] he dealt in 'manufactured,' textiles — "manifatoora." My grandfather, also very wealthy, "wouldn't, do it" [buy or rent a *private ḥohsh*]. Your father, too [the writer's father - Abraham (ibn) David Sutton also dealt in "manifatoora," at that time. He also lived then in *ḥohsh* ᶜAbood Harari.

Your brothers, David and Selim, also took lessons along with me from a private tutor in French. They came to our home to study, under Yiṣḥaq ᶜAdes, a small man with a "mehleh," a limp; we paid him little so that he would not get drunk [?!]. Later Selim Garazi came to my home to tutor me in French. [*Garazi-Grazi, later became an outstanding member of the community in Bensonhurst, "il-See-Beej"*]

When I entered the Alliance I was less than ten years old. I studied there for 1½ years. I was very "pikeyaḥ" [Hebrew, 'smart'], especially in Hebrew studies, and later in French studies. The Alliance School was then in Khan-il-Ḥarreer (the Caravanserai for silk). One Friday afternoon I was walking out of the School with Mons. Raffoul, one of the teachers, when two Muslim men approached the school children, intending to kidnap some of the boys. [*Some Muslims are very fond of young boys, for sexual abuse.*] A Jewish man by the family name of Bahleet ["mischievous"] came by then — he recognized me, one of our leather warehouses was rented from his family — and throwing off his coat lunged at the Muslims, who fled in terror. That incident fortified my desire to seek a better setting for my life elsewhere.

Where I studied Torah? In Midrash Ḥakham ᶜAbood Harari, a form of Yeshiba, a Metibtah. The 'Yeshiba' was founded by a Signor Silvera, who appointed ᶜAbood Harari as head; but Silvera's initiative was later overlooked. I studied along with David Sutton, ibn Ḥakham Moshé Sutton, father of the present-day Saul Sutton in Argentina, Sutton-Dabbah. Directly facing your later family-*ḥohsh* there was my father's maternal aunt, they had a lovely, lovely *ḥohsh*, my aunt Mazal Laniado. Your sister Naomi, *Allah Yirḥamma* [God shed his mercy, on her soul] the oldest among the children, would scold us for not studying enough, "*méchants.*" (Fr. "naughty," "mischievous") she would shout at us. Selim your brother, very bright, was particularly disobedient, David was more pliant.

Yes, I went to a kittab for a period, the lower grade school of Ḥakham Yiṣḥaq Kilzi [family from Killez]. I learned 'some'; especially *shari'ḥ* [memorized classical-Arabic translations of some later books of the Torah — Ruth, Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc., a specialty of this teacher, as he taught it later to this writer in New York, at the 48 Orchard Street kittab-synagogue]. My grandfather was not satisfied with this (Aleppo) kittab. He said "This is a very bright boy, a pity that he wastes his time with young children. He should go to a *Midrash* where advanced studies are pursued." I was taken to Midrash ᶜAbood Harari, where I was placed under Ḥakham 'Liahou Marᶜashli [from Marᶜash, near the corner of Iraq and

Syria]. "Il Marḥoom, ᶜalav ha-shalom." I was taken by hand by my grandfather, to Ḥakham Marᶜashli and Ḥakham Ezra Shᶜayo, my maternal aunt's husband, a great man; both of them, Pillars of the Generation. Ḥakham Ezra used to accompany my grandfather, the 'Father' of the rabbinical court to confer with him about difficult questions, such as a knotty *geht*, a divorce issue, etc. They would come from 'everywhere' to receive the opinion of Ḥálab's Religious Court, and particularly my grandfather's. Even from Jerusalem they wrote to get his views. He wrote many books; among them, I think, *Yad Ha-ḥazaqa.* At one time I had no companion with whom to study, as was the custom. They brought me one, the son of Ḥakham Mosé Mizrahi — Yosef Mizrahi. One day they were 'reciting' — (examination) before the principal. There was a difficult passage; the examiners were having difficulty. They called me, a little child, and I, the little boy, explained away the difficulty. The rabbi smiled and putting his hand on my head, blessed me and sent me back to my studies. I studied then along with Ḥakham David Sutton-Dabbaḥ — who later went to Buenos Aires. His son, Saul, there is a master, "a Prince, Nasi, of Israel." Monsieur Benvenisti and Mons. Vizaro and Mons. Alger, were my teachers at the Alliance.

In Ḥálab, I would read (study) in *Midrash* ᶜAbood Harari, as I said, behind the Great Synagogue. Ḥakham Michaél Toubbal used to bring Ḥakham Marᶜashli some bones with a bit of flesh around them, so that he could prepare a dish for the Sabbath.

Saturdays we presented ourselves to the *gabbais* [overseers], including the wealthy Signor Mose Silvera, to be examined; also present was Ḥakham Ezra Ḥamwi-Khabbaz, who later became Chief Rabbi. My recitation was so pleasing that they said of me "Ḥarifá, Ne-isha-aá" [*Aramaic, 'most intelligent'*]. This was very satisfying, but not entirely; I did not propose to develop into a rabbi!

To become better prepared for the world, I had to learn French, and it had to be in the Alliance School. However, no one was enrolled until he was familiar with "histoire sainte," holy stories from the Bible, in French. That is why my father had brought in Isḥaq Ades to tutor me. One night before the

entrance examination, I studied all night; I didn't get a wink of sleep. Along with me at the examination, there was Raphael ibn Faraj Dwek, brother of "Joe" Dwek. I was "first" in the examination. My name was placed on the Tableau d'Honneur, the honor list. After a year and a half, I felt determined to travel.

The treatment by Muslims of the Jews? Well, in the evenings we would enter our homes and lock up securely. In an area with many Jews, we would get up at night to go to the midrash or synagogue and when we returned, we were sure to lock up carefully. In any case, robberies were fairly common. The burglars would steal some brass or silver articles or whatever was easily available and run off. There was also a gang of Jewish burglars as well. Their leader was a "recognized" person to whom Jews would sometimes appeal, for the return of some stolen articles, "found" for a fee, of course. One night we had a brass tray stolen, another time it was a large deep pan, a *la-in.* One night my father thought he heard burglars and rushed to the roof. Since he sometimes travelled to Urfa [a Turkish town, two-day travel by carriage], he had 'arms', a large double bladed knife. He passed it across a roof-stone, to indicate, by its noise, that burglars (if any), would not get away safely. The marks he left on the stones could be seen for years.

The Jews in general offered a low profile, walking along inconspicuously and modestly. It was discreet for a Jew to yield the right-of-way to a Muslim, on a town street or elsewhere. Although there was little anti-Jewish violence in Ḥálab such as there had been in Damascus where there had been uprisings, *omat,* and sometimes massacres, there was none of that in Ḥálab. Some of the ignorant Muslims were inclined to be rough, violent, and so Jews in general did nothing to stir up this feeling. Yes, there was an episode in which two young rabbis, brothers, Yeḥizqel and Ezra Matalon, got into a dispute with some Muslims — and later were found murdered. Some said it was the work of burglars, but this is not certain. When the murders took place, there was tremendous commotion among the Jews. The Jews in general, in their relations with the

common populace of Muslims, in effect had no rights — none that they would want to, or dared to, defend in court. Even if the Jew was to win, in the end he would suffer for it. Yes it is true that among the notables, *akahbehr* of the Muslims, Jews were well-regarded and well-treated. It is partly because the Jewish notables made extra efforts to placate, to win the good will of the Muslim leaders. In general, if you lent money or gave credit to some Muslims you had to wait until he was ready to pay. You would not, or could not, insist; when some of these Muslim merchants again needed additional merchandise, they would come, to pay the old debt. [*Contradictory views exist; some informants speak with the highest respect of the integrity and honesty of Aleppo's Muslims — merchants and 'notables' in particular. Both views may be correct.*]

Raḥmo Brez'a had two brothers, Sami and Tammo, who sold greens, vegetables, very poor. They lived in il Essariyeh (Kaiseriyeh?) quarter. One night, Ḥassan Beg's son ["Beg" or "Bey," is a Turkish title of honor] and friends had come across a modest Jewish wedding, with a little music. Ḥassan Bey's son took over, to have the musicians and the Jewish women dance for them. Just then, the Brez'a boys came by, to see this outrage. In their fury they beat up the Bey's son and his companions. To flee, to hide from the revenge of the great Bey and his power, the Brez'a boys fled to the *basateen,* the orchards, which somehow were "out-of-bounds," under the authority of the *bistanji,* the gardener. When the Jewish boys were pursued, they were protected by the gardener and soon, they discreetly made their way to Scandaroon [Alexandretta], then on to an ocean voyage which landed them at the end, in Argentina. They became very religious — and very wealthy. Another happening.

Shaheen, a poor Aleppo Jew, had a young mule which grew to be a very handsome beast. This animal provided the man with the means of making his livelihood. One day in a nearby village where he had gone to buy some eggs, etc., he was attacked and his beast led away. Since he was very strong, he defended himself and beat up the Muslim, who surrendered his musket to Shaheen. Apologies from the Muslim followed. The opponents shook hands and the musket returned to its owner.

No sooner had Shaheen mounted his mule, but the Muslim took aim, fired — and killed the man who had returned his firearm.

Yaᶜcobeh Sebbo, the victim's nephew, was a powerful individual. His maternal uncle Shaheen having been murdered, Sebbo made his way to the village, and soon was able to determine the identity of his uncle's attacker. He seized him, and in his fury he slew him. Having heard how the Breza'a men had fled, he too went to Scandaroon and then overseas. I don't know where he landed finally. [The Sebbo family was associated with catering, musical presentations, and midwifery.]

Ezra Dwek, "Abu-Faraj," had two sons, Faraj and "Joe" (they had English nationality); very wealthy. "Joe's" daughter Rachél was his right hand in helping orphans; her father had helped Signor Raphaél Silvera to establish *Kittab-il-yettomeem,* the Orphans' school. "Joe" Dwek was called Father to the Orphans — *Ab Yetomeem.* Isaac Shalom in New York, used to arrange charity payments to Signor Raphaél, for whom he had worked as a bookkeeper while in Aleppo. Rachél, (who died in Jerusalem), had married Rafful ibn ᶜAboud H'wehreen (Horn). Her father would think to give a poor man a *mejiddi* [25 cents]. "No, father," she would tell him, "you must give him a *mejiddi* and a half — he has a large family." She was a saint. She had lived in Saó Paolo — her two sons are builders there; the oldest son is Obadia, a younger one is Elia.

I recall that in Ḥálab we used to buy flour from a family named Zareef ["lovely"]. There was also Raḥmo Toubal, who sold groceries, and another Toubal who sold only eggs — they were all in Baḥsita. Also Moshé and Saul Sutton-Dabbaḥ the grandfather of the ones in Argentina. [The Toubals also migrated to Argentina.]

When weddings were held? Friday afternoons usually — late afternoons, sometimes before, sometimes after dusk. There was an ᶜAdes, who was highly respectable ["shareef"], who was often the caterer. Sometimes these weddings were on Saturday nights, 90 percent of the time [?]. Sometimes they summoned musicians Friday night, or they would have a *mu-hazzer* [a comedian] and singers. The next day, Saturday after morning prayers they would have a banquet lunch for special guests,

later, general guests would come. Yusef Farrah, the Christian shoemaker (he made very fine quality shoes, he bought the best leathers, from my father), used to bring his band ensemble, "Mozika" [*European-type band*] on Friday nights. Sometimes, on Saturday nights there was a "*Mozika*" followed by a *nobeh* [Arabic instrumentalists and singing], for the party.

Before the wedding, often there were gala dinners, one night in honor of the groom, another night for the bride and her family. This was before she performed the Ritual bathing, the night before the wedding. Sometimes, also, there was a festive Bride's bath-party; at such time she went with a *mwa'ah-feh*, an attendant. She would cover, conceal her face carefully then, in the old days, as she went and as she emerged. The night of the *khal-weh* [*first marriage privacy*], this privacy was in the home of the bride or groom; *during* the wedding festivity; a man — 'best man', would stand by the door of the couple's bedroom and at one time would announce the completion of the union — the coupling. This custom was not 'aristocractic' *and was abandoned* as "vulgar." Some of the traditional Galicians in Jerusalem, even 'today,' I saw with my own eyes, had the wedding ceremony under the sky, and a "watcher" was there to announce the completion of the coupling.

. . . *Trahb il Hillok* — is [therapeutic] soil that stopped the hemmorrhaging of a circumcized child. Some circumcizers used to keep record — dates, *the only ones who kept birth-records.* [*R. Jacob Kassin in New York records dates of wedding ceremonies.*]

How I came to migrate to Amerika? Yúsef Cattán, my sister's husband, had gone there and used to write to Ḥálab, praising the opportunities for success. When he left Ḥálab, he owed money right and left, perhaps 30 or 40 "leerat", [*gold pounds*]. Soon, in America, he earned money and sent back to pay his creditors, every last "irsh," every last piastre. He migrated because he had heard of the opportunities; first he went to Scandarooneh (Alexandretta) where he took a ship to Alexandria; then to "Marsillya" (Marseilles), then to New York. Yisrael Misriyeh [*who later operated an East Side restaurant*] was my *wakeel*, my protector on the voyage to New York. I

carried my money on me. No, no, it was not in a money-belt. It was in the "dikkeh" the belt-loop of my "l'behs" [drawers, the 'tunnel' of the sash which held up the drawers]. My money was in English gold pounds — *Liraat Ingliziyeh.* Yisrael Misriyeh and Abraham Ḥusney and someone by the name of Safdieh were traveling together. Misriyeh undertook to look after me during the voyage and he was to be paid two *Lirat Ingliziyeh* for his service.

Does it seem strange that I undertook to leave Ḥalab and my family, a young boy of eleven, not yet wearing *tefillin,* not yet Bar Mizva? I'll tell you, my family was very successful, very wealthy, yet I saw that life in Aleppo for the Jews would deteriorate; would become bad. The Christians — and the *Musilmeen* [Muslims], were very 'bad'. Commerce was bad, a sort of "criza" [depression], even the merchants — even in the "Karasta" shoe leather business things were bad. People who formerly wore shoes, European-type, took to wearing a *gazmeh ḥam-rah* [native red shoes, like a form of slipper, common to the majority]. They were made of bullock-hides, common in Egypt, too, indestructible; but, no, I believe they were made of cowhide. There was a tannery, several, in Halab . . . .

. . . How it was that I, a lad of eleven, should have been awake to the situation? We were very wide-awake, we boys in Ḥálab; I was especially alert. At the Alliance Israélite where I went to school, I was at the head of the school — my class. I had worked hard at my studies, sometimes until midnight. And then I left, to go to "Amerika."

[*This narration is continued elsewhere, in a section on early East Side days.*]

Murad Shᶜayo (visiting from Buenos Aires)
Interviews in Arabic Nov. 1982

Born in Aleppo, circa 1898

"ONE DAY IN BEIRUT WE SMUGGLED 350 REFUGEES INTO ISRAEL"

I settled in Argentina in 1953, I and my family. We quit Beirut because conditions became quite unsettled; because of the difficulties when I was smuggling the refugees from Aleppo and Damascus who had come *wahra il barda-yeh* ["behind the curtain" — illegally].

Even as a young man I did not stay continuously in Ḥálab where I was born. I traveled a lot on my money-exchange business — a private banker. We had a partnership with Yusef H'wehreen. I was only seventeen years old when I began working; I always loved commerce and trading, even then I used to travel on business. My parents did find it painful to have me away so much; at the same time they were very pleased for me, that I was making a considerable amount of money. In the beginning my father had said, "Isn't it time for you to 'come down', to work in my enterprise?" I did not want to. I said, "When my brother grew up you took him to your business; when the next one grew up you took him too. And what service are they rendering? Nothing. No, I will not join them. Even if I look for a position as a clerk, I would prefer that!" By coincidence my cousin H'wehreen had come by, and when my father related my attitude, he said, "Send the boy to us" [the H'wehreen, 'Horn', family business]. Later, I became their partner; I had saved my salary and I had accumulated 800 gold-pounds, since I had no expenses at home. That was a considerable amount in those days, close to seventy years ago, when you consider that three businessmen with 200 gold-pounds each, could begin a business and send a partner to supply merchandise from Manchester . . . .

My father's partnership was in Khan-il-Qassabiyeh, — a large enterprise, "Jadaᶜh, Ḥabib and Shᶜayo," one of the

foremost Jewish establishments. They dealt in textile materials which they imported, mostly from Manchester, England. They made a vast amount of money during the war, 1914-1918; they owned a large stock and they managed to get additional goods somehow. I didn't stay in Aleppo much in that period; I had made many trips to Istanbul — very profitable trips. Turkish *paper-money* did not command public confidence at that time in Aleppo. I, and others, would buy the Turkish pounds — paper-notes at a discount, sometimes 50 percent. When we arrived in Istanbul we changed them fully into gold pieces, then returned to Aleppo. This operation was illegal and if caught, one would be in serious trouble. *Barukh ha Shem* ["Blessed is the Name"], I did not meet with trouble. Then I went to do business in Cairo; I stayed there for three or four years; I would come and go to Aleppo. Then I lived for three years in Jerusalem. It's true, Jerusalem was *not* much of a business city, but I did my business supplying gold pieces that the "fellahin," the peasants prized, as decorations for their wives. That was around 1922-1923. I also stayed in Istanbul for about five years, discounting notes — as a private banker. Then I decided that I should marry, it was time! I was 29 years old when I married, the daughter of Joseph Safra (Edmond's uncle). I stayed in Aleppo for a period. Much of our business was done with Turkish *"ghanaameh,* cattle-dealers, who brought large herds of "ghanaam," sheep. When they sold their large flocks in Aleppo, sometimes 300,000 or 400,000 heads, we issued checks for them on our Istanbul connections. We did very well, we made money. Life for me was just fine.

My father had a large *ḥohsh,* a courtyard residence. It was so large that sizeable weddings were held there — by close friends or relatives. They would say to my father, *"Khawja* Rahamameen [Mister, or Sir, Raymond], if you would be so kind as to permit us to hold our wedding there . . ." It was not polite to say "No," despite the trouble it would involve. "Certainly, certainly, with pleasure!" Then around 1923 we moved to the Djamiliyeh area, into a very large house; so large that it accommodated my father's family — as well as my three married brothers and their families.

When I decided to move to Beirut in 1938, my wife

protested and was very unhappy, she wept. She did not want to remove far from her family and friends. I suggested that we try living in Beirut "only one year," and if she still didn't like it — well, we would return to Ḥálab. At the end of the year in Beirut when I brought up the subject, she said, "If you gave me the whole weight of Ḥálab in gold, I will not leave Beirut."

Beirut did have a small Jewish population then, but not a very religious one. Some of the Jews of Beirut had originated in Ḥálab, many more from Damascus and *Séda,* Sidon. The 'native' Jews were not many. They were said to be "the families of 'Dana, Ḥana and Man-a' ", there were numbers of each in the city. The Jewish population of Beirut swelled to perhaps 10,000 or 12,000 [others report 20,000] after the disturbances in Syria — the violent reaction to the establishment of the State of Israel; many, many Jews fled Aleppo and Damascus, thousands and thousands.

We dealt in gold over the years, and after World War II; in 1948-1949 this trade became more important than ever. Of course you know that Beirut had become one of the most important financial centers in the whole world. It was in this trade that so many Jewish private bankers made still larger fortunes, like the Safra family, which now has very important public banks in Switzerland, Brazil, New York and elsewhere. In Beirut, we bought gold from *Londra,* London, and the United States; sold it to Kuwait, the Saudi Arabians and others. A little later we sold it in larger quantities, to Hong Kong, Indo-China and Indonesia, etc. Why our customers didn't buy from *our* sources? They didn't know! They were not 'sophisticated'; *ḥamoreem!* (Heb., "jackasses")! We sold our gold at a big profit. Before, in normal times, the profit on the exchange of gold was about 1/2 of 1 percent. Now we gained 10 percent to up to 15 percent. Later the profit sank to 3 percent to 4 percent, and the activity decreased. Our family's business had always done very well. In this period it was better than ever.

Beirut was a lovely city, with civilized, educated people. It's because it was Christian. The population of Beirut was about 80 percent Christian with the other 20 percent mostly Muslim. Now it has changed a lot, it is mostly Muslim. The Christians

are in the mountains, except for Druze and other Muslims. Yes, in ᶜAleh, the mountain resort, they are Druze; they are such nice people. Muslims of a somewhat curious sect. Now, I don't know, they may have changed. In any case, it was the nicest kind of life. And the climate! It is incomparable — there is nothing like it in the entire world! First, you have the beaches everywhere around the city. Then in twenty minutes after I left my office around noon, I would be in my summer house at the top of the mountains, either in ᶜAleh one year, or in the nearby B'ḥamdoun, with clear cool air. Actually Beirut's climate even in the summer was *mahh-doum*, tolerable; no, not excessively warm [?] Then in winter, one could go to "Daar-il-Beda," the White Fields, where there was excellent skiing I was told, just forty minutes away by auto. We used to go to Zaḥlé, too, with its flowing rivers and water pouring everywhere; with its many cafes . . . . The streams had such cold water that a bottle of Zaḥle's famous *ᶜarak* would be put in the stream for a while and come out icy cold. And the nearby famous town of Baᶜalbac with its huge Greek/Roman temples from the first century. How did they raise those huge blocks of stone — some of them more than seven meters in size? I found the Bᶜaalbac temples much larger, more impressive than those of Athens. Yes, I've been there; there is no place that I have not visited. Life in Beirut was most enjoyable.

In addition to its loveliness, Beirut had *ḥur-riye*, freedom. Then, it was not as it had become later with veiled hostility toward the Jews by the P.L.O. and other fanatic Muslims. We lived well, and enjoyed it very much, *il Ḥamd I'il Allah* [Thanks to God].

It was because of my involvement in spiriting out the illegal refugees from Aleppo and Damascus that I became uneasy and decided to leave Lebanon.

I and a small committee had worked at getting these refugees across the Lebanese frontier to Israel. In this activity I received the assistance of Isaac Shalóm from New York, who sent me money he collected to finance this work. *Il ḥamd I'il Allah*, we were able to smuggle more than 1800 persons. My co-workers and I rented a large house where we received some of

of these refugees from Syria without legal documents. We provided them shelter for two or three days until we could arrange moving them on to Israel. How did we do it? There was a law in Lebanon which provided that "an undesirable alien could be sent out of the country in any manner possible," over any frontier. We used this 'cover' to secretly load buses full of Jewish refugees and send them on to Nakoura, the frontier point between Lebanon and Israel. One day we sent on about 350 persons.

Somehow word of this activity reached some unfriendly authorities. While an *individual* undesirable alien could be sent out of the country in any manner our large-scale activity was possibly against the law. You see, we had an unofficial understanding with the Chief of the Secret Police. He was very helpful to us; a Christian, a very high class, kindly, individual. No, it was not necessary to offer him bribes — not a piaster. He had told us to do whatever we wanted — to send out our people any way we willed; "by land or sea — any way." He would "look the other way." Our activity came to the attention of the Military Authorities — and that was a different matter. They sent for us — me and a few others, including Zaki Elia and Albert Elia, the head of the Jewish community. (Later the Syrian Secret Police abducted Albert and took him to Syria, where he was never heard from again.) The Military interrogated each of us separately. "How much did you bribe? Who did you give money to?" Each of us could truthfully say that we had never bribed *anyone*. Only that we applied the existing law — the one about deporting an undesirable alien. "If that is improper," we said, "we will simply cease our help to refugees!"

One day I was out of my office when a Polish Jew who had escaped through Syria came asking for help to get to Israel. My office directed him to Deeb Saᶜadia, the Jewish Mukhtar who arranged the secret travel to Israel. I had a premonition that the presence of this Polish man could create serious problems if he were caught. I ordered that he be given transportation to the Israeli frontier *that very day;* although it was usual for us to wait a couple of days until we accumulated a van-load or a car-load, before we sent them off. "Whatever the Lebanese smugglers are paid, pay them double, or more, to

move out this man without delay!," I insisted. The man was asked to notify me promptly of his safe arrival. He was taken — and word of his safe arrival reached me immediately. The following morning I found perhaps twenty policemen surrounding the building where my office was located. "What is the trouble?" The police demanded to see me and said, "Yesterday a Pole [?] came to see you. He is here and we want him!" I told them that I knew of no such person. My son-in-law who was standing there spoke up. He said "Uncle, ["ᶜAmmi," Arabic term also for Father-in-Law] yes, there *was* a man here, asking for a little money to live on. I told him to apply to Saᶜadia who would give him food, and permit him to pass the night in the Synagogue." They hurried to Deeb Saᶜadia, a *'mamzér'*, a most wily fellow. "Yes," he told them, "a penniless man did apply for help, I gave him a few Lebanese pounds with which to get food. When he returns I will surely detain him and call you promptly! After all, I am a Mukhtar [an official community intermediary with the Government Offices], I am one of you; you may count on me!" I was relieved, since word had reached me of the refugee's arrival in Israel, but the official pressure was building up. That was enough for me. Soon after we left Lebanon and settled in Milan, Italy for a year.

In Milano, I learned to speak Italian, in addition to my Turkish, Arabic, French, Hebrew and later, Spanish. Even before I lived for five years in Istanbul I was able to speak Turkish.

When I went to Milan after leaving Beirut, I met Selim Silvera originally from Ḥálab. His father Signor Mosé Eleazer Silvera was a great friend of my father. He used to pray in our Bet Midrash, that my father founded — and supported through a "Wakf," a trust foundation that he established. It was part of the *Kittab il Yetomeem* (the orphan's school). "Joe" Duek was in charge there. [Duek was known as *Abou il Yetomeem*, the "Father" of the Orphans. Duek's daughter Rachél — who married a H'wehreen, 'Horn' — she was his right hand in this Orphan work.]

I had stayed in Beirut for 15 years, always a member of the Community Leadership *comité*, [committee], just as I had been

in Aleppo until I left in 1938. Actually, I had lived in Beirut on-and-off before, but later I settled there for 15 years. It was a lovely life, very advanced, with very good commerce, suitable for my private banking activity. Beirut has seven universities, including St. Joséph, the French-speaking religious institution, and the famous American University. Students from all over the world flock to study there. I sent all my children to study in England, at Withingham College. It's a Jewish school, near London, with kashér food, and Jewish studies, of course. They all turned out well, and well educated. One of my boys studied medicine. All of them live close to me in Buenos Aires, now.

Then, leaving Milano, on to Argentina; my brother had settled there. I had gone to see where life would be best. I spent a month in Saó Paulo in Brazil, and then after two months in Buenos Aires, I settled on it. Argentina's life appeared very pleasant, the people were very civilized, life was cheap, 'everyone' well-dressed, and with no Blacks at all, *at all.* Commerce was more brisk in Brazil, but I was attracted more to Buenos Aires' atmosphere. It has a European air, "a trifle less" than cities in Europe, but *trés agréable,* very pleasant. Argentina was "America" enough for me. I sent for my children and have lived in Buenos Aires ever since, for many years, *Barukh Ha-Shem.*

Buenos Aires has a very good climate, with no extremes of heat and cold. It is one of the world's seven most beautiful cities, (but New York is even nicer.) It's a different, a better life, in New York, I like it very much. I first visited New York in 1952. In New York life is more civilized, more orderly. Yet Argentina *is* 'European', with five millions of Italian origin, twelve to thirteen million 'Argentinians,' and two millions of assorted others. We are perhaps 30,000 Syrians in Buenos Aires and, with the other Sepharadeem, in all there are about 50,000 of us. The Ashkenazeem are the most, with close to half a million Jews in the whole of Argentina. Those from the Sham, Damascus, number about 8,000. We all live well I would say, most of us.

The first Syrians there in Argentina — and who were

formerly the foremost — are the Toubals — 'who opened-up' Argentina. Ezra Toubal came first, then he sent for his brothers. He had studied in the Alliance Israélite, where he learned French — a big help to him. Ezra Toubal married an Ashkenazeet. His father-in-law who was very successful in business helped Ezra to get established, helped him to open a factory, which later became many, very successful enterprises. The Toubals were the ones who really founded the Ḥálabi community. When new arrivals came, they helped them — gave them merchandise to start them, goods that they carried on their shoulders. Afterwards it was a Sutton, I think it was Ely Sutton, who worked with them to establish the first Syrian synagogue.

The *Lavage Synagogue*, named after the street where it was opened, 'they' bought an old house there and transformed it, and later enlarged it; rebuilt it so that it is first class now. There are five streets, Lavage, Tecuman and Corridon Streets . . . that is where many Jewish Syrians still live. The Lavage area is where the kashér restaurant is located, and many kashér butchers . . . and the synagogues; there are perhaps ten synagogues there . . . .

In the earlier days, I was consulted about the need of a rabbi for the community. I remembered *Ḥakham* Yiṣḥaq Sheḥebar from Aleppo, who had fled from Syria to Beirut. I knew him, and recommended him highly, at the same time saying that he is "difficult, very strong-willed, stubborn." On the strength of my advice to Ḥakham Yiṣḥaq, he agreed to come. In that period Moise Toubal was President of the Community committee, and ran affairs according to the Toubal Family's dictates. Rabbi Sheḥebar would not accept their rule. They became his opponents; but we backed the *Ḥakham*. A great dispute came about, but the Toubals could not prevail.

Ḥakham Sheḥebar performed wonders. I can tell you that he got perhaps 75 percent [?] of the Syrians to return to strict religious observance, Sabbath observance; instituted a Yeshiva — something that we had never dreamed of. He is truly a great man, one of the four or five greatest *ḥakhameem* in the entire world, including the Ashkenazi *ḥakhameem;* his age? about sixty years. He has restored *deen*, religion, to Syrian Argentina — and enforces kashrut — strict kashrut. Before he came,

weddings and bar mizva dinners were held in hotels that knew nothing about kashér food. When I wanted a bar mizva dinner for one of my sons, I visited the caterer of a hotel and with the 'gift' of a few hundred dollars, arrangements were made for strict kashrut. Since that time every dinner at a hotel is that way; *Ḥakham* Yishaq will not give his approval for a wedding or other dining celebration, otherwise. Because of his influence the Shammi, Damascus, area, called "Flores," is also more religious than before. It has four or five synagogues too — they have their own rabbi.

Many of the wealthier Ḥalabiyeh moved a little out of town to the Palermo district, to the Avenida Liberador. Before, people used to go to Palermo which was like a park, to pass a pleasant Sunday. Now that Buenos Aires has grown Palermo is part of the city. It is a most beautiful area — like Deal, in New Jersey. The Ḥalabiyeh bought and built homes there; there are more than 200 families. A Synagogue was built, "Jeshurun," a most beautiful structure on Avenida Liberador; and a Hebrew School. The Ḥalabiyeh live for twenty blocks on each side of the Synagogue. Yes, they come to prayers on the Shabbat — *many not on foot. Ḥakham* Sheḥebar always speaks forcefully about observing the Shabbat, quoting the Toráh that "he who violates the Shabbat is worthy of death"; that it is better *not* to come to the synagogue on the Shabbat if it is to be by car. Some in Palermo listen to him; others now come by car, driven by a non-Jewish chauffeur, but leave the car a few blocks away and then arrive at the synagogue on foot. Actually, many individuals are unfamiliar with, or they are ignorant of Toráh; yet one must be grateful that they do attend synagogue services regularly. We hope that by being close to the House of Worship, their children will grow up knowledgeable, observant Jews.

Ḥakham Angel is head of a general Sepharadi Talmud Toráh of 800 students. The government provides teachers for secular studies to the Talmud Torahs and Yeshibot, while we pay for the religious teachers for a half day of religious studies. In other Argentina cities too, there is now a *Yishub*, thoroughly religious settlements, largely Ashkenazi.

I will tell you how we established the Palermo Synagogue.

When we saw so many families living there, I and a few others arganized a *comision,* which met in my home. There was Joséph (ibn Raḥhmo) Nehmád, and Albert Tawíl, they are engineers in Buenos Aires, busy with construction. They agreed to build the synagogue. A fine structure. During Rosh Hashaná and Yom Kippúr, we have attendance of 700 to 800, including the women in the balcony, and many standees. We established a Talmud Torah on one of the five floors of the building. The principal, *Ḥakham* José Batillas is a very able man; the children love him. There are now almost 80 students there. Not too many? Well, you must understand, the Syrian residents of Palermo are quite rich, and many rich men are not very religious — they are not eager to send their children to a Talmud Torah. They do *not* acknowledge that before everything else must come Torah.

Not so long ago, I went to a Sutton in Buenos Aires, one of the sons of the late *Ḥakham* David Saul Sutton, for money for the Talmud Torah. He and his brother are very wealthy, very close friends of ours. "How much do you 'command'? *("b'ti'mor").* Finally he offered me $5,000. I laughed. "Leave the matter to me," he said, "I will take it up with your son" with whom he is a good friend; we have many transactions with the Suttons, dealings, with my sons who now operate our business. (I do very little, just what I wish to do.) My son told Sutton that I was looking for $30,000 from him —. Finally my son came with a check for $10,000 . . . .

Oh yes, indeed, in Buenos we sing *Pizmoneem; of course!* When there is a simḥá the host invites the congregation to a *séᶜuda,* a synagogue snack — just after the service on Saturday mornings. In his own home, he will have a party for close friends, but not on Saturday mornings, as in Brooklyn.

Like the *Yahh-doot* and the kashrut of the Ḥalabiyeh in Brooklyn — there is nothing like it anywhere in the world; and the number of their beautiful synagogues! Buenos Aires? Not even half — not even half as religious as the Ḥalabiyeh in Brooklyn. After New York, I rate Buenos Aires second; and Saó Paulo in Brazil also has a good Syrian religious life. [*Buenos Aires and Saó Paulo are both said to have an 'epidemic' rate of religious intermarriages.*]

In Argentina if you earn 100 pesos in a day for example,

when you get to 'count' them at home in the evening you find that they are worth only half; and in the morning they may be worth half again! [1982] It is because of the fierce inflation of the country . . . . In spite of that, the Jewish population and the Syrians in particular, manage to do pretty well, *Barukh Ha-Shem.*

I can assure you that since I arrived in Buenos Aires in 1953, never once did I know of anyone molesting Jews. The Argentinians have no hatred in their hearts; yes, perhaps some have a dislike of Jews, it exists everywhere, perhaps because of their Catholic religion, but the Government is not against the Jews. The reports of official hostility to the Jews is false. [Note: *It is reported that there exist many anti-Semitic publications;* semi-official, some of them.] Jacobo Timmerman had a powerful pen, wrote fiercely against government anti-democratic decrees. It was in his concern for such influence being turned against Jews that he wrote so courageously. But remember that when he was imprisoned for years, it was a house-arrest. [*Jewish authorities are inquiring about large numbers of Jews* who have "disappeared."]

Life in Buenos Aires is very agreeable, *Il Hamd I'il Allah,* I brought up my children, married them off, and I am happy to see several grandchildren. My sons are in the business with me. I told you that one of my sons is a medical doctor? I have a daughter married in Brazil, Rita, married to Alberto Mishaan. The other children around me in Buenos Aires, Raymond, my oldest, Arlette, married to Selim Matalon, Fortunée, now the wife of Miro Attieh, and my Alberto, who is the physician. *"Barukh-Ha-Shem".* He has been kind to me. *Hodoo L'Adonai Ki-Tobh; Ki Gabbár ᶜAlennu Ḥassdó* — "Praise God for His Goodness; He has overwhelmed us with his Kindness."

One last word: In all the lands I visited and I have been everywhere, it is the Ḥalabiyeh who cling to *deen,* religion. Of 90 percent of the world's cities where I went, I can name them individually, it is the Ḥalabiyeh who are in the forefront, even in Hong Kong. Even in Kobe, Japan, Ḥalabiye established a synagogue — and built a *Mikveh!*

Pauline "Bolissa" Grazi (Garázi) Born in Aleppo, 1902
Interviews in English and Arabic

"THESE YOUNGER WOMEN, I LOVE THEM LIKE MY OWN; BUT HOW ARE THEY BRINGING UP THEIR CHILDREN? *WHAT ARE THEY DOING?*"

I was nineteen years old in 1921 when I arrived in New York, almost twenty years old. I came with my mother and sister to join my brother. He had married and soon after, left Aleppo for the United States. No, we didn't live with him, because he was working for the summer in Georgia. But *ibn khaaliti,* my maternal cousin, Ḥakham Ezra Baqqaʿi received us very cordially. Before we left Ḥálab several marriage proposals were offered me but my mother was insistant that we go to America. It was soon after the end of World War I, just as soon as we could get visas.

I had a very good reputation in Aleppo, no girl of my age was more highly spoken of, if it is not too immodest to say this. I was at the head of my classes in the Alliance school until it was closed at the beginning of World War I.

My father, Ḥakham Abraham Baqqaʿi, was in very modest circumstances but with the influence of one of the supporters of the Alliance, he didn't have to pay full annual tuition; (around 1907 only *five French francs* — since the school was Jewish-French subsidized, equivalent to $1.00; [?] but more like $75.00 today). When my father became unable to pay even this small fee, I was sent home. Since my family held French citizenship, my father rushed to the French consul. They proposed a school for me where I would not have to pay tuition, free, the *Soeurs* — the nuns. After a few days at that school, because of the many Catholic observances — although the education was very good everyone said; my father appealed to the Alliance and I was taken back without tuition. I was very young when my father had first enrolled me in the school — only four years old. Usually children are admitted at age six. "Well," they said, "she

appears very intelligent, but are you sure that she is capable of 'taking care of herself" (toilet trained)?

My father had no sons; the step-brother whom we went to join in America later, was a child by my mother's first husband, who had died. There were only us, the three sisters, and so my father gave us a good education at home, in Hebrew reading and writing and Torah and Musar, and of course I learned French. I learned and sang *pizmoneem,* everything. I am able to read and write Arabic; I can read Arabic better than English! [P.G.'s English is quite good — even without schooling in the language].

When I graduated the high school level at the Alliance, I was chosen to go to Paris to the Alliance's college teacher-training school, but my mother wouldn't think of it! My father had died in 1914 of a kidney ailment at the age of 39, so my mother was *very* closely attached to us, her daughters. To make money, to earn in order to help support our family, I began to write letters for those who had not learned to write. I learned to embroider like a real expert. I tutored children, and taught a few classes. My embroidery work — and my sister's, was very much admired. As soon as a girl became engaged, her mother used to rush to us to embroider her trousseau. Every fancy bedspread we embroidered brought us three or four gold pounds.

Knowing that I was a bright girl, the directors of the Jewish health and welfare organization, *Seddaqa-u-marpé,* wanted me to work for them as a pharmacist. "How can I do *that*"? I asked. For three months they trained me and then I could prepare the prescriptions. All those who came for the medications were very poor, of course, and when the voucher was issued for the drugs, sometimes it was for less than the prescriptions cost. "The poor people," I used to think, and I used to add a little of my own money to help. That year, *sant-il-ḥakkeh;* the year of the itch, there was an epidemic of some skin disease which caused a terrible itch, those poor people, they would tear their skins, from their pain. When they came to the pharmacy for their medication they used to plead with me for an increased, a generous amount — *"Dakheelehk, baḥ-bi-ḥi-ya shway-eh,"* [I beg you, make it a little more plentiful.]

I embroidered early in the morning and after I returned

from the pharmacy. Yes, I remember them well, all those nice people who worked in *Seddaqu-u-Marpé:* Ḥakham Rafael Harari, Suleman Garazi, Ḥakham Meir Nehmad, and also a 'Spanioli' who was called *Nisseem Effendi,* 'Sir Nisseem'.

One day Ḥakham Raḥameem Nefikhi-Mizrahi had come to me, pleading that I come to the Orphanage School — one hour a week, to teach a little French to the children. The French lessons I gave at this Orphanage were not a success and because I didn't want to waste their time I told Ḥakham Raḥameem to send a girl or two to my house, I would teach them embroidery there. Soon I had ten or twelve girl students; I taught them to do fine embroidery, which they could use to help support their families. As they left my class my mother used to present each of them a *barghoot,* a small coin, for them to spend on a *tshib-re-aa,* a treat, for those penniless children.

I mustn't forget to tell you about the *Muslimeen* (Muslims) in Ḥálab. How much many of them respected the Jews, how much they loved us. I heard one Muslim woman say to another, "I like the Jews more than the *Muslimeem*!" They revered the Jews so much that they would ask the Jews to *pray for them.*

Yes, indeed, we were a sizeable family. My father had already passed away, *Allah Yirḥammo* ("may Allah have mercy" — on his soul), but there was my mother and three daughters and a son. Yes, we had been three sisters, but later during a pregnancy my sister died, already a widow, leaving two small children. With my widowed sister and her children, we had been seven persons — and we had to survive, we had to eat. With one kind of work and another, we were able to have a sort of decent life. As a young woman, a lady happened to ask my name. "Oh", she said "*you* are the Bolisa (Pauline) Baqqaᶜi!" I had a good reputation, my name was well known.

Soon after the end of the World War I, (1921) as soon as we could, we started our trip to America. On the way we stayed a few days in a Marseilles hotel, waiting for our ship, with a number of Syrians there. Among them was such a nice lady, Salḥa Silvera Sutton, wife of Abraham David Sutton, (mother of this writer), with her son and his Egyptian bride, Emma Angel. I will *never forget her.* In a conversation with another

Syrian lady she asked her about her plans to travel. The lady said that she was stuck in Marseilles for lack of money, money from relatives in the United States, that just didn't seem to come. Without hesitation Salḥa Sutton turned to her son and said quietly, "*Daveed*, go down and buy a steamship ticket for the lady. She will repay us when she can." I will never forget Salḥa Sutton and her kindness to so many people. She was also escorting two families from Aleppo whom she brought over at her own expense.

My cousin Sadqa Ashkenazi came for us in Ellis Island. After staying in Ḥakham Ezra's home, my cousin, for a while, we insisted in moving out in spite of his protest. We rented a small flat for $15 a month at 21 Orchard Street close to many Syrians. We bought one bed and a cot for the three of us, a piece of linoleum for the living room and a small table with a few chairs. Next door to us was the family of David Shᶜayo. I knew two of his daughters, Leila and Latifeh; I had been a very close friend of Leila in Ḥálab. She told me that there was possible work in embroidery, that was at what she and her sister were employed. We had moved in on Thursday, and Monday morning like Leila told me to do, I looked at the classified advertisement in the newspaper and with 25¢ for carfare, my sister and I headed for 9th Avenue and 21st Street where they were looking for embroiderers. Certainly we didn't know our way on the elevated trains and by the time we took the right trains it was eleven o'clock when we applied for jobs. "Is this the time to apply, so late in the day?", the lady in the office asked us severely. "The jobs were taken three hours ago!" My sister and I had worn jackets with a *shaddai* [a religious amulet], and when the lady noticed this, she changed. "Wait," she said, "we have new girls being tried out. If they are not satisfactory by noon-time, we will try you in their place. Go to lunch now and come back at one o'clock." We went down, but not to lunch, we had only five cents left! We worked that afternoon;they were very pleased with us. Before we left, we went to the office to ask for carfare to be lent to us. The lady said, "Oh, you need money for 'coffee'?" We kept insisting it was for "ka-fare" and she kept repeating "Oh, for coffee." Finally, we got her to lend us the money and got home. In that

shop they did embroidery and crochet beading for beautiful dresses. Guess how much we earned a week — ninety dollars each! It was a fortune in 1921, and it made it easy to live comfortably. It was an enjoyable life.

The Garazi family lived near us. One day Mrs. Garazi, *Allah Yirḥama* ("God have mercy on her soul") suggested that son Vita consider one of us, the Baqqaᶜi girls for marriage. "The pretty one with that very pleasant voice?" he asked. We were brought together and a few months later we got married.

Vita was manufacturing silk underwear. You are right, [this writer], it was not until a little later that he called his business "Victory Silk Undergarment Company," at 51 Orchard Street, when he became a partner with Asher Esses and Raffoul Salem, [Esses' widow is now the wife of Basil Cohen whom we meet in another memoire]. They were very successful, selling to the peddlers. *Barukh Ha-Shem* (Blessed is the Name) we lived very well then; and thank God I live well now; I lack for nothing — I have everything I can want; (except my late husband) my children are so good, so beautiful.

Of course I stopped working when I married. I worked at something new — raising a family. We had moved to 20th Avenue in Bensonhurst — in the "Sea Beach." Later we bought a larger house on 65th Street since we had ten children — nine of mine, and Raymond, Vita's son from an earlier marriage. Raymond was a really wonderful boy; he passed away, the victim of a drunken motorist. *Fa-laat-il-Kehr* ("may it be good 'forecasts" in the future). We enlarged the house, and later we moved to Flatbush. As it happened, I sold our house on 65th Street to my girlhood friend Leila Shᶜayo, who had married Nissim Maleḥ.

Vita had suffered in his business during the Depression. People's fortune moves up and down, the important thing is to know how to accept it, and live with the good and the bad! In good times, don't exaggerate the good fortune; as they say *shraab il tadbeer wa-loo mahyet il beir* ["know how to drink ('wisely'), even though it be only well-water"].

When we first moved to "Sea Beach" everything was centered on 20th Avenue. As more people moved from Williamsburg and the East Side, they bought one-family houses

on the streets near 20th Avenue — from 60th Street. 65th Street was the center of the residences; it had a mall in the middle of the street, with grass and shrubs. At first, prayers were on 66th Street in the basement of the Ashkenazi synagogue. Sometimes, in the very beginning it was not easy to gather a *minyan.* Then a private house was bought on 66th Street, close to 19th Avenue for a synagogue, and as the community there grew, it was decided that we should build our own, Magen David Synagogue — at 2027 67th Street. I remembered that they curtained off areas, *ya ḥaraahm* 'how pitiful', to use as classrooms. There was Ḥakhams Mosé Ashear, Ezra Mishᶜaniyeh, Mosé Khidery, Ezra Baqqaᶜi and sometimes Ḥakham Matloub Abadi, and others whose names I don't remember. After a period a Talmud Torah building was erected at the side of the synagogue.

There were several grocers, and a butcher; Terzi, Abraham Salem, David Cohen (it's a shame, to mention Cohen's popular name "Slehlatt." but it only means 'wicker baskets', which his family sold in Ḥálab). There were grocers, the very gentle Abu Yomtob Salem, ("Nikchaari"), and Shaᶜya Shalom — (no, not Victoria's husband). Ḥayeem Cohen had the only butcher shop. They are all gone, *Allah Yir-ḥammon* (God have mercy on thier souls.) Do you remember the Savoy Mansion and the Colonial Mansion? That is where we held wedding-dances. In the early days on 20th Avenue, (circa 1920-1930) a 100 pound bag of rice cost $2.25, thirty eggs for 25¢. For four dollars or so you could prepare most beautiful meals for Shabbat *for a large family.*

For many years, after 1930 or so, not many Aleppoans came to New York; nor from Damascus. Now our large community, *Mash-Allah* (blessed by God, in numbers), it is full of Egyptians and others. When Jews had to leave Egypt they poured in to New York; and the people from Beirut and the Ḥalabiyeh who had lived in Israel. Really, we have a beautiful community. Whoever comes to visit the neighborhood, when they find out our qualities — the Ashkenazeem, they all marvel at us, our closeness, our order.

There were many Ashkenazi friends I made in my work at the Infants Home of Brooklyn. I was 'the builder' of the Home, almost. It took in children from babyhood to age six. The Home

became my life. How it happened? One day a stranger, "Mrs. Rubin," rang my doorbell asking for a contribution "for a Home?" "What is that?" I asked. The lady invited me to come see it, to see what was done there. I went, and I fell in love with what they were doing for those poor neglected children, orphans, and children from broken homes. The Home has since become a place for retarded children. Later, I turned my efforts to the Jewish Pioneer Women, where I also worked hard. I am immodest to tell you that I received a lot of recognition for my efforts. I worked at HIAS, too, where I aided the Board of Directors. Now, 1983, I am selected as a delegate to the Women's Mizrahi Organization in Israel, I am going with my son Jack.

Even with the 'girls' — the women of the community, God protect them, let them be well and let their wealth stay with them, what are they doing, *what are they doing?* In chatting with one lady, she asked me what was usually served at a *Berit Milah* ceremony in the earlier days. I remarked her that a fruit-syrup drink, and a piece of sponge cake, was the usual. Now? Do you know that today's formal *Berit Milah* breakfast receptions cost $3,000 to $4,000 or more! *What for?* Everyone is on a 'diet'; they heap food on plates and leave it almost untouched. I wish with all my heart that someone could come to stop all that nonsense. If only Isaac Shalom, if only Seleem Sutton [this writer's brother], *Allah yir-ḥam(h)on,* were still living to put a stop, to reduce this meaningless spending. When Raymond was about to be married to a 'Jewish Girl' — "idshyeh" (Yiddish, Ashkenazi), we invited *everyone* in the community — from Shaul Semaḥ's list — (the shamosh's book) to a simple synagogue ceremony. Then we invited close relatives and friends to a party *at our home.* Now $20,000 or even $30,000 is not enough to pay for a wedding celebration. You can buy a house with such money [?]. God bless them, but what for, all this spending and display?

Life was really enjoyable in the old days. Today with their many cars, their tennis parties and running around . . . who ever went on a vacation in the old days, or on a honeymoon? Now it is a honeymoon in Acapulco or even in Hawaii. My granddaughter went to Honolulu. It *was* a *gorgeous* wedding.

She is an only daughter, my son *insisted* that it should be "grand."

The younger generation of women don't have the fine manners of the old days. If an elderly woman comes into a room they don't hurry to give her a seat, show her respect. Thank God, I am always treated respectfully, but many other older women — they run away from them! They are very cordial to a young woman who is elegantly dressed, or at a formal occasion, one who is *décolleté.* They are not interested in character or quality, or for one who does good deeds. Now that we have a comfortable, a prosperous community, why don't they look around them to form organizations to help with what is needed? We still have many families which are in need. I love these younger women, just as if they were my own children. A person who loves people doesn't like to see them go around thinking only of their own pleasures . . . .

With all this running around *Allah la yi-add-ehr* (may God not permit it) this is a *danger,* to them, to their children. These young children have a "new mother" every few months — with every change of a domestic — "maid." There is even physical danger with the display of necklaces and other jewelry. The muggers don't wait for a woman to give them the jewelry, they jerk and pull it off. It is all because of our abundance, of money, too much spending money. This brings about in some youngsters all sorts of bad things — alcohol, drugs, wildness, gambling. Some parents are not guiding their children — or, *they themselves* set terrible examples. Sometimes, when a school child comes from school, the mother is not there; and when he leaves for school, his mother is still asleep after a night out. These women, I know them well, and the community — they are all dear to me. Thank God, *most* of our people are not like that.

Still, where we had ladies' auxiliaries at the Magen David Yeshiva, and yes, Parents Associations, where are they now? I think the Sephardic High School *has* a Parents Association. Of course, there is the *Sephardic Bikur Ḥoleem* group. They do wonderful work — those who come forward to help. But even in this organization — one of the very few — even they are compelled to beg for workers, through putting up appeals in the

synagogues. Why shouldn't *Bikur Ḥoleem* be flooded with workers? They should have to turn them away. What shall I say — they are good women but too many of them, don't give their thoughts to the people who are in need. There are many of them, unfortunately; in spite of the prosperity of the general community

Now I live in New Jersey to be closer to some of my children. I am moving to the Imperial House in Long Branch. There are so many Syrian families living in that condominium — sixty or more? In New Jersey, too, I am always busy with Jewish organizations, to help Israel and everyplace.

My children, *Allah yi-kha-li-hom* ("God preserve them") ², as I told you, and they gave me thirty-three-grandchildren, and great grandchildren! My kids are:

Abraham, married to Marcelle Dweck; they have Paulette, Rachel, Lisa and Victor

Jack, married to Claudia Shalom, has Victor, Paulanna, Harry and Barbara

Morris, married to Paulette Beyda, has Karen, Victor, David and Shirley

Sally, married to cousin Joseph Grazi, has Edward, Michelle, Bonnie and Richard — a Ḥakeem (a physician)

Emma, married to Mr. Pohuskin (an Ashkenazi), has Victor, Michael and Randi

Clair, married to Michael Shamah, has Victor, Susan and Stuart

Rosalind, married to Joseph Franco, has Rena, Bonnie, Judy and Tamar

Gloria, married to Ezra Bobo, has Ralph, Nathan, Scott and Richard

Diana, married to Martin Hoffstein, has Louis, Pauline and Jennifer

Some of my *grandchildren* are married and have young boys and girls. All, everyone of them, show me respect and affection. I am blessed — (except for the untimely death of my dear husband). *Barukh Ha Shem.* (God be blessed).

Thank God, I am in good health, and I am energetic in spite of my years. Up to about seven years ago I needed eyeglasses. Since that time, I can read anything *without* glasses.

Soon I will be 82 years old, but as long as I am busy and active, I pray that God will continue to bless me and my family.

[*Pauline Garazi died July 31st 1986. She was highly regarded for her good deeds, kindliness, and for discreet help to many individuals and families.*]

Isaac Goldman — Born in Aleppo — 1923
Interviews Arabic, English

"I GOT MY ONLY LICKING! THE DAY IN 1930 WHEN ALEPPO'S FIRST TROLLEY-CAR RAN"

My name, Goldman — everybody asks, "How is it that your name is Goldman, yet you are so very Aleppoan, Ḥalabi?" My grandfather was from Austria, I don't know from what town. He was associated with the early Zionist movement — the first Aliyah, [circa 1880]. He knew six or seven languages; he spoke German, Russian, Polish, Turkish, French, Yiddish and Hebrew, but he knew no Arabic! His profession? The best ladies' tailor of coats and suits — the very best, the most fashionable.

He had photographs of himself with Herzl, with Jabotinsky and others, all the leaders of the Zionist movement. They used to bring the Pioneer immigrants to Palestine through Vienna and Rumania, down the Black Sea to Istanbul and along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean — through Aleppo. Aleppo was a "station" on the way down, where the travellers could rest and receive help to complete their journey — mostly on foot or in a caravan — to Palestine. My grandfather told me that he himself arrived in Aleppo, en route, just before one Passover. This may have been around 1890. Since he didn't

know the city, where would he go? He went to a synagogue. Yes, he was religious — quite religious; in a "modern" way. He was the first one — the only one, really, in Aleppo to own an Ashkenazic-type large *tefileen* [Rabbenu Tam?] At the synagogue there, he met a man of the Bistreh family — one who was also called Abi Gadohl ["the father of the great one," more popularly known as Avigdor; Ḥakham David Abi Gadohl was originally from Iraq.] Bistreh invited him to pass Passover with him, communicating together in Turkish. Bistreh was pleased to find that my grandfather was also a tailor like himself — Bistreh was a "gentleman's tailor" expert in making smart suits in the European style. Soon my grandfather agreed to settle in Aleppo, and joined Bistreh in partnership.

My grandfather told me that he had been married in Europe, but his wife had been killed — maybe in a pogrom? Since Bistreh had an unmarried daughter, my grandmother [!] — need I say more? A young man was most welcome as a suitor, especially since he was skilled in a trade, and moreover one who did not demand the usual *dóta,* dowry. The partners were very successful, each one was a master in his specialty, "renowned all over." Even now, I meet very old ladies who tell me, "Your grandfather, Signor Yiṣḥaq il Khayatt, [Signor Isaac the Tailor], made a beautiful coat for my trousseau, which I still have." [The title "Signor" was given to all Europeans.]

When I first went to school, at the Alliance Israélite, I was asked to write my name. I wrote Isaac "Khayat" (Tailor). The teacher said "That is not your name!; go home and ask your father to tell you your correct name!" My family was usually called "Khayatt"; the name Goldman was too strange to use.

I remember my grandfather very well, he used to tell me a lot about his life in Europe; I was sixteen years old when he died, in 1939.

Before the Alliance school which I attended at the age of seven years old, I had attended a kittab, a Hebrew elementary school when I could barely walk. I remember being carried on someone's back — I may have been two or three years old — to be taken to the kittab. We lived in the old city then on a street called "Darb-il-Souk" [the Way to the Souk]. Soon after we joined the many families which moved to the Djamiliyeh;

[*almost a 'suburb', to the south of the city.*] I remember the *ḥohsh* where we lived earlier, in the central city; and later in the Djamiliyeh, our trips to the Grand Synagogue. At the end of the prayer services Yom Kippur Eve, it was the custom for many young men to walk to the Old City, quite a long walk from the Djamilieyh. We would visit *Me-ar-rát ha-Saddiqeem,* the Cave of the Just", to pay our respects to the remains and memory of the sacred rabbis who were buried there, at the gates of *Knees-il-Kibbireh,* the Great Synagogue; and to visit the seven arks, in the interior and in the courtyard of the huge Synagogue. 'No one' entered into the *Cave of the Just,* it was forbidden. However, there was a flame that burned there at all times, deep in the interior of the cave.

You ask if there were trolley cars in my time in Aleppo? The day that the first trolley ran in Aleppo [1930?] was the day that I got my *only* beating from my father. It was on a Sabbath, and I was so curious to see the wonder that was so much talked about, a carriage moving without horses! So I had failed to attend synagogue service that morning in my eagerness to see this wonder.

There were several other Ashkenazi [non-Sepharadi] families in Aleppo, I am not quite sure how they came to settle there. There were Grinberg, Romanoff, Lerner, "Sackess" [Sachs], Toukachensky and perhaps one or two more. Romanoff was Russian and a physician. The mother was well-known, called *"Sebatyah il-dah-yeh"*, Sebatyah the Midwife. Romanoff's son, Leon, was also a physician. His grandson Henri, a schoolmate of mine, is now one of the foremost heart surgeons in Israel. The older Romanoff was the 'official' *Tarjman,* translator, for several consuls — [honorary consuls] — who represented European nations. He spoke many languages fluently and was renowned for his beautiful handwriting. Toukachensky worked at the Baghdad railway station. Lerner was an electrician. You ask about the need for an electrician in Aleppo? In my youth, in the early 1930's, electricity *had* been introduced, perhaps at the same time that the short trolley line was established. As to "Sackess" (Sachs) — to tell you the truth, I don't remember his trade. Grinberg (called *"Franji"* — European), was a *tadjer,* a merchant on a modest scale.

Which brings to mind the great trust and respect the Muslims had for the Jewish merchants of Aleppo, the great honor in which they were held. The Muslim merchants, even the most important ones, dealing in large quantities of commodities, almost all chose to have Jews to keep their accounts and act as their agents. When a Muslim farmer brought and sold his sometimes large crops in the city, he would accept only gold pieces in payment. At the end of the day, he would seek out a Jewish merchant friend, such as my grandfather, who made beautiful coats for the wives of the rich Muslims. The farmer would come to my grandfather with a bag containing the gold pieces and say *"Eedie fi zinnar-ack"* [literally, "my hand on your genitals" — [a declaration of trust, just as in Genesis], please keep this bag *bil-amahneh,* in trust, for me overnight." The bag would be placed uncounted in the Jewish merchant's strong box until the owner came for it; no receipt would ever be thought of, it was never necessary.

. . . . Weddings were usually celebrated in the afternoons, circumcisions were morning affairs; Bar Mizva ceremonies were very simple. At the end of the prayer-service on a Monday or Thursday morning, the family would offer some sugar-coated almonds, and a piece of almond cake that was called "Pan de Spania" [Spanish 'bread' as it was called in that language. This was doubtlessly a carry-over from the custom of the Jewish-Spanish refugees].

My father related to me the legend that in 1914 at "the beginning of World War I, with Turkey allied to Germany and Austria-Hungary, an Army officer entered the Great Synagogue with the intent to requisition this ancient Sacred Temple as a barrack for his troops. A serpent sprang out from one of the seven arks and wrapped itself around his throat. This effectively stopped the requisition." [The serpent episode is related in a much earlier 'saga' and is connected with a Muslim king, who slept in the Synagogue and was enlaced by a huge serpent.] My father told me also about a "blood-libel" that he heard had taken place in Aleppo, brought about by Christians. A Jew named Moussan was accused of slaying two Christians to secure their blood for Passover wine. This resulted in what was called "Nehs Moussan," the Moussan Miracle, celebrating the

freeing of the Jew Moussan, who was "miraculously" exonerated. One of the two Christian "victims" was "Badry Tooma" (Padre Tomas). [This story too, is a confused account, of the genuine blood-libel terror *in Damascus* involving the same individuals in 1840, more than three-quarters of a century before the alleged event in Aleppo].

My mother? she was born on the island of Rhodes, perhaps of Spanish origin. From there her family, the Kohéns, migrated to Salonika, then to Constantinople, Smyrna, and then to Syrian Tripoli, and from there they settled in Aleppo. It was natural for my father, the son of an immigrant, to marry the daughter of a new settler in Aleppo.

Tédef, a village in the hills to the north, on the nearby southern border of Turkey, also had sacred synagogues. One is associated with Ezra the Scribe [circa 400 B.C.E.]. Tédef was a popular summer resort for Jews of Aleppo. Poor rabbis and others went there too, on donkeyback. They set out Sunday morning and would arrive on Thursday. Others in the old days, travelled to Tédef by hired carriages; the journey took only one day. I remember that my father took the family there in the 1930's. Since it is only about 35 miles from Aleppo, *we* got there in about two and a half hours — by a hired new automobile; the roads left a lot to be desired.

Aleppo possessed many ancient documents whose reputation was known to scholars everywhere, both Jewish and Christian, but *inaccessible to them.* One day a stranger came Aleppo, went to the Synagogue and put on two sets of Tefileen, the mark of an ultra-pious Jew. Since he spoke no Arabic, but Yiddish, my grandfather "Signor Yiṣḥaq" was asked to look after him. He showed that he was a scholar, preached on the Talmud and Bible with great skill. My grandfather would lead him to the Jewish treasures about which he had heard. Despite the piety and rabbinic learning the visitor showed, my father remarked, that somehow, speaking Yiddish, his speech seemed strangely non-Jewish — more German than Yiddish. After several weeks of close association, one Sabbath while visiting my grandfather, he revealed that, indeed — he was a Christian, anxious to be able to see the treasures of the community

through passing as a Jew! My father fasted for three days, in fear that his association with the Christian may have been a desecration.

Like many others we migrated to New York, living and working with Aleppoans. I married Fortunée [Reenie] Kassin, daughter of the highly regarded, the late Joseph Kassin. I am blessed with children and grandchildren. My oldest, Solomon age 33, (an ordained non-professional rabbi) and his wife Renée have Ḥannah, 9, and her twin brother Nachman; Leah, 8; Zvi, 6, Mazaal, 2; and Isaac, age one. My daughter Kaden, married David Applebaum. They have Joseph, 4; Ruth, 2. My son David, 21, is unmarried.

I hold an important position in commerce, devote time to Toráh study and I am particularly fond of music — *pizmoneem. Barukh Ha-Shem* [Blessed is the Name].

Mr. 'S. S.' Born '1896' — actually 1902, in Aleppo
Interviews in Arabic

"WAS IT A SIN TO LIE TO THE OTTOMAN (TURKISH) ARMY RECRUITING AUTHORITIES ?"

. . . Wipe out, wipe out the tape . . . I will speak only if you remove the tape recorder . . . Well, if you promise to let me hear the tape . . . To be used only with my permission . . . . [*permission granted*].

It was in 1906 that active Jewish migration out of Ḥálab began. It continued until 1914 when the War began. They migrated because of their poverty, severe poverty. But if it had not been because of immigrants *into* Aleppo, foreign Jewish gentry who had come to Aleppo much earlier, conditions for the poor would have been even worse. [*The "foreign gentry," the European "Franj," had come in the 17th and 18th centuries.*]

They were Sepharadeem who had come from Hungary, Austria, Italy. They came to trade, and were very rich and very charitable. The families of Piccioto, Silvera, Ancona, Yaᶜabes, Pinto, and others. Yes, there was also the Altarás family, but they were not very rich. Actually, we lived in the Pinto *ḥohsh* near *Firn Chiroh* [Chiroh's bake-ovens], past the *Sabᶜh ᶜOh-jat*, the "Seven Turns," it was on the Shᶜayo family lane.

The rich "Franj," the Jewish Europeans, established many study-halls, "midrasheem," as many as twenty [?] and they had many *shil-ḥons;* there was one every week [*a shil-ḥon is a designated day of Torah studies*, at which the destitute lucky ones were given the opportunity to earn a few piasters and to eat well — for a change]. These *shil-ḥons* were for the very poor rabbis of the city and for some of their poor advanced students.

Mosé Shamah and Ezra Shamah used to come to the schools and "midrasheem" on Thursday afternoons to distribute money to the rabbis, for food for the week and preparation of their Shabbat meals. To my own knowledge when I was young, the foremost such poor rabbis were given a *madjidi* [*a silver coin, equivalent to 25 or 50 cents*]. This is how poorly they lived; they didn't have the cost of food.

When many had migrated to America, they began to send money to their families, and when people saw this, they were encouraged, too, to go to America in order to escape their poverty and misery. Migrations continued until 1914 and then from 1918 until 1938 when, soon after, World War II began. At that time, when the large scale migration began, there were 18,000 Jews in Aleppo. In 1905 there had been, when Ḥizkiya Shabbetai came as Ḥakham Bashi, chief Rabbi, there were 25,000 [?] of us in the city. The entire city had a population, it is said, of 125,000. [?]

Men, and their wives, used to come from all nearby quarters of the city to attend prayer-services on the Shabbat at the *Knees-il-Kibbirreh*, the Grand Synagogue, from "Seven Turns," the Saḥa, the Djaloum, the Illeh, from Ḥari-il-Yahood (the "area of the Jews") and Baḥseeta; everywhere. The women wore "habbaraat" [a thin dark cloth covering over their dresses], white ones and black ones. The women came to see the

Sefer Torahs, and to pray for the welfare of their families... .

[*When this discussion is finished you must let me hear all of it!*]

I first studied under Ḥakham Mosé Bawaabeh, *Allah Yirḥamo* ("God have mercy on him," the deceased) his 'partner' was Ḥakham Dahood Dayan. I studied with him at his *kittab*, his school. Then I studied in "Mad-rasit il-Alliance" [*Alliance Israélite Universelle school*], first at its central-city location, then when it moved to the Djamiliyeh area. I was twelve or thirteen then, and I studied until 1914. Before that I had also studied with Ḥakham Sion Fishkehli, and Ḥakham Ḥayeem ᶜAzar. Those were the rabbis who taught us — and Ḥakham Isḥaq Saq'a. At the Alliance, we studied some Hebrew, too, under Ḥakham Mosé Bawaabeh, one of the world's finest teachers! We studied the Tanakh, prayers and so on. No, I didn't go to any other schools after that. In 1914-1918 there were 'no schools' at all. The Laique [secular, non-religious school] began in 1921, established by the French — under their League of Nations Mandate ... ."Kitab Sariyeh Anzaroot" was one of the city's Talmud Torah schools... .

Ḥizkiya Shabbetai came in 1905 as I mentioned. The community had been in disorder, and so Ḥakham Hizkiya was invited from Istanbul to serve as Chief Rabbi. He was very good, helped the community a lot; during the war, especially. [*There are strongly differing opinions.*] In Aleppo, there were very great rabbis, too; Ḥakham Yaᶜakob Dweck, David Menasche, Yaᶜakob Gindi, Eliahou Ḥamwy, they were all very sane, very fine. . . some were in the *Bet Deen*, the religious Court.

My father was a very poor man, a tin-smith. When I left school I worked as a clerk in the general-goods store of Orosdi-Beck [*from Austria*].

I claimed that I was "born in 1896," when World War I came. I gave this earlier date age so that I would not be taken as a soldier; actually I was born in 1902. Is it a sin to have fooled the Turkish authorities? (laugh)

I must tell you; what I know no one else knows! but I hesitate to talk freely . . . no one knows what may develop in

time. What is published remains for all time. . . .

Mrs. S.S. his much younger wife: "Why do you hesitate to talk up? This is not the Mukhabarat, the Syrian Secret Police: why are you so shy? Usually you are only too eager to talk!" Mr. S.S. responded: "It is not that I am fearful. It is that in Syria the authorities are *rehshaᶜeem,* villains. . . ."]

I was very wily, crafty, even as a youth of sixteen. I had a cousin who had lost an eye and his other eye was also, *ᶜayyib a-ool* [it is shameful to say], 'imperfect'. In spite of that, in 1914 when World War I broke out, he was conscripted into the Turkish army, but he was given a delay of six months for 'eye-treatment'. At the end of the six months, he was raked in into the Army and placed in the Ishleh, the military barracks. In the Alliance School I studied French and Hebrew, but I also knew Turkish. One day my cousin came weeping to tell me that finally her son was being inducted as a soldier. What was to be done? She was desperate. How could I help? I *had* to help, somehow. Early the next day, I wrote a text in Turkish, put on a "stamp" to make it look "official". The text was an affidavit stating that my cousin has only one eye, with the other eye defective, and pleading with the authorities to order "another examination of his vision."

I was always very eager to know the news of the day. I went daily to pick up a newspaper to keep myself informed. I read that Mustapha Kemal Pasha, the military governor of the Aleppo District [later head of the Turkish Republic], was due to arrive in the city that very day, and would stay in the Hotel Baron. In the company of a friend, Nisseem Shalom, I hurried to the Hotel Baron where I was told that the Pasha would be at the Ishleh, the barracks. We hurried there. The guard would not permit us in, but when he turned away to drink, I hurried in and hid behind the doors, with the petition in my hand. As the Pasha's carriage drove in, I threw the petition at his feet and left. My cousin's wife came to me the next afternoon in tears, to tell me that my cousin had been removed to the *Till-al* conscription-travel barracks! I hurried there and in the courtyard I saw my cousin in the middle of a convoy of recruits that were about to be shipped off to *Dyar-bekr,* a city in the Kurdish Province. Just then an officer appeared, with my

petition in hand. "*Kim-bu* Seleem?" (in Turkish: "who is Seleem?"), he demanded. I identified myself and admitted that it was I who had prepared the petition. I will tell you the truth I will take an oath — I will not lie — the officer pulled my ear — I was just a boy — and said that if the petition was not truthful he would have me whipped! "I accept readily," I said, in Turkish. He examined my cousin — and ordered him — out of the Army! My cousin's family could not praise me enough. "*Allah hoo yirrdah ᶜalehk! Allah hoo yi-khal-leek!*" "May you find favor in Allah's eyes! May Allah preserve you!"

Jewish relations with the Muslims of the city were very fine. The Muslims would not cheat a Jew of even a piaster; *ab-a-dan, ab-a-dan!* [not at all, at all!]. Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived together in peace. Yes, Christians and perhaps some Muslims as well, had no love for the Jews within their hearts, but as for relations or negotiations together? They were first-class. Since my earliest years I have never heard of a Jew being abused. Now, there is *political* hatred, not religious, but abuse of Jews by Christians or Muslims did not exist [?]

I will tell you an old story, from 1933 or 1934. A Jewish merchant sold a Muslim in the *Bab*, a village near *Tedéf*, 20 gold pounds worth of goods and took a promissory note for the amount. When the note became due, the debtor claimed to "have already paid"; that the "signature on the note is not his own — it was a forgery!" The Jew brought suit, and when the Muslim judge — one of three — asked him to take an oath, he declined, because of religious scruples against taking *any* oath. The judge adjourned the case to the following day. I had a shop near *Khan-il-Hareer*, the Silk Caravansary, where that evening the judge, a friend of mine, stopped in to visit me while he waited for the nearby *tramway*, the trolley-car. We were friendly enough so that when Jewish holidays occurred he would visit me — *bi-ᶜay-iddni* [to 'holiday' me] and I would visit him on Muslim holidays. He said to me, "I have a request to make. Today, a Jew came to my court, and he will not take an oath. Please speak to him, persuade him to swear, so that I can dispose of the case." I could not — I *would* not persuade him to do this; so the judge appointed two Muslim lawyers to

examine the debtor's handwriting. One found the signature on the note to be genuine. The other 'disagreed', he quoted to the judge an Islamic 'proverb' that "right or wrong you must help a Muslim." This judge, my friend, was one of the *ḥasideh oomot haᶜolam* (non-Jewish "Just Men of the World"). Said the Judge, "It is impossible that such a saying could be found in our sacred *Kor'an*. The *Kor'an* says that "justice must be given the people of the Book. He who is unjust to these people is unjust to me [Muḥammad]." When the case came before the Court again, the judge said to the debtor, "I am convinced that this is truly your signature. I will give you until Sunday in the forenoon to pay; otherwise, I will send you before the High Tribunal to be tried for fraud. There, you can be sentenced for from three to seven years." "Your honor, before Sunday, the Jew will come to tell you that he is satisfied," the debtor said. "*That will not do!*" the Judge replied. "I will not have you intimidate this man. You will bring the 20 pounds in gold to this court and pay *here*." And so it was! No, no, there is no religious strain, whatever.

I cannot say if the following tale is true or fabricated. There is a story of a rabbi who dreamed one night; a voice cried out to him, "Awaken, go to the Great Synagogue. It is burning!" The rabbi woke and reached the synagogue before dawn. Something led him to open the Tabernacle. There he saw a bottle — full of blood. How? Why? He emptied the bottle and refilled it with wine. Who had brought blood and for what purpose? Did someone, a Christian perhaps, plot to 'discover' the blood and accuse the Jews of having killed to secure the blood for Passover, as had happened long before in Damascus? I cannot say — if it is a true episode.

In 1910 a Doctor Pepper came to Aleppo as a Missionary to the Jews. He rented a large *ḥohsh*, in the midst of the Jewish quarter, of the Ḥimsany family. He announced that Thursday afternoons he would treat anyone who came — without charge. What an able doctor he was, incomparable. He said to the assembled patients, "I love you, and I wish to direct you to the Right Path. If you come to listen to the *Injeel* [The New Testament, the Evangel] I will award you with a *bishlek* [value about 10 cents]." While few had come to the Sunday sermon

before, eager for the bishlek fifty came; then, when he offered two bishleks, 150 appeared. He told them how Jesus had "cured the blind, had healed the crippled. . . ." One day a Jewish young man, a wily one, a brother of a 'violated' girl, a dog, son of a dog — (*one like me*!) came to a sermon, and began to dispute with Pepper. Privately, Dr. Pepper said to him, "I am now awarding two *bishlek* for attendance. I will give you four *bishlek*, if you will no longer come!"

It was fanatic anti-Zionist mobs which burned the synagogues in 1947, not the government. [*There are several contrary reports.*] We Jews were all in great dread, fear of what could happen to us . . . . fortunately the feared massacre did not materialize. Recently, just before I came to New York a year ago, [1982?] I can tell you that the local authorities no longer mistreated their Jewish neighbors. When orders had previously come from the capital, Damascus, it was the Palestinian residents in Aleppo who carried out the cruel edicts, they and the Secret Police. In fact, when a Jew escaped out of the country and abandoned his home, it was only to other Jews that the house was made available — and at very small rental. At present there are three Jewish physicians in Aleppo, each one has such a large practice that they earn three times more each day than any doctor in New York! The doctors are Kassab ["Butcher"!], Dayeh ["Midwife"], and Bekhaar. *Many others authoritatively said they number fifty, in Damascus, yes,*]. There are also three skilled Jewish architects; they are in the employ of the government. We were almost 5,000 in Aleppo eight or nine years ago. Many, many fled the country. Now there are only about 500 Jews left.

Jews had much property there. I owned two *ḥohsh*: they were expropriated to enlarge the boulevards, etc. They were valuable, *each* meter of ground is worth 10,000 Syrian pounds [$1,600]. For both my pieces of property, 350 meters of ground, I was offered 23,000 pounds! [$4,000] Injustice! "It was for the "public good!" One day when I was visiting my friend's shop, Jack Khasky's — he is now living in New York — I met a gentleman shopping there who spoke to Jack in perfect Aleppo Arabic and to his own blond wife in French. It developed that

he was originally from Aleppo but lived in Switzerland and married a Swiss there. What brought him back to Aleppo? "I am a lawyer. I've come here to represent people whose property was confiscated." I told him that I had also suffered that way, what should I do? He advised me *not* to accept the 23,000 pounds settlement — that one day in the future I will get the full value, but to be sure to keep the title deeds in a safe place. That, I have done. They are still in a 'safe' place in Aleppo. No one knows; some day I will perhaps be able to get a fair price? But when will I return to Ḥálab, Aleppo, to claim my money?

Yes, please be sure to come to visit me soon. I enjoyed your presence very much. I look forward to seeing you.

[*Despite very poor vision, Mr. S.S. receives and is able to read Arabic newspapers. Fellow-Aleppoans, recent arrivals who know him well, consider him "willful and opinionated." He is an avid reader, and thus better-informed than most; they avoid disputing his statements. His son Raffúl is well-established commercially in the new land.*]

Marie Sasson Toussie — Born in Aleppo, Circa 1916
Interviews in English, Arabic

"WHEN WE SHARED OUR FIRST SECRET KISS WE WERE NOT AWARE THAT WE WERE ALREADY HUSBAND AND WIFE"

I was engaged to be married at the age of fifteen, in Aleppo. It was two years later when I was able to marry and come to live in New York. My father engaged me to a cousin in New York — *by mail.* My father knew my cousin — my maternal aunt's son — up to the age of nine when the boy came

with his family to the United States. He remembered him as a bright child, nice in appearance. This is how the engagement came about: my sister Sarina had sent a photograph of me to my aunt Rachél in New York, who thought I was very pretty, pretty enough for her son Isaac to marry! — "with a background she knew . . ." She showed the photo Isaac — and noticed that his eyes sparkled in looking at my picture. My aunt had sent a picture of Isaac to Ḥálab. When I was asked my impression of my cousin, I thought him to very handsome. That's all my father had to hear! He told me to write a letter to my New York cousin — we respected my father so highly; we always obeyed my father in everything. We wrote one another for some time and liked what we read. "Did I like my cousin, would I like to marry him?" I was assured that he was well-to-do and that I would have a happy and comfortable life. I was a docile, quiet girl and I had no objection. A formal engagement was sent by mail, a religious *in-yaan* And that's how I became engaged to be married.

When my father began to make travel arrangements, the American Consul would not issue me a visa "to go visit my aunt." "A young girl of fifteen travelling without her family? No!" What to do? Several appeals to the Consul took a long time and got no results. Meanwhile, many months had passed, two years, with no solution to the visa problem. Then, my father insisted that Isaac should come to Aleppo to marry me; and if he wouldn't, well apparently "*ma fi nah-seeb*" — 'it is not our fate'. Isaac did not wish to come to Syria; instead he suggested that I come to Paris to his uncle's family and there we could marry, and have a wonderful honeymoon, "visiting the French Riviera and other beautiful spots." Isaac sent me (q)-*id-u-sheem* [a formal religious marriage contract]. My father accepted for me and I travelled to Paris to stay with Isaac's uncle's family, Marco Toussie; Isaac stayed in a nearby hotel. Isaac took me everywhere in Paris, to all the nice places, wonderful theaters — everything of the very best. It was one evening after a theater when Isaac was escorting me up the stairs to his uncle's apartment that he kissed me — embraced me, my only kiss from a young man. Actually we were *formally married* even before I left Ḥálab, My father had accepted (q)-

idusheem, but I didn't know that I was *already his wife when we first kissed so secretly.*

My first impression of Isaac — when I first saw him — I found him very attractive, and from the beginning I recognized what a fine, thoughtful person he was. He told me, with that first kiss, "how beautiful" I was, how lucky he felt to have me for a wife, that he never believed he would have such a bride, that I was what he had dreamt of. But as I said, I was *already his wife* — without being aware of it. We completed the marriage formalities with a civil ceremony, according to French law.

We got married civilly; and did go to Nice and Monte Carlo and other lovely spots. In fact we were forced to stay in France for an unexpectedly long time. Since my father held Persian citizenship I needed Teheran's approval from the Persian government for a valid passport. We waited around Paris almost two months for that document — *m'sajjaleh aḥwaal* it was called. After those many weeks it arrived, and we took a ship to New York. I was now the wife of an American citizen.

From the beginning he showed me his deep love. He was a *wonderful husband,* in every way. Until the day he died. After 42 years of marriage, we were like newly-weds, really.

I was about four or five years old when my mother died — one of nine children, two others had died earlier. We always lived well. When my mother died, we lived in a lovely and spacious aparment in the Djamiliyeh section. Our home was large, well-furnished, with Persian carpets in every room. Soon after my mother's passing away, my father lost his money and we had to move to a smaller house, in the Old city. We lived in a Muslim neighborhood, it was less expensive; and besides, my father wanted us to grow up *away* from the poor Jews in the Old City — "many of them were 'low-class, uneducated'. He wanted to bring us up along his own ideas. It was a very nice area, with nice homes, nice neighbors. Of course we did mingle with Jewish children — at school, the Alliance Israélite.

Sarina, my oldest sister, looked after us at first, along with sister Renée. Sarina had many suitors but she would not consider marrying, until the end of the year of mourning, until

my father could look for a wife. Soon he found a wife, a divorced woman with a daughter. One Saturday afternoon he took all nine of us kids to her home to visit her. She was a very good looking woman and quite young. Only later we discovered why she had been divorced. He told us that "she was to come live with us," and that we were to call her — *khal-ti,* "Auntie" — [mother's sister]. They married and she came to our home with her young child. At first, my stepmother thought to place her child with her father's family. My father would not hear of it. "A child should be close to her mother," and insisted on having her with us. "You are to look after my nine children and not take care of your own child?"

We loved the new sister, we loved her very much. She was sweet and intelligent. There was no distinction between any of us.

After a year of marriage, a daughter, Esther, was born to my father and his wife. My stepmother was quite happy early in her marriage. My father a most thoughtful, educated, gentle person and much ahead of his time in his thinking. He gave us vitamins even then. Every day we had to take cold liver oil. She was very pleased when she gave birth to a daughter. Now she had two lovely little girls. Soon she thought to have a male child — but could not get pregnant. She was going "nuts." "Why?" She *could* bear children and in fact had given birth to two children. "Why?" There must be some secret forces — some *evil* forces which prevented her from conceiving. There was Black Magic working against her, wicked, evil forces! Little girls that we were, sometimes we would drop a few hairs on the floor after we combed our hair. "Aha!" the hair was dropped so that *she* would step across it and re-inforce the *Evil* Spirits working against her.

She soon took to consulting the nearby *Fataḥ Fal* [the fortune-teller], a Muslim elder. He recognized the 'fact' that there *were* Evil forces at work! He would begin to use his Magic against them, but "it is a difficult, *ya binti,* my daughter, costly, and a slow process." I don't know how many times a week she had to visit him; she paid him each time, of course. Then she didn't have enough money. Removable decorations of the house began to disappear, given to the *shaykh.* My father had

presented her with jewelry of all sorts, medallions, necklaces, brooches. When my father asked her to wear them to go visiting — she fell silent. They had gone to the *shaykh*, the fortune-teller! It came out then, why she had been divorced. Her husband couldn't stand her peculiar ideas anymore. [?] We used to hear my stepmother quarreling with my father at night, shouting and screaming. My poor gentle father; sometimes we could hear him weeping during the night.

It made life miserable, all we kids were very unhappy. That is why we looked to get away. My brothers and sisters, almost all fled, to Israel, Buenos Aires . . . one by one. When my father suggested that I get married to an unknown in a strange country, even though I wasn't quite fifteen years of age then, I didn't hesistate to accept. She was killing herself — and killing us, with her changed attitude to us. she had almost emptied the house — she was ready to give the *shakyh* the Persian rugs under our feet! No, the *shakyh* didn't help her. She didn't conceive.

My father was my grandfather's first son. He had sent him to Istanbul to get educated. My father later said "*Any place* is better than Ḥálab. It is so backward." He refused to wear a fez, he wore a smart hat. He was modern in every way. "Why was I born in this old-fashioned city, where I must stay because of my family?"

Before my mother died, we lived so well. In fact, we had four servants in the house. Later too, before my father's second marriage, we always had a maid, an Armenian woman, even though my father's circumstances were 'modest'; he was the bookkeeper at the *Sedaqa u Marpeh* charitable institute. After all, my stepmother had eleven children to look after every day. Really, she was a nice woman at heart, quite attractive, with beautiful long hair and lovely eyes. She couldn't help herself, couldn't overcome her 'funny' ideas.

That poor woman, she had led a poverty-stricken life, I don't condemn her. In her first marriage — with the man she divorced, she had a miserable life. Her husband used to drag her by her long hair; he threatened to throw her down the well . . . . He was crazy; but she was a little cracked herself! My father

suffered so much with her later . . . . They led a hard life. It was rough for both of them, but it was roughest for us children — without a loving mother and a stepmother who was not normal.

Yes, we were all healthy, thanks to my father's knowledge and care. He saw that we had nourishing food, and the cod-liver oil, against rickets.

I attended the Alliance Israélite school; I *loved* the Alliance! It was my best 'recreation' . . . I loved classes, I couldn't get to them fast enough. We wore aprons, not uniforms. I would wash and starch and iron my aprons; black in the winter, white in the warmer months. My sister Sarina was a teacher in the school, but I was never in her class. When Inspectors came from Paris to examine the school, Madame Penso, the *Directrice*, the Principal, always called me up, presented me to the visitors as an example, to recite, to sing. My marks were never less than "10," which is equivalent to 100 percent. I was still in school when my father engaged me to be married by mail. But really, I didn't have to quit school because, as I said, it was almost two years before I left Aleppo in 1930 to go to Paris. In my last few weeks in school, they began to teach us Arabic, one hour a week. To my surprise, when my son and I were visiting California a few years ago, I saw a sign on a store in Arabic characters. And don't you think that I was able to read: "Falafel." I was so surprised, I was shocked; I had had only a few hours of Arabic study fifty-three years before!

A few years ago I taught myself Spanish to be able to speak to my New York domestic-worker. I wrote down thousands of words in Spanish, I have *very good* visual memory. In the first six months in America as a bride, Isaac my husband who was such a good, a mostly self-taught scholar, brought me four English word books and soon I began to speak the language fluently, grammatically — in less than six months.

When I had first arrived, I was very nervous about the strange new language; I was like someone deaf-and-dumb. It was a horrible feeling, enough to make one cry. Isaac had suggested that I learn ten words a day — and I learned them. He said to his mother — my aunt, with whom we lived "Mom, don't speak a word of English to Marie!" He didn't want me to pick up her broken-English accent, although she had been in

New York for — maybe thirty years. Pronunciation was a problem, it is so different from the French, which I know.

My recent visit to my stepsister Esther in Tel Aviv, with her five boys! it brought back all the memories of living together in Aleppo. It was unbelievable, all the recollections. Really we were very happy together as children. Esther knew about her mother's Black Magic. When my father died, my stepmother left for Israel where her daugher had gone, and married. For the third time my stepmother was found attractive enough to get a nice husband. Esther had married Menaḥem Gindi, originally from Aleppo. They have five splendid boys, some of whom are known throughout Israel, as builders of large housing developments. They live so well, and were so hospitable and loving to me on my visits to them.

As a young child I had become ill and was taken to a hospital for operations, on two occasions. A small scar on my back was left. I didn't know what had taken place; until only a few years ago. When I submitted to some medical tests, the doctor asked me, "When was your kidney removed?" I didn't know *anything* about a kidney removed. But that was the nature of my childhood operations. I have gone through life perfectly healthy — but with only *one kidney.*

I had a most happy marriage, as I told you, although for many years we didn't have too much money . . . . I have three fine affectionate sons and a daughter: Sam, Robert, Michael and Joyce. Three are married, with lovely children. Only Michael, my youngest son, is a bit of a problem. He should be married, should have been married, several years ago... .

In a more recent re-interview:

God has blessed us with children and grandchildren. My oldest, Sam, married Nancy Hanan. They have Marie, 16; Victoria, 15; Isaac, 14; Ralph, 12; and David, 6; Daughter Joyce is married to "Moe" Mizrahi. Their children are Susan, 22; Carol, 20; Sam, 19; Linda, 16; and Nancy, 15. As you see she has only one boy, and he is a "doll." My son Robert married Laura Shear (her mother is Syrian). They have "Zizzie" (Marie), 15; Isaac, 13; Elizabeth, 8; and Candice, 3. My youngest son is Michael who has *at last, just married.* She is

Debby Kaplan; they met in a sporting-goods shop; they are both in love with the outdoors, with sports. Now I look forward to marrying off my grandchildren! *Inshallah* ['would to God'].

[*The oral biography of David Sasson, brother of Marie Toussie follows*].

David Abraham Sasson [brother of Marie Toussie] — Born in Aleppo, circa 1920

"MY WIDOWER FATHER PLEADED, 'FIND ME A POOR WOMAN, 'A HUNGRY ONE,' WHO WILL SHARE IN OUR MEALS AND LOOK AFTER MY NINE CHILDREN' "

You [this writer] knew my father; in 1931, in Aleppo, Abraham ibn Mosé Sasson — ᶜAdjmi" (originally from ᶜAdjam — Persia), a fine family. My mother's maiden name was Regine Tabboush. Her grandfather was a distinguished rabbi — Ḥakham Mordechai Tabboush. The famous poet-musician Rafael Tabboush — (il)-ᶜAntebi [from ᶜAintab], was his brother.

My mother was sick only three or four days — and she died, at the age of forty-two, leaving *nine* children, five boys and four girls, the oldest a boy of thirteen.

At the time my father's finances were in good shape. He was a partner of Selim Salem in *Kaff-il-Aḥmar*, the "Red Palm," [a popular general-merchandise shop, somewhat like "Orosdi-Beck"]. Salem was a bachelor and saved his profits, while my father with a sizable family spent freely. In time, Salem proposed to enlarge the business and demanded additional capital. Since my father was unable to provide more money the partnership was dissolved, Salem keeping the business. My father brought home dry-goods, blankets and the like; they were used in many forms. Our fortune fell. *Il mara*, the 'woman' [the mother] gone, and with her prosperity went.

With that my father sought a job and found it finally as bookkeeper for the community charity organization, *Sedaqqa u-marpeh* [Charity and Cure Society]. As a young man he had been a watchmaker for a short time when he had gone to Egypt for a few years. He used to say, "It is an excellent profession, and he who masters a profession will always have a bite to eat." Nevertheless, when he tried his hand at the craft before becoming a bookkeeper, he was discouraged. "You work like a dog from morning until night — and you earn very little with which to feed a sizeable family." The customers were reluctant to pay a fair price. "What did you do? Very little. You merely poked a little at the mechanism." The only solution would be to import some watches and thus make a decent profit. But this was not so easy to do; my father had no capital with which to go into that business! You ask why the watch repair customers were reluctant to pay a fair price. It's because my father was very honest. He would tell them that the watch required no more than an hour or so, to repair; *il fi qalbo, fi thoum-mo*, what was in his heart was in his mouth. He was always painstakingly honest and forthright. And our circumstances fell. We were compelled to abandon the [suburb-like] *Djamiliyeh* quarter to live in the old city in *Bab Jnehn* ("The Door to the Garden"), a Muslim area, and then in the *ᶜAaqqabeh*, another area where we were completely surrounded by Muslim neighbors; not a Jew anywhere. He said it is cheaper, and what's more, Jewish neighbors gossip. "No one needs to know my poor circumstances. They do not have to see that we can afford only bread and raisins — no one needs to know." We didn't have the means to secure decent food. "Sit down and eat, children. bread and raisins, with a little laban [yoghurt]." He engaged an old widow to keep her eyes on us, the nine children, an Armenian widow from the neighborhood. Finally he became the bookkeeper of *Sedaqqa u marpé*, the Jewish health organization. He would come home from work at the hospital dripping with perspiration.

My maternal grandmother in New York was married to Ḥakham Murdoch Tabboush; they had migrated to America. She had requested a photograph of her grandchildren — all nine of us, from the oldest who was about sixteen, to me, the

youngest, who was born only a few months before my mother died. Here is the photograph: do you recognize which one is Marie who eventually married Isaac Toussie? My father had gathered us all, took us to the photographer, an Armenian, with the result you see before you. I found the photo recently at my sister's home in Israel, married to Moosa Chirro-Cohén, and had a copy made.

Yes, at the *ʿAqqabeh* area we were looked after by the Armenian widow; but not too carefully — after all we were not her children. In addition she received such little pay that she had no incentive to struggle for us or with us. My father said "I need a different kind of woman. Find me a woman, a poor one, — a 'hungry one', who will appreciate a home and a handful of food." The solution — a wife rather than a servant. So the marriage brokers set to work. Eventually they brought Raḥél K. They said "She is a fine woman, loving in nature and peaceable." My father met her a few times and found her "agreeable and friendly." She had been divorced from her husband, a Kurd (Jewish) and had a daughter.

ʿA-la kul-ḥal [in any case], they married, she and my father, and the girl was brought along. She was treated just as lovingly as if she were my father's own daughter. Why did she marry this quiet, unassuming little man, poor, and with nine young children to bring up? We can only suppose that she wished to rid herself of the title of a "divorced woman" and also to be able to eat regularly.

It developed later that the new wife's divorce came about because she was so terribly strong-willed, *awi-yeh*, and unpleasant, and the Kurd could not live with her in peace.

In time, my stepmother gave birth to a girl-baby — she had wanted a boy. Nevertheless the new child was spoiled and cherished like *Phakhdit il Nabbi* ["the thigh of the Prophet" Muḥammad.]

Soon my stepmother began to quarrel, constantly, with my father. She complained that, "Your children are working witchcraft on me; that is why I can't conceive, and have a *son*." She stole from my father whatever money she could lay hands on; she stole soap, lentils — whatever was around, to give to the local healer and fortune-teller, the shaykh [sheikh.] He would

draw out information and names from her stealthily — without her paying attention — and at later sessions he would astound her by what the Spirits were saying about so-and-so. "Do you have an uncle Ibraheem, about whom the spirit is speaking?" Only a few days before she had related episodes mentioning her "Uncle Ibraheem" and so on. Each time the shaykh would bless her for her generous gifts and urge her to win additional "merit." He gave her a cock's feather and hairs and a few beads to put under her pillow, to protect her from the *Shehtahn* (Satan). "Bring more food-stuffs, dear child, to protect you from the witchcraft of your stepchildren." She would return home in a fury, shouting and crying out against my father. She was an uneducated women from ᶜAintab [a provincial town]. My father was a scholar and loved knowledge.

What misery we underwent. He had pride in his family ancestry and refused to allow his thread-bare daughters to marry "beneath them." "What," he would shout, "my daughter to marry a Chirro, a lowly baker?" My uncle, Ḥakham Meir Neḥmad advised him to accept the suitor, who offered ten gold pounds as a dowry, [in this case, "bride-price"]. He yielded. Unfortunately, the marriage was a very unhappy one. Her husband would not permit her to see us, her father and brothers and sisters. He provided a home in a basement in one of the several buildings he had owned. His promises to take her to a better life in America went unfulfilled. He had gone to the United States with a brother, where he had lived for a period previously, before he returned to Ḥálab. My father wept at the deprivation "not even to see the face of my daughter!" The husband, who accumulated wealth, would hide his gold pieces in the bags of rice and other food stuff. When the uprising and fires took place in 1947, my sister's husband fled to Israel. When he returned before long, he was seized by the Intelligence officers, accused of being a "spy" for Israel. He secured his release and returned to guard his treasure at home; and in Israel where they settled later. Was it relatives — he was widely disliked — who did it, or sent agents to do it? Burglars came and stripped his house in Tel Aviv of every last coin and every piece of jewelry. This was tragic for him; but he had much property and money in the banks.

I have a sister Rena and another, Sarina; it was they who looked after us at home. Esther, my father's only child from the second marriage, her cousin on her mother's side, Menaḥem (ibn Ezra) Gindi who now lives in Rishon LeZion in Israel, married her. When Esther was born, Gindi's father had declared, "She will be my son's bride!" — and so it was!

Earlier, the commotion created by my stepmother was nerve-wracking. Soon my brothers sought to get away from the scenes of quarreling and misery, and one by one they left, encouraged a little by my father. Meantime "black-water" attacked my father's eyes, and he became blind. I would sit by his side and read to him.

My fifteen-year-old sister Marie, around 1930, became engaged by mail through an exchange of photographs, with our cousin Isaac Toussie in New York, the son of my sister Raḥél. Raḥél's husband died in the influenza epidemic which struck the United States in 1918, only a few months after arriving in New York. With poor prospects of marrying Marie in Ḥálab without a dowry, my father was not reluctant to marry her off, even in New York. [See Marie's oral testimony elsewhere in this study.]

As I read to my now blind father, he would recite the text from memory; he was so learned and well-read that groups of boys and young men gathered in our house to read and to study Torah texts under him. Some would try to confound him with outlandish, ridiculous, questions: "What is the moon made of?" He would give it to them on their heads, by asking them to simply define the composition of the fibers of their clothes, questions to which they had no answers.

At times, he received visitors from the Pope, the Vatican, some Catholic scholars, each with a beard down to his waist. They came to Aleppo to search out old Hebrew manuscripts, to examine them and sometimes to buy them.

In a discussion with one priest, the latter said to my father, "Sir Abraham, I am eager to understand your religion for myself. Is Christianity not correct?" After extended discussions, the priest was convinced of Jewish beliefs — and converted. He became a rabbi — and a "big one" [an important one.] My father took him to be photographed and placed the symbol of

the Twelve Tribes around the picture. The photo remained in our homes for years. I remember it — until at the age of seventeen when I left home and my stepmother, to get away from Aleppo.

But first let me tell you of one of the pleasant moments I had as a boy. Best of all was the *ʿIshreh*, the children's feast connected with Purim. Money was collected from the Hebrew School pupils with which to prepare the delicacies that were served in the school that day; *mamuniyeh* [a pudding made of farina] and *attayef* and *mu-jad-dar-a, etc. Ḥakham* Ḥayeem Turjman and *Ḥakham* Dishy; they would collect the money for the feast; it was a joyous day . . . .

There was also a boy in the school by the name of Skéff who was in charge of the *falla* [the bastinado], he would lay the naughty truant boy on his back, lift his legs to secure the feet — and then the victim was struck repeatedly on the sensitive soles of his feet. They would place a duncecap on his head and march him through the classrooms reciting derisive quotations and remarks, such "as *jaḥish, ḥamohr, wa fi-timmoh jar-dohn*" "a donkey, an ass, with a rat in his mouth . . ." They shamed him so that he would come to school more regularly. *Ḥakham* Signor Raphael Silvera, the trustee of the school, would come to visit on his donkey [?].

As a youth I worked in the cinema, the movie-house, as an 'operator'. I had a friend by the family name of Bobo who broke me in to the profession. I worked at the *Cinéma Empire*. At first, I had visited him in the projection room where he worked; I would see the films — without paying. When an assistant became necessary, he recommended me and soon I learned to be a projectionist. When the machine stopped for some reason, I would ring the bell to have an expert set it going. It was almost an all-day showing. A performance at 10 in the morning, another at 2 in the afternoon, at 4 and at 6 and 9 in the evening . . . . There may have been twelve or thirteen movie-houses then in Aleppo (circa 1936) . . . *Cinéma Diana, Cinéma Cosmograph* . . . many. There were also open air theaters during the warmer months. Until 'talk' came to the movies, records were played.

One day I projected the film — backward. Before I could set it straight, the *mu-ᶜallem*, the master, came up, very angry. This caused me to lose the job; he even refused to give me my pay.

How did I get to Beirut? Well, because of our [?] poverty we were compelled to buy everything on credit [a quite common practice in Aleppo], paying at the end of the month. One day my father gave me three or four gold pounds to pay the grocer, money he had received as his salary at the 'hospital'. Since there was so much unpleasantness on the part of my stepmother, on an impulse instead of paying the grocer, I took a bus and set out to Beirut, without telling anyone of my plan. I went to a Mr. Ḥannono who had previously worked at my father's 'hospital'; he lived now in Beirut and took in boarders at a low price. After a time the Ḥannonos said,"Look, David, you are a single man living here with difficulty. You should find yourself a nice girl to marry and have your own home." (I had not written home to Aleppo to tell them of my whereabouts; I was afraid they would compel me to return.) I was certainly suffering in Beirut, but how could I marry, with no money in hand? Each day Mrs. Ḥannono would tell me of two sisters who were marriageable. "The older one is quite nice-looking," she said, "the younger one is not very attractive — and the older one has money." I was working as a clothing presser — hard work; how could I work at the cinema without connections? Each day the girl was pushed on me — even though she was twenty-eight years old, although I was seventeen or eighteen years of age. I was persuaded to meet this older sister. "They are fine people, a good family, they have money, you will be received to live in their home without charge, and in addition you will receive a dowry!"

After much persuasion, I agreed to an engagement; they were eager for a quick wedding. They too, took in boarders, I saw when I visited their home. Some of their relatives did not speak well of them to me — attempting to dissuade me from the marriage. "This family? Certainly not! Their real name is Shamᶜa [candle], low-down people. The father is a money-lender, lending money to gamblers who were losing money. The bride-to-be has a bad reputation, she 'goes out' with Muslims,

they are anxious to marry her off to improve her reputation." The money that was promised to me, they said, "You will never see it!" I went to them, demanding the promised dowry. "What!", they said, "do you expect the money *in advance*? The girl became 'indignant' attacking me as a 'worthless Aleppoan'. "I don't want to marry him. Why didn't you talk up before"? They agreed to write a check for the amount of the dowry and placed it in the hands of a "third party." This proved to be a relative of theirs. As soon as we were married, I took the check to the bank. There I was told that no bank account existed. I was indignant and thought to bring a law-suit against them for this shabby trick. The relative seized the check and tore it to pieces!

After a few days, she went to the hospital; when she came home a week later she would still not let me approach her — she was 'tired', she wasn't well — nothing could induce her to let me consummate our marriage. "She is an innocent girl, with no experience with men," her mother consoled me, "she is shy." After a few weeks of waiting, I insisted that she yield . . . . What would be said about a man who was a husband in name only!

My wife's family had found me a position in a movie-house — where I went to work at ten in the morning and came home late in the evening. To my disappointment, my wife arranged to collect my salary — leaving me with only a few piastres: not enough to have my shoes shined. On Saturdays my wife would give me a *miḥshiyeh* [*stuffed-squash*] in a sandwich. This was to be my Sabbath meal! If I didn't like that I was free to leave, she would say.

One morning her mother told me that they were leaving to go to a cousin's house to help in the preparations for a dinner to celebrate the marriage of a cousin [who was a slut, who would entertain Muslim gentlemen 'friends']. At the end of my work-day, toward midnight, I was to join them at the cousin's home. "Here is the key to the wardrobe. Dress in your good suit when you return from work and join us."

I prayed to God to help me — "I lift my eyes to the hills from whence comes my aid" — I would make my escape from this misery, this marriage, this family! Since her brother had

invited friends to come dance and have a party in the house, how could I make my escape without his knowledge? — they would prevent me from going if they knew! I bundled my clothing and managed to let them down from a rear window, and went out to make my way, with trepidation, to the bus station — to go back to Aleppo! Since I had no money for a bus ticket I sold my *wedding* ring. *I waited until the bus was about to leave* before I went aboard — for fear that I would be seen and be prevented from leaving. Even after the bus left, my heart was beating violently, I was in dread that my wife or her family would send word ahead to have me taken off the bus. After a few hours of travel I relaxed, confident now that I had successfully made my escape from an intolerable life.

When I arrived at my father's house, "Where is your wife?" they asked. (by this time they knew of my whereabouts and my marriage.) I related my experiences — my adventures, just like a cowboy film. They were happy to have me home. I meant to have my revenge on her — I would never yield her a divorce — without which she could never marry! A letter came to the *Bet Deen*, [the Jewish Court of Law], accusing me of stealing her gold bracelet and fancy comb. When I related my experiences to the *Bet Deen* court they recognized the injustice that had been done to me. Later another letter came saying that my wife had found her jewelry — I had not stolen it, and would the Court please persuade me to return to her. The Court replied that a wife is obliged to live where her husband resides; they suggested that she come to join me. Of course it did not suit her; she would not leave lively Beirut to come to live with me in my father's home — in "backward Aleppo," as she constantly referred to my city. My father reasoned with me to persuade me to divorce her, to rid myself of her finally, and consider a future in Palestine, where some of my brothers and sisters had gone earlier. "You will join them, find good work there and find yourself an honest woman whom you can marry, and lead a good life."

At last I agreed to give her the *geht* [the bill of divorcement], according to Jewish law. It is the Torah law that the man *hand her* the bill of divorcement. She insisted that I go to Beirut to hand it to her. The *Bet Deen* proposed that she

designate a substitute who would be authorized to accept the 'handing' of the *geht* in her place. This did not suit her; she insisted that I come to Beirut to give her the divorce papers. The rabbinical court wrote her that if she did not go along with their proposal for the divorce, the court had the authority to permit the husband to marry another woman under the circumstances, and thus she would remain married to me for life. Finally, she relented and accepted the divorce. I was then twenty-four years old, having married at the age of less than twenty, while my wife had been in her thirties.

I smuggled my way to Palestine, since the authorities would not give me a passport, because I was subject to military duty; only older people were issued passports, like Chirro, my sister's husband, they travelled by railroad. I paid a total of three pounds sterling to the men who were to lead me across the frontier, one pound in advance, the balance upon safe arrival in Palestine. "You will give it to Toufiq Ḥamrah, a brother of the man who arranged the smuggling." The first night, still in Syria, we were made to sleep in a cemetery. Then at the Palestinian frontier where the smuggler had arrangements with the 'British' captain, I was permitted to enter *Eres Yisrael*, but not without much fear and alarm since some of the frontier guards, Jordanians, had created difficulties. We arrived finally in Tiberias and from there I made my way to Tel Aviv, to my brother Mordechai. He lived with his wife and seven children in a small apartment. Now, one of his sons has become a millionaire . . . .

Esther [Nahzli], my father's only daughter from the second marriage, her cousin on her mother's side Manaḥem ibn Ezra Gindi, who lives in Rishon LeZioẋ, married her. Her children are now large-scale builders in Israel, multi-millionaires.

I worked in Israel for a few years, but I was not happy there. With Shifra, my second wife and the children, I went to Teheran in Iran, where I taught in a Jewish school for many years, until I came to New York, with my wife and children. In Teheran I taught myself sculpture and made and cast many artistic pieces. One was ordered for the Shah himself. But that is all in the past. Here in New York where we settled after leaving

Iran, my sons have now developed two busy discount stores. I have now married off two daughters, *Shebaḥ La-El* [Praise to the Lord]. My children, I have seven,*Allah Yi-khal-li-hom*, God preserve them: they are: Abraham, Ezra, Leah married to Mr. Khavavi, Violet married Allan Sakal; and there are Shirley and Victoria. My daughter Malka is not with us. She prefers to live in Israel.

My wife Shifra and I are glad to be here and to enjoy a good life in an excellent community. The only difficulty is the English language. Although I know the vocabulary of maybe 1000 words, I can't seem to pronounce them correctly. A new friend here devoted countless hours tutoring me — without much improvement — I've given up trying to speak English!

Mary Namér Hedaya — Born in Aleppo, 1908
("Mary Twins" - twin sons)
Interviews in English and Arabic

"AT THE FRENCH ALLIANCE SCHOOL IN ALEPPO, WE WERE FINED IF WE DARED TO SPEAK IN ARABIC"

I came to the U. S. in 1924, age sixteen, just married to Harry Hedaya. He had come to Aleppo to seek a bride. No, I didn't know him when he came from New York, but my family knew *his* family. They were "nice people." My step-brother Robert Namér was in Cuba. He knew Harry.

My father was 48 years old when he died of typhus in Aleppo in 1916 during the war. Lots of young men died from typhus. He had no hesitation in going to the orphanage to look after the sick.

Actually my father, Joseph Namér, was not a *Ḥalabi* he was from Istanbul and was known in Aleppo as a "Spanioli," Spanish. His family were merchants there in the wholesale

business. He had come to Ḥálab to trade, but he stayed to become a Ḥálabi, although he spoke a somewhat broken Arabic. For example, he would pronounce "ḥet" (wall) as "khett," (thread), etc. He opened a general store, a small "department" store across the road from *Kitab Sayriyeh ᶜAnzaroot*, near the *Manzool*, if you will excuse my mentioning it — such a shameful place. [the Manzool, the "red-light" district.] My father's family also had a wholesale business, in one of the *khan-at* caravanserais. I remember times when we visited my father in his *odha* 'room' [actually an office and warehouse]. He would take us for lunch, *ᶜand il qassab*, at the butcher stalls, near Souk-il-Gimrog. Later he sold his wholesale business to the father of Shimuel Franco, who later made a fortune in New York. The business dealt in notions, pins, matches, and so on — and particularly in cigarette paper. This was a very important item; and when he received a shipment [during the war shortages of 1916] he was besieged by buyers eager for cigarette paper. *"Khawaja Yoosef . . . " ('Sir' Joseph)*, they would plead . . . .

My father came from Istanbul as a single man (his wife had died) and married my mother, a Shamah. There were three children, my step-brother Menaḥem and two sisters. My father had married around 1906. I never got much information about family background. One didn't discuss these things with parents in those days, it wasn't proper.

My father maintained business connections with Istanbul; I don't know if you ever heard of the well-known partnership there of ᶜAnza and Beyda . . . .

Do you know my sister? Her son Leon (Tawil) is married to Rae Dayan's daughter. You don't remember? It's true that all of us — our memory is not so sharp as before. What is it with memory in people of our age? Yet, there are people much older than us whose memory is excellent. Now I am 72. When I came here I am sure you were still going to school, when I had borne my children already.

Education is something that I regret very much not having had more. It is not nice to boast, but my teachers used to praise my intelligence and they urged me to go to Paris, Versailles, to

the Normal School of the Alliance. They used to urge my mother to send me there.

We lived in *Bistan il Klehb*, near a big mosque; no, it was not near Joe Duek's home, in the Djamiliyeh. In fact, my father and Joe Duek founded the orphanage, [along with signor Raphaél Silvera]. Why he was called "Joe" Duek in Ḥálab? It's because the family was "English" — with English protectorate.

I remember going to visit your [this writer's] sister, Naomi, at your uncle Signor Raphaél Silvera's home in the Djamilyeh, in Aleppo, where she was visiting in 1935 from her home in Jerusalem. It was her second visit to Ḥálab. I was also visiting that year — my second visit to Ḥálab from, New York. I made the trip in the company of Dahood Shabbot, Isaac Shalóm and Yacob Maleḥ. The first trip was in 1929; I was so homesick in New York that I had to go. My husband was very kind and understanding. I took my two sons (the twins) with me and stayed a whole year to make it worthwhile. In 1935 I stayed only four months.

My grandfather? he was Jabra Shamah, who died when I was very young — before 1914. My grandmother was of the Shalom family. *Her* mother was a Shamah. I don't remember my grandfather's business. He lived in Sikkit il-Jiddideh [the "New Road"].

My earliest recollection as a child? It was the declaration of war in 1914. They called it *Daq il Tubbl*, "The Beating of the Drums." I remember too, that we travelled to Tédef in a covered wagon, not a carriage. As a child I remember that life there was very primitive — unbelievable things, how they ground the wheat between two stone grindstones [!] My children can't believe it when I tell them some of the customs. You must remember that one didn't buy ready-made flour. Wheat was bought, washed, dried, and then was ground at the primitive mill. Even now, if you tell a child in Aleppo how things were done in the old days, they can't believe it. I am speaking of what I remember in 1924, close to sixty years ago.

When I was old enough to go to school, there was no Alliance Israelite School available due to the war. It had closed because it was French. Instead we went to a sort of school operated by the *(Q)'attan-at'*, two unmarried sisters by the name

of *(Q)attan* (Kattan). At the end of the war, the Alliance opened again. In the *Djamiliyeh* there were two buildings facing one another. One for boys and at the insistance of rabbis, the other for girls. In the higher classes, however, boys and girls studied in the same classes. Mme. Farḥi came in 1919 as the principal. She was succeeded by Mons. and Mme. Penso; then came Mme. Nasi, née Sasson. The *(Q)attanat* really gave us a very good elementary foundation. At graduation the famous General Gouraud attended the ceremony.

The poor were accepted in the Alliance too, each family paid according to its means. I attended until 1922; I didn't quite get the *Brevet Superieur.* I left to marry. The lowest certificate was the *Brevet Elementaire;* after that came the *Brevet Superieur,* then the "Bacho." After the "Bacho" one could go to France to study at the Alliance school in Versailles, or in any college or university. For the *Brevet Superieur* there was a city-wide examination — all types of schools and their students.

My mother was reluctant to permit me to go to Paris, to the "Alliance." So far away — unknown dangers, although for her time, she was broad-minded and with some education. I had also studied a little in the German school, *Madris't il-Almahniyeh,* during the war [1914-1918]. It was situated in a very nice house, beautifully decorated, with lovely plants indoors — a rarity. It was near Joe Duek's home. I don't know about some of the Christian schools, and the *Laique* that came later. Some Jewish children did go to the Christian religious schools, but they were frowned on by the very religious families.

Did I speak much French in Aleppo? I had to. In the Alliance, we were permitted to speak *only* French. If a child spoke Arabic, he or she was reported to the principal. In fact, each class had an official *rapporteur* (monitor). I think you were fined *barghoot z'gheer* [about 5 cents] for each violation of the rule. [In higher grades?]

To get back to my marriage in Aleppo, it was a matter of three weeks from my engagement to the wedding. After all, the bridegroom had to hurry home to his business in New York. It was a necessity to have a trousseau — some of it with fine hand embroidery. We were married, no, not in a *hohsh;* it was in the

Djamiliyeh section [with one and two-story buildings, with conventional apartments.] Some of these apartments were very large, with huge corridors perhaps 15 meters in size. It was in such a corridor of a relative, Yusef Sasson, where the wedding took place. The food offerings were sweets — *ghraybeh stambuliyeh* [Istanbul cookies], coated with almonds, other baked delicacies and *shrahb-il-lohz*, a sweet almond purée drink.

The custom in Aleppo was that when the bride set out from her home to the scene of the wedding, all the neighbors came forward, each one with a present of some baked sweets — *maringo, ghraybeh, mas-a-ban* (marzipan) and the like.

Wedding ceremonies were held in the afternoons and at the end, the *Mozika* [a band of modern European-type instruments] played at the ceremony and then led the way to the home of the bridegroom or the bride, where the celebration continued. At this place an elaborate dinner was ready for the family and very close friends, prepared by the customary caterer Seleem-il-ohs or another by the name of ᶜAdés — a very high class family which only sometimes catered. After the dinner, an Arabic music ensemble performed, a *nobeh*, with a well-known female singer by the name of Biba; Aslan Shehebar would play his *ᶜood*, lute. Our marriage took place just before Passover and, after the holiday, there was a series of celebration dinners offered by relatives of the groom and the bride, as well as friends' parties — with Arabic *nobeh* ensembles.

Shortly afterward my husband and I left for New York. I had several friends here and soon entered into the customary life of the community. My husband had a modest business, a drygoods store which permitted us a comfortable, but not luxurious life. We were blessed with children, some who have since gotten married, and have given us lovely grandchildren. Since my husband died some years ago I now live for my children and grandchildren, who are loving and attentive.

My sons (twins), Ezra ("Eddie") and Joseph are now 60 years old. Ezra, married and divorced, has Marilyn (named for me), 30, Joanie, 28, Henry, 24, Joseph, 22. My son Joseph is now married to Evelyn Sasson. He has Harold, 36, Marilyn, 34, Bobbie, 32, and Nathan. Renee married "Izzy" Shamah. Their

children are Rosalind, 34, Mimi, 32, Isaac, 30, and Harold, 25.

My son Danny, 40, is a well-known television and film actor, unmarried. [In 1985 Hedaya starred in the film *Blood Simple* to widespread critical applause; a recent film is *Secret Sunday*]. I am truly blessed, with my children and grandchildren.

Yvette Sasson Mizraḥi Born in Aleppo, Circa 1934-36
Interviews in Arabic, French,

MY FATHER SHOUTED, "THE JEWISH CONSCRIPTS YOU WANT ME TO FIND FOR YOU, I CAN'T PRODUCE THEM BY MAGIC!"

We lived in the Illeh, in a *ḥohsh* [courtyard residence]. There were two other families living there. At one time we had three rooms, earlier we occupied two rooms, but they were very large — maybe three times the size of the rooms here in Brooklyn. [?] That's how we were able to fit into the two or three room, we eight children and my father and mother. Each room was separate and had a door to the ḥohsh.(There were trees in the inner courtyard, with a tile floor.) To go from one room to another, it was necessary to go out to the courtyard, rain or shine. Our two rooms — and later when it was three rooms — they were used for sleeping as well. Some slept on the *kanapeh* (sofa), others on beds. Yes, we had beds, not like some who brought out mattresses from the cupboard to lay out on the floors. We had beds in every one of the rooms, yes, even the *Salon*. We had couches covered in velvet . . . . I slept in the same room as my parents until my sisters and brothers moved away I was about eight years old when I slept in another room.

My father was a Mukhtaar [a neighborhood civic official] representing the local government. His father before him was a

Mukhtaar, too. The French authorities liked him very much too, they used to help him at every turn. France was the League of Nations Protectorate until about 1944 when Syria received full autonomy. He wasn't able to write Arabic 'very well' but he could read it. At times he would bring some boys from the Jewish *Madrisit il Yetohmeem,* the Orphan's School, *Allah yirḥamo* ["Allah have compassion on his soul"], to get their help, to dictate an official letter in Arabic. His Arabic handwriting was not very good . . . .

My grandfather too, had been a Mukhtaar, as I said, even before the important years of World War of 1914 to 1918.

My father had been a 'merchant' [a peddler] dealing with the Arabs, certainly. At the time of that war my grandfather was afraid that his son would be taken into the Turkish Army. My grandfather died at that time and so my mother was alarmed for my father; at the danger of Army conscription, especially since he had five or six young children to look after. She said to my father, "Why don't we arrange to have you become the Mukhtaar, since a Mukhtaar is safe from conscription." She set about arranging matters, so that finally he was indeed named a Mukhtaar, a position he held until his death.

Do you have any idea how much good my father did for the Jewish men in Ḥálab, Aleppo? He was able to rescue so many from being taken into the Turkish Army and possibly to die far away from home. I was told by many old men of his deeds. When the government authorities were seeking 'Abraham Salem', for example, to take them away into the army, they would come to the Mukhtaar to have him find the men for them. He would shout at the top of his voice *so that he would be heard by everyone,* "Yes, how do you expect me instantly to find Abraham Salem, Seleem ᶜAzar? you are killing me, how do I know where they are?" Word quickly reached these men, who would leap from one roof-top to another to make their escape. My grandfather, and my father after him saved many lives; here in New York many old men recalled to me the service my grandfather and my father had done in saving their relatives from the Army, *Nishmataam fi Gaanᶜ Eden* [may their souls rest in the Garden of Eden — Paradise]. Yes,

many of the Jewish men taken in to the army lost their lives, they never came back.

My mother would tell such stories! How the Muslims used to slaughter the Armenians, Christians, in that period [*circa 1915*] — like sheep! Yes, in Aleppo, too, the Muslims used to kill them. Their bodies would be found thrown on the streets. The Muslims would warn my mother away. They said, "*Kannit abu Seleem* ("daughter-in-law of Abu Seleem, the father of Seleem Mukhtaar") we fear for you, it is not safe on the street, go to your home!" The Muslims of Ḥálab were tender-hearted? Many of them were rotten. *Shiḥwaar il neel!* [*"black, Nile muck"*!] it was the *Jamhoor,* the populous, the mob which did it, they disliked the Armenians, and when it became the official Turkish policy (1915-1916) [and as it had been in 1893 and 1896], some among the uneducated lower class — animals — took up the killing. They would say to my mother, "It is not safe on the streets, go to your house." She used to tell me that when she went out to buy household needs, flour, sugar, etc,. She saw many bodies of slain Armenians. I, too, saw similar episodes. At the end of the war, in 1945, I saw French soldiers killed by Muslims. I saw a Senegalese-French soldier shot, and then the daggers came out, to cut the body into pieces. We heard that in Ḥama [*a large city in Syria*] a French Senegali soldier had his head cut off and it was put on display there. I saw similar episodes in Aleppo with my own eyes. The Senegali soldier had gotten off a *tramway* [a trolley car] at the same time as a Muslim, who drew out a revolver and shot the soldier. He tried to lurch away, when the daggers came out to cut him to pieces. I remember it clearly, it was near the Hotel Baron. At that time, the hatred for the French was so great that it was dangerous to use that language in the presence of the Muslims. *Istiqlal,* "liberation," that had been the dream of the Syrians during the French occupation. During World War II, it was the Vichy French who ruled in Syria, but even though they were Vichyites, they never disturbed the Jews. Later, toward the end of the war, British warplanes bombed Aleppo [*the Vichy forces?*]. There was some damage, and some people were hurt, but none among them was Jewish. Muslims said to their Jewish friends, "The British bombed the city Friday night. It must have

been your Sabbath that protected you!" Soon afterward the British forces quickly took the city — to the disappointment of some Muslims. They had hoped perhaps that during disorders, during the change of government forces from French to British . . . they had lost the *occasión* (Fr.) to possibly pillage Jewish homes and property during changing of powers. There used to be talk, during the war, among some Muslims, teasing (?), "Your day will come, oh, Jews," they would remark. "These shops will be ours, and those homes we will take over, when Hitler's forces get here."

It's a fact though, that the Muslims of Aleppo, in general, were almost always very *awaadem* [well-mannered] to the Jews; they did not cause us any grief. However, Jews were always uneasy during periods of disturbance, like that when *il ḥara-yek*, "the Fires," took place in 1947, 'anti-Zionist' riots; with the approaching emergence of the Jewish State, all Jewish religious institutions were put to the torch.

I will relate a nice story — one that I told in my son's class in Israel. Some nationalistic Muslims used to wander around the town, looking to uncover *"sahh-u-niyeh,"* Zionists. It was earlier, before the war began in 1939, at a time when agents of the Jewish Agency had come to Aleppo to arrange for the removal of Jewish youth and children to Palestine. There was much Muslim agitation for *Istiqlal* ("liberation"). The Muslims would shout "Ḥassan Beg, have no fear, your troops are being mobilized." [Ḥassan Beg was an army person, and the official head of the *WAKF*, the religious properties.] We used to laugh at these troops being "mobilized" — all in tatters, with run-down slippers on their feet. Six times my mother made trips to help get her children to Palestine. Siyahu Shamah [a leading Jewish Aleppoan] was most helpful in this activity. He arranged with the British consul to get 'tourist' visas for these children and many others. He gave his 'bond'; promising that "they would return."

My mother and some of my sisters and brothers had gone as tourists to visit Jerusalem in 1938. The children were very pleased with what they saw there and they decided to stay.

Actually, they had been impressed with the Palestinian Jewish tourists, Ashkenazeem, who sometimes visited Aleppo, and they had dreamed of settling in Palestine. My sisters said to my father, "How long will we stay among these Muslim barbarians?" When they went as "tourists," they stayed. We had Aleppo friends in Jerusalem as well as relatives. Among the friends were the Toussié [*now "Toussié-Cohen", one, a leading lawyer in Israel*]. Little by little all my brothers and sisters finally made their way to Beirut, Lebanon and later to *Eres Yisrael*. Some of them went legally, others went *acha-a*, secretly, stealing across the border.

My mother's trips were for the purpose of arranging my sisters' installation in Palestine and later on, their marriages. One married from our *ahhl* [*folk or family*], another married an Iraqi, very much like a Syrian.

As I began to tell you earlier, the Syrian undercover authorities came to the Mukhtaar, my father, into his home, his *ḥohsh*, looking for "so-and-so," and "so-and-so," several local individuals, suspected of being active in smuggling the youth to Palestine. These very men were visiting my father then, but kept completely silent. My father thought quickly, and said to the secret police, "Yes, dear friends, I will bring each and every one to you. However, you must excuse me for a few hours because I have official business at the Government Offices which cannot wait. In three hours, I will search out these men and bring them to you, each and every one of them". As soon as the police left, these men ran to their homes and soon after they left they city — for Palestine. I will never forget this to the end of my days.

I entered Palestine *acha-a*, secretly, smuggled in 1947. My mother accompanied me to Beirut, to arrange my illegal entry into Palestine.

There is another story I must tell you. After the massacre of Jews in Ḥebron in 1929, I remember my father — who was a fearful man — saying, "Now the Muslims will rise against us too, here in Aleppo, and they will slay us." In fear he placed all the wood furniture pieces in the house against the door, in case of an attack. Just then some French officials came to consult my father in his role of Mukhtaar. My sister called out to them

from the balcony, telling them of the fears of the Jews. Soon after, a full regiment of French troops were brought in to patrol the Jewish Quarter in case of a Muslim attack. The French authorities were very friendly to the Jews. Fortunately it was a false alarm, and life continued in peace until the "Fires," in 1947.

The smuggler who took me to Palestine was a certain "Ḥusain." We left Beirut at seven in the morning by car, for a short distance. We had paid him part of the $15 or $20 fee for each, for leading us, a party of five. ["Forgive me, for doing some household chores as I speak to you. *I am like a Muslim woman!*"] We had to walk from there over the mountains until at four in the afternoon, we had to hide ourselves until dark. At this time, Ḥusain demanded more money "to bribe the Palestinian government agents." My mother had heard of smugglers like Ḥusain, who demanded the balance of their fee in the middle of the trip and then deserted the people in the wilderness to look after themselves. They could be the victims of robbers and others, and could even lose their lives. I told Ḥusain that my mother had given me no money, but that my brother was waiting to pay him, in the Kibbutz near the border of Palestine. With some grumbling he agreed, although he collected money from the others. At nightfall we set out again but soon we had to hide again because of the patrols. Finally we set out again, over hills and mountains we trudged until four o'clock in the morning when we finally arrived at our destination, the northerly kibbutz, in Israel. Actually Ḥusain was a 'reliable' smuggler, who did not wish to jeopardize his regular Jewish smuggling activity. However, by collecting his fee in advance he would be sure of payment; in the event of the party being discovered by the Patrol he could make his escape and avoid severe punishment — with the money in his pocket.

I married in Israel Eliav Mizraḥi,an Iraqi, and was blessed with two daughters and a son; Mollie, David and Ephat. Later we decided to go to New York for the children's future. My husband found work quickly through a "new friend". We lead a quiet but happy life. Since I had many years of successful work as a saleswoman in Tel Aviv I hope to go into business in my own store some day.

[That "day" arrived. Yvette Mizraḥi owns and operates a tiny busy shoe store in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn.]

❀

Chapter Two

Later Aleppo, 1930-1986

Latifeh ᶜIkehs
Interviews in Arabic

Born in Aleppo, 1907

"I WAS SENT AS A SERVANT AT AGE TWELVE"

[Subject is elderly woman speaking only Arabic, unable to read or to sign her name, one week out of Aleppo, enroute to daughter in Israel. Syrian passport indicates birth in 1907. She is uncertain of the year.]

Why am I in New York since I wish to join my daughter in Israel? I should have gone to Turkey or Cyprus or to Athens, which are much closer to Israel? I don't know anything like that. I was told to go by way of New York — that it would be easier that way to get Syrian Government approval, to go by way of New York, that's why I am here. Even so, I had to post a bond — a security bond — that I "would return"; that is the condition for letting a Jew travel out of the country. It required 5000 'papers' [*Syrian pounds, close to U.S. $1000*]). That money and the cost of transportation will use up most of the money I ever saved.

I must tell you that the welfare committee of Jews in Ḥálab [Aleppo] helped me a lot. When I fell and broke my leg and hip, I was taken immediately to Doctor ᶜAzar; yes, a *Yahudi*, there are three Jewish doctors in Ḥálab. He said it was not something he could treat and turned me over to Doctor M'gharbaneh — a Christian, who had me admitted to the city hospital. I was there for many weeks. A metal rod was inserted into my leg to keep it straight. In a few months I can have it taken out, I was told. The bill at the hospital, because I am poor, it was reduced to half. The Jewish community paid 5000 Syrian pounds balance.

I lived in Ḥarit il-Yahood, 'the Jewish Quarter"; no it was not Baḥshita, it is further in, close to the Great Synagogue. There are no Jews left there, none. Those Jews who remain in Aleppo all moved to the Djamiliyeh section. All except one

other old woman like me. The area is all Muslim, I was surrounded by Muslims. The Muslims? They are all fine, it is wrong to say that we are in a *Galút* ['suffering'] because of them. My neighbors were all courteous and looked after me tenderly. If someone tried to mistreat us, children — they would put them in their place. When I was sick, my Muslim neighbors used to come to look after me, to feed me, change my clothes. They are not present here, but it is only right to tell the truth about them; *mamluk-ton ᶜala kitaf-na* [their 'kingdom' should be held high on our shoulders].

I have lived in my *ḥohsh* for forty-five years, never once was there an unpleasant word spoken by the Muslims. It was a small *ḥohsh* with two rooms. When my husband died, I invited another Jewish widow to share the residence with me.

When I was married? I don't know.... How I married; how does one get married? He lived close by; and when he divorced his wife he "took me." I must have been about seventeen years old. Why he divorced his wife? She took to a "different path"... with Muslims, with anyone. Later she went down to [word unfamiliar] God help us. She was arrested several times on the streets and so they compelled her to take residence in the *manzool* [*red-light restricted area*]. She had a daughter, I helped bring up and later we married her off. After twenty-five years, she too divorced her husband and smuggled her way to Israel, with her son and daughter. In those days, 'eveyone' fled to Israel.

When I married, my husband had a vegetable stand in the Baḥsita area. He gave that up to go around buying and selling old clothes — *"asaab lil-behᶜh!"* He went around the streets picking up what he could. He worked, and I worked, and so we lived....

I worked as a servant, in homes, at functions, at the 'mikveh' [ritual baths] and also laying out the dead bodies, washing them, and purifying them. When I was only a child, my mother was a struggling widow, a washer-woman and I began working as a servant, maybe twelve years old. I was put out in service *in return for food and lodging* [emphasis added]. Only after several years was I given a *ma-hee-yeh*, a 'salary', a few coppers a week, at another position. At the end, I received

two gold pounds per month. I sufferd a lot in my life.

I must tell you about my husband's trip to the *Eres* [*the "land", Palestine*]. This was many years ago, before the anti-Israel disturbances. He was a drinker and one day having had a lot to drink, when he passed a taxi-station with the chauffeurs hollering "To Beirut, to Beirut," he had some money on him and jumped into the car, and later continued to Palestine. He returned after seven months, to find that I had given birth forty days earlier. He didn't like Israel, got into some trouble and the authorities deported him. He had a half-brother in Israel, his father had married three wives... I never met my mother-in-law, she had died during *Safaar Bar-lek* [World War II].

My mother came of a good family. Rabbi Isaac Sheḥebar, Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires, is my cousin, my maternal uncle's son. (His daughter Lulu is here in New York married to Raffael ibn Yaᶜkoob ᶜAttieh; Yaᶜkoob's father was poor too, he was a porter.)

Travel? No, I never left Ḥálab, except for a short time when I was a servant at Madame Costi's. He sold auto-supplies; originally from Egypt. When they moved to Beirut, they took me with them to help settle them in their new location. Sightseeing? Nothing. I saw the city, and I used to go to visit people I knew from Ḥálab. I never saw the mountain-resorts, like ᶜAleh, Bḥamdoun. They are only names to me. Ḥakham Isaac's sister Sariyeh also lived in Beirut. She is married to "Bari."

I hear that there is a ᶜIkehs family here but I have not been able to locate them. I asked Ezra Antebi [*a recent refugee from Aleppo*] to inquire — I saw him at his son Victor's. When Moise Matut, now in New York [whose daughter is engaged to Doctor Morris Antebi, here three years from Ḥálab], had a Bar Mizva for his son in Aleppo, it was something to please your heart to see. For three days and three nights, the festivities continued. I served there throughout. Something so wonderful, *Ma bin-ḥakka wa ma bin-shaaf* [impossible to relate or to see]. For four days I scoured pots and dishes. Raffoul Sardal in Aleppo, I brought up his children. He came here for a visit and returned. [Sardal is now a resident of Flatbush, with his family.]

I know everyone here from Ḥálab — those who came in the

last few years. I had served all of them. I must tell the truth, they are all very cordial to me, they invite me to their homes, to lunches and dinners, but I am too shy to go. They say that "one who is light-headed will have tired feet." I do not want to have tired feet.

I spoke to my daughter in Israel on the telephone twice since I got here. She is in Israel as I told you. The last time, she told me that she wasn't well, and when I called again, I got no answer. I am so worried, my heart is on fire with worry. I have only one child; my husband went astray, got some disease somewhere and I could no longer conceive. Actually I had conceived the night of my wedding, but that was the end . . . .

The money for the bond that I posted, it was from my savings, from my own labor. For twenty-two years, I worked in the school, in the ritual bath, and the people's homes.

If it were not for my fall, I would have stayed in Ḥálab. Now, I want to go to her. If somethings happens to me... she will look after me. She has ten children — married off eight of them. It's twenty-six years since I've seen her. "What the Creator decreed, the black Demon cannot undo."

To speak again of Aleppo; in Aleppo, bread — every six large loaves cost half a 'paper' and a 'franc' (total about 9¢), each one twice the size of this (pita) bread. It's sold by weight. Good meat is now 50 'papers' *per kilo* [about $1.80 per lb.]. Before, a whole sheep used to cost 25 'papers' [about $1.25]. How we lived? We worked. There is plenty of work available now, a living is not hard to earn. Of late, I used to earn 200 'papers' a month [close to $32.00], a good amount; in addition, I used to receive tips of about 50 'papers' at the ritual bath, in addition to work I did at people's homes. I lived, I saved. My only expense was for water and electricity. The poor didn't pay rent; my property belonged to the Jewish community. And when there was a Distribution, we poor received benefits. [Money received from the Syrian community in New York and elsewhere; also from the Jewish Joint Relief — U.J.A.] Yom Kippur time, when chickens were killed as "kaparot" I would receive many — sometimes as many as ten.

Aslan Bawabe married Yom Tob Shamah's daughter; you are aware?

You ask me about Henri Guindi in Aleppo, poor man. He has money, but his children are all scattered out of the country. When he asks for permission to travel "temporarily," they tell him, "Yes, when your children return!" There is only Henri, an aged man and his wife, in delicate health. They cannot run away illegally. He sold the property he had, a magnificent home, and settled in an apartment that he bought. Poor people, to end their days separated from their children...[Both are now happily, comfortably, settled in New York].

The day of the *Kharba-ta* [*disorders, the fires, 1947*], I stayed in my home. Yes, we were all terrified. But not one individual was hurt. They burned, but hurt no one. They burned synagogues, stores, many homes. This was all in retaliation for the Deir Yasseen killings by Jews in Israel [?]. Yes, a few low persons pillaged a little — some carpets and the like, but otherwise it was not widespread . . . .

As soon as my papers are processed by the Israeli Government, I will go off to my daughter. I am most impatient to be on my way.

David Shamah, in the company of Morris Zaᶜfarani
Interviews in Arabic

Born in Aleppo, 1922

"PREVIOUSLY WE LIVED WITH THE MUSLIMS LIKE 'BUTTER AND HONEY' "

I was born in the "Djamiliyeh" area where my family had moved from the "Illeh," in the old city. I studied first in the Talmud Torah, in a "kittab," when at age nine I transferred to the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* school where I studied for about eight years. It is a fact that some in the Rabbinate did not favor attendance at the Alliance but didn't put up strong opposition. It was recognized that its education was important

for advancement in the commercial world. The elementary level enrolled students, boys and girls, from kindergarten through the "Superieur" level, which awarded the "Brevet" diploma for students of varying ages — seventeen to nineteen (and even twenty-one). Most male graduates then went to the *souk*, the commercial center. Others might have transferred to the non-denominational *Mission Laique* school endowed by the French government; which held the League of Nations mandate over Syria. This school took up where Alliance education left off. The emphasis was on a junior college education.

The Alliance taught mostly non-religious material, mathematics, history, geography, etc., with an emphasis on French culture and language. At the *laique* school graduates were qualified for possible attendance in a college or university, in France or Beirut, possibly, where professional studies could be pursued in law or medicine. With a "Brevet" certificate from the Alliance, students were encouraged to go to Paris, to the Alliance colleges where they studied to become Alliance teachers. In return for this free education the graduates were obliged to teach at Alliance schools in some country where the Alliance schools existed. Very few Aleppoans attended the Alliance colleges in and near Paris, the girls' school was in Versailles. Most parents were reluctant to send their children to France, and then to other lands.

I must tell you that in the advanced classes at the Alliance boys and girls did study together. Never was there a hint of impropriety, *ever*, associated with the mixed-class attendance; our girls, our community was honorable, careful. Yes, almost all the male Jewish graduates went into the world of commerce to the *souk*; maybe 90 percent, like their fathers. Very few turned to anything else. Among the Jews of Ḥálab there were no physicians, then, only two or three attorneys, "maitres" (masters-at-law); Maitres Azrak, Shehebar, and Shamosh, none went into medicine then. The "maitres," after finishing at the Alliance had studied at the non-sectarian *"Laique," The Lycée* Francais. After that, they went to Damascus or Beirut for law studies. Azrak became a National Deputy — brother of Murad Azrak here.

The *Lycée Francais* (the Laique), was very large, it took in Muslims, *ᶜareleem* [*uncircumcized, Christians*], as well as Jews; also Armenians. It had an enrollment of 2000 or more. Formerly it was located at Barri-yet il-maslakh [the "abbatoir field"], then it was moved to the Djamiliyeh. 40 percent to 50 percent of the Alliance graduates went on to the *Laique* [*such large numbers were previously unreported, but previous reports were from older people*]. A little English was taught as well as Arabic. The emphasis was on French studies and culture. Later, 'they' burned the Alliance schools, in the period of the *Ḥawadess*, "The News"; the agitation and fires at the time of the establishment of Israel.

There was also another religious school, the "Soeurs" — the Franciscan Sisters. Jewish and Islamic girls were not compelled to study Catholic religion — nor attend mass. Very good and firm education, excellent. [I heard that in Egypt a few of the Jewish girls who went to convent schools, became Catholic.] Some few Jewish male students attended the school of the Monks, the "Fréres." Yes, a small number of the Jewish students did go to Catholic schools seeking better education. The Jews in Ḥálab had become quite modern in the recent years — more so, perhaps, than in New York. Now, the Islamic women, most of them no longer wear a face-kerchief, some are government officials; and the thousands of Islamic Ḥálabi students at the very large Aleppo University and the government high schools [*non-existant before World War II,*] are in jeans and military jackets, etc., both boys and girls. In the last few years Jews were admitted to government schools and even the university.

We knew no "kollel" or "yeshiba" as such in Ḥálab. Advanced studies in religious literature was done in a Bet Midrash (*House of Research*), a few rooms in which groups of students studied, 'informally.' There were not many such centers, two or three; one was Midrash of Ḥakham Mosé Tawil — that was located in *Bet Nassi*, the Home of the "Prince" [*pertains to the "princely" Dayán family who had lived originally in Babel/Baghdád — purported lineal descendants of King David*]. The Midrash of Aboud Harari? This was not called a house of study in my days. It was used as a small

synagogue; they prayed there, above Bet Nassi in the Illeh; it had a door on the Khandaqe — the area abutting on the Souks.

Respect for Jews was the rule, in the oldest days, and *even now*. Of course, I am not speaking of Nationalist fanatics. They exist among a small number of Muslims in Aleppo, but the populace has an affection, and respect for Jews to this day, disregarding Damascus propaganda, anti-Israeli, anti-*Moosáwi* [Jews, followers of Moses' cult], which is dismissed as "usual Damascus governmental bureaucratic politics." In my opinion it is the high position that Jews held in commerce that brought about the almost total absence of insults and abuse that sometimes existed among some of the illiterate. The leaders among the Muslims showed their appreciateion for the Jewish merchants. They were always to be relied upon — their word was 'law.' Muslims benefitted a lot from Jewish commerce. I think that is what earned the affection of the Muslims. [*For Shamah's testimony we can substitute Rev. Maundrell's letter of 1699 mentioning the noble character of Aleppo's Jews.*] We lived with them very well, it would not be honest not to state this. Before the State of Israel came into being, we were living with them like "*samneh w'ᶜassal*" [butter with honey]. There was no fear, no dread; one could walk home late at night with no fear whatever; safety, *amáneh*, much safety. The Jews were held in high esteem; they had a Deputy in the important Chambre de Commerce — also in the National Parliament. We lived well with the Muslims of Ḥálab, like brothers. They love, yes, love the Jews, and have the greatest respect and confidence in them: they trust a Jew more than a Muslim.

My father? He was a semi-wholesaler of dry goods. He would buy by the bale and sell by the meter, or by piece — 60 pieces to the bale, of course. This is the business I entered when I left school.

Dyers? yes, but most of them were small enterprises not much larger than this large sitting-room. After dyeing, the materials *were* hung along walls on the street to dry, as you [this writer] seem to remember. They dyed all colors, but mostly black, dark colors and *azrak-ehn* "double blue," canvas, and heavy muslin, etc.

The butcher-stalls near the souk were in the area called *saqqattiyeh*; nearby was the area selling "kharda-wat," notions, buttons, thread etc. (kharda,sing), close to an area called Souk il-Soos [*where licorice-wood (soos) was sold.*] *"Club d'Alep," it is near the old Hotel Baron.*

One day I will never, ever, forget is the day in 1947 when Jewish institutions and homes were burned, set on fire, in the period when the United Nations had decided on a Jewish State. We were strolling on the street watching the anti-Israel demonstrations of students when we became aware of the fires being set. We fled to our homes where we saw the beginning of violence — pillars of smoke, and fires. Every Jewish synagogue, school, institution and some homes was set on fire. Jewish stores were emptied of their contents which they burned. *Knis't il Djamiliyeh,* a large synagogue, has marble door steps. In the fire they turned red, and remain that color to this day. Muslims stood at the windows and flung down *Sepher Torahs* — the sacred Biblical scrolls, to be consumed by the fires in the courtyards.

With the beginning of the fires, our two most highly respected individuals, Raḥmo Neḥmad and Syahou Shamah — the most recognized Jews, rushed to the Muḥafez, the mayor, asking for police protection for Jews and Jewish property. The Muḥafez told them, "Do not worry, by evening everything will be quiet." The fires did not cease *until evening.* A Muslim youth engaged in burning *Sepher Torahs* at the Great Synagogue took a piece of Torah parchment from which he made gloves. The following week an old Muslim woman was seen kneeling in the courtyard of the Synagogue, praying for her son's sin; *that week he had died.*

The fear of a massacre was not realized, although all the Jews were in dread. Some fled to Beirut on the evening train, others in the following days. Soon a permit was required to go to Lebanon; soon after such travel was forbidden.

Quiet, 'normalcy' had been restored, at the same time that Jews were no longer permitted to go out of the country — not to Lebanon; not anywhere. This was followed by cruel edicts which caused much suffering for Jews for many years. Many

Jews — mostly young and not-so-young men, as well as young women, escaped the country secretly; at first by smugglers' autos, fairly easily. Later it became very difficult and with serious imprisonments and tortures for those who were caught in the attempt. My family and I succeeded in being smuggled to Lebanon. From there a few of us smuggled our way out, to Israel. It was on a small boat with an outboard motor. We had to go far out at sea to escape the authorities; it took us three days to land in Israel. From there I came to New York.

Barukh Ha-Shem (Blessed is His Name). I am in a country of freedom, in the midst of a large community of Ḥálabiyeh, and established in a city which provides us with our needs. There are many hundreds who left Aleppo in the very recent years, our friends and relatives. This provides a very comfortable social environment here; we have no feeling of being "strangers" in this community where we are received as brothers.

Eduard Farḥi — Born in Aleppo 1938
Interviews in Arabic and Hebrew

"WE WERE COMPELLED TO STAND BY, AS THEY BURNED OUR HOUSE TO THE GROUND"

I have lived in many countries, I've had many difficult periods, but always, *Barukh Ha-Shem* ["Blessed is The Name" of God], I recovered, with His help. I was a boy, seventeen years old when I smuggled my way out of Syria.

At the time of the *Ḥawaa-des* late in 1947 [*the day in Aleppo when Jewish religious organizations and property were set on fire*], I was ten years old. My family suffered tragically. At Bab-il-Nassr, our home was really a mansion, with large grounds and trees around it. The family is a very old one,

centuries old in Syria and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, and a historically distinguished one. My father was in comfortable circumstances, a lawyer practicing in the *Seraia*, the Hall of Justice. Our home was furnished with many fine pieces, antiques really, which had come down to us over the many generations. The day of the *Ḥawaa-des* — at a time when the Arabs were furious at the triumph of the Zionist cause in Palestine, Syrian General Zaʿile gave orders that the Jews in Aleppo were to be used as scapegoats, "pillaged, attacked, killed!" Immediately, a corrected order came from President Kuwaitti, head of Syria, which forbade killing. "Rob, pillage, burn, but do not physically harm any Jews, *under penalty of hanging.*" During the day, a large mob poured on to our property and set about destroying every piece of furniture, every elaborate crystal chandelier, every fancy window, everything. Then they burned down the house — to the ground. We were lined up outside, all seven children and my parents, to watch this devastation. They searched us, took what money we had and tore it to shreds. It was total devastation. Like the Biblical Job, in a few hours my family's fortune had changed, to become one of homeless, penniless individuals and lacking even food. A notable Muslim, one of the *a-kah-behr, Ḥaj* Maḥmoud Sabbagh, a most thoughtful and courteous man, came with cars toward evening to take us for safety overnight to his home. What a horrible sight to see the flames soaring all around, where so many ancient Jewish institutions were located close together in the neighborhood. Syrian army troops were spread out toward evening to prevent a possible massacre. You can well imagine the fears of the Jewish population that night. Fortunately nothing happened, and soon the Jewish fears calmed down somewhat.

Edward Duek with English nationality, cabled to Brazil to my uncle who promptly cabled a sum of money to help us. It was a nightmare. My father was forbidden to practice his law, he worked from home, advising, preparing documents, etc. As I grew up, it was obvious that there was no future for a Jew in Syria, and as a I told you, at age seventeen I left.

I made my way out travelling unmolested through Syrian territory to Hama, Homs, and then secretly across the frontier to

Trablos [Tripoli] in Lebanon, and so I was at last safely out of Syria. The Jewish community committee in Beirut was very helpful and cordial. I found employment with a Jewish textile merchant, Sabbagh, who looked after me and helped me in every way, (thanks to the fame of the Farḥi name.) The Ḥalabiyeh escapees in Beirut lived close to one another in a very nice area, and prospered. They built a synagogue for themselves. This is not to say that there were sharp differences with Jews from Damascus, Lebanon, etc. No, all were integrated together, most cordial to one another. Every Jew was considered the equal of any Lebanese as long as he carried himself respectably and was honorable. We went about with our heads held high; there was complete freedom — so different from Syria. Since I had a highly successful uncle in Brazil who was eager to help me, I did go to him, especially since I had no relatives in Beirut.

My uncle was in Rio de Janeiro, although for many years he lived in Manaus on the Amazon River in the north central part of Brazil. That is where many Syrians and North Africans had gone in the early days. Syrians there became merchants, importing, because of the heat and humidity, linen from England and silk from France. The Syrians recognized that in Manaus, with a very small Jewish population, their children's Jewishness was in danger. Rio is a large and beautiful city; it was the capital of Brazil at that time and that is where they moved; it is in Saó Paulo (Brazil) where the Syrian Jews are now concentrated. It is the commercial center of the country. When Jews left Beirut in large numbers later, many went to Milan, Italy and from there quite a number went to Saó Paulo. In Rio, I had set up a business employing commission agents selling direct to homes. They carried some goods, jewelry, clothing and so on. Others carried catalogues of furniture, household appliances and the like for which they took orders. It was an installment-paying business. But I didn't succeed in it, especially because of the tremendous inflation rate of 100 percent to 200 percent annually. Even with high prices, I was not in a position to keep up with inflation; what was paid monthly became almost worthless. I had to abandon my business. I was wiped out.

I became Treasurer of the Rio Syrian community organization, looking after the Talmud Torah and other community enterprises, clubs for youth, etc. I assisted also as an amateur assistant ḥazzan, cantor. The ḥazzan was very friendly. He used to explain to me the musical order of the prayers, he taught me *maqam-at* [the *Oriental "modes" of songs and chants*]. That is how with time and practice I became something of an expert — and now I am, as you know, a professional. The president of the community in Rio, Roffé, also knew music and taught me and guided me. (He had succeeded my uncle, as President, when my uncle died.) It is an Aleppoan characteristic to know Arabic music, "modes," with some expertness.

Syrian Jews in Rio came to perhaps five or six thousands. There was also another sizeable group from the Orient — Jews who had come in large numbers from ancient Sidon, *Séda*, in Lebanon. They had their own community, their own Jewish schools and synagogues. Tawfiq Nigri was their head, a fine dedicated man, devoted to religion and the individual welfare of his group, and in fact, anyone who needed assistance. His grandson, also Tawfiq, has just received an MBA from New York University. Damascus Jews were few in numbers. Later some Syrian Jews migrated to other places in Brazil — to Saó Paulo, to Brazilia the new capital, and elsewhere.

In time I sought a change and came to visit New York, after which I considered several countries of Latin America in which to try my fortune. First I visited Panama where I was most cordially received, and led the Holy Days Services for them. Then in 1966 I went to Mexico City and in a short time I had met and married Rosa, my lovely wife. Somehow I was persuaded to enter into a business — manufacturing buttons. With lack of business experience in this operation and wide-scale pilferage by the workers, I was cleaned out of money and abandoned the enterprise. I suffered a lot and developed a serious case of ulcers which required several operations. I was invited by the Damascus community to be the Cantor (after service in the Ḥalabiyeh synagogue for four years). In the Damascus community I was almost a "Chief Rabbi." I was a cantor, Talmud Torah teacher, I was slaughterer of animals. An "iddshi" [Ashkenazi], helped to teach me ritual slaughtering, he

and Ḥakham Sadeq Harari. I was conciliator in family disputes, a guide and leader in the community; I was involved in divorces and marriages; I published a Siddur. I can almost say that I "brought them up." I became outstandingly respected; I was like a *mal-ek*, a king, although I do not want to appear immodest in saying that.

In Mexico City, Jews had lived earlier in the Roma district. You can compare it to Bensonhurst, the Sea Beach. Most Ḥálabiyeh now live in *Polanco*, like the Ocean Parkway area; but some have moved to a more luxurious area, *Tecomachalco*, which you can compare to Deal, New Jersey — mostly Ḥalabiyeh, and some Shawam, where they built a synagogue. Even more luxurious is *Truiet* (?) further up a mountain side, where a synagogue was also established. The Shawam built a private club, "Centro Central": a clubhouse and small park. They hold dances there for the young, and picnics. There is a kashér restaurant, and they hold weddings there, too. The "Centro" is between *Tecomachalco* and *Truiet*. A synagogue was recently completed nearby by the Shawam. *Polanco* has several synagogues, mostly Ḥalabiyeh. Actually Aleppoans and Damascenes live together. They are *not* separated geographically; they help one another financially and socially. [*Contrary testimony appears elsewhere.*]

For eight years I supervised the provision of kashér food for Ḥálabiyeh and Shawam. A large supermarket, "Gigante," distributes sealed packages of kashér meat in areas such as Polanco and in Ashkenazi residential districts — packages which were prepared by us. Packaged kashér chickens were available at "Gigante" markets on Thursday mornings for example. A half hour after they were put on sale 3,000 chickens would have been *sold out*. The religious leaders, to make it easy to eat kashér, had the products sold at the same price as non-kashér. This was costly to the kashér-committee but we were only too happy to have kashér food used. I supervised and helped in the slaughtering and preparations.

It is true that good Jewish education is not easily had in Mexico. By law, schools are absolutely forbidden to teach religion in any form. We tell the authorities that in our

afternoon schools we teach Hebrew *as a language* and so we give the children a knowledge of Jewish tradition and religion.

The numerous Ladino-Spanish have a large day-school. The Shawam school, Mt. Sinai, has close to 2,000 students. There are several small Ḥálabi schools in Polanco, like the old kittabs in Ḥálab. Each accommodates 20 to 30 children for Orthodox religion studies. In a synagogue Keter Toráh, a sizeable afternoon school is operated for the hours when the children come out of the public schools. The children are well instructed; they learn to read a Sefer Torah, study Talmud, etc., etc. The old Synagogue in downtown Roma has almost no congregants. If it were to be completely unused, it would be confiscated by the government, so a *minyan* is gathered for the Sabbath, with difficulty, since all Syrians have moved away — moved *up*.

The Ḥalabiyeh are building a large school with the intent to teach religion more seriously — as much as they will be able to. Thanks to the efforts of the Lubavitch and others, there are several other small schools for serious religious study — almost rabbinic.

There are perhaps ten thousand Ḥalabiyeh in Mexico City. We used to speak of 2,000 families, multiplied by "five" [*fi ainehn il shaytahn — 'to spite the evil eyes of Satan'*]. Some families — not many — left Mexico to live in other countries, partly due to the devaluation of the peso and the commercial slow-down which resulted. Talk of possible anti-Semitism in the past may have influenced a few. Yes, for a short period, there were anti-Israeli statements by high government officials. When American Jewish tourists stopped coming, to show their displeasure, the Government became alarmed at the loss of American money, "insisted" on their neutrality and friendliness to Jews. However, the sizeable Jewish population remains Ashkenazeem, Ladino-Spanish as well as Syrian — and is not exactly flourishing, considering the economy. The severe devaluations have hurt some.

I would estimate that about 60 percent of the Ḥalabiyeh may be considered religious. Among the Shawam, only 30 percent are observant. However, in both Syrian communities,

there is a revived and quite considerable new interest in religious observance and education. Marco ᶜAtash, a Shammi, is outstanding in his strong efforts, along with a small committee, to foster schooling, Ḥálabi or Shammi or of any background. He is a highly respected businessman, and when he stops an acquaintance on the street [?] for a donation to support the school, no one refuses him a donation of $100 or $200 or more. When the Chief Rabbi of Damascus, Ḥakham ᶜAsa, came to visit and observe, he advised that religious education should be concentrated on the young, from the ages of six upward. He remarked that boys in the early and mid-teens were too set in less religious conduct; it is the very young who can be influenced. It appears to be the case. I have heard wonderful reports about Shawam children of ages ten and twelve, who can lead prayer services and read the Sefer Toŕah.

Religious intermarriage in Mexico is very limited, it is the unusual case. [?] When such a marriage is contemplated, the individual is visited, urged, cajoled (!) to dissuade him or her. I know of what I am telling you, I was in the midst of everything for fourteen years. Inter-religious marriages occur, but not many. [*Strong contradictory testimony is presented in the Dabbaḥ interview.*] Nothing like Brazil or Venezuela or Colombia. In those countries it is like an epidemic.

En route to Israel one year to visit my family, the Executive Committee of Sha'are Zión Congregation of Flatbush, in a quickly convened meeting invited me to take the post of Chief Ḥazzan at an attractive salary. What with the wonderful, very pious community of Flatbush, and since my contract in Mexico had expired I accepted. *This* is the best place in which to bring up my children. Financially it was a fortunate move, too. When I left Mexico with the money I had, the peso was at 23 to the dollar, now it is 160 [in 1983]. I had sold my Mexico house, and with the money realized I bought a home in Brooklyn.

Here in New York, I have become a *pizmon* writer, creating new songs to celebrate engagements, weddings, Bar Mizvas. These are all original and simple works. Soon I hope to have enough songs to have them published in cassette form. I have become a *"mu-ghanni, mu-laḥ-ḥehn, mu-aal-ef"* (a singer,

a song creator, a poet). I am preparing a new Siddur — Mexico wrote to ask me to do it, a simplified form, suitable for every Sepharadic community.

I am not ambitious for wealths and honors. I say *"Ezeh-hoo-ᶜaasheer? — ha-sameyaḥ beḥ-ḥilqo."* [Hebrew, "Who is the wealthy man? He who rejoices in his lot?"]

Recently Brazil offered me a post with an apartment, car, and a large salary — *in dollars* (to avoid Brazilian inflation). I had no interest in the Jewish Syrian life that exists there. Except for the very religious, almost every family has one or more children who have intermarried. I am alarmed, and fear in a matter of twenty years there will be no Jews left there. It is enough to tear the heart.

Barukh Ha-Shem ("blessed is His Name"). I now live in New York in a truly good community and I am blessed with Rose, a fine wife, and three good children, Sarah, Denise, and David. *Yit-ᶜam-hom ᶜim-mir* ["God grant them Life," Arabic].

[See the oral biography of Isaac Dabbaḥ, another Mexican, in this volume].

Mrs. 'G.S.' Born in Aleppo, circa 1938-40
Interviews in Arabic

"THE CHILDREN HAVE FLED; EVERY JEWISH SYRIAN FAMILY IS BROKEN UP"

Yes, I will chat about Aleppo, which I left several months ago. [1983] A widow, I came with my daughter 'Victoria', she is twenty-one years old. There was absolutely no future for her in Ḥálab. Jews in Syria may not emigrate, of course. However, in the last several years, the Government has become a little more lenient. A Syrian Jew will be permitted to leave the country for

medical treatment, or even to visit close relatives in Europe or in the United States, *on condition* — it would be insane to try to get an Exit Visa to visit relatives in Israel, even though I have children in Israel whom I have not seen in years. The condition for permission to visit outside of Syria is based on paying several thousand dollars as "security"; and then, only if the traveler has close family ties still living in Syria — a husband or children... hostages, in effect. I left four children behind. I am waiting hopefully for developments that will permit me to be reunited with my scattered family.

Well, it's quiet in Aleppo, what can I tell you; the Jews there live, live quietly; they eat, they sleep, yes, and they go outdoors; they work, but there is no wealth in their hands. Really rich Jews there? There is no one with greater wealth than perhaps 200,000 Syrian "papers" pounds, equivalent to $30,000 [?]. Yes, there is one man there with 'real' money. A million or more, dollars, it is said? Who has counted them? They "estimate"; but how authoritative can that be? *Bil-ḥa-(q)'ee-(q)'*, [*in truth*] there are no 'seriously' wealthy men like the important *"tid-jaar,"* merchants, of earlier years. Who is left in Aleppo? It is not like the times when really important families lived there — like Neḥmad, Beyda, Safra, Jaddaᶜh, Picciotto, Shamaᶜh. Those who are there now have very modest business establishments. They may own a piece of property maybe; a house in which the person lives, but no more, no real wealth and property. [?] And how many Jews are there left in Ḥálab? A handful only, are said to be wealthy individuals. *Dakheel-ak* [*Oh, please!*]. Of the people of Aleppo, if one's daughter receives a suitor, can her father give a dowry of 100,000 Syrian pounds [$16,000]? But in New York it is common for the bride's father to spend more than $30,000 on his daughter's wedding party; *"mash-Allah"* [*Allah's 'benifice'*]. What do you think? — if a person can manage to live without distress, does that mean that he is rich?

In fact, although the Authorities are no longer watching the Jews as they did before, just the same, you cannot call living conditions good. We are always aware that we are liable to danger. We do not feel free, at ease. If you want to leave the

country to live elsewhere, as you can in the United States, can you do it there? Of course not. If one wants to leave Aleppo, he must sacrifice, by leaving close family ties behind. Just look at poor Mrs. "XY." her family is broken up. She has children — half of her children separated from her (out of Syria secretly). It's something that tears the heart! She is still a young widow, and must suffer for God knows how long, under these conditions. [Mrs. 'G. S.' speaking of *herself*]

I too, I came with my girl to New York, having put down everything we had [?] as security to the Government for our return to Aleppo, as I said earlier. I left behind two sons and two daughters, all married and with children, and I have three children in Israel. I am a widow, and I have to suffer this cruel situation alone here in New York, except for my daughter. Well, it is cruel, but I have no choice, except to see that my girl who is with me, with God's help, that she will find a good husband. A few months ago she became engaged to a nice young man, but he did not entirely suit her. He is not well-educated, operates a store somewhere, and in addition he is not religious enough to satisfy her.

She went to school here, financed through NYANA, to learn English, and office procedures. When she finished her schooling she took a job — temporarily — in an insurance company.

One of my sons in Aleppo is a draughtsman — architect. Since he attended the free government college, he is obliged to several years of "service," with a semi-official construction company. His salary is very low — almost like that of a soldier because he 'owes' the state for his education, since as a Jew he cannot do the usual military service. Maybe, after the compulsory substitute-service of five years, he will be free to work on his own. The college education is at the Government expense, with small charges, and the cost of his books. Going to college is an improvement over past ruling; at the same time he will not be accepted for work in a Government bureau, because we are Jewish. [?] Lower levels of study are usually at private schools, where there is a substantial tuition fee. There they make provisions for Jews; even though there are classes on

Saturdays, they allow them to stay away that day, and make sure that they will not have missed much work by their absence. Yes, even the private schools are run by the government. There are still convent schools, but they, too, are also under government supervision. Even the Jewish schools, the Talmud Torah, they have Muslim principals. There are strict limits to the Hebrew education. After school the children go to the synagogue for religious education, supposedly as part of prayers. At the Talmud Torah, they receive a general education, including some Jewish "history," in addition to regular secular subjects. It is an elementary school education. They they go on to the *Brevet*, and if their grades are good they may qualify for college. Children who do not do well can get manual training, such as carpentry; these schools charge a small fee. College-study is almost free; Jewish students there are few — perhaps ten [??] or so. Education is widespread in Aleppo now — so that servants, house-workers, are scarce!

Life in Aleppo is not bad; except for us Jews, who are now 'aliens'; with every family broken-up. So many children live in other countries — three-quarters of them; brothers and sisters, sons and daughters... what do you think! It's not an easy situation, it's a big blow, for the Jewish people. Some day God will have compassion on us. In any case "he" [*President Assad*] is not too bad; he is certainly better than others who would be much more restrictive, much more cruel. [*Assad is a member of the Alouite [Alawite] sect of Muslims, a minority sect which is deeply disliked by the majority; this may account for his relative 'leniency' to the Jews.*] One way or another he permits a few Jews to make their way out, somehow. For example, permission is given to leave the country by posting security, as I said. Many go, with no intention to return. Assad's government is aware of this, but they "look the other way." Even so, not only must the would-be traveller deposit security-money; now a local Jewish Syrian must sign a 'guarantee', for the traveller that he is responsible for his "return." There is a threat that possibly the property of a traveller who does not return more or less promptly, would be confiscated; I don't know how it will turn out. God protects us from all evil . . . . Entire families are never permitted to travel. [There have been a few exceptions in the recent past.]

Travellers are being made to sign a statment that they will not go to "Israeel" [Israel] and if they do, their families will suffer "consequences" . . . this is what I heard lately, from those who arrived in New York recently. One time there was an edict that we Jews were not permitted to sit on the balconies of our own homes past seven o'clock in the evenings. This ruling did not last long, and *il ḥamd l'il Allah* [thank God] this passed away. "They" claim that all these edicts are to protect our safety! One doesn't know what to think; only that when anything takes place, international political disorders, we are in fear. As long as things are quiet, we manage to get along. The Jews want to get out, although they are living quietly — they have shelter, food, etc., but if they were told that they can leave, everyone would hurry to go; they would slam the door and run, leaving everything behind.

In the past, so many left homes, so many left their property and possessions, just so they could smuggle their way out of the country. It's the future of our children that is our greatest concern. Selling your property to realize cash? Impossible. Yes, if someone wants to sell in order to buy a better home for example, that is acceptable, but to sell in order to realize cash, that is forbidden. The authorities are afraid that the money realized would be made to go out of the country — through illegal money deals. Everything that takes place is under the scrutiny of the authorities. Even if a Jew were to go to a summer resort — anywhere — the authorities are aware — everything. There are government informers everywhere. On the streets we are careful of what we say for fear of an informer. They are everywhere, the Secret Police, "the Mukhabara." We are careful to speak only among ourselves. If we see a Muslim approaching, listening in on a conversation, we change the subject. They know where we go, where we come... they have photographs of every single one of us. Anytime we offer a petition, to travel — anything, we are made to give information about our parents, children, their whereabouts . . . everything. They know every single one of us.

There is no *muᶜa-maleh* [*social intercourse*], with the Muslims; Jews do have pleasant relations with Muslim neighbors, and as friendly as they are with a Muslim, a Jew will not reveal a secret to him, like intended escape from Aleppo, etc. He will not be as open with him as with a Jew. It's a well-

known fact, of course, that Jews have always cultivated good relations with the Muslims, it was a matter of ensuring safety. Only a lunatic would or could be completely open with any Muslim.

The summer resorts? Certainly not in the familiar resorts of Lebanon. That's outside the country. But there are lovely mountain resorts near Damascus, *Bludan*, etc., they are on the eastern face of the Lebanon mountains, within Syria itself. At one time it was forbidden to travel freely even to the Sham (Damascus). Now things are considered very 'relaxed.' It's a "marvel" now, compared to previous times. Now a Jew is free simply to board a bus — but not to Beirut, or Turkey nearby, that is impossible. Yet, if one cannot get a legal passport there is always the illegal way, through the wilderness and across the borders, to Lebanon or to Turkey.

How I decided to leave Aleppo? It's for my daughter. I am anxious to marry her to a nice person. There is no choice, really, in Ḥálab, and no future. I have four children in Israel, all married; two boys and two girls. They went over the frontiers illegally. I didn't know when they left Ḥálab . . . over ten years since I have seen them. I didn't know, when they escaped; although parents of other children were aware. They agreed among themselves, the young people. First, one of my boys left. Then a couple of months later, worried about him, how he could get along, I decided to send one of my daughters to him in Israel; along with a group that was about to leave secretly, I sent her on. Another daughter left illegally, without telling me; she was sixteen years old. She had told me that she was going to a friend's home to do homework. When evening came and she had not returned, I inquired from her friend's family — they told me. I was frantic with grief and worry . . . but I remembered that I was obliged to report her absence to the authorities. "She is 'missing', please help us to find her!" We did not dare to tell that she had escaped. After a time, they voided her citizenship on their books and marked her name "escaped to Israel." Previously they held the family, the parents, they imprisoned them and beat them. Now they no longer hold them responsible. More recently, when a group of thirty made their escape, the Government authorities announced one

Saturday in the Synagogues that that if there were to be any more escapes, the whole community would be held responsible; there would be "terrible consequences." This threat has had its effect, no more illegal departures are taking place. The Jews suffer! [*Jews continue to escape.*]

God was good to us, we left by airplane, officially. It cost us so much — all what we possessed — and more. We went by bus, six hours to Damascus and took the plane there. The bus was elegant, government owned. The fare was 20 pounds [equivalent to $3.00]. Well, how "cheap"? Actually, one earns a Syrian pound and spends accordingly. In the United States one earns dollars, and what costs a dollar here costs a pound in Syria. If it were not for the special difficulties imposed on the Jewish population, life would have been reasonably comfortable for most of us.

We left Damascus after a day there. It is a very nice city. We took a plane to London, and then another to New York.

Life in Aleppo is comfortable, really. A Jewish merchant goes home to lunch in the *Djamiliyeh.* In certain business districts everyone must close up for the lunch period, by Government rule; during the summer, from 1:30 in the afternoon until 4 o'clock. Then they resume their affairs until 7:30 or so. Afterward many men go to the cafés, for a snack and perhaps a game or two of backgammon.

. . . And so we arrived safely in New York, my daughter and I. My trust is in God, that he make it possible to place my daughter, to find her a virtuous, a kindly husband, and that God in his compassion will permit me to unite with my family. "*Allah Kareem*" [God is compassionate].

Here, I communicate with my son and his family in Aleppo, by mail or by telephone. I don't know when my letters to Aleppo arrive. All letters to Jews are censored. No, nothing is cut away, because we are very cautious in what we say. Even in telephone conversation, we are very careful. We *never* mention Israel. We do say that "your brother or sister is well, and sends regards." My children's letters from Israel to Aleppo, to their brothers there, are forwarded to New York and then sent to Syria. Everyone does that.

In the Sham [Damascus], the authorities are being quite

merciful with older girls, unmarried women. The girls who are perhaps twenty-six to twenty-eight years old or so, they permit them to get exit visas fairly easily. They must post security — *without* individual guarantees from Syrian Jews. The authorities are much more considerate than before. With time, maybe . . . .

We were in a bad situation before. Now, thank God, we have the Government of Israeel [Israel] backing us. At least there is a Jewish State, which must be kept in mind.

The daughter has married happily and has presented her mother with a grandchild.

Aslan Bawabeh — Born in Aleppo, 1946
Interviews in Arabic,

THE POLICE SAID TO THE THREATENING ARMENIAN COMPETITOR, "WE KNOW THE JEWS, THEY ARE HONORABLE AND HONEST. DARE TO LAY YOUR HANDS ON THIS MAN AND YOU WILL ROT IN PRISON."

I arrived here in New York a few months ago in 1983, from Ḥálab, Aleppo, Syria. [How he got out of Aleppo Bawabeh preferred not to disclose.] I've begun to resume my work. In Aleppo I dealt in gold, gold jewelry manufacturing and that is what I am doing now.

Relations with the Muslim population and with the authorities there? Let me tell you a story that will illustrate the situation. Many of the Jews remaining in Ḥálab are craftsmen and merchants in gold jewelry. I won't say that all of the city's gold jewelers are Jewish, but there are many if not the majority. My gold jewelry shop was located in the heart of the jewelry center. We did a very good business, most of us. It wasn't only

to Aleppo or Syrian buyers to whom we sold. We got many visitors from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They knew that Aleppo was a center for jewelry and they came to us in quite some numbers. Arabs, I can tell you, are very fond of gold articles. One day a Saudi came by looking for an Armenian merchant whose store was nearby. Finding that this store was closed he came in to look at my merchandise and found my goods to be more attractive that the Armenians', where he had made purchases before. He ordered a lot of goods and came back again and again. The Armenian became aware of this and was furious with me. He claimed that I had "stolen" his customer and made angry threats — he meant to have me beaten up. I reported this to the police authorities. They summoned the Armenian and said to him, "We know the Jewish merchants, they are most honorable and honest. If you dare to put a hand on this man you will rot in prison." That put an end to his threats.

A few years later some of my relatives heard rumors . . . . My relatives were in alarm. They had gotten word of some possible Muslim attack. They brought out their hidden money and gave it to us — stuffing the bills and jewels into a pillowcase. No, there was no thought to count it. They were leaving it with us for safekeeping. They had gotten the family money — of course they did not keep it in banks — to leave behind, because in leaving secretly they were afraid that they would be attacked by hold-up men in the fields and mountains as they smuggled their way from Aleppo to Lebanon. (In all there were forty-two persons in the group.) No, these were not sophisticated merchants — they were like *daraweesh,* dervishes — almost like peasants. When they made some money in peddling or other trading they would come home to tell their "women" to hide the money somewhere, "put it under a mattress or some corner of a closet." The Syrian money they left with me I changed to U.S. dollars, in a check drawn on a New York bank — money changers handled all forms of money for a 1 percent or 1 1/2 percent fee. I kept the dollars for them for a whole year, and when I left Aleppo and reached Israel I turned it over to them.

At that time the rate was 4-1/2 Syrian "papers" — *leeraat,* [Syrian pounds to the dollar;] soon after Syria had a devaluation by about 50 percent in the value of the currency, and now a Syrian pound is at 6 1/2 to the U.S. dollar. But to quiet the population, to avoid disorder because price's shot up for everything, what did the authorities do? The Government subsidized some necessities. For example, if you wanted to buy rice, or bread or sugar, their prices were held down artificially. A kilo of bread, a little over two pounds sells for 35 *irsh,* [irsh] piastres, 100 piastres to the Syrian pound, or about five cents for over two pounds of bread. In the United States a kilo of bread costs $1.75! Or take rice, it is at 80 *irsh* to the kilo, or about 12 cents in U.S. money; about 5 1/2 cents per pound. The price of all these necessities sold for double on the open market. Each family was given ration cards for those basic foods. For every person in the family, for instance, they received an allotment of two and a quarter pounds of rice per month. If you needed more, you had to buy it at the open-market price — on the 'black' market.

At the time of the *Ḥawaades* [the 'news', the black news when the synagogues were burned, in 1947] . . . I was born in 1946 — so, I was a babe in arms; of course, I don't remember anything of what took place. Now in Ḥálab things are quiet and peaceful for the Jews. I venture to say that they lead a more contented life than the Syrians here in New York — *except* that they are forbidden to travel or leave the country and they are separated from their children, who fled. But what if the Government changes its present attitude?

As soon as a Jewish housewife throws together the family meal — by 11 o'clock in the morning, she is out visiting, an *"ibboul"* (reception) in the morning and another in the afternoon. Then in the evening she may go out to pay visits with her husband. Here I find in the year that I am in New York, the people seldom go visiting, except sometimes on the weekends. The men come home from work too tired to go out.

In Ḥálab all the Jews are very religiously observant; I don't know of any that violate the Shabbat, by turning on lights or anything like that. There are one or two Muslims who go

around to the Jewish homes to do the necessary. In the old days, some peasants used to come from Bele-ramoun, a nearby village, on the Sabbath to serve the Jewish population. Now Bele-ramoun has become an integral part of Ḥálab. Yes, the beehives are still there, [not far from Ḥálab the peasant homes which are in the form of beehives].

There were good relations with the Islam (Muslims). I remember my father telling me that in the period of fires (1947) a Muslim neighbor stood at the door of the *ḥohsh* to keep any mobsters away. "This is an Islamic home, you may not enter!" Even in modern times, in rough areas of the city, like Bab-il Nerra, where people are sometimes waylaid and sometimes killed, Jews were never molested.

The city and people of Aleppo have advanced a lot, the population is about 1 1/2 million now. They have every modern convenience there. "What do you need, a washing machine, a freezer?" There is hardly a home that does not have a freezer, for example. What would you want to buy — quickly it was supplied. Most equipment was smuggled into Syria, although some was brought in legally. Most of these articles came via Saudi Arabia, or from Lebanon; they were mostly of American manufacture. A taxi-chauffeur about to drive to Beirut — simply tell him what you need and couple of days later it was delivered to your door. [This was confirmed in the N.Y. Times dispatch Dec. 3, 1986.]

I learned to speak some French in the Talmud Torah; the Alliance Schools had been forbidden. Yes, there had been French schools, at the *Fréres*, the French monks' school or at the School of the *Soeurs*, the nuns. Even these foreign religious schools were abolished about ten years ago. All education is in the Government schools. Would you believe that the principal of the Jewish school, the Talmud Torah, is a Muslim official?

Although Aleppo has become modern, with some areas — like the Baḥsita [an old Jewish quarter], destroyed to make way for modern boulevards, the old Souk area, the ancient covered markets, has been preserved intact and continues to function as in the old days. The Souks were declared National Monuments. You may not so much as drive in a nail without official

permission! In the hottest days when you enter the Souk area it is so, so, cool.

Yes, the streets of Aleppo still have the vendors of *soos* [a delicious non-alcoholic licorice beverage]. Some of it is still carried around in goatskins; others carry it in small drums. They continue to place a chalk mark daily near the door and collect once a week.

The supply of fruits and vegetables in Aleppo is seasonal. With the coming of spring, we began to receive cherries, melons . . . . Here in New York I find it different — every type of fruit and vegetable is available throughout the year . . . .

Damascus is called a second Paris, it is now so pretty, with its flowers and rivers. Its summer resorts, like Bludan and other mountain places on the east, face the Lebanan . . . They are most beautiful — *beejaninoo.* [They make you "crazy" with their loveliness.] There is nothing remotely like them around Ḥálab. Antioch [Antákeh] and other such former favorite resorts are now beyond foreign boundaries [Turkey].

The Neḥmad home in the Djamiliyeh, a huge building, was taken over by the army and the vast gardens surrounding the house were converted into a municipal recreational sports park. It cost an enormous amount of money and took almost ten years to complete . . . .

We Aleppoans, recent arrivals here, many came with some money. We have resumed our commercial activities here and have entered into business partnerships, etc. It is the Jews in Aleppo who are in deep misery in spite of their getting along well; their children have fled. They feel the separation tragically; ready to leave everything behind, if only they could leave the country to be reunited with their children.

In Flatbush here, while we newcomers are a part of the general community, we maintain our closeness to family and friends who also left Ḥálab in the last few years.

Morris Antebi, M.D. Born 1953 in Aleppo
Interview in English (and Arabic)

"IT WAS MY *NAHSEEB* [FATE] THAT I WAS THE DOCTOR ON DUTY AT THE HOSPITAL THAT NIGHT."

It is about three years since I came from Aleppo, close to 1980. I spent a month travelling in Europe before I arrived in New York; I have relatives in Istanbul, Amsterdam and London. Best of all I liked London; it's such a lovely city, and the English people! They are so nice and so friendly, so civilized. When I met people on the street — asked for directions, they saw that I was a visitor and they would ask me if I was free in the evenings; they invited me to concerts and other places — not to night clubs.

I left Syria with an official passport, not secretly over the frontier. It's a very curious story how I got the passport. I studied medicine in Aleppo University and was interning in the hospital there. One evening I was on duty when a wounded man was brought in. This was at the time when there were violent attacks — riots — against Government army officers, of The Alouite (sect). They were attacked because of the extremist hatred of the majority Sunnis for the minority [Alouite] sect of Muslims. Syria is largely Sunni-Muslim, but the country is run by Alouites — Haffez-el Assad, the President, is an Alouite. I don't know the details of the attack on my patient. He was a high ranking official in the Mukhabarat, the secret police and was himself a Sunni, but because he was part of the Alouite official world . . . . Later, as I treated him and he became friendly, I confided to him that I felt bad that many of my colleagues in the hospitals had been permitted to go abroad to advance themselves in studies, in their medical specialties, but that I could not do so. "Why is that?" he asked. "Because I am a Jew, and cannot get permission to go." He promised me to get me a passport quickly. And in fact he did soon after, not only for me. A year later, he secured passports for my parents as well.

It was *Nahseeb* (Arab. chance, fate), that I had been on

duty that night. One of my fellow-doctors had a wedding he wanted to attend, and I had agreed to replace him so that he could go. If that chance substitution hadn't taken place, I would still have been in Ḥalab. The Syrian Government would not permit a Jewish doctor to go abroad. He had gotten his medical education free at the expense of the Government. There is no tuition for attendance at the University and they were not going to permit a state-educated Jewish doctor to go abroad, perhaps to help the *Sahh-you-ni-yeh,* Zionists, in Israel!

We lived in the *Djamiliyeh* district, a very nice area where almost all Jews live now. The city had already changed a lot when I was born — in 1953. It continued to improve. Many new areas had developed to house the new class of *bourgeois* that was growing — the business people and others. They became extremely rich, because President Assad had very liberal economic policies and many people took advantage of the opportunities. Many neighborhoods there are very beautiful, lovelier than Beverly Hills in California, which I visited; nicer than Deal in New Jersey.

Aleppo's people are known to have very developed taste, in music, in their clothes, their architecture; all of them, Muslims, Jews, and Christians; especially in music, they are world-known. It is said that every Arabic musician, if he has won the approval of the people of Ḥálab, he has *carte blanche* to audiences everywhere. I met the most famous Arabic/Egyptian singer, Muḥammad ᶜAbd il Waháb, the greatest living singer in the Arabic world. He was spending the summer in *Bludan,* a resort on the Syrian side of the Lebanon Mountains, near Damascus. He told me that forty years before when he started his career, it was in Aleppo that he got his first recognition — from Aleppoan Jews. There were other well-known singers in Ḥálab then, Leila Murad whose uncle was the famous Zaki Murad and other Jewish singers. ᶜAbd il Waháb was still remembering with appreciation the reception he received in Aleppo. Yes, ᶜAbd il Waháb is still alive and healthy, although he is old and no longer sings. *Allah yee-tahwel ᶜimmro* [may Allah extend his life], he is such a nice person. He wrote a special song to celebrate the Camp David agreement, *Nasheed il Salaam* — the Hymn of Peace. He is very friendly to Jews.

The attitude of Aleppo's Muslims toward Jews — my personal observation is that Muslims might be even friendlier to Jews one day if the anti-Jewish propaganda is relaxed. They *can* be friendly. The Aleppo Muslims are business people who are not interested in 'boloney' topics like "Judaism, Zionism." The minority of Christians there really have a more deep-seated dislike for Jews. The Muslims were always generally very tolerant toward Jews. For example, after the Expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 the Muslims welcomed large numbers of Jews to the Ottoman Empire. We had suffered much more from Christians than from Muslims. If you are friendly and courteous with Muslims, you can get along very well with them. Some of the Koran's expressions against the Jews may continue to exist deep down in their hearts, but if you are civil and friendly with them, they reciprocate — at least on the surface. If you *no-mitt-on*, 'play along' with them, you can have friendly relations with them.

The problem now is somewhat different. Although Muḥammad also did say friendly things — sometimes, about the Jews, some Muslims now say that the Jews are not *Beni Yisraeel* about whom Muḥammad spoke favorably; "they are converts to Judaism, not the genuine people of Muḥammad's time." [*This may rise from Arthur Koestler's view that Ashkenazeem Jews stem for the Kusaris, the 8th to 12th century converts to Judaism.*] Anti-Jewish Muslims also state that it is not the 'genuine' Torah that Jews follow now. They claim that it is 'changed'. Incidentally, the Sunni Muslims do not consider the Alouite Sect, the government sect, as genuinely Islamic — they are *Kiffár* ("blasphemers"). A Sunni would prefer that his daughter marry a Jew rather than an Alouite. They think the same of the mysterious *Yezeedi* sect, Kurdish Muslims, who live North and East of Aleppo, although I don't know much about them. The expression of "Kaafer-Yezeedi" is still used ["a Yezeedi blasphemer"].

As I remember, in Aleppo a child began his schooling at the age of six. I went to a Kittab [*an old-fashioned traditional Jewish School*] in the *Djamiliyeh* Synagogue. At first we learned Hebrew and Arabic; first the alphabet, then *asacar* where we learned to form words, then *Ḥumash*, Proverbs, etc., and in the

7th grade, we began Talmudic study. From the earliest classes, we began to read and write Arabic — and French; only recently English was substituted for French. It was only ten or twelve years ago that *Muslim principals* were appointed to supervise Jewish schools, but they created minimal difficulties. Before that we used to spend a lot of time on Hebrew studies; after the Muslim principal came, religious studies had to take place in the synagogue itself — not in the school (and under the cover of "learning to pray"). Muslims have great respect for religion — *any* religion. It may be that they are not 'sophisticated', or they choose 'to look the other way'?

No, I really had no serious difficulty then, in entering the University. Repression of Jews had relaxed. It was the preparation of the paper-work that presented delays, difficulties. In all the Third World countries they require an awful lot of 'papers', the bureaucracies are very demanding. All the University students in Aleppo — Jews and others — in Syria in general, all their records are on file with the Intelligence police, to determine if they are involved in anti-government political activities and so on. Some Muslim and Christian youth *are* deeply involved in political movements. They don't have the Western interest in sports to the same degree; many turn to political activity, parties, student movements.... The authorities know about everybody, especially the Jews. So getting the Papers approved was very long for the Jews, we missed classes, even semesters, which we had to make up.

In proportion to the general population, Jews have a much higher percentage of University students. At my time in the school, in my last years, in 1975-1976, there were about fifty Jewish boys and girls in the university. Don't forget that at that time there were only about one thousand Jews in the entire city [now there are about 400 to 500 left there]. We Jews studied medicine, engineering, architecture, economics, French literature, agricultural engineering. Few Jews studied law; they studied subjects that could be put to use anywhere — *in any country*. In any case, law is not respected there; the *Shaykhs* deal with a lot of legal issues; the Syrians do not use the Courts very much. Jewish girls too, go to the University. Most girls who do not get married, as they come out of high school go on

to Higher Education. Many married women attend too, including Jewish women, pursuing professional and cultural studies. There are three Jewish female doctors in Ḥálab. Here in the United States there are NO Syrian Jewish women doctors, although I know of one young married woman, a Sutton/Khidary, who is completing her medical studies at Downstate, where I am an Intern in anaesthesiology.

It seems to me that high-school education abroad is superior to that in the United States. But apparently American students catch up in college. How else can we understand the excellence of the Americans, in technology and so on?

We Jewish students in the Aleppo University had a 'youth movement'; we would meet weekly in a discussion group called the *Nad-weh,* the Forum, and would examine everything 'humanitarian' and so on. We had to be very careful, very discreet in our discussions. Very discreet, yes; if we were to be accused of pro-Zionist talk it would mean expulsion — and perhaps — prison, for years. I was president of the group many times; I and one or two others would alternate every three months. We knew how to manage the group. Fear of betrayal from within our group to the authorities? Never! In *Il Sham* Damascus it may have been different... .

In the *Sham* Jews are fearful of one another. Damascus now has a Jewish population of about 5,000. They are more *ᶜalma-ni-yeen* (secular), more 'open', while the Aleppoan Jews are more conservative, traditional, and much more religious. Religiousness in Damascus is difficult to measure. *Perhaps 20 percent compared to Aleppo's Jews.* Many of the Damascenes work on the Shabbat; *Ḥar-it il Yahood,* the Jewish Quarter, is some distance from the commercial center; they must ride to get to work. In addition, they don't have a very good Talmud Toráh school, so many children go to the government public schools; they don't know Toráh like the *Halabiyeh,* and it has an influence on their behavior in later years.

I am scheduled to spend my residency in an Illinois State University institution in Champaign-Urbana. This will consume two years and more. I don't propose to spend these years of

'exile' alone. I propose to seek a bride, to marry and take her with me.

In fact, soon after Antebi 'found' a lovely bride, whom he knew from Aleppo, (also a recent refugee from Ḥalab,) of the Matut family, well-known to Antebi and his family.
A year or so later Antebi made an emergency return to Flatbush to join in his families' mourning ceremonies. His sister who had continued to live in Aleppo with her husband and young children was found assassinated, with her belly cut open to destroy the baby she was carrying. In addition, her two young children were also killed. No one was apprehended for these murders, nor are there suspects. It is not believed to be part of an organized anti-Jewish terrorist act.
Dr. Antebi has settled in Chicago permanently.

Margo Bigio Silvera — Born in Aleppo, 1913
Interviews in Arabic

"ALTHOUGH I WAS MARRYING A WEALTHY MAN PAYING HIM A DOWRY WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY"

When I was fifteen we lived for a year in the house of Signor Mordechai Silvera. That is where Elie Silvera, their cousin, first saw me. I admired him, but who was I, a young girl, to aspire to this handsome, well-developed man, rich and of the finest family? My own family was modestly middle-class. One of my brothers was always urging Nizha, and Eliahou Sutton, "il Agha", who were part-time marriage-brokers, to arrange a *bazrah*, a match, for me with Signor Elie Silvera. They

arranged for him to meet me, over a long period of time, before he was persuaded, decided. Did he take me out? What are you saying? Along with one of my older brothers I was taken to meet Elie at an out-of-the way cafe where no one who knew us would be likely to see us; for an hour or so, every week — for ten months. Never once were we unescorted before marriage. It was a desirable match, although he was twenty-three years older than me.

Earlier my husband, Elie, had been engaged to Elvira, Signor Meir Silvera's daughter, on condition she learn a little French; he got her a tutor. Elie soon recognized her T.B., which was current in her family. He did not break the engagement nevertheless; until they created an 'incident' and an excuse.

Before I married I was *tahy-she* [light-headed, 'giddy', very playful] — but along with my girl friends; never with a boy or a man. As soon as I married I changed; I became very much a "lady." After all I had become an aristocratic "signora."

There were thousands of Jews in the city, so one could not know every family or individual. When a marriage match was comtemplated, it was the family which usually initiated it. A mother who had seen a desirable girl, the daughter of a friend or neighbor, would suggest the match to her son. It would be arranged that the boy and girl would be present at some fixed-up visit, at the home of friends or relatives. He and she would sometimes be brought together at one more contrived occasion. If they seemed agreeable to one another, the broker who had arranged the meetings would be told to proceed with the arrangements. That was the beginning of often lengthy negotiations involving the two families; how much the dowry was to be, etc.

As I said, my marriage was arranged through Eliahou and Nizha, the brokers. Every match *had* to have a broker. Even close neighbors, next-door neighbors, when they decided on the marriage of their children it was always through a *khat-tahb*. It was the same in commerce, every deal was through a broker. In my case "il Agha" the playful title of Eliahou who held himself so upright — [an agha is a "Lord"] had agreed with my brother that his fee was to be seventy-five gold pieces. Well before the wedding Eliahou asked my brother for his fee. But, if the

marriage was not consummated my brother knew he would not recover a *n'ha-seh* [a small brass coin]. My brother did make a part payment.

Although I was marrying a well-to-do man, a dowry was absolutely necessary. My family gave him three hundred gold *lee-rat*, pounds — which we had to scrape together. The more desirable the prospective groom the larger the dowry had to be.

The liveliness of my youth? I was very spirited, in an innocent way. I ran around with my girl friends, strolling, visiting one another's homes, playing cards, and so on. This was after school, of course — the Alliance school hours, as in all the non-religious schools in the city, all began at eight o'clock, until noon. After two hours for lunch, we returned at two to study until four o'clock. After that we played, as I told you until supper time, when we did a little homework. [*Most other informants spoke of intensive homework assignments at the Alliance and similar schools*]. We girls played together, never with boys — even Jewish boys. No respectable girl would be seen in the company of a male other than brothers. This was the same among Muslims girls, too. The school boys played too. No, not much ball-playing nor roller-skating. They spun tops, played with marbles. A few owned bicycles, groups of boys used to cycle together in the neighborhood. Yes, there were football teams [soccer], mostly in the Alliance school.

Children's festivities in Ḥálab? At Purim there was a feast for the children in the Jewish religious schools, [elementary], a *ᶜishre*. The rabbis' wives would prepare a huge pot of "mjaddara" [rice with lentils], "atah-yehf" [pancakes], and "mamouniyeh" [a dessert made with farina and syrup]. Purim was the great holiday for children. It was a two-day Festival in Ḥálab [*Halakha, religious law, since it "had had walls in the time of Joshua ben Noon"*] observed much more than in New York. All Jewish businessmen closed their establishments. The children received gifts, mostly money, from their parents and relatives. They would play cards for small sums, have donkey rides, games of all sorts. Sometimes boys and girls, separately, would hire a *ᶜarabiyeh*, a horse-drawn carriage — carrying five lads or five girls who would each contribute to the hire. They

would be driven around the town for an hour or two. Sometimes the boys played in the wheat fields nearby. Sometimes we went to the vegetable farms where we would secure *khass* [romaine lettuce, considered a delicacy]. We were not aware that human waste was sometimes used to fertilize the crops. [*In early years, typhoid fever was common in the town, sometimes in epidemic proportions.*] Of course for Purim *every* family prepared traditional small cakes, *maᶜmoul and kara-beej,* the latter dipped into *nah-tehf,* a delicious 'marshmallow' confection, baclawa, nut-stuffed pancakes, "zin-gol," deep-fried fritters and other *ḥil-wee-yaat,* sweets.

Although, as you know, card-playing was very popular among the Jewish population, immediately after Purim it was the custom in every household to tear up the playing cards. Winter was over, household card-parties ended, somehow. It wasn't a religious rule . . . . In later years we became more *moderne;* we went to clubs; there was a handsome club in the Djamiliyeh area, where most Jews lived. Earlier there was the "Club d'Alep" that I remember being taken to as a young girl.

Another 'holiday' which the children enjoyed a lot was "Eed il Jahr," holiday of the 'neighbor' [*correctly "Eed il s'jaar" in Arabic, the "holiday of the trees"; in Hebrew, "Ḥag Ha Illanot"* which is celebrated 15th of the month of Shebat]. This holiday is commemorated only *one night.* We had all forms of fruits and nuts, they were served up in addition to traditional sweets, after supper. Each child had a small cotton bag with a slip-noose closing, sewed up for the occasion, in which the child accumulated the goodies. [The following day in the *kittab,* the traditional Hebrew school, the children, boys, used to compete as to who had the most, the best, in his sack, as this writer remembers].

There was a delicacy which was prepared only one time each year. This was for the *Shabbou-ot* [*the Festival of the "Wheat Harvest" in the spring of the year,* a celebration also of the Giving of the Torah from Mount Sinai]. It was "rizz bᶜassal," a rice pudding with honey. It was served with milk and was called "Brekheet-o" [*a term assumed from the Spanish Sepharad Jews who had settled in Aleppo*]. "Kibbeh b'masso" was also special, for Passover. ["This is a torpedo shaped

concoction made of matzah and a stuffed with meat and spices. It was prepared to use up the possible excess of matzah in the household; despite its being delicious it was seldom prepared any other time.]

On the *Sabbath* Jews would not touch fire. A Muslim was called in to heat the food, to stoke a stove for warmth; except of course for those who had a Muslim domestic. At one time our domestic was Jewish, who went home to her family in the Jewish quarter on Fridays. One Saturday in need of fire I called out to the *ḥehr-ess*, the area private patrolman, asking him to send me someone to light our fire. Soon a young man appeared, a Muslim, who was asked to do the necessary. "What do you do?" I asked. "*Ya Sitt* [my lady], I am an official in a bank, and I earn yearly more than all the inhabitants of the area put together! Nevertheless, I am glad to be of service."

We had 'everything' Jewish, burglars, and even a few disreputable women. There had been a "registered" Jewish prostitute Rena S. of a good family, who was legally compelled to live in the "red-light district." She had a sister whom I knew well, wife of a Ya'coob H., a lovely, respectable lady. There was also F. a popular singer, and her sister, M., Jewish; they were wild, probably prostitutes too; also K. Flirtations, affairs? I don't know of any, although they may have existed. Not everyone was truly religious. Yes, some poor girls (who were sometimes servants), some of them may have been loose. In one such very poor family with many girls, they were said to contemplate becoming "registered" prostitutes. The girls were hurried off to Palestine, to avoid such a fate.

We did hear of a very few girls from very poor families who became Muslims. They married Muslims, maybe as a last resort; no work, they had no dowry; no Jew offered to marry them . . . . I heard the story of one girl who used to do needlework in the homes of Muslims. She married one of them, to the alarm of the rabbis, the heads of the community. They hoped that with the promise of a big sum, 500 gold pounds, they could persuade her to come back to the fold. She had been engaged to marry a Jewish man, but the day before the wedding he jilted her, he left the city. A bitter girl. She finally turned Muslim. An emissary met her on the street and said to her, "Remove the

face-veil. I have 500 gold pieces for you 'from your brother in Argentina,' return to your religion." she said, "After I have the Honor to become a *Muslim-eh* you ask me to return to that filthy crowd? Except for you [*a form of courteous talk*] they are all filthy!"

There was so much poverty among the poor, so much. Many were led to begging. In the winter one could see Jewish children on the streets, almost naked — and hungry . . . . [This was one reason that many of them emigrated when they could, and when they were compelled to, by fear of military conscription.]

There was much poverty everywhere. The *fellaheen*, the peasantry living in the hundreds of small villages, they too lived a poor life, although they had enough to eat. Actually they were little different from serfs. Many hundreds of villages were almost all entirely owned by a small number of absentee landlords who lived in the cities. A few *fellaheen* owned small pieces of land. The peasants, most of them were without any education, or very little. When for some rare reason a *fellah* needed to travel by train out of Aleppo, we used to see his whole family installed at the railroad station days before the arrival of the train they were to take, with all their property stacked around them.

Elie and I left Aleppo with our four young children, in 1947, three days after the Jewish institutions and stores were set on fire. How could we stay when there were such things happening? When we left Aleppo it was legally. For a short time afterwards Jews could travel freely. Later it became more difficult; Jews were forbidden to leave the country, and soon had to go secretly, smuggled out. *That day*, when we woke up Elie announced *"Partage* [Fr:"Division"] has been declared. *Palestine* is now divided into a Muslim state and a Jewish one!" I was worried at this news. "We Jews in Aleppo will suffer," I told him. During the day when I was watching the children play in our garden Elie rushed in to tell me of Muslim demonstrations. Hordes were running around, burning synagogues, schools and Jewish stores. They were shouting: *Palestine b'ladna/wa il yahood k'laab-na* [*rhymed: "Palestine is*

our land and the Jews are our dogs!"] Across the street was the home of a Muslim neighbor by the name of Ahbyahd [White], with whom Elie was not on particularly friendly terms. Mr. Ahbyahd was standing at his doorway joyful at the anti-Jewish demonstrations. However, when I went to him saying, "Neighbor, I've come to you for refuge," without hesitation he said "Come in *ya bin-ti,* my daughter, bring your family and come in." I asked him to escort us to my sister whose neighbors were the influential Jábbri family. The Jábbris took us in, and supplied us, and other Jewish families, with shelter and food. A few days later we left for Beirut. At that time it was not yet forbidden for Jews to leave Syria as I told you. We went to Lebanon, to Beirut where we lived for more than six years.

Soon after arriving in Beirut I returned to Aleppo to bring our household things, rugs, furniture, etc. Elie didn't go because by that time there was fear that Jewish men would not be permitted to leave Syria. I went with my sister Rachél, married to Ya'cob Hazzan. Rachél was friendly with her neighbor — the Jábbris, influential Christians. It was agreed that Mme. Shukria Jábbri would say that the furniture had been bought, yes, from Jewish neighbors, and it was being moved to the Jábbri summer home in the Lebanon mountains. To take us safely across the Syrian border, Jábbri took me and Rachel in his huge auto. Despite being stopped, and we were accused of being Jewish, Jábbri's importance and influence was made clear to the officials, and with his bluster and threats, we were finally released to continue our trip to Beirut.

We lived well in Beirut, life there was very nice. Elie did well commercially, too. He dealt in gold.

Life for the Jews in Beirut was peaceful and very enjoyable. Contrary to some opinions, the Christians there, the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox, were not truly without anti-Jewish feelings. They *appeared* to be very friendly, but in their hearts they continued to have religious hatred for the Jews — but were very courteous. The Muslims were less hostile, traditionally; however, when the P.L.O. came, some became less friendly. In fact, Jews, when they took summer homes in the Lebanon mountains it was never in Christian villages. The popular

Jewish resorts were ᶜAleh, Sofar and B'ḥamdoun; all were Druze Towns — Muslim.

Beirut's climate in the summer was not like New York's. It was very warm — hot. Fairly well-to-do merchants in Beirut would work only until a little after noon and then take a car to the mountains. Beirut's heat is very humid; in ten minutes of walking about, especially in the evenings, one's clothing would be dripping with perspiration. [See the biography of Murad Shᶜayo with a totally different report on Beirut's weather.] It was impossible to sleep because of the heat and humidity; the mountains behind the city cut off any breeze. Most of the year the weather was mild and pleasant. Life there was most pleasurable, *jan-neh*, a Paradise, for those with some money; especially in contrast with Ḥálab and its quietness. After six years there Elie decided for us to move to New York. There would be better educational opportunities for children, and better careers.

What a fine life I had. My husband loved me, spoiled me, all the years of our marriage. Although he died ten years ago, he is never out of my mind. I am comforted by my loving, educated children, Ḥezkel, Claude, Ralph, and Nina; Ralph is married to a cousin, Fortunée Ancona; they gave me two grandchildren. Elliot and Margo, named after Elie and me, of course.

Chapter Three

From Aleppo etc., Finally in New York

Sophie (Shafia) Ashkenazi — Born 1901 in Aleppo
In Arabic and English

"WHEN THE SYMPATHETIC AMERICAN CONSUL IN MEXICO WAS TRANSFERRED WE FOLLOWED HIM"

My father went from Aleppo to Mexico. This was the beginning for me of much travel. He went in 1908 — when there was no one there, maybe one Syrian — named Isaac. . . . I don't remember his family name; this man had been a schoolmate of my father in Aleppo. When the need to leave Syria became urgent — he was afraid of being conscripted into the Army (Turkish/Ottoman), he had decided to flee the country. Since his friend was in Mexico that decided him to go there — to Mexico City. No, I don't know how old my father was; he was married, with three children. But he left alone. It was a year later when he sent for us. He had married as a very young man — at age eighteen, he was young enough to be subject to being forced into the Army. We lived in an area called *Ḥarit-il-Chaweesh,* not far from the *Il-leh.* My mother's father's name was *Ḥakeem* (doctor). Our home adjoined the famous synagogue *Bet Nassi;* we had a small window opening on the synagogue, so that women could look in to see the Sefer Torah and say their blessings on Shabbat and holidays.

I'm not sure how old I was when we left. Maybe six years old, or so. Yes, I do know; the year of my birth — it was 1901. My father was "modern" [in English]. He had attended a *jamiᶜa,* a college, in Beirut. Some sort of sickness, plague or cholera, was rampant there and so they sent him back to Ḥálab. Soon after he saw my mother and married her. Yes, it was a *bazra,* an arranged marriage. My father's work? I'm not sure. He worked with his father, wait, I'll remember at what. . . .

My father was quite religious, he was not sure there would be *kasher* food in Mexico, so before he set out he learned to become a *shoḥet* (able to slaughter chickens according to Jewish ritual). There was "no one" there in Mexico, at all. We

didn't eat meat, only poultry. A few years later *Ḥakham* Selim Labaton came, he was a *dabbaḥ*, who slaughtered cows. He was a truly wonderful man. For the twenty or more years that he lived in Mexico he never took a peso from anyone for any religious service whatever, for marriages, divorces and circumcisions, everything. He did everything. There was no one in the world who did not love that man. His livelihood he earned by working, just like everyone else.

Only later there began a small stream of immigrants. When I married there were perhaps twenty. My mother had been the only woman in the community; only later the men sent for their wives and children. When the number of Syrians increased, the Aleppoans and Shawaam [those from il Sham, Damascus] each lived separately. The Shawaam were very economical, while the Ḥalabiyeh spent their earnings freely on their families. The Shawaam, if they earned ten centavos, they would spend one centavo — that's why they have become so very rich! [chuckle]. The Aleppoans wanted their families to live comfortably, so they spent all that they earned; they didn't hoard. They were separate communities. The Shawaam would not contribute to the general community. As many Shawaam came as Ḥalabiyeh. When I married, there were only three or four women among the Syrians, in 1916. All Jews lived fairly close together in the center of town then. [?]

I went to school, a Mexican school, when I came in 1909. I went for a year and then the schools closed because of the Revolution; Pancho Villa. . . a very violent Revolution, even bread was hard to find. . . .

When I married in Mexico I returned with my husband to New Orleans; my bridegroom was in business in Louisiana. He had come to Mexico to visit his aunt, married to Yishaq Dabbah; his aunt spoke highly of me and urged him to court me. My father however would not agree, until I would become *fifteen years old.* Two months later I reached that age, married Ezra Ashkenazi and went with him to New Orleans where he had his business.

This is how my husband had reached this faraway place. In Aleppo my husband had the equivalent of one hundred dollars — it is equivalent now to several thousand dollars. He

was sure that since he had to flee from the danger of army conscription, he could earn a *lot of money* in America. With the help of a maternal uncle in Aleppo, Shaᶜya Raffoul, he was encouraged to go to New York. When he got here he found that the usual work of the Syrians in New York was not to his taste, carrying heavy valises full of merchandise to be carried up and down the tall tenement houses; New York City peddling was not for him, he decided. It was suggested to him to find other fields. "Why don't we go to sell in the hotels, out-of-town?" They hired a carriage, my husband-to-be and his friends, loaded it with merchandise and set out to seek their fortunes "out-of-town." It was cold on the roads, and at the foot of one hill or mountain the horse refused to pull up! My husband later related to me that he began to weep at the predicament. "We can't live like this!" he said to his two partners. Soon, my husband with his good sense of humor suggested that they bury the merchandise. Somehow they dug a hole and buried their goods to be dug up at a 'later time.' They returned to New York feeling depressed, and discouraged at the chance of becoming rich in America. One of them proposed: "Let us go back to Ḥálab! Even though there is a war [World War I] we can somehow make our way to our homes in Syria." A friend discouraged this proposal. He said: "Look, Puerto Rico has a good market. Why don't you go there, you are sure to meet with success." [Mrs. Ashkenazi bursts into peals of laughter at the recollection.] Sure enough they went to Puerto Rico [more laughter]. There they were introduced to some people who spoke Arabic, and who sought to help them. They were given boxes, into which were put needles, thimbles, thread, etc. At the end of the work day they were invited to dinner by the Christian Syrians. What did they serve up? Pork, which was sliced, sprinkled with salt, which they were expected to eat raw. My husband and his companions excused themselves, on the basis of "upset stomachs" and fled, promising "to return early the next morning." Immediately they sought transportation and a few days later their boat docked at a lovely city. "What is this nice town?" they asked. "New Orleans, Louisiana," they were told. My husband and his companions, *w'lad ᵉeemoomo* [paternal uncles' children], set out to work in this location. No

one knew of it [no Syrian competitors], it was all theirs! Later others came. Joe Menasche Sutton and his relatives, Abraham Bigio and others came, and did well. There was a shortage of mercantile goods, but soon after the end of the war came a depression and, in order not to declare themselves bankrupt, they sold everything they owned to pay their indebtedness. He was again where he had begun! He had gone earlier to visit Mexico and to marry me when his finances were good; but now?

I did like New Orleans, a lot. It's true that it was somewhat lonesome, few other Syrians — but I liked the city, and adjusted somehow. I learned to speak English quite well. Only now, recently, when I had that serious accident, somehow the shock drove all my English out of my head! I spoke well, was able to do business, and I managed very well.

Later there were 16 or 17 Syrian families. . . We stayed in New Orleans about three years, and then went to Ilton, Georgia. How did this happen? Well, my husband was travelling on a train when it stopped at Ilton. In a conversation with a stranger at the station, my husband inquired if the man knew of a good business that was up for sale? Yes, indeed, the man knew of such a business. He told of a very fine man, a friend, who had just recently had a son killed in the war and who was most anxious to leave the scene, to leave the town. My husband met the man, liked the store. He told the owner that he was impressed with the business. However, my husband told him, he had no money; but if the man wished to sell — on credit? My husband would pay him regularly until the store was paid for. A bargain was struck. He was such a nice man and my husband took over.

In those days the government did not pay money as is done now, to farmers in need. The farmers of the area had no cash with which to buy their everyday needs for large families of twelve or fourteen persons. They bought on credit from my husband. When harvest-time came the farmers were paid directly by the bank from the proceeds of their crops. From that crop money, my husband's bills were paid. That's how we lived. My husband prospered. At that time, I had a young child who was ill with polio. I took the child for treatment in New Orl-

eans, but to my sorrow, the child died. That decided us to leave that farm town — just like the man from whom we had bought the store. We decided to go to Mexico City, where my husband began to work. What work? The same as all the Syrians, mostly peddling.

At the time we went to Mexico, I had two children, Saul and a girl; the others came later. I have seven children now, but I had ten children — three died. We lived in Mexico until 1936 and decided to go to the United States because of my husband's health. He had broken his hand and couldn't seem to improve; he developed *septesimia.* He suffered a lot, poor man, for a whole year. It was decided that it was necessary to amputate his arm to save his life. However, we sent an X-ray from Mexico City to relatives in New York who showed it to important doctors. They advised that he go to New York for treatment, that the diagnosis in Mexico was wrong. He went to New York and he was cured, just as they told him!

We wanted to join him in New York but could not get an entry visa. It was in the Depression, few people were being permitted to enter. I went to the American Consul many times in Mexico City — without success. Someone told me of an American Consul in another city, who was known to be sympathetic and kindly. I packed all my household goods and went to that town. It was a miserable period. The children were sick, my husband far away, recovering from his dangerous illness. But the kindly consul had been transferred somewhere else! What was I to do? Follow him! We went there, where I encountered a Syrian friend named Ashear. She told me that she had two American young women visiting her — two fine girls — non-Jewish. The two girls, orphans, had been adopted by an important American engineer; he brought them up. The girls took us to meet their father since "I was so fond of Americans." I met this man, and in conversation he asked about my family, etc. I related to him the sorrow and pain I was suffering, my husband far away, ill, the children not well. . . and that I was so anxious to join my husband and to live in the United States. I did not tell him of our being refused an entry permit by the American consul. However, he took my name and address and other details and said he "would see" what he could do with the

American authorities. He remarked that he had once eaten "a delicious pastry called baklawa, or something like that. Do you know how to prepare it?" Although I had never baked baklawa, I told him, *"I am an expert at it!"* I got some instructions, and, somehow, baked him a tray. He was delighted. Before long this wonderful man got us our entry permit to the United States! Saul, my oldest, had the amibition to become a physician; Ely wanted to become a certified accountant; how could we afford to give them the necessary education in Mexico?

Finally, we joined my husband and the family was reunited, but all the stress I had undergone had affected my health. It was recommended that I take the therapeutic baths at Hot Sulphur Springs. I took the cure for three months and improved a lot. By this time my husband has been persuaded that Houston, Texas would be good for business. He went there to work for the Christmas selling season, working with a brother of Abraham Bigio, whom he knew from New Orleans. They didn't get along too well, and my husband returned to New Orleans. Joe Menasche Sutton there, was quarelling with his wife and was eager to rid himself of his enterprise, which consisted of several stores. Sutton was prepared to sell the whole business to my husband on easy terms, since my husband had little money. My husband consulted me; he respected my judgment. What with Sutton quarreling with his wife, I saw that there would be endless trouble and advised against the deal.

Birmingham, Alabama was not too far from New Orleans; it was recommended highly by friends. We went there where my husband wanted to rent a store; I saw the store, a very nice spot. When we returned to the hotel, my children, whom I had dressed in neat, clean clothes, were full of soot and grime. Birmingham is an important steel producing city, always full of smoke and dirt. "Not for us!" I said. We went on, this time to Atlanta, Georgia. The store we took was a small one, which did not produce money enough to feed us. So he went back to Birmingham for a while, and then rejoined us in Atlanta. Charlotte, North Carolina was decided on, where we opened a nice shop. My husband went to nearby Winston-Salem, where he opened a store and where he stayed, while we worked in Charlotte.

Yes, the children did go to school, but with all this moving from city to city it was not easy for them. Saul gave up his ambition for medical school. He said, "Mama, just so long as you are obliged to stand on your feet working all day in the store, I too will work with you. We will all work with you!" Ely too refused to continue going to school, even though he was only thirteen. His teacher came to me, pleading to have him return to school — he "is so bright," she said, "it's a pity, a great pity." After a year or two he decided that he must complete his education. At that time there were only a few months to the end of the school year. Several schools refused to enroll him, but one did. At graduation when I went, he was at the head of the classes. A stranger entered into conversation with me and eventually asked my name. "Ashkenazi." He said,"Are you a relative of Ely Ashkenazi?" I told him that Ely is my son. "You should be very proud of him," he said. "He is so bright, so intelligent; I congratulate you!" Ely became an accountant after completing high school, but when he was offered a government post elsewhere, he refused to go. Later Saul took charge of the Winston-Salem store so that my husband could come to the family, in Charlotte.

Saul became a boarder at the home of the Jewish people who operated a clothing store next door. The man's son insisted with his father that "Saul is not Jewish," while Saul insisted to them that he certainly is Jewish. As Friday night dinner approached, Saul was promised a treat — *gefulte fish.* "What is gefulte fish?" Saul asked. [Much laughter by Mrs. Ashkenazi in telling this happening.] ...How much a person undergoes *m'shákal wa-m'láwan!* ["many varieties and many colors"].

After a time, we closed the stores in Carolina and came to live in New York. Why? It is true that we were living well, but that is not everything. What is "living?" My concern is with my children. Here my children could marry, and did marry Syrian Jewish mates. If we had stayed in the South, they might have married God knows who — gentiles! No sirree, [in English] I wanted to bring them where they could "take" [marry] people of our own faith, our own kind. We closed up and came to New York!

How old Saul and Ely were? I don't know exactly, perhaps eighteen . . . We came to New York during the war . . . [World War II.]

My husband became a partner of Joe Kassin. They did quite well. The boys worked with them.

At the time, 1942-1945, Ely wanted to volunteer for the U.S. Army. As one born in Mexico, the Mexican Government asked the Mexican-born living in the United States to hold themselves in readiness for a Mexican call-up. We were pleased at this; *maybe he could escape Army service?* But no, he went and volunteered, and entered the U.S. Army. Later he tore a ligament in his foot and was hospitalized for four months. Then they wanted to discharge him as disabled, but he resisted. They said they could not keep a disabled soldier and did give him a discharge. My husband and I were very elated. To celebrate, he and I went to Miami, for a vacation. Suddenly Ely appeared. "What brings you down here?" we asked. He intended to re-volunteer for Army service. We pleaded and argued, but we could not move him. Since Saul was home it was *his* duty to go! He joined the Army, and for two yeras we didn't know where he was. Later he told us that he had been in a secret station, in some intelligence capacity; he was in some highly specialized radar development.

How they married, Saul and Ely? Well, we lived in Flatbush next door to an Ashear family whose daughter Allegra, married a Mr. Isaac Franco. She had two lovely daughters, Sally and Grace, who frequently visited their Ashear grandparents. Ely became friendly with one of them. We urged him to marry her, and soon he did so. The other sister, Sally, announced, "I plan to marry Saul!" Her father was eager for this marriage and urged us to it. A few weeks later Saul and Sally were decided, and got married soon after.

The boys began a business in the Philippines; they dropped a fortune, *il ʿehnayeem* ["the eyes" — Hebrew] and gave it up. Upon their return to New York they were *bee-khab-beetoo* [tossing around]. At that time business conditions were difficult. I said to them, "My children, I want to go to work.

What is a possible business?" Ely told me that cigarette lighters from Japan and key chains from Italy were 'prospering.' I opened an office and imported. I wrote letters and sent samples and got orders by mail. It was not a 'bad' business. Saul, who had returned to Charlotte, came to New York finally and joined me in the business. Just around this time, my husband had died, to my deepest sorrow, and a married daughter who had been living with me, moved out of the city, which added to my feeling bad. . . . So Saul relieved me of the burdens of business. Soon he began to import radios, Ely joined him; the business went well. [Desirable shares of their company were voluntarily withdrawn recently from the American Stock Exchange!]

I must tell you, I *like* to work. Even after rearing seven children and marrying them off, I had been happy to work.

Mrs. Ashkenazi appeared eager to recite the names of her children and their offspring. Son Saul married Sally Franco. Their children are Carole, married to Dr. Edward Sutton; Joyce, married to Jack Kassin (and like Saul and Ely, two of her children married siblings). Joyce's brother Ezra married the sister of Jack Kassin — Sharon Kassin: Lisa is unmarried at this time.

Son Ely married Grace Franco. Their children are Ezra, married to Debbie Esses, Isaac, married Shelly Cohen, Sheffie, (Shafia) married Leon Cohen. Ronald married, Shafia; David and Allegra are unmarried. Mrs. Ashkenazi did not name the children of her daughters: Frieda (Hafif), Celia (Esses, now deceased), Julia (Chammah), Sarah (Hidary), and Ruth (Neḥmad).]

Now you have the story of my life that you asked me for!

[*'Sophie' Shafia, daughter of Farida, died 15 January 1984.*]

Sophie (Shafia) Ashkenazi's *Eulogy*, delivered by Ezra Ely Ashkenazi, her grandson.

It was a cold Friday morning, the ground was covered with snow, my grandmother could barely walk, yet she insisted on

going to Deal, New Jersey. Once she made up her mind, her children knew that no one could dissuade her. For her to leave home when feeling so ill was out of character, yet somehow she knew she had to go, for that evening she fell into a coma which lasted over a week. She revived briefly to acknowledge her family in farewell.

Upon arriving in Deal, 'Teta' [a childish abbreviation of "grandmother," in Arabic] wanted me to take her to the Hillel Yeshiva. With evident satisfaction she inspected the school, glimpsing for the final time, what she knew was the testimony to her success, for she understood that what her children achieved was *her* success. Their initiative had built the school.

While at the Yeshiva I witnessed an equally great testimony to this matriarch. As she walked by one of the classrooms one of her great-grandchildren spotted her. He immediately got out of his seat, headed toward the door, and exclaimed with pride, "She's my Grandmother!" He kissed her and returned to his seat. This respect, admiration, love and spontaneity is indicative of the feelings she inspired in members of her family.

Who was the unique woman who raised my aunts, uncle and father, who was loyal to her sister Tera Ḥakim and her brother Abraham Ḥakim. *ʿalav ha Shalóm* ["Peace to his memory"], a woman who nurtured men and women of high character and noble ambitions?

Firstly, and most important, she was a woman intensely devoted to her husband and family, both in poverty and wealth. Her family was her life. All of her talents and energy were channeled there. During times of severely limited means, even in rural sections of the South, she made certain her family lacked nothing, intellectually or materially. Besides providing them with love, discipline and proper character-education, she saw to their physical needs. She helped her husband in his business. She arranged to buy for pennies the milkman's surplus milk, making it into buttermilk and cheese; likewise from surplus fruit she made jellies and pies. There was never food lacking. Since clothes were too expensive, she would buy seemingly worthless fabric remnants, and with an uncanny artistic ability created fine clothes to dress her children with

dignity. Later in life she used these abilities to produce beautiful weavings, tapestries, needlepoint and table cloths for her loved ones, not to mention bassinettes for her newborn grandchildren.

It is truly amazing how this city girl of seventeen adjusted to the hardships of rural life, working in the field and milking cows, to feed her family. [In rural Georgia.] Yet despite this toil, when her husband came home he was catered to as a king. In fact, *she* was like a queen, and her family, loyal court-subjects. As a child I remember how she would gather us together on Occasions, preparing sumptuous feasts for us all. Her day never ended and I know of no one as self-sufficient as she had been. During her last years she suffered more from this loss of self-sufficiency than the physical pain itself.

My grandmother was a woman of intense loyalty. When as a young woman her husband, Ezra Ashkenazi, *ʿalav ha Shalóm* ["Peace to his memory"] fell ill and was in a coma for weeks, she would not leave his side. After coming out of his coma he remained an invalid for approximately two years. In order to care for him and support her family she sold her possessions piece by piece, jewelry, furniture, everything until he recovered. And, as her friends can testify, when Shafia Ashkenazi made a friend, it was for life.

The Gemarah [Talmud] states that one of the highest degrees of perfection is found in one who is *eḥad ba-peh e-ḥad ba-lehb*, which loosely translated means that what one speaks with his mouth, is what one feels in his heart. There was no such thing as flattery by my grandmother. She spoke with conviction and sincerity.

Because she cared for people, she was involved with them. She was a source of advice and a confidante to her grandchildren. Many sought her wisdom. As a woman of true foresight she knew her family's future was in New York, she spent years toiling in the South to save enough for her family to live respectably in New York.

She was a spokeswoman for her relatives no matter how distant. She relentlessly pursued my brother to obtain an apartment in the Deal area for a Kollel rabbi related to us, who commuted daily from Lakewood. She didn't let up until her wish was fulfilled.

What I found most amazing was her unique hospitality to those in need. When my grandmother was twenty, I was told, her sister-in-law died, leaving a teenage daughter. She brought this niece into her home and cared for her until the niece married. In her late twenties, with five children and one on the way, her husband's stepmother's nephew, a teenager, came to Mexico with no place to live. My grandmother brought him into her home where he lived as family for over a year, until he could gain entry to his desired destination — United States. In fact, during her life my grandmother invited nearly half a dozen single girls, most from out of town, to live at her home. For years she cared for them as if they were children, guiding them until she married them from her home. She would not give her consent unless she felt a potential groom was the right choice.

At the *beth avel* [house in mourning], a prominent member of our community told me of a moving event that happened to him. Approximately twelve and one half years ago, after recently suffering a terrible tragedy and loss, this man came from Lebanon with his three small childlren, and moved a few doors away from my grandmother. About one week later, in the early evening, the bell rang. He buzzed to open the door. He saw a woman of seventy climbing the long flight of stairs. Half way up she announced herself by saying; "My name is Shafia Ashkenazi, I'm your neighbor." He invited her in. She told him that she had heard that he and his children were newly arrived in this country and to please let her know if there was *anything* he needed and that her house was always open. If he required shopping, laundry cleaned, or anything else, she was available. Touched beyond words, this man began to cry. She hugged and comforted him and subsequently aided his family in many ways.

This man told me that he will never forget those acts of kindness and concern, that it was a breath of fresh air and a light, after so much darkness, suffering and loneliness. Some of my grandmother's children never knew of her aid to this family. How much more is hidden from us?

In seeking to recall her qualities I referred to a poem by the wisest of men, King Solomon, who wrote it in honor of his mother, a woman who constantly guided him in his develop-

ment. This poem, called *Eshet Ha-yeel* "A Woman of Valor," describes the perfect woman. [Proverbs 31:10-31].[*abridged, below*].

Aunts, uncle and father, please think back to your childhood, to your mother in her prime, a beautiful young woman and how she cared for you and your father, as I recite this poem which parallels her life in so many ways.

Whoever finds a valorous wife — far greater than her pearls is her value.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he lacks no gain.

She repays him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and linen, and works them willingly with her hands.

She is like the merchant ships, from afar, she brings her food.

She rises while it is still night and gives food to her household and tasks to her maids.

She considers a field and buys it; from the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard.

She grids herself with might and strengthens her arms.

She senses that her business is good, so her lamp is not extinguished at night.

She puts her hand to the spindle, and her palms support the distaff.

Her palm she spreads out to the poor and her hands she extends to the needy.

...She has no fear for her household because of snow, For her entire household is clothed with scarlet wool She makes herself coverings of tapestry, Fine linen and purple wool are her clothing. Her children rise, and make her fortunate Her husband praises her also, saying,

Many daughters have attained valor but you surpassed them all. Charm is deceptive and beauty is vain, a God-fearing woman — she would be praised.

Give her the fruit of her hand, and let her deeds praise her at the gates.

I pray to *Hashem* [The Sacred Name] that my grandmother's good deeds serve to praise her, Shafia *Bat* Farida, *ᶜAleha Ha Shalóm* [Peace to her memory], at the Gates of Heaven.

Esther ᶜAbadi (Mrs. Ḥakham Matloub) Born 1899
Interviews in Arabic and English

"EACH TIME MY FIANCE APPROACHED I RAN TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE ROOM."

One great characteristic of my late husband *Ḥakham* Matloub was his intolerance for hypocrisy and impatience for loud-speaking fools. He was so sincere and dedicated to truth. I am very proud of him; of the great respect and deep love in which his memory is held by everyone who knew him — or ever knew of him. *il-Marḥoom* ["compassioned" — died; Arabic], passed away fourteen years ago, yet he is still spoken of with greatest respect and affection.

I consider myself a part of the Syrian community in Brooklyn, although my father was born in *Trablos il-Gharb* (Western Tripoli), in Libya. He migrated to Palestine, and I was born in Ḥebrón. Libya was under Italian influence; my father spoke Italian fluently. In partnership with his brothers they had a very large business. His mother had a deep longing to die in Eres Yisraél. She told him that if he did not take her there she would never forgive him. He took his share of the business and resumed his commerical activity in Jerusalem. When my grandmother had died, since Palestine was a very small country commercially, and since he was a vigorous and able merchant, he moved to Beirut. A year there was not productive and so we moved to Egypt where we stayed eight or nine years. We lived "high-life" [in English], with a large staff of domestic servants and a private carriage. My father was a great friend of Isaaco Silvera, originally from Aleppo, who also lived there. A *crisa*, (economic depression) took place, commerce came to a standstill, bankruptcies became common, so he decided to return to Palestine, in order to conserve his capital; but not without strong protests from my mother. She knew how backward the standard of living was, compared to Egypt's. She didn't want to leave the fine life there. My father promised to

build her a residence "as fine, as comfortable and as modern" as she was now used to. "It will be as fine as in Egypt; I will install running hot-water, everything you have here. I have capital — which I don't want to lose here in Egypt." And that was the way it was. Visitors to Eres Yisraél would be brought to view our beautiful home. Our furniture was supplied to us by one of his brothers who lived in London. We had our own *Mikveh* [ritual bath]. My father did not return to active commerce like Isaac Shalóm [a New York merchant, philanthropist and activist in religious affairs]. He operated orange groves in Petaḥ Tikvá, at the same time that he kept real-estate holdings in Egypt.

He became increasingly a *ḥasseed* [most pious]. We had important rabbis in our home constantly. In one period he used to fast for *three consecutive days and nights,* and before he broke his fast he used to roll in the snow when it fell, and then, celebrate the Shabbat. ["No, you may smoke, pipe tobacco doesn't bother me"]. He was determined that his daughters, my sisters and I, would be wed only to "Ḥakhameem," rabbis. My sister married an Aleppo born rabbi, Ḥakham Shalóm from a local yeshiva; (Porát Yosé́f had not yet been built.) My father would not permit us to attend receptions, weddings; only those of most pious people. My sister's husband had formed a friendship with a young learned man from Aleppo, Rabbi (Shaúl) Matloub Abadi. His sister had died there; he came to Eres Yisrael to *yee-ghyyehr hawa,* get a change of air. Since Matloub Abadi was intelligent, handsome, very learned in Torah, as well as being generally well-informed, and unmarried, my brother-in-law brought him to visit us. I was about fifteen years old and very shy. I kept out of sight, and we barely glimpsed each other. My father was much impressed with him, and invited him to visit again. To get us to see one another, face each other, my father sent to ask me to bring him, while Matloub Abadi was in the room, a pair of scissors. Too shy, I sent them with a younger sister. "No" my father insisted, "I want Esther to bring them." And so we had a good look at one another. Soon we were engaged. Even then I was too timid to sit near him, I would sit at the other end of the room. When he came to me, I used to go to sit away from him. He remarked

about this strange engagement where the bride-to-be would sit at a distance from him! I lost my timidity and soon after we married. My father insisted on giving him a dowry, but it would be paid *only after two years of married life;* meantime the interest of the money would be paid to him.

When war began in 1914 they wanted to take my husband into the army. They didn't believe that he was exempt as a Rabbi; he had no beard, no turban. "If you are recognized as a Rabbi in Aleppo, go there" He went, leaving me behind, for a while. Later I joined him and we lived there through the war. He was a partime merchant of some sort and also teaching in a school (*Reshit Ḥokhma,* which closed), earning only enough to give us a very poor living. At the end of the war we received reports that commercial conditions in Jerusalem were very poor. This persuaded my husband to want to emigrate to America; and until he established himself in New York, I should wait with my three young children (Farida, Abraham and Adele) in my father's home, in Jerusalem.

Matloub was a very determined person; having made up his mind to establish himself in America, he had said he would go with — *or without me.* I decided to wait, in Jerusalem. He wrote me from New York about a modern life there, the ability to earn. After two-and-a-half years of separation I carried my children with me and came to New York.

In New york my husband Ḥakham Matloub, after considerable resistance, accepted a position in the Magen David Hebrew School, teaching Talmud, Rabbinic texts and grammar. At a salary of 50 dollars per week you can imagine that we did not live luxuriously. Matloub always resisted taking a position of Rabbi in the community; he wanted to earn money, yes, but not as an "official" Rabbi. With the salary that was not enough for our needs, with the five children we now had, he took to commerce for half a day; peddling? at I don't know what; and taught in the afternoon — at half his previous salary. Although other teachers fought for better pay Matloub quietly accepted what he was paid — until a very prominent member of the community suggest a *cut* in his salary. Then Matloub pointed out that never once had he demanded an increase, and when he was not paid sometimes until many months went by, he had not

complained, and at this point — he handed in his resignation. No amount of pleading by the many members of the committee could change his mind. Later when the Magen David Yeshiva was established he was most helpful, he gave them much time and advice. He went into importing merchandise from Japan, with sons Abe and Seymour to help him. He was modestly successful, and after a few years he withdrew, leaving the business to the boys. He employed his not-very-large capital in private banking, financing merchants who needed additional funds. In this way He earned enough to permit us to live in a respectable style.

At the same time he was a volunteer teacher of classes for young and mature men, in the study of Talmud, the writings of *Ha-Rambam,* (Maimonides) and other advanced works. He earned the respect and deep love of his pupils and disciples, and the highest respect of the entire community. "To accept a post as Rabbi? Never." He would lead, but never as a paid official.

At every turn he could be seen scribbling in his small handwriting on small scraps of paper — his observations on Torah texts. "With all your scribbling why don't you assemble them into a book?", I urged. he complained that with his characteristic handwriting in a Rash-like-script, no one could decipher them to put them into print! Moshé Faḥam, a friend and disciple, offered to help transcribe into the 'modern'-Yiddish script; Matloub would read out his text, Moshé would write it down. The book that emerged, *Maghen Baʿadi,* he published at his own expense, shortly before he died. He requested that I donate a copy to every Jewish institution and library, and when anyone came to buy a copy, to donate the proceeds to a charity. Everyone who knew him recognized him as a saint, for his fearless truthfulness, his sweet character and his unassuming modesty. I think that everyone will agree that we have no one that can compare to him. [*A generally accepted opinion.*]

My children have all married and live well. Frieda (Fritzi) the eldest, re-married happily, after a union that was not a happy one from the beginning. During the long absences of her first husband she began to work at ceramic art pieces. These

were very beautiful, and after she divorced, she began to sell them. From this she turned to painting, at which she has received a lot of recognition, with "one-man" exhibitions in New York, at which she is very happy. Adele too, married, "Jimmie" Sutton, a fine person with whom she leads a very satisfying life. The same with Evelyn and Seymour. Frieda has two girls, Annette and Esther. They each gave her two grandchildren. Abe has three fine boys, Charles, Steven and Michael. My daughter Adele and her husband Jimmy Sutton also gave me joy; they have Charles, ('Matloub') David and Lana — all have gotten married; Charles has Jimmie, Morris and Adele. Lana is the mother of four, Adele, Melanie, Jimmie and Nissim. Evelyn, my daughter, married to Morris Rahmey, is the mother of Joyce, Eileen, Jack, and Charles. *Her* Joyce has Jamie, Eve, Daniella and Albert. Does that tell of all my children? No, there is also my youngest, Seymour — he married Lily Cattan; he has three small children, Charles, Sandra and Esther. The name Charles was decided on as a substitute for my husband's name, the "Esthers" were named in my honor.

From my daughter Fritzi I learned to make and paint ceramic objects, a pastime which gives much pleasure and fills in the time — when I am not being visited by my very caring children and *their* children.

In the summer I spend some months in Deal at the home of one of my children. Soon I will leave for my yearly stay in Miami Beach. My hotel, the Saxony, is full of our people. It is a very lively scene; I have many friends with whom I pass my time enjoyably. *Barukh Ha-shem.*

ELI "Eliahou" Hedaya

PART TWO

"I HAD TO FIND HUSBANDS FOR HER OLDER SISTERS BEFORE I WAS PERMITTED TO MARRY MY FIANCÉE"

We arrived in New York in 1905, on a Sabbath Day. I was escorted on foot from Ellis Island to 188 Madison Street [!] on the Lower East Side. We were 23 persons living in that flat. There was someone named Sutton, two Mansours, Picciotto, Ezra Zonnana, Cohen, and others. Later, we moved to Monroe Street nearby, to two different houses; then to Hester Street ["where the elite lived," Mrs. Hedaya added] and then, later, some moved to the Bronx, but not many; very few. Yes, there were 'few' here in 1905 when I came to New York. There was Yúsef Chabbot, Yúsef Beyda, Yaᶜcob Beyda, Ezra Blanco; all were peddlers: also later, Ezra Zonnana, and Ezra Naᶜhem and others. 'Everyone' came to live with the family of Yúsef Chabbot, including Dahood Chabbot and his wife Marḥabba ("Hello") every newcomer. Yúsef Chabbot was to become my father-in-law, but much later. I paid Yúsef Chabbot $3.00 per week to lodge; this price included being fed on the Sabbath. At other times, I would eat in some luncheonette. There was no place to bathe in the house and so once a week we went to one of the many public baths, just as we had done in Ḥálab.

Nissim Bechar in New York was a great help to us Ḥalabiyeh. He was a "Spanioli" [from Jerusalem?] who used to stand guarantor (*yidmahn*) for us with Doctor Mendes to have him lend us a Sefer Torah to use during our own Sabbath Services. Doctor Rabbi Mendes was the head of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, uptown, with Rabbi de Sola Poole, his assistant. My father-in-law-to-be (ᶜammi), Yúsef Chabbot used to go around to collect a *minyán* for the services which were then held in his home.... There was a Menaḥem Lévy the father-in-law of the late Jack ᶜArama . . . .

Did I go to school when I arrived in New York as a boy of eleven? I went, for a very short time; then I went to night school for a while too, then I went to work. I used to buy supplies from Natan Labé, who was then on Washington Street, although Jewish. I would buy a dozen or dozen and a half 'pieces' at a time, which I sold as a peddler. Labé also brought 'pieces' from *Belgica* [Belgium], pictures, etc. [*tapestry*]. No, working at age twelve or so was common in Ḥálab. At that age a boy went to work to support, help feed the family, among the poor.

I lived for a long time with my *khal-ti* [my maternal aunt Garaz], mother of Shaᶜya and Abe Assin [Kassin — Qaaseen]. I paid her $3.00 per week to sleep, and eat on the Shabbat. The rest of the week I ate *ᶜala eedi* ["on my hand" — on my own]. I remember that there was a man ... in the mornings he sold milk and coffee, and *kaᶜik* also, something like Danish pastry, "ring-cookie"; Coffee *and* the "ring-cookie" cost 5 cents. For supper, sometimes, we went to a very religious Ashkenazi woman on Allen Street — a store, — a kind of restaurant, where we had our supper for 16 cents. Later we used to go to visit your father [this writer's father, A. D. Sutton came to U. S. 1909 — d. 1938]. On East Broadway — a number of us went to this restaurant for Shabbat meals (when we were only lodging, not "boarding"). We went there on Friday to arrange for our meals — to pay for them.

There was a girl by the name of "Yaffeh" [Jaffe?], who worked for a seller of "shirtwaists" on Allen Street, a lovely Ashkenazi girl, *adamiyeh* [well-mannered — of good family]. I went out with her for a few weeks; her sisters were married to some people on Canal Street — very *awadem* [well-mannered, etc.]. She and I used to 'walk' together; she knew that I was a "Partner"; we bought and sold silk shirtwaists too. I bought them from Ḥassoun. "Miss" Yaffeh was a friend of Mary Chabbot now my wife, and her companion Alice Chabbot, who married Isaac Shalom in 1916/1917. Miss Yaffeh would walk by and talk to me. Why not? I was a personable young man, and a partner in a going business. She and I would walk to "Philip Bond (?) and Norden." Sometimes it was to Chatham and Phoenix Bank, where we went to make deposits.

On Friday night, "we went out" — along with Isaac Esses, son of Abraham Esses [Isaac died with no male issue, but has a daughter, Mary]. I had a cane, a walking stick, which I flourished — I still have that cane. We went by bus — yes, by bus. How did I go by bus on the Sabbath? Well, I did! Yes, it's true that I was very Orthodox in my upbringing; I was a close friend of the not-so-religious nor religiously-learned Isaac. We would all ride on the open top of the 5th Avenue bus to go to Riverside Drive and later go for beer. I would then take the Yaffeh girl home. One night her mother got hold of me, she said, "Eli, my daughter is a very respectable girl; she doesn't run around — in fact she has never been 'out' with anyone else. This matter of going out on Friday night — Sabbath — this musn't be." I agreed not to do it on Friday night. They were living on Jefferson Street. You ask me if I kissed her or embraced her? Never! I never touched her. When I delivered her to her house, we would shake hands just before she went in.

After a time — when my sister Altoun and her family (Joseph Sultan, etc.) had arrived and settled in New York on Eldrige Street, I lived with them. Aunt Altoun said to me, "We are going to marry you off, you are now 20 [or 22 years] old." "Well," I said, "it will have to be one of the Ashkeknazeem [*East European Jews*], since there are 'no' Syrian girls." She said, "Look here, 'Liahou (Eliahou), what about that Chabbot girl — Mary — she is a *loul-yeh*, a pearl." But there was a problem. Mary had unmarried sisters — who were *older.* [*Custom did not permit a girl's marriage before that of older sisters. They would be thought to be "undesirable" — and perhaps remain unmarried.*] What was to be done to get her father to give in? I found husbands for each of her sisters! For her sister Frieda, I matched her with Yaᶜcoob Tawil — "Jack," another *mifles*, ["bankrupt," a peddler at that time]; also Abraham Gemal, he married Lizzie.

Gemal used to go to Old Orchard, Maine to open a summer resort store . . . I sold to him too, merchandise that none of the other Allen Street merchants — shop-keepers, had — or knew where to get such merchandise like my stock. It was goods I used to buy from Ḥatem and Ṇahass — Christians, *ᶜah-reh-leem*, — uncircumcized. The other Allen Street merchants,

Arazi, B'racha and others didn't know about these sources. There was also Salvator Bunan, who carried silk shawls, which we bought from him. Later we bought from Kohen, who had been Bunan's partner, also, still later, from Albert Zerah.

You want me to return to my marriage? Mary was still very young. She had not yet begun to go to work — she may have been sixteen or so — and I was 25 or 26 [?] years of age. There was a rabbi Maieer Vaknin [*circa 1916-1918*]; Vaknin was here as a *shaliyaḥ* from Tiberias, but was prevented from returning until the end of World War I. When her sisters married, I became engaged to Mary, after I asked her if there were any young men who compared to me, "as good as I am," for quality. There were several other young men "standing by," interested in Mary, Selim Sutton [the author's brother who had come with my father], there was also Gabriel (Jabra) Haber, and also his partner Marcus (Lala).

I was rich; a merchant; when it was agreed that I marry Mary, *Ḥakham* Maieer Vaknin was commissioned to seal the *bazrah* [the negotiation, as in bazaar]. He carried the official offer, and performed the *'in-yan (qinyan,* the ritual promise). I had arranged with Mary that if everything was going well, if she agreed to the engagement . . . she was to telephone me at my store, since I was very busy on Sundays particularly — "and I would answer her."

I was then a partner with Ruben; the firm was Ruben and Hedaya. We sold large quantitites of merchandise. I had bought a big lot of goods from Mazawaya Co. — a big lot of "Chinese" kimonos. We didn't know that Mazawaya was having financial difficulties. At first I bought 50 pieces at $3.00 each. He told me that he had additional stock; I agreed to buy, at $2.75. I told him that I would pay him "C.B.D." Cash Before Delivery. I sold the Kimonos at $3.50 each. I bought an additional 400 to 500 pieces, and before he shipped part of the order, I sent him money. I always had $500 in advance payments. It was beautiful merchandise I bought from him — *bit-jan-en* ["enough to drive one *crazy*"]. Later I secured kimonos worth $20.00 each, which I bought at $11/12. I sold them at a "full dollar" profit [double?] . . . Yes. I had told Mary to telephone me, if I had persuaded the 'girl.' Although I had been a boarder in their

home for a time, she was just a child then — I didn't know her too well... *(Mrs. Hedaya:* "Eli, who came and went — who is *he?")* She telephoned me. I asked, "Who is this?" She said, "Eli, you have a very distinguished, beautiful voice." I knew then I was 'sold', with her.

The truth is that I couldn't believe my luck . . . so beautiful. I bought her a silk dress, real silk; then I bought her still another dress; no, it was not *j'hehz,* a trousseau, they were for her to look nice — beautiful! After Sabbath dinner Friday nights on the East Side, I used to travel by train to the South Bronx where Mary lived then. It required three trains to get to Avenue St. John. I would take the 2nd Avenue and 3rd Avenue elevated trains and change at 149th Street [see the sixth "Family History," in *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush,* for details of travel to the tiny Bronx Syrian colony there]. Then later, I would return to the East Side.

One time I was taking her to a "show," a movie, in the Bronx; no, it was not the Empire Theater, it was something even more grand; yes, yes, it was the Loew's Prospect Theater on Prospect Avenue. But my father-in-law-to-be, Yúsef Chabbot, could he entrust her alone to a young man not yet her husband? He sent along a chaperone; one evening it was Abraham Gemal (Chabbot's son-in-law). We went — he in one direction and Mary and I, in another; after all I was eager to have some privacy, so that I could steal a kiss. She was *bit-jan-en,* "crazy-driving," so beautiful. It is now 63 years that we are married. Another time we had tickets to a "show" but my father-in-law would not permit us to use them since it was the Sabbath . . . we gave the tickets to Julius, Mary's very young brother — we threw the tickets away [!] and I stayed to play *tawleh* [backgammon] with her father. I would telephone her — and come and go to the Bronx. One time the Chabbots were spending the summer in Bradley Beach [*even then, 1916/1917*], where they lived on Main Street, a commercial area. One day I rented a horse and buggy there, and went to Shore Road. There was a terrible rain-storm, the horse became wild, and I had a hard time getting Mary home.

We were engaged for 5 or 6 months — until I could get her trousseau made — I was rich — her father was poor. There was a dressmaker on East Broadway who specialized in trousseaus; I bought her beautiful Cheney Brothers Silks. There was also a man by the name of Seigel; he bought and carried these materials . . . one material more beautiful than the other . . . .

It was expensive *but oh, so beautiful . . .*

We had the wedding on 2nd Avenue, a very high-class place; Tuxedo Hall. There may have been 700 persons at the wedding. [?] Why we didn't hold it in the Grand Street Hall? The 2nd Avenue location was much nicer; the Grand Street Hall was the usual place for Syrian weddings; on Grand Street corner Allen Street, across the street from Daniel Jones Furniture building. What was served after the wedding ceremony? — what was *not* served! *m'labbas,* sugar coated almonds, marzipan, etc., etc. They were made by ᶜAdes — a *chalbakchi,* who specialized in wedding catering [a *confused recollection? ᶜAdes was recognized* as *The* wedding *caterer in Aleppo. No mention by any other informant of* such an ᶜAdes in New York].

We settled in a flat on Delancey Street; "very expensive"; corner Clinton Street, number 588 Clinton Street [!] on the 3rd floor. I gave her a maid, a white girl — I paid the maid $15 per month, sleep-in; she slept in the "front," [the 'salon' or sitting room] of the apartment.

When did I become an importer? After I had changed from Ruben and Hedaya to a partnership with the well-known businesman, Ezra Sitt. I travelled to Japan with Ezra Sitt, we imported kimonos. What we bought in Japan at $11 each, we sold for $50. For the partnership with Sitt, we were each to put $15,000 as capital — he put $18,000. Sitt had a connection in Japan — a buying agent, a Syrian Ḥalabi ("ibn-ᶜArab"). We bought "Mosaic" [drawn-work, and embroidered] table-ware, which cost $190. (per dozen) which we later sold for $15/16 (per piece). Later, Sitt dissolved our partnership — he chased me out — he said, "Your capital is all lost." Joe Betsh, another well-known international merchant and friend of Ezra Sitt, was also around then... [See the oral history of Sitt's son.]

I went out with nothing, what was I to do?

When I had become partner with Sitt I went to Yokohama, Tokyo and Osaka. Sitt and I had also bought a quantity of shoe-laces. The vessel nearly sank with our goods. Fortunately, we had been insured and collected $4,000 to $5,000 for water-damage. Sitt took this money. The damaged merchandise was about to be auctioned off; when the experienced auction-buyers saw a strange, an unfamiliar face, me, they increased the bidding [a common practice to discourage away 'non-syndicate' buyers]. *I let them out-bid me.* But they didn't really want that merchandise. After the sale ended, they approached me, eager to dispose of the unfamiliar merchandise. Finally I agreed to buy it at a very, very low price, for $300 or $400 or less. Sitt, my partner-then, and I took the merchandise to our store and found that only the top layers had become wet, the rest was perfect. We made an awful lot of money with this goods; but later "we lost money," as I told you, Sitt put me out, cleaned-out. Sitt was highly educated, known over the whole Syrian world — Manchester, Buenos Aires, etc., in Syrian commerce. He was highly experienced, very clever. Who was I? A 'boy'; and Sitt told me that I was cleaned out. I offered to join other existing businesses and although I was experienced and knew of sources for merchandise I did not succeed in being accepted.

At this time, my brother Selim had come from *Mexique* [Mexico, in French] also with no capital — except a trunk-full of baby dresses, carriage covers, etc. In a whole month he probably sold only $600/$700 worth of goods when he went about to retailers selling his goods.

Farḥood and Iteht [?] Christians, used to import Madeira embroidered goods. They were from Aleppo, very friendly and courteous. Shaᶜya Shalom and Ezra Ḥazán and others — [Shaᶜya was on Orchard Street] they lined Allen Street — including David Ruben. The Allen Street merchants were short of table napkins to match table-cloths. Baloutine, Naḥas Marᶜash and Farhood and Iteht gave me samples of napkins, and of baby clothes. I took these to Allen Street where I was able to sell quantities to the Jewish Syrian merchants. I made a profit of 25¢ or 50¢ a dozen since I had to have quick cash, to be able to pay for my purchases.

There was a man, the son of Shimwehl Tawil, the father of Maeer, he bought napkins from me, 12", 13" and 14" napkins, also baby pillows. Abdo Mizrahi, Araazi, Yiṣḥaq Beracha, Ezra Beracha, they also bought from me. I wrote "head-checks," advance-dated checks, although I had "10-day" terms — in which to pay. I would take what cash I collected and paid before due-date; I would get a small discount for this. And so I built a fine name, a fine reputation with my suppliers... Samara Bros. (Joe) Dweck and (Joe) Hafif, partners, were outstandingly successful in dealing in Madeira embroidered goods from the same sources as mine. Dweck travelled to Madeira. I used to buy baby dresses — 150 dozen at a time, and with the better credit terms that became available "10 E.O.M." [10 days after the End of the Month] I had money available to deal in larger quantitites, and even, I had a substantial balance in the bank. With my brother, we became Hedaya Importing Co.

At 180 Allen Street [!] a block from the Syrian commercial center, a skirt-maker a 'Spanioli', was about to move from his large store. We bought the lease from him for $150 and with the installation of fixtures and the Holmes Electric Burglar Alarm System, we set up, my brother Ezra and I. Ezra sold to his customers articles at $1.75, which I was able to buy at only $1.00. In a short time, between cash on hand, accounts receivable and inventory, we were soon worth $16,000 to $17,000.

I borrowed $1,500 from my uncle, to increase our cash. A very good source of merchandise, Marᶜash on Washington Street [Christian] was very skeptical, tight in extending credit. At that time, in the beginning of the Depression, merchants were going bankrupt left and right, especially on Allen Street. He was ready to give us credit. Samara, too, had beautifull quality embroidered Philippine nightgowns, 96 x 100 [?] count to the square inch; I would buy by the 100's of dozens. One time Samara shipped us 500 dozens of nightgowns. Many on Allen Street 'experienced' fires — as well as bankruptcies. A dubious Washington Street Christian merchant visiting customers on Allen Street was dismayed by what he saw. When he visited our store, I showed him a stack of checks we had prepared, in advance of due-date. He said, *"Wa'Allah,* [by

Allah], Mister Hedaya, you can have everything in my stock, to the last thread!"

Where to unload the merchandise? The Boardwalk at Atlantic City had a number of busy linen-stores, some operated by Jews, some by Christian Syrians; Madeira Lace Shop was Jewish, Sirgany was Christian, with many others like them. Not all were reliable credit-risks; there were many bankruptcies, whether genuine or contrived. Many stores sold their goods at auction [high 'orchestrated'], where they moved large quantities of merchandise. The auction was like an entertainment before T.V. days and the popularity of radios. The hundred seats or more, were regularly occupied by older vacationers to listen to the joking, and affable show put on by the auctioneer. Earlier in the session, a small handful of elderly persons were paid to sit, and thus encourage others. But just the same, wholesalers were reluctant to sell to these stores. A sale I made to an Eli Greco(?) resulted in a loss of $500 due to his bankruptcy. Finally he settled at 30 percent, to go back to business.

The Washington Street importers would not consider selling to these stores. I was on the spot; selling cheap, *but on cash terms.* I would take this money to pay almost cash to merchants who were hungry for buyers and so I could sell cheaply enough to permit me to sell at prices below the market. I built a "big name."

Shaᶜya Shalom did his own importing from China. [See *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* for a short biography of this colorful, inventive merchant.] Leto Hamwy was Shalom's partner, resident in the Orient. Joe Ashear worked for A. D. Sutton & Sons [the business owned by this writer's father and two oldest brothers]; their enterprise in the Orient was not, at first, a success, Ashear left them and came to be a partner with us in the direct importing. He left on a buying trip to Europe and managed to lose the entire capital of the enterprise! We urged a new arrangement with him that would allow a somewhat greater share for us. Agreed; his brother went to China as the representative but the merchandise that came was ugly, the wrong assortments, bad coloring . . . . Joseph Ashear left to work for I. Shalom & Co. where his efforts were quite successful. He stayed with Shalom for years, until he

established his own successful business with his own brothers, importing handkerchiefs. There were 110 mostly Syrian houses importing handkerchiefs before Kleenex became popular!

Meanwhile, with bad merchandise, and other problems of the Depression we had hard times, even compelled to sell at retail, to realize day-to-day household needs. Brother Selim, and later, brother Isaac, went to the Orient for the enterprise. After the difficulties, we began to see good times, with styling that no one could match, and thus thank God, we were once again restored to success.

[Attempts to resume the interviews later were brushed away by Mr. Hedaya. He had remembered his business rivalry with this writer's family — and some antagonism. Soon after Mr. Hedaya died; with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren — a patriarch; a leading member of the community.]

Gabriel Sheḥebar (Cheḥebar) Born 1917 Cairo, Egypt
Interviews in Arabic, French and English

"*BARUKH HA-SHEM* [BLESSED IS HIS NAME]. FROM CAIRO'S NASSER TO CUBA'S CASTRO, AND AT LAST TO THIS BLESSED COMMUNITY"

It was my father, Abraham, who had left Aleppo for Egypt in 1906. My father married three wives; no, not simultaneously; the first two had died! Now people marry as many as six wives — but not officially. He was one of six brothers, several of them went out of Syria to different locations. They had heard of better commercial opportunities "outside." One went to Buenos Aires in Argentina, another to New York, Eliahou; and my father who went to Cairo, Egypt, where I was born.

When my father came to Egypt, he was a peddler carrying a bundle and wandering through the Egyptian villages selling to

the *fellaḥin,* the peasants. It was a trying, a difficult life for him. We were nine children, young children, my father's responsibility to feed and clothe. When it came to the Sabbath — he would 'sell himself' to have a proper *Shabbat.*

We went to the school in the Sabeel area. It belonged to the *Communite' Israélite,* which operated many schools. There was also the Alliance schools, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle.* I attended there too, after I had graduated from the Sabeel school. That is where I learned to speak French so well, like everyone else in Cairo with an education, in earlier times. After secondary education equivalent to American high school, many attended the *Collége des Fréres,* [college of the Catholic monks] Such schools were the only ones available for higher education where they could study professions, etc.

I attended school a full day, and late in the afternoon I attended the Talmud Toráh for religious studies. The regular school had an hour or two of Hebrew studies, but in the late afternoons it was to the Hebrew school. We went to school 5-½ days, half a day on Sundays. Yes, we children played — on the streets, when we had time. We played football (soccer) with a ball made out of old stockings.

On Saturday night, a group of boys went to the City. Girls? No; sometimes with one of my three sisters. I was more interested in play, games, my 'gang'. Some of the older boys did go to the "red light district," but not we. My father was a 'rabbi'; we went with him always, to early services. On Saturday mornings we went at four or five o'clock for extra readings before the prayer service.

In Cairo we used to pray in a *knees,* a synagogue named after Nissim Ashkenazi. Later there was a Ḥálabi synagogue named *Ahava ve Aḥva* in our Daaher Quarter. The area is where many Jews lived, of every nationality, many French, Greeks, Turks, Italians, Ḥalabiyeh — and many old-time Egyptian Jews. We have a synagogue in Cairo, the "*ibn Ezra,*" which is more than 900 years old, "from the time of Ezra the Scribe" [*G. S. is confusing two Ezras — in this instance separated by 1400 years*]. Today tourists to Cairo go to visit this synagogue. When I went to visit Egypt recently I visited this synagogue. Before, we had thirty synagogues. now Cairo

remains with only ONE, the only one that is functioning — and it can gather a *minyaan,* with difficulty. There is no kosher food.

In Egypt, each synagogue did not have a "rabbi." There was the Rabbinate Center — the *Ḥakham-Khana.* It supervised all the city's synagogues. If a *kniss* lacked something, the *Ḥakham-Khana* would see to it.

The religiousness of the other Jews in Cairo? There were so many kinds — Italian, Polish, Greek, Egyptians, French . . . it was the Syrians, especially those of Aleppoan origin, who were, the most religious. Yes, there were Zionist activities in Egypt, among the 100,000 Jews in Egypt. They started before the war (1939-1945). I was not active in them, although some of my friends were. The Syrian Jews were not very active in these circles. Somehow the other Egyptians Jews were more 'broad' in their interests. There were many such groups which were very deeply interested in political Zionism — and *Sión.* They were enthusiastic about everything Jewish-Palestinian. The Syrians were satisfied to be sympathetic — and religious.

All the Jews worked, either in their own enterprises or else in the employ of large enterprises, Jewish and non-Jewish owned. Yes, there were many who had very modest positions; there were some poor Jews, too . . . . Unlike New York, Jews in Egypt formed a part of the more educated class, compared to the majority of the Muslim Egyptians. So, many advanced as executive employees when they did not own the enterprise — and many more were clerks and so on. While the Syrians — and in particular the Ḥalabiyeh made a decent living, almost all of them, they were not the outstandingly successful. Yes, there were a few who were notably successful, but on the whole Syrian "took a back seat," compared to some of the other Jews. However, as to their position in the country, Jews had been highly regarded and were looked on with — what shall I say — affection, by the authorities and by the populace in my days [*in the mid-and-late 19th century some anti-Semitism had been wide spread*].

I left Egypt in 1957, after the Suez War of 1956. All the Jewish enterprises had been closed down in 1956, seized by the Egyptian Government. I fought hard to repossess my property

and after four months I succeeded, because my nationality was Egyptian; something that very few Jews had; large numbers had clung to the nationality of the country they had come from. It had given them a "special status," and protection. That is how I succeeded. I had a very important lawyer who helped me, a very influential lawyer. He had been the law professor of most of those officials who were given the responsibility over important businesses of Jews. They had taken over the enterprises of the Jews, confiscated them, and employed their former owners as salaried workers. When he visited one of these confiscated enterprises, all of the officials greeted him with respect and deference. It was because I had Egyptian nationality that he succeeded. I had to send to Aleppo, Syria for documents, to help establish my Egyptian nationality. That was not easy, I can assure you. Many weeks were required before I received documents, proof of Syrian birth, etc.

Meantime in the four months my business was closed, it ran down seriously. People who owed me money didn't pay their bills, and I did not dare sue Egyptians; I had to keep quiet. Later to be able to leave the country, I had to leave behind everything I owned. In addition I had to satisfy the authorities that I had paid everyone — including government taxes, in order to receive an exit visa. Otherwise, there was "no difficulty." The Government wanted Jews, all Jews — to leave the country.

I left everything behind; I had a good business in whole — saling textile materials, with three branch-stores. On 29 October 1956 the stores were closed overnight. In the morning I went to my store to see a group of soldiers at my door. I asked their chief, "Why is my store closed?" He said that it was "Government Orders," because I was a Jew, and Egypt was warring against the Israelis. I dared not open it because they put a seal on the doors.

Let me tell you about the nice life we Jews had in Egypt until 1932-1933; the Jews were very well liked by everyone, by the populace as well as in government circles. Many Jews had high posts in the government. They were particularly well liked in the Royal Court, by King Fuad; and later by his son Farouk. Some Jews were his constant companions and fellow poker-

players. Others were titled, Pashas and Beys. With the rise of Hitler to power, the German government began to send secret — and not so secret — agents. They infiltrated the newspapers and other publications in order to undermine the British government's influence — which ran the Egyptian Government through a High Commissioner. They bought editors and writers and supplied funds to the fanatic Muslim Brotherhood. Earlier, there were no anti-Jewish manifestations, only quiet propaganda against Jews — and vociferous anti-British agitation. Since Jews in general did not mix in politics, no one molested us, and we continued to lead quiet lives, busy with our many enterprises; some were nation-wide enterprises. (Jews were important factors in the enormous cotton trade, in rice, onions and other commodities.) The most important department stores, Cicurel, Sidnawi, and others were the family properties of Jews. In the 1950's Cicurel's stores were put to the torch three times. The stores continue to this day under the Cicurel name, as the most important shops — but no longer owned by them. While life for the Jews was quiet then, yet there was an increasing undertone of uneasiness.

In 1955-1956, the famous head of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Flatbush, Rabbi Kalmanowitz, sent an emissary to Egypt, a Rabbi Shoskis, with the mission of taking out one hundred young Jews, aged sixteen to eighteen, to train them (as rabbis?) He went to Nasser, who agreed to permit twenty-five young men to go, after much negotiations; Nasser did not want to release one hundred, for fear of unfavorable propaganda, that "Jews are persecuted," etc. My son was only fourteen years old and Rabbi Shoski did not want to acccept him. "My orders," he said, "are to take no one younger than sixteen." The reason I was eager for my son to go was not because I wanted him to be a rabbi, although we were, and are, quite observant Jews. It was because much anti-Israeli sentiment had developed. Since my son was strong-willed and resentful of anti-Jewish remarks of some of his classmates in the "Colleges des Fréres" (Jesuit monks), he got into many fights. Sometimes he returned home with blood on his face and clothing. I was afraid for him; some day he would get into a fight with a nasty gang of Jew-haters and could even lose his life. But Rabbi Shoskis could not be

induced to take him out in spite of every persuation I used. In desperation, I telephoned from my house in Cairo to Rabbi Kalmanowitz in Flatbush, to the *Mirrer Yeshiva*, to explain the danger to my son's life. (I spoke to him in Hebrew.) I told him that taking my son would not cost the *Mirrer* a single piastre; I was ready to assume the expenses. He agreed, and my son was one of the twenty-five youth who left. He is my oldest son, Albert.

Although my wife, Marcelle, had agreed to sending Albert out of the country, she soon had her regrets. She missed him so much. Day and night she wept because of the separation. Even if we wanted to bring him back, we could not do it. Once a Jew left Egypt in that period, he could not return. His passport was confiscated and he was "written off." They would give the person a "*Laissez Passer,*" a travel document marked "To go, only, without return."

In spite of my growing and prospering business after the Suez War, we decided to try to join my son in the United States. However, we could not get an American Immigration visa, in spite of every effort I made. I applied then for a tourist visa, to visit the U. S. in order, at least, to see our son. No success. Since the American Consulate knew of my application for an immigration visa, they thought that I would arrive in the U. S. with the intention of staying. What could I do? I was desperate because of my wife's eagerness to be reunited with her boy, even though thank *Ha-Shem,* I had three other sons and a daughter. But it was Albert with whom she had to be reunited. Well, since I had a brother who had left to settle in Cuba, in 1948, I decided to go there, closer to my son, and perhaps we could get to see him in New York, en route. I applied to the Cuban consul for an immigration visa to Cuba, which he agreed to, without difficulty. To get to Cuba it was necessary to pass through New York. But the American authorities refused to give us a Transit Visa because of my earlier application for an Immigration Visa! Thanks to the great friendship I had promoted with the Cuban consul, he went with me to persuade the Americans to grant the Transit Visa. On the strength of the friendly relations between the Consuls, and with

the signed "guarantee" by the Cuban that I would go on to Cuba, a Transit Visa was granted finally for the familly.

We arrived in New York and saw my son. We found him in tears, very unhappy with the unfamiliar surrounding and life at the Mirrer Yeshiva; every one with *péot*, long sideburns; with the *Iddish*, no entertainment, no movies allowed, etc., with strange unfamiliar food he had difficulty in eating ". . . everything prepared with sugar." He said, "Poppy, I beg you to take me with you to Cuba." I replied, "*ya sidi*, (my 'lord'), stay here until we settle in Cuba, begin to work and establish ourselves, then you can join us." I engaged an important immigration lawyer to see if he could arrange somehow for our staying in the United States. No success; since we had entry available in another country — Cuba, we could not benefit from consideration as refugees, as some others had done.

My brother Joseph had left Egypt in 1948 because of what had happened to him in Cairo. In a violent Muslim Brotherhood demonstration directed against Israel — and Jews, somehow he was seized, "Here is a Jew!" and was severely beaten, injured. He was so deeply affected that he left the country immediately after, to settle in Cuba. After considerable hardship there he managed to establish himself, with some success. When I arrived, I found him shipping large quantities of alligator handbags to the United States. He collected skins from all Cuba. It was a good business; he had to work only one day in the week. He greeted us warmly, he was so very happy to see us after the long separation. We were in Cuba barely two weeks when, unexpectedly, his immigration visa to the United States was approved. He had been waiting for it nine years! His wife was anxious to leave without delay, to join her family and cousins — the Shalams in New York. My brother encouraged her to leave — without him. "My brother and his family have just arrived to live here. I cannot leave until I help him to become established, to find a means of earning a living for himself and his family." *Il ḥazeet*, the poor fellow, he stayed behind for a month and a half. He secured a home for us and furniture, since I had no means whatever; we had been permitted to carry out of Egypt only our transportation ticket

and $20.00 for each individual, in addition to small pieces of gold jewelry.

I must say that the Cubans are very nice people. They greeted all refugees who arrived there with warmth and even affection. My children were received into the best schools — without charge whatever. I went to the Israeli consul for help and advice. He referred me to several businessmen, but nothing came of that. Finally my brother succeeded in securing a position for me with a manufactureer of alligator handbags, who manufactured my brother's skins. He arranged for a $40.00 a week a salary and I set to work. Although I had not known Spanish, I managed to get along soon; my knowledge of French helped me to learn Spanish without great difficulty; and my children were in the best schools, the very best schools, as I mentioned. My daughter, after a fairly short time, her photograph appeared in the newspapers. "A refugee girl who was in a short time the most brilliant student in her school, even though she could not speak a word of Spanish when she arrived."

My employer, the Cuban — no, not Jewish, he caused me great hardship. My brother had insisted that he pay me the $40.00 per week, a large salary in the Cuba of those days, the average employee received eight or nine dollars — ten dollars was exceptional. My brother had told the man "I won't buy any more bags from you unless you pay him $40.00; what he deserves, because of his experience." This did not sit well with my employer; he felt obliged to make me carry heavy bundles of skins three floors up. This *ate me up;* I lost considerable weight, getting thinner and thinner; I became skin and bones. This work was not what we were accustomed to in Egypt; I had been the proprietor of three wholesale stores. . . . At the same time I *had* to work to live; I would not ask for assistance from anyone, even though I had affectionate cousins in New York who were "happy" [well-to-do]. When I returned home at night and my wife called me to supper . . . *"what supper?"* I wanted only to throw myself on my bed. She was so alarmed at my condition that she telephoned my brother in New York. "Come see your brother," she said, "something critical is going to happen to him." He came to Cuba immediately and when he

saw me he was shocked. "This is what you've come to, Gabriel?" He went to see Domingo, my employer, and turned on him in violent anger. "This is how you treat my brother who I left in your care? This is the end of shipping me handbags to New York. I will not deal with you anymore!"

In the course of my work I learned all the skills necessary to manufacture the handbags and in Cuba if I wanted 100 workers, I could find them easily. My brother told Domingo that he planned to establish me in my own enterprise. Domingo was worried, alarmed. He protested that he had taught me the business, that he had meant everything for my "good" . . . I asked my brother to find me a factory-location, and to endorse me for credit with his customary suppliers of alligator skins. I would manufacture the handbags and ship them on to him in New York; I no longer wanted to work for this man Domingo. My brother then suggested to Domingo that he take me as a *partner*, and that he would take our entire output. In brief, Domingo felt obliged to accept the arrangement, and life changed for me. I no longer had to do menial work, hard labor. I worked in the office and saw to the shipments, etc. The demand was so great that we had to enlarge our business and we had to ship our products by air.

Domingo was a spender; he spent all his profit on women and horses and drinking. I, on the other hand, lived decently but I saved much of my share of the profit. A point was reached when I no longer saw any benefit from the partnership and when my brother was in Cuba on a visit, he broke the news to Domingo. He told him that he had the choice of buying my share of the business or to sell me his share. Domingo was desperate. If he bought the business and I opened my own factory, he would surely lose my brother's patronage. If he sold out to me . . . where would he be? My brother proposed, and Domingo accepted, that he sell to me and take a job in my employ, that I would give him a generous salary. This worked out well for both of us. He was a most capable manager, and the workers were in awe of him. Then Castro came to power and passed new decrees. Workers had been paid eight to ten dollars a week; Mr. Castro ordered wages raised to $23.00 minimum; plus social security, etc. This was most difficult, if

not catastrophic. But somehow, by stretching rules a little, I managed to continue my business since my workers liked me a lot, all 36 of them!

In walking to the synagogue one Saturday morning, I saw a long line in front of a building. "What is taking place?" I asked. I was told that people were assembled to register for immigration visas to the United States. Without hesitation, I joined in line, and when I came before the official, he asked a few questions, names of members of the family, etc. He didn't ask me to sign anything. Weeks after, a disagruntled worker filed a complaint of some sort against me. The authorities set a date for an audit of my business records. I was deeply disturbed — what if some disagreeable official should dig up some triviality and make a grave charge? Who could know how Castro's government would treat a "capitalist" employer? Reason for much upsetting possibilities, possibilities which I did not welcome at all. Only a few days before the dreaded scheduled audit, I received notice that my visa to immigrate to the United States was ready! Rather than submit to uncertainties with Castro's dictatorship, I decided that we should leave the country. With only our suitcases, we left our home. "You have so many suitcases," a neighbor observed. "We are going on a long vacation at Varadero Beach," I replied. When finally we boarded a plane for the States, I breathed a sigh of great relief. What did I care about my business, my furniture, my home, in view of a possible entaglement with the Castro government?

Arrived in New York once again I was a penniless individual, but happy to be reunited in safety, with my relatives; no Nasser, no Castro. What to do to make a living? I had met a Charlie Serouya in the synagogue in which I prayed each morning. He directed me to a shopkeeper on Nassau Street, Jack Tobias. I spoke to him in Arabic, "Serouya, etc." When he first saw me, he almost immediately told me that he "didn't need anyone." Then he said he wanted a *young* man, one able to move heavy cases, a strong person. I urged him to try me out, if I did not do the work satisfactorily, he could send me away, without ceremony. "No," he said, "you will not do,

the store must be swept, errands must be run, someone has to go for coffee; it is not for you." I agreed readily to sweep, to run errands, to go for coffee. "Just try me for a week, I need the work!" Then he asked me, "Are you married?" When I admitted that I am married, he said "Goodbye, sir, you are not for me." Why, what does it matter? He told me he was looking for a young, single man who would be satisfied with $50.00 a week; "too little for a married man." "You are right, Mr. Jack, to suspect that a married man with several children would be tempted to 'borrow' merchandise during the week. However, I have a brother who provides me with $50.00 weekly. I can get along with a salary of $50.00. I can get along satisfactorily *until I am worth more to you.*" He said, "Do you know that the store opens at 8 o'clock in the morning?" *Ḥaader*, I am ready, I replied. Then he added that the work calls for six days a week. "I am ready," I told him, "from Sunday through Friday!" "Oh, no, it's from Monday *through* Saturday." I should have to desecrate my *Shabbat*? I offered to have him reduce my salary to compensate for not working Saturdays. My eyes teared. He had compassion and said, "Be here tomorrow morning at eight o'clock."

Where that morning I had followed Serouya's instructions and emerged from the subway with Tobias' store directly in front of me, the following morning as I came out of the wrong end of the subway station, the store was not there! In my broken English I could not find anyone to understand my request for directions to "88 Nassau Street." I was desperate, and finally, I wrote the address on a piece of paper, and got directions immediately. Tobias did not respond to my "good morning" and did not talk to me. What were my duties, what should I do? No word from Tobias. I set about to rearrange the rumpled stock, assorting colors and sizes neatly, wiped the showcases till they gleamed. All this time he did not speak to me; until at 10 o'clock he said to me abruptly, "Why were you late?" Six minutes late! I explained my difficulty with the wrong subway exit, and he then told me what my duties should be. "Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" "*Ḥaader!, Ḥaader!*" ["Ready!"]

One day Mr. Tobias pointed out to me a coffee shop down the street and ordered me to buy him "a container of coffee and

two. . . (?)" I ran hastily to get the container of coffee and . . ., what was that strange other thing of which he wanted "two"? For the life of me I could not remember the unfamiliar "two" objects. I was in panic, sick with frustration and worry. In any case I joined the line to buy coffee, still wracking my brain for that missing "something." Just before me in the line a man called for "coffee and two doughnuts." That was it! It was *doughnuts* that my boss had ordered!

Later, after other small difficulties I had completed my week of work and when he gave me my salary it was for the full $50.00. He did not deduct for the Sabbath when I would not work. In time I took over many responsibilities of the store; so that after a period he did not find it necessary to appear at the store for more that an hour or two. When I asked for a raise to $70.00 a week, he fumed and stormed, but yielded; and the same response, when later I told him I needed $100.00 per week so that I should not rely on outside help for my living. "If that is not satisfactory, there would be no hard feeling, I will leave at the end of the week, meantime you may want to look for someone else . . . ." I accepted the $90.00 he said that he could afford. At the same time that he promised me a "bonus" at Christmas. And in fact, at Christmas time he handed me $100.00 as a gift.

One time, I saw him in the company of visitors examining the store. I took them to be government inspectors and gave the matter no further thought. One day, however, he had other visitors, who spoke to him in Arabic; I was surprised to hear one of them say to Tobias, ". . .what's a couple of thousand dollars, be nice." When they left I said, "Mister Jack, are you negotiating to sell this store?"

My brother who had come to America long before me used to rent a retail store in the summer resorts, and one day had said, "Gabriel, I found a nice vacant store in Old Orchard, in Maine and rented it for you for July and August." What store, what Maine? I had no capital and did not speak much English. My brother said not to worry; he would select the merchandise for the shop, he would guarantee my credit, and as for speaking English, "Not to worry, most of the summer customers are tourists from Canada — who all speak French!"

How to persuade Mr. Tobias to my going for the summer? Well, *ya sidi,* for help during my Saturday absences, he employed a young man, a student. I suggested that Tobias would not suffer by my being away for two months; he could employ the student who would be on vacation anyway. My boss finally, after storming, gave me the "leave of absence." When I returned, after using part of my profit for my family's needs, I still had profit of $3,000.

"Yes," Tobias told me, "I intend to sell this store. These fellows are offering to pay me $27,000 in cash." What an opportunity for someone; but I had only $3,000. I approached him, to sell *me* the store. I would pay my $3,000 and give notes for the balance — and I offered to pay interest until the notes were paid. He laughed and laughed. Tobias knew of my involvement in the Egyptian congregation — and gave me money for it monthly. He was convinced of my sincerity and honesty — but with only $3,000? Finally, I *persuaded him;* since he was fairly wealthy, he did not really need the $27,000. He took my $3,000 and prepared 24 monthly notes for $1,000 each — *without interest!*

I summoned may son Albert who had gone to work in Boston — to run away from the Mirrer Yeshiva, although at first he was not convinced of the merit of the store. "Here is an American man, Poppy, experienced, etc., yet he wants to dispose of the store, how can we foreigners make it successful?" Nevertheless he came along, on the basis of each of us taking $100 per week. "Jack," I had asked Tobias, "do you think we can make the $200 each week?" He replied, "Easily." And so we were in business. Albert put in a small department of cosmetics and hair supplies in addition to the towels and sheets the store carried. He sold hair spray at a profit of only 5 cents or 10 cents a can. Soon the store was a "riot," so crowded with purchasers of hair spray. It didn't matter if they bought only hair spray, another time they would buy a scarf or a table cloth or a bed sheet. I won't prolong the story, except to say that in time we opened stores on Pitkin Avenue in Brooklyn and elsewhere. We succeeded in buying advantageously a building on Nassau Street facing our store and we continue to operate all these stores. Then we acquired the "Rainbow Shops" chain of

thirty-three stores; *Baruch Ha-Shem* [*Thanks to G-D*]. Soon they will number fourty-four. It is thanks to Him that we have been permitted to flourish. I stayed myself for seven years at Nassau Street.

I am quite pious, "*nas-ma-lah,*" and I established a Foundation for support of religious studies in Israel. There are now four *yeshivot* which I support principally and which carry my name. Thank God, they are successful; one is *Navat Yisrael,* another is *Makhon Ha-ketab,* headed by Ḥakham Ezra Bassri; another is headed by Rabbi Sam Kassin, previously called *Midrash Sepharadi.* Another was known as the *Avedani Yeshiva.* I have also rooms dedicated to me in other yeshivots. I am leaving to visit the schools in Israel, in a few days. They telephone every week pleading for more cash.

Our marriages? Well, *ya sidi.* I married Marcella Levy. Her family was from Ḥálab, they were neighbors living across the street from us in Cairo. I was blessed with five children — four boys and one girl. The oldest, Abraham ("Albert"), was named after my father. Then came Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Giselle. All married here in New York, mates they met in summer vacations in Deal. Albert married Joyce Misry; Isaac, a member of the Tebeleh family; Jacob married into the Bibi family; Joseph wed a Gindi, Giselle, my daughter, married a Ḥaber from Egypt. Except for Jacob, whose wife's family comes from Damascus, all the others married mates from families which originated in Aleppo.

I am very proud of my several grandchildren. Excuse me to give you their names. Albert has a Gabriel and Marcelle, named after me and my wife, also Edward and Michael. Isaac also has a Gabriel and Marcelle, as well as Adela. Jacob has a Gabriel, Marcelle and Isaac. Joseph also has a Gabriel and Marcelle; God increase his family. Giselle has a Joseph named after her husband's father; the second son was given my name; Minette, after her maternal grandmother, and David. If she has another daughter she will be Marcelle!

Shebaḥ La-El [Praise to the Lord], all live a good life together, *Allah Yitᶜam-hom ᶜimmir "God apportion them (long) life".*

Seleem Esses [ᶜEsses] Born in Aleppo, circa 1913
Interviews in Arabic

"AFTER CASTRO TOOK OVER I LEFT WITH ONLY THE CLOTHING ON MY BACK."

I don't know anything about the old-time East Side life, I am only here for 12 years — from Cuba. Many members of my family lived there — until Castro came along — and after a few years under his regime, I decided to leave. We hadn't gone to Cuba originally. My relatives had settled in Mexico City at first.

In Ḥálab, I was in the Midrash under Ḥakham Mosé Tawil, until I went to Cuba for a few years. Nissim Esses, my cousin, was there. First my two older brothers had joined my uncle in Mexico. He owed a lot of money. That decided him to move to Cuba.

I was seventeen when I left for Cuba. Ḥakham Isaac Sheḥebar, Ḥakham Sadeq Harari — they were my fellow students in the Midrash in Ḥálab [*Sheḥebar officates in Buenos Aires, Harari in Mexico*]. There were few Syrians in Cuba — Ḥanono, Esses and also Ezra Garazi; Ḥakham Eliahou Ḥusney was there for a while, then went to New York. My two brothers married here in New York, brides who came from Aleppo, one by the name of Sasson, the other daughter of Asher Antebi for a long time the Shamosh of the Synagogue. In the old country, he was a *sankari*, a tinsmith. He came to New York but returned to Aleppo after a couple of years — a long time ago.

In Cuba, I learned to speak Spanish; I knew Hebrew and a little French. No, I didn't attend the Alliance Israélite; a little French was taught in the Talmud Torah in the Midrash, about half-an-hour each day. It was a short man, a Mons. Ḥeres ['watchman'] who taught us French.

I returned to Aleppo to find a bride. I married a daughter of Signor Mosé Silvera, her uncle is Signor Eliahu Silvera — (also another uncle, Jacob, whose family remains in Panama). They manufactured cigarettes. I stayed in Ḥálab 2½ years or more. In Aleppo I tried to trade — without success, then back to

Cuba. I built a house, bought still another. I saved money; and buried it in a wall safe when Castro demanded a conversion of the currency to flush out hidden wealth. My paper money remained in the wall. Even now, there are $10,000 buried there. Some people went crazy because of the money loss. Those who turned in their money — gold had already been demanded earlier, they were allowed a weekly stipend by the government . . . . There was a limited amount of food — you could buy bread only with coupons. 1964 I sent my two sons to New York, the third stayed — after all we had a comfortable home, etc., and didn't want to give it all up. Finally, through HIAS, I got papers and we came to the U. S. Most Cuban-Syrians went to Mexico; I came to New York via Mexico, my wife's sister's husband is Ḥakham Sadeq Harari, my school-mate. I left Cuba with two shirts and the suit on my back, after all the years of work . . . . Even to enter Mexico in transit, was a difficult thing. Sadeq posted a 10,000 peso bond for us, about $1,000 U. S. [of that time]. When I came to Mexico, I was required to go regularly to the government to report — to assure them that I am not a Cuban communist.

I could find no work among the Syrians here in New York; they said that at fifty-four years of age I was "too old." But finally I did find work — a job sweeping, fixing the stock shelves, etc.

Zakieh Ashkenazi (married Dabbaḥ), she brought her family from Venezuela. Since her sons went to summer resorts for store keeping, I got a job with one of them in Bar Harbour, Maine; but it was not a success. After a summer or two, they closed up, and opened on 14th Street, in New York. I worked there, mostly watching against theft, etc. at $10 per day. I would not work on Saturdays, so that I didn't gain too much. After they closed their store, I worked for Al Dayan at $10 per day. Here too, I was fired; "no work." But my fellow workers rebelled — they said they would quit if I was fired, so I was taken back; until Dayan fired a *lot* of workers — me included. Then I worked at a discount store beginning one Sunday, at $10 per day. I was told *not* to report the next day, the job was only for busy Sundays! Soon after they employed me three days per

week. Then I left to work for *Khedriyeh, w'lad Khedriyeh*[, [the sons of Khedriyeh] for a few years. Now they have a store in Lawrence, on Long Island. I stood outside in the cold to watch for shoplifters. I would wear double layers of clothing to escape the cold. He agreed to pay me $20 per day — what I told him I was receiving previously.

Then I reached the age of sixty-five and began to collect Social Security of $210 and my wife collects $120. By living in the Aḥi Ezer Senior Citizen apartment house, in two rooms at $83 per month, I'm getting along fine, *Shebah La'el,* "Praise to God!"

Murad (Max) Ancona — Born Aleppo, 1906
Interviews in English-Arabic, 1984

"IN SHOWING MY SAMPLES TO R.H. MACY I QUOTED THE 'ASKING' HIGH PRICE, READY TO REDUCE AS WITH SYRIAN CUSTOMERS"

My family and I arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey July 4, 1921. The following day we were taken to Ellis Island — possibly for a health examination? The sister of Nazira Ades, Bahia, was also on board, as well as my aunt Salḥa Sutton, may she rest in peace. Also David Sutton and his bride. The Suttons left the ship immediately on arrival, and later in the day sent you [this writer] with kasher food for us who had to stay on board, my father Abdo, my mother Mazoul [Mazál], and my sisters, Alice, Margo, and Julia. Also remaining on board with us were my mother's niece Farida Dweck and her husband Faraj, their sons Ezra (ᶜAzour), Eli, and daughters Rachél and Elvira [Albera].

Although I was fifteen years old when we left Ḥálab, I didn't know many people outside of my family, although I did

have some friends in school. At first my father had me attend the *Soeurs,* Catholic Nuns school. A few years later he transferred me to the school of the *"Fréres,"* monks, Dominicans. I think these schools required a fee, not like public schools in the United States. I would say that 90 percent of all Jewish children — no 99 percent did not go to modern schools, they were sent to a kittab, elementary religious school. [*These figures are mistaken; a considerable number of Jewish children attended the Alliance school.*] In the Alliance they took in girls as well as boys — but in separate schools. When war broke out in 1914 the Alliance schools were compelled to close, because they were "French," sponsored and administered by French Jews. You see, Turkey was allied to Germany, both were at war with France. It was at the end of the war when the Alliance schools resumed. That was when I was sent there. By the time we migrated I had graduated, taking the Brevet "Elémentaire" and "Supérieur" diplomas. It was then that I was shown a marvel by another student. His brother in America had sent him a present. To induce me to help him with his studies, my friend would let me hold his gift, a pen which had *its own supply of ink* — a fountain pen!

In the months while we waited for travel documents I had a private tutor, Monsieur Angel, a teacher at the Alliance, who came to my home to improve my Arabic studies. After a time he advised my father to discontinue the lessons; "The boy knows Arabic better than me!" That didn't suit my father and he had a *shaikh,* "Shaik-il-Khayalee" he was called, to continue my Arabic education. He taught at the Alliance, too. He taught me *"surf"* and *"na-ḥaw-ii,"* grammar and classical Arabic language. I had a tutor in Hebrew, too, while I was in school. After that I put in the many hours of required home work.

As I told you, I didn't know many families other than relatives. I recall that when my mother had to sew — a dress perhaps, she would buy a piece of fine material, then invite her close friends to a sewing-visit. She and her friends along with cousin Elie Silvera (!) would gather one afternoon to work on the dress, following the instructions in the Parisian *Modéle* book. It was the custom to serve them a light lunch, which was some times followed by a game of cards.

There were three or four Jewish social classes. The top were the *Franj*, 'French' [any family with a European background and continuing to hold foreign nationality]. They and the wealthy merchants, etc. Then came the moderately well-to-do. Below them were small tradesmen and shopkeepers and crafsmen. Then the class of poor people; very poor. Among the *Franj* there were the Picciottos, Silveras, Anconas, Altaras, Segré and a few others. [A Segré was a leading scientist who helped create the atom bomb. I don't know that his branch of the family came from Aleppo.] My paternal grandmother was a Segré. My father told me that she spoke Arabic with difficulty. The Dwek/Duek family held British nationality, [they had ancestors who had lived for a time in India.]

Being *Franji* with Italian citizenship held disadvantages sometimes. When Turkey went to war with Italy in 1912, we felt it necessary to leave Syria. We went to Egypt, we and other Italian nationals, the Silveras, too. My mother's brothers, Raphael and Ezra Silvera also went. Uncle Ezra stayed in Egypt until his death many years later. We returned to Ḥálab after a year in Cairo. My father's commercial activities were disrupted by leaving Syria — he was a private banker before, just like his father and his brothers. A moratorium was declared due to the war; payment of debts were suspended for a time. That was a heavy blow. When my father returned from Egypt and the war had ended he lost a lot of money, debts he had not been able to collect and debts paid at the end of the war — with worthless paper currency. He went into several unsuccessful ventures, several unfortunate partnerships, one which carried us to Aintab in nearby Turkey for a period. Hatred for those who had been "enemy aliens" brought about a threat to my father's life; we left *immediately* to return to Ḥálab, left everything in Aintab. That was the beginning of hard times for my family. To provide for us he sold household goods, some of my mother's jewelry, etc. Three years later we left Ḥálab at the great urging and with the help of my aunt Salḥa Sutton, my mother's sister. She had come to the Near East to find a bride for her son David, and to once again see her brothers and sisters in Syria and in Cairo. David married Emma Angel in Alexandria, where we had already come, on our way to America.

In New York, after a stay with Aunt Salḥa (Sutton), my cousins found us a suitable low-rental apartment. Now to earn money for our needs. How? By peddling. To help us get a start, cousin Sam Sutton took us to the "mountains," the Catskills, with lots of Jewish hotels, large and small. He hired a carriage and went with us to the hotels to help us learn the ropes. With his ability and help at the end of the day we had earned $30. Wonderful! The second day we made $20. Sam had to leave to return to his own buisness. We continued for a couple of days to visit the hotels; but each day *without* Sam's help, we earned less and less. At the end of the third or fourth day our profit was — $5! Discouraged, Pappa and I returned to New York. Through cousin Sam's help I secured a job on Allen Street, doing the dirty work in a Syrian dry goods store; until, a year or so later I was permitted to wait on customers; I had become a salesman. I was then in my late teens, eager to earn money for our daily needs — no thought of further schooling, of course. I changed my position to work for Dweck and Hafif, in their store on Allen Street, on the Lower East Side. I would leave at 7:30 in the morning and return home at nine o'clock or later. My love for gymnastics in Aleppo, my skill on the school's soccer team, my liking for running, all were forgotten. Only the long days on Allen Street, under the dark and deafening 2nd Avenue elevated trains; that was all I knew, for six days every week. I now earned $15 per week, of which my mother gave me 10 cents each day for carfare along with my lunch.

When my bosses moved uptown to 30th Street they were persuaded to take me along. There was a salesman there known as "Gadᶜh il-Missri," "The Egyptian Youth," a mark of elegance, Eddie Dayan, who had customers on the East Side. He would spend half-a-day there, selling a few hundred dollars worth, and retire for the rest of the day. One day I approached him and said, "Gadᶜh, I saw merchandise similar to ours in R. H. Macy's; why don't you call on such customers?" He was not interested: said for *me* to go there if I wished! Our firm had never solicited or sold to any but Syrians. An acquaintance I developed in the daily subway ride, an "Iddshi," [Ashkenazi], when I questioned him, "How does one sell to an R. H. Macy?" He replied that it was very easy. "Simply go to their buying

office on the 17th floor of the store and ask for the buyer of your type of merchandise." I did that, and met a stern woman, very brusque. She gave me an appointment to bring my samples early the following day. I had been trusted with the keys of our office, the only one; every employee waited for me to open the premises. That evening I turned the keys over to someone else, not telling of my Macy appointment.

In showing my samples I asked the 'opening' high price, ready to 'reduce a little' as we always did with our Syrian customers. As I showed the articles, she separated many articles to one side. At the end she brought out a book and wrote in it. It was her order, which she tore out and gave me. I took it back to my bosses, who did not know exactly what the sheet contained. A knowledgeable man read it for them, excitedly. It was an order amounting to $10,000, which today would be the equivalent of perhaps $150,000 or more! *They questioned the man about the safety of giving so much credit to one store!* Then I went to Gimbel Brothers where the buyer said that my prices were "too high." With the knowledge of Macy's order I silently began to pack up my samples. "Wait a minute, young man." I may have been 19 years of age. "Don't be so hasty; let me see those samples again. Is the full-window display at Macy's yours?" It certainly was! Then he began to write an order. This was for about $4,000 — in one shot. My salary went up with each such successful order from one large New York department store after another. Soon I discovered "Resident Buying Offices," buying agents for out-of-town stores, where I was quite successful, too. By this time I demanded a commission and salary — which I got. Meantime Shaʿya Assin, who was in a similar business, married my sister Alice; and was eager to have me as a partner. I was then earning close to $15,000, yearly a very respectable amount, around 1928.

I had my own assistant, a secretary, who would receive my many calls from out-of-town buyers. On the advice of my adviser, cousin Sam Sutton, I demanded a partnership then; or else I would look elsewhere. "I'm going on a vacation and when I come back I hope that you can give me your decision." Just before I went on vacation, a buyer from San Francisco who was a good friend had visited our office and had given me an order

for $30,000! When I returned from the vacation Joe Dweck and Joe Hafif, my bosses, could not see their way to admitting another partner. I left, to join Shaᶜya Assin. Shaᶜya was old-fashioned, fearful,and not ready to follow modern ways of doing business — which hurt our chance to progress. It was not a good move for me, I soon realized. Anyhow, I did not want to break up a partnership with my own brother-in-law. We were only a modest success. Many years later, when he decided to retire I continued the business on my own; too late to make it a big enterprise. A couple of years ago I retired.

My wife Rachel, "Rae" and I have one daughter, Fortunée; married to my cousin, Ralph Silvera. We are delighted when we see them, and my grandchildren Elliot and Margo, named after cousin Ralph's father and mother.

Sonia Cohén — Born in Cairo, 1936
Interviews In English

"FROM CAIRO TO PARIS, ETHIOPIA, ISTANBUL AND NEW YORK AND SOON I WILL SETTLE IN ISRAEL"

I don't have to tell you of my deep involvement in the religious, charity, and pro-Israel activity in the community in Flatbush. I'll tell you more about it later. First, my origins. My mother's family originated in Tunis. Her father dealt in ostrich feathers; he migrated to Egypt to further the feather business. My father's family, Eliakeen, had gone to Egypt (from Morocco, via Israel) several generations ago.

There were no purely Aleppoan synagogues in Cairo; all nationals worshipped together. [?] I remember a prayer-service at age five. This was when everyone came to pray at the time of the Nazi advance on El Alamein, with great danger to Egypt.

Everyone was fasting, I was told. My father was in the British Army when it was retreating, he escaped encirclement by the Germans. He was blue-eyed and fair-skinned yet he arrived home dark, deeply tanned by his walk of four days over the desert.

He held French citizenship because he served in the army in Algeria in World War I, even though he was born in Egypt. My grandfather too, held French 'papers'. (He was the Royal Caterer, to King Farouk, and became quite wealthy.) Most Jews had Italian or French 'nationality', some of them had *bought it.*

I attended the *Lycée Francais;* some of my friends studied at the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Jewish school. There they learned some Hebrew as well as French. I graduated the Lycée with a diploma in French — and Arabic, I know the Kor-an well! After the Suez War — 1956, Jews were expelled as undesirable foreigners, even though they and their fathers had been born in Egypt. Egyptian nationals, Jews, few in number left voluntarily later. We lived in the Ghomra area [*middle and lower-middle class*]. We had many Jewish neighbors as well as Muslims, and some Christians. Ghomra was a suburb of Cairo, part of the *Dah-her* area. Many Ḥalabi-yeh lived close to us. It was from them that we learned to eat *kubbeh, kubbeh-ḥam-da,* and so on, these were Syrian dishes. We also had Greeks, Italians, Turks and other Jews who lived nearby.

Was my family Ladino-Spanish? I can't say that. But I remember that my maternal grandmother spoke Ladino, from her days in Tunis. The Ḥalabiyeh mingled freely with other Jews. They were generally well-to-do, they were always very good businessmen. Even those not too well-to-do, had at least one servant, a Nubian or one from Sudan. These were very honest and reliable. We had several synagogues, two of them were in easy walking distance, one was the Krayem Synagogue. I didn't attend every Shabbat, only on holidays. The social life was excellent; with some non-Jewish friends, too. One of my father's friend's was a Muslim judge. He and his family would dine with us and we ate at their house — kosher food especially prepared for us.

The Jews of high level, many of our cultured friends, lived within the city, Kassr-il-Nil, Dooki, Zamalek, Heliopolis, closer

to the city's center. Since the Lycée friends were subscribers to the artistic performances from Europe; soloists, opera, orchestras, French plays, my friends from Bené Akiva Club participated in this too.

Bené Akiva was a Jewish club with a strong feeling for Israel — although this was not officially declared. In fact, one day I was interrogated by the Authorities to determine if it was a Zionist movement; "of course it is *not.*" The daughter of one of my teachers, a Mons. Nino, was arrested for doing Israeli underground work and was in prison for several years. Isn't everyone born with a strong Zionist sentiment?

My husband-to-be, *Alav ha-shalom* (may he rest in peace) — was a fervent Zionist, activist; he left Egypt in 1948 to go to fight in the War of Independence in Israel. In fact his two best friends were Marzuk and Azar, who were later captured by the Egyptians for their involvemnt in the Lavon Affair — and were hanged as 'spies'.

Many Jews lived in Ḥarit-il-Yahood, near Rambam Synagogue, a poor neighborhood — the "Jewish quarter." When King Farouk was very sick he used to sleep in the Rambam Synagogue, hoping for a cure. Perhaps this is the reason that this synagogue is still well maintained [?] Muslims too, revered the holy Jewish rabbis. (Fostat is "old Cairo," where there is Ibn Ezra Synagogue where the famous Geniza was uncovered.) Some Ashkenazeem too lived in Ḥarit-il Yahood. We referred to them as "vos-vos," [a typical Yiddish expression, meaning "what?, what?".] On the whole there was no prejudice against them; I "went out" with an Ashkenzai youth at one time. Yet, there wasn't much socializing between the Sepharadeem and Ashkenazeem. The Eastern Jews somehow always cling together it seems. The Ashkenazeem, many of them lived in Bab il Barabara. Actually there were not too many of them, they did not have an impact. [*Considerable numbers of Ashkenazeem had come in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century.*]

There was a serious problem with Egyptian Jews. most of them considered themselves "modern" and when they forgot their tradition and roots they tended to assimilate fully, faster. I saw that when I lived in Paris, many former friends had married non-Jews. The 60,000 Jews of Egypt who are now scattered

around the world — we are losing thousands of them.

Religiousness of the Jews of Cairo? I would say [?] most of them were observers, but in a loose, a traditional form; among my friends, when I visited their homes the Sabbath seemed to have been observed there. Jewishness was universal among them, we were close-knit that way. Because of Islamic fanatic hostility? It may have been the reason . . . Tradition, too.

When I insisted with my father that I wanted to go to Paris, it was "rebellion!" to disagree with him about it. Legally, even though I was already nineteen, I had to have my father's written consent to get a passport. I wanted to go to France to work — to prepare against the storm that I saw was coming for the Jews of Egypt. Finally he consented, and I left Cairo in 1956 in the company of my younger brother. I taught French to the Americans working in "PX" centers. (Of course I had studied a lot of English in school.) Soon after settling in Paris I met, through his sister, this nice young Egyptian who was working for Israel in France, serving, I found out later, in the Mosad, ("Sheen Bet") the Israel Intelligence Service. We liked one another, and in addition, we had in common our deep commitment to Israel. Before long we got married. I was twenty, he was 10 years older. We married even before my parents came — expelled soon after.

At one point, in 1964, my husband was assigned to duty in Ethiopia, where we lived in Asmara. It is a mountain region with a very nice climate, and many Italian residents. Later we moved, children and all, to Istanbul; from there my husband had to make hurried short trips, to Stockholm, Hamburg, Italy, wherever he was needed.

We were constantly involved, not only in cultural matters, most of all was our attachment to Israel and its welfare — our Jewishness. Israel is our spirit — our homeland. We decided finally after being re-assigned to Paris — I had had enough of moving around. Bringing up the children had been left to me, since my husband had to be away so much. Especially when in one period, he was asked to settle in Japan for three years. We returned instead to Israel and one day he told me that it was necessary to be absent from us that Rosh-Hashana and Yom

Kippur. That was too much! I had no relatives there. His brother Moshé was visiting in Israel from New York then, and suggested the possibility of our living in the United States. There my husband could work with Moshé, and we could lead a normal family life. The children were growing up with a 'sometime' father; in New York he and I could enjoy our children before they grew up and went off on their own. He suggested that we go to the United States for a few years before settling in Israel. My husband's brother returned to New York where he had a business in which my husband had invested some money earlier. We came here, to New York, where my husband worked in the store, a store selling electronic articles, a tourist "yo-yo" store on 42nd Street, on the very worst block, between 7th and 8th Avenues. With his education and his past activity, my husband could not tolerate that life. He could not get used to the frantic irregular hours and activity of the store; he needed a quieter life.

A year later he opened an electronics store in a quiet neighborhood in Queens, where he earned modestly. What shall I tell you — a hanging parapet loosened in a storm, and struck him on the head — fatally. What grief we suffered, he was so young!

I have four children. Esther, the eldest is married in Israel to a very nice Ashkenazi kibbutznik. Joel is twenty-three, he was in business here in the store in Queens, but is eager to enter some wholesale activity. Ronnie just finished in the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* and volunteered for service in the Israeli Army. We are Americans and also Israeli citizens. Good boys, before everything we are Israelis. The youngest, Danny, is a sophomore in the Sha'are Torah (H.S.) Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Hillel Haber, the school connected with Ḥakham Yosef Harari-Rafful, temporarily housed in Mikdash Melech's building.

I had made a solemn vow that we would live in Israel; that was eighteen years ago. *Beᶜezer Ha-shem* ["with the aid of The Sacred Name"] I will go to Israel to live, *this summer*!

We had settled here in Flatbush when we came to New York. I was always an active individual since my teens. When I

got to Paris I became involved in B'nai Brith and the world Zionist Organization. Here I found the B'nai Brith activity less dynamic in the *local* chapters. I threw myself into the Ladies Auxiliary of Yeshiva of Flatbush where my children were students.

Sadly, I found almost no Syrian mothers attending meetings. I met many people and was asked to assume responsible roles; I was president of the Yeshiva women's group for several years. I was invited to participate in U.J.A. United Jewish Appeal, I work with Mrs. Alice Shalóm in the senior Syrian Women's Group, and the Young Women for Israel, who have fund-raising luncheons annually. They are doing wonderful work, they are precious. Then, also with Emuna Women which, in Israel, its center is known as *Ha-ishah Ha-Da-teet,* The Religious Woman. It drew me because it is an orthodox organization. If I were to choose only one group with which to work — Emunah Women would be my choice. Because of the lack of active involvement in the Syrian community with Israel I set about to organize a Sepharadic Chapter — which I succeeded in doing! It now has sixty members– and is growing. I am looking to establish a youth Chapter. We meet monthly and have seminars, lectures, etc., to be close to Israel. It should be in the mind of every Jew. Such meetings expand the views, the horizon of sensitivity about Israel, our home. Since I hope to live in Israel in a few months I am eager to the best of my ability, to leave a foundation of Israel-interest.

The situation in Israel, as you know, is not good. I feel it is my duty to be there. Friends have argued that I can help Israel with my activity here, more than in Israel. I want to go back. With a network of friends and some organizations which I will leave here, I will be useful in making trips back to New York, to explain, to 'preach' Israel and its needs. It is a vow that I made. I can work from there.

Religiously, the condition in the Flatbush community is improving. Since I came here in 1966, I feel the feedbacks, through the Yeshiva of Flatbush, for example. Before, there were no Syrian women at the meetings. Since my name is not particularly Sepharadi and I don't look Sepharadi, I used to

hear 'remarks' about us. They hurt me. "Why didn't the Syrian mothers come? They want their children to be well educated. Is it enough simply to pay the tuition and turn away? Is it because they had no time? Certainly not! Where there is interest, time can be found!" Now, in more recent years there *is* attendance of some Syrian mothers. I see more Syrians involved in organizations. It had been utterly pathetic before, now there is some change in attitude.

I see a marked *renaissance* in religiosity, too. Now I see women at synagogues, their heads covered with wigs, [*ritual-imposed wigs, worn by very-orthodox married women*]; with a kerchief, in places like Rabbi Raffoul's ᶜAteret Torah prayer services. He is vigorously making drastic changes in the community *which will become very wide-reaching.* I sent my young son to Shaᶜare Torah school (Rabbi Haber's). It is fantastic! It is the first Sepharadi *very-orthodox* High school Yeshiva *for boys only.* The Sephardic High School headed by Rabbi Shamah, it is very good in its own objective, but it does not set out with a ultra-Orthodox teaching aim, because many of its students come from only formally observant families. Rabbi Haber's is the first — the first time ever, ever, that there is such a Sepharadi school in the United States. It was missing; it is needed badly. People should realize, they should appreciate. Actually, the majority are still living in an earlier world, a different world, a world that is not alert to the danger to Judaism. Sephardic High School has some students from parents that are 'Syrian' stereotypes; I mean that they are eager to exhibit their finanacial success — how much money they have, etc. This is reflected in their children, their emphasis on fancy clothing, how much pocket money they have and so on. It's good that they are studying in a Jewish environment, but I don't have confidence that *they* will be the ones to lead the community in future years. I'm convinced that a more strict education, more structured, more demanding, is needed. Parents who give in to their children's demands, who indulge them, who are anxious "not to be bothered," they are doing their kids — and the community — a lot of harm, without knowing it.

There is more openness in the community now. Problems are recognized and discussed, not like ten or twenty years ago,

when everything was kept under covers. Yes, even in those days there was something of a problem with a small number of kids who were drug abusers. It was all "hush-hush"; if it was mentioned, it was in a shamed whisper. Now such problems are faced openly. Kids who have lots of money in their pockts, lack of good examples on the part of their parents, and lack of rules which the children *should have been compelled to respect* — what can you expect? Unfortunately there are "drop-outs," some drug cases, and other patterns that are not — I'm sorry to say — as they should be. In many cases parents are not — interested — or are not aware! I know that, through my own children, who tell me about the young people of their age. There was too little communication between children and their parents. Now I sense greater openness and a bridge of communication between them. Some parents are now more respectful of their children's attitudes, their personal problems; they are ready to *listen*. This is good. As the parents themselves become more alert, more educated of the psychology of their children's youth-problems, the situation will improve, I think. This is a distinct improvement; although I can't say that this is yet the general situation — not yet. Our religiosity is really limited. There is not so much of it, so that our children may turn their backs on it — even compared to what is called 'modern orthodoxy.' When children attend a yeshiva — (I am talking about girls), they are not permitted to attend in jeans or slacks. Yet when they appear in synagogue they wear them, because of the leniancy of the parents.

I don't know what the community will be like in twenty or thirty years. Yet I am *so encouraged*. There is a small group, who have become quite religious. I am an optimistic person, I have some hope that the influence of this small but growing group, that it will help to keep us truly observant. The problem is that as some of our children go in for higher education they are very likely to become secularized — and lost to us. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to combine secular education along with religious standards. I can only hope that this will not be so. I pray that we can be part of the modern world and yet cling to our heritage, our Judaism.

Aharon Laniado
(ibn Ḥakham David)
Interviews in English and Arabic

Born Jerusalem 1940

"YAᶜACOB YASHOOB!" ("JACOB WILL RETURN!") IT WAS A LITTLE CHILD WHO SPOKE, HIS FIRST WORDS."

I came to New York only to visit, twenty years ago; I was twenty-two years old. I came from Jerusalem where I was born, one of the younger of fourteen children. I had a cousin of my father, a well-known person in New York, Eliahu Menaged, *Allah Yirḥammo* [Arabic: "God have compassion," on his soul], a cousin on his mother's side. When he was visiting us in Jerusalem he invited me to visit New York, to make the trip as his guest. I came — and I stayed, because I liked it a lot here. Of all of us, fourteen children, it was to me that Menaged chose to offer the trip.

My father *ᶜAlav Ha-Shalóm* [Hebrew: Peace be on his soul] was a Ḥálabi, born in Aleppo in the year 1900. From his very childhood he longed to go to Jerusalem — and at the age of thirteen he did, he ran away — to study Torah in Eres Yisraél. His companion on the trip was another boy of the same age. This boy is now Ḥakham Raḥameem Churba [the father of the Joseph Churba, now an important authority in Washington]. He lives in New York. A nice man; although he is now a sick person. Part of the way to Jerusalem, they walked. Raḥameem Churba's father, who was also *my* grandfather, he begged him to return, since he was an only son. My father's father, who was an important rabbi in Aleppo, Ḥakham Shelomó Laniado, wanted my father to study Torah, yes, but not to become a professional rabbi. He sent my father to New York, where my father *did* become a rabbi. For about two years, he was the rabbi of the Atlantic City 'community' [?] and later, of the Eldridge Street Synagogue — on the Lower East Side, a rabbi and Talmud Torah teacher. At the end of the two years he hurried back to Jerusalem, to spend his time studying at the Ḥálabi, *Porát Yoséf Yeshibá,* in the heart of the Old City.

While still a youth my father was walking along the *Shouk* [market street] one day in the company of the much older Ḥakham Abraham ᶜAntebi Sa'ka, a great man. There came along a lovely young woman of fifteen — she was an orphan, of the Zebede family. Ḥakham Abraham said to my father, "Do you 'want' her?" [Do you wish to marry her?] My father quietly agreed and they got married soon after.

Let me tell you a story about my father's quietness and modesty. In later years we boys in Jerusalem, we used to play ball when we should have been studying. When we saw my father coming from the distance we ran to hide. A man standing by said to us, "You stupid boys," [you must excuse me the expression]. "You don't have to run away; your father won't notice you; he always walks with his *head down* and doesn't notice anything more than three meters away!" [This is a religious mark of modesty] All his life he was like that.

Earlier, my parents had moved to Ḥebron, where my father continued to study, at the *Porát Yoséf* Yeshibá's branch there. Every morning he went to pray in *Meᶜa-raat Ha-makh-pehla,* the Cave of the Patriarchs. [where they are purportedly buried.]

One day in 1929 as he was walking, two Arabs came along, one with a heavy stick in his hand. One said to the other in Arabic, which my father understood, of course, "No, let us leave the killing for later, first let us rob the Jews." With that my father hurried home, seized my mother by the hand, with an infant in her arms, and ran off to take refuge, to hide in a 'safe' building. Well, my father and mother in running to take refuge, with a little child in hand, saw much blood on the street, the blood of the many Jews whose throats had been cut. When they saw an opening, a basement, they leaped into it to hide. My mother told us later that she had never seen my father pray so hard. He said the *viddui* [a Confession of Sins] and called out the *Shema Israel* and recited *Tehillim,* Psalms. The British troops came out of their hiding *after* the Arabs had done their *peraᶜót,* massacres. They came five or six hours later, and called out for all Jews to come out of hiding — "It is now safe!" My father and mother were taken to Jerusalem; but my father returned to Ḥebron the next morning with the *Ḥebra Kaddisha,* the burial committee, to take away the slaughtered in order to

give them a ritual burial, and to rescue the Sefer Torahs and books. On the return to Jerusalem, he rode on a truck, with a Sefer Torah clutched in his arms.

My father had a deep cut on his upper lip. How did he get it? Well, he taught us never to question God's purpose in *whatever* takes place, not to doubt, not to question; and one time he told us about the cut to his lip. It happened on the truck carrying him back with the dead, the precious sefareem, the books, and Torahs. He said that at one moment as he rode along, he reflected that he could not understand God's justice in allowing the killing of 38 students at the Yeshibá, and others, "*Rabbono shel ᶜolam, zo Torah; ve zo sekhara?*" [Lord of the World, this is Torah Study, and this should be its reward?] At that instant the truck lurched on the rough road and the Sefer Torah he was holding in his arms tilted sharply and struck him on the lip. He always repeated to us that never, never, should we question God's motives in whatever takes place.

Here is another story about that saintly man. On a particularly cold and snowy day in Jerusalem, my mother, *Allah Yir-ḥam-ha* [Arabic: "God have pity on her — on her soul], saw my father returning home with only a thin jacket on his back. "David, where is the heavy overcoat with which you left the house? You will get sick!" she shouted at him in alarm. "Well, Mazál, *habeeb-ti* [Mazál, my beloved], as I was walking I saw a destitute man in thin clothes, shivering from the cold. Yes, I did give him my overcoat. I know that I can dig up an old one in the house, I am sure. With this act I've fulfilled the *mizva* of *malbeesh ᶜaroomeem* ["clothing the naked"].

My family was maybe the poorest in Jerusalem! But we were also the richest — in spirit. My father spent his days in the Yeshibá, except for a few children who he taught, tutored — for a few piastres. My mother told us that he never went to sleep with even a few coppers in his pocket. What little he had he spent on us and gave to the poor.

One Friday evening my mother told us that a *neḥs*, "a miracle" had happened to her the day before. What had taken place? She said that as usual on Thursday she used to shop for food for the Shabbát but — she didn't have a single piastre with which to buy anything! She had no courage to go to the food-

stalls, she owed money to everybody. In desperation, she picked up the Book of Psalms to gain a little courage; yes, she knew how to read, how to pray. As she opened the Book, there she saw — two pounds sterling! With this money she was able to buy everything suitable for a nice Shabbát. "What have you done," my father shouted, "This money belonged to a man who gave it to me for safekeeping!" She said, "Your children have to eat, too. God will send you the means to pay it back." And so it was!

How did my father's great book *Liqdosheem Asher Baress* come about? When my father and mother were newly married, with a baby on her arms, they went to Ḥálab. Every morning he set out, neatly dressed. When he came home at sunset, he was covered with dirt. "Why?" He spent his days in the cemetery, taking care of the graves, dusting off the tombstones in order to be able to read the inscriptions; the names and years of the death of the Ḥakhameem who were buried there; to record this information for use in his book *To the Holy Ones in the Land.* There is no other book like it, a book which carries the information on the lives and written works of hundreds of the great Ḥakhameem of our city and those of nearby lands. Recently it was reprinted in Israel.

My father had carried a bag of soil from holy Jerusalem, back with him to Aleppo. When his father died, he made sure that his father was buried, symbolically, in sacred soil, even though it was in Aleppo.

Who are my brothers and sisters? Shelomó, Yitzḥak, Yaᶜacob, then came Sarah, Raḥel, Esther, then Abraham, Aharon (me), Ephraim, Eliahu, Shemuél, Sipora, Israél, and Reena.

My three older brothers, Shelomo, Yitzḥak and Yaᶜacob were students at Yeshibát *Porát Yoséf.* When the conflict over the establishment of a Jewish state was only beginning in 1947, my three brothers joined in the struggle; one went into the *Haganna,* another into the *Etzel* and another into the *Leḥi,* all underground. When war broke out, they all fought in the Jewish Army.

The youngest of the three, Yaᶜacob, was then sixteen years old, but anyway he volunteered in the Army and was accepted.

One evening, the Commander of his Company said "My boys, we are going in to relieve Kibbutz *Gush Etzion*, [surrounded by the Arab enemy.] It is a dangerous venture. Some of us may not return. . . ." Yaᶜacob's base was not far from our home, and late that evening, a Friday night, he was given permission to visit us. My mother quickly gave him to eat, and then he went out on the balcony with my father. I was eight years old; I followed them, to listen. My brother told my father of the dangerous mission ahead of the Company. "I may not return, and should that happen, take consolation in the existence of my mother, brothers and sisters!" My father said to him, "Go, *Allah máᶜaak* [*Arabic: God be with you*]. If you find yourself in deadly danger, recite the *Viddui*, recite the *Shemaᶜ*, and if anything happens, you will go before your Creator pure. Meanwhile put it in your mind and heart to repent in the future. I am confident that you will return safely." As my brother left, his tears were pouring out. There was the small Silvera family synagogue on the floor of the building where we lived. My father went there, quietly, followed by my two-year old brother Shelomo, who could not yet speak. My father opened the *Hekhaal*, the Ark, and began to pray for Yaᶜacob's safety. Just then he heard "Yaᶜacob yashoob!" [Yaᶜacob will return!]. It was the little child who spoke, his first words.

He returned to tell my mother, to reassure her. "How do you know?" she asked anxiously. He said "It came out the mouth of a babe." A few days later he was approached by Ḥakham Yosef Tawil a yeshiba colleague, now living in New York. "Ḥakham Daveed," Rabbi Tawil said, "I have comforting news for you, but it will cost you — a cigarette." The city barely had food and water; there was a shortage of everything because the Jordanian Army surrounded it; and in any case my father did not smoke. However, he secured a cigarette; and then was given the news. Although my brother's company had lost 35 boys, he, Yaᶜacob, was safe! He had been captured and was a prisoner of war in Ḥebron. How did Tawil know? His daughter had been in the Kibbutz Gush Etzion when it had to surrender. The women were released, the men were taken to the prison camp in Ḥebron. (!)

My father had a deep love for Zion, for Eretz Yisrael. Even though I and all my brothers, all Yeshibá students, were exempt from military service, every one of us did our years in the Army, with my father's warmest encouragement. He believed in Eretz Yisrael; if it needed protection, you must fight for it!

We lived in Maḥaneh Yehudá, in one room, on the same floor as the Silvera Synagogue; at first in one room, then we needed another. Yes, eventually we took another room, on the floor below. That is where the girls slept. In all, we were sixteen persons living in two rooms; but our life was a happy one.

I went to the Jerusalem Magen David Talmud Torah under Ḥakham Natán Salem; then I went to a yeshibá. I wasn't a good student. . . you can't make much of my studies. . . . There was an Alliance Israélite School but my father didn't favor it. His principal interest was to have us grow up fearing God, fair in our dealings, and Torah scholars. Thank God we all grew up as decent persons, all my brothers and sisters. My brother Ephraim is rabbi of the Ḥálabiyeh in Saó Paolo in Brazil; my brother Abraham was rabbi in Milano; and a brother who was secretary to the Rishon-le-Zion the Chief Rabbi, in Jerusalem. My brother Yaᶜacob became a colonel of the Police in Israel. At one time he was Governor of Rafiah, an Arab town near Gaza. All are married and they are happy.

My father trained us to live a happy life. Yes, it was 'rough' at home in Jerusalem — but I miss those happy days. I shouldn't say it was 'rough', really, because we didn't know anything different, anything better! Today it would be impossible to live there, where I used to live. But we always had a lot of love from my mother and father; my father was the 'softest', the most tender guy alive.

After I finished my army service, I began to work — in something like the F.B.I. When I had finished with the army, one day my father said, "Please, may I speak to you, Aharon?" Of course! Yet he was so modest in his approach... even to a young son he said, "Please may I talk to you"! He said, "Remember that this is your home, even though you work and earn money. Work, enjoy life, but stay with me. You do not have to spend a *irsh* [piastre] here. There is one thing that I ask you to do — always give a *maᶜa-sehr* [a "tithe," 10 percent of

one's earnings, to charity]; I will distribute it to the many poor persons." I agreed promptly. When I received my first paycheck of 200 pounds, I immediately gave him 20 pounds for charity. Later — here I was, a young man with a young man's expenses. . . I'm ashamed to tell you that that was the end of the *maᶜa-sehr.* Not once did my father reproach me.

I was here in New York when my father died. "What can I do for him, to honor his memory?" I remembered the request he had made to me to give *maᶜa-sehr* [10 percent to charity], and ever since I've tried to live up to my promise to him. I learned from him that to do good to other people is the best way — the only way.

I want to tell you a nice story about my friend, who is president of the company in which I work, he and his two brothers. About eight years ago, before this company was established, Mr. "X" used to own a modest retail store. I told him that I could see that one day he will be such an important businessman that people would have to "wait on line to see him." He laughed at me! He is a 'beautiful' man, I love him, he is my *friend*; I *wanted* it to be like that.

"All very well," he said, "what do *you* want out of that future situation?" I said, "*The time will come,* and when it comes, I want to be in charge of distributing your charity; and I want the privilege of having access to you, to see you any time I wish, and to have my own freedom in your company, to come and go as I please." [*and so it came about!*]

At that time I can tell you that he didn't have much money, but then "it all came about! [*a truly sensational success story*].

I asked him to let me handle the charities — I believe [*Barukh Ha-Shem,* Blessed be His Name] that to "give" is the greatest good deed. I love the man; for Mr. "X" and his brothers I "wished" good things for them, and they happened! I give to charities and I used to show him that I gave. Did it influence him? I think so. I believe in giving for education; I think that we Sepharadeem need much help in the field of education. I see so many young men, they don't know how to read Hebrew, even; their own language and religious texts.

Religious education is the greatest gift to give children, because it helps to keep them unique, high-minded. I observed it among the Ḥálabiyeh — wherever they settle, in any country, they establish a Talmud Torah, even before a synagogue. [?] Mr. "X" my friend, is outstandingly generous in his giving to Sepharadi and other Jewish institutions.

They say of Ḥakham Eliézer Alfendri, one of the greatest of his generation, that he never addressed a "rabbi" with that title, he called them by their names — *except for my father,* it was always *"Ḥakham David;* because he recognized what a true *ḥaseed,* what a saint, my father was. *Barukh Ha-Shem,* I have three wonderful children, Hannah, and David and Mazál, named after my father and mother; Children are the greatest blessing.

Jacob ("Jack") Shrem Born in Killez (Turkey) in 1898
Interviews in Arabic and English

"MY FATHER WAS SEEING MY BROTHER ON TO A BOAT, FLEEING CONSCRIPTION. ON AN IMPULSE, HE JOINED HIM"

I'm from Turkish Killez [a Jewish 'satellite' town of Aleppo. Killez was then a town of perhaps 45,000 inhabitants.] It had about 300 Jewish families. There were ritual slaughterers, *mohels,* rabbis two synagogues, and a *midrash;* a miniature Ḥálab! There were the Betesh, Ashkenazi, Shrem, Tawaski, families, etc., also Signor David Silvera — a merchant from Aleppo. Then Ḥakham Abraham Esses came, as a merchant. Jews considered Ḥálab as a mother city — everyone looked up to Aleppo. In Killez the Jews spoke 'Aleppo' Arabic among themselves — Turkish with the populace. Ḥakham Yaᶜcob Dweck came from Ḥálab and was the *Ab Bet Din,* Father of the

Religious Court (of three). We received many learned men, there was much study of Torah; a small replica of Hálab. We had a teacher who taught writing, Ḥakham Eliahu Ashkenazi, grandfather of Eliahu (Ely) and Saul. He left too, when we left, in 1910-1911. Ely and Saul Ashkenazi now have a highly successful business in New York.

In 1908 I completed the *kittab* — the Hebrew school, and when I applied at the Turkish school at age ten, I was placed in an advanced class; at thirteen I left for Egypt. When I attended the Turkish school, I was ordered to attend on Saturdays; Friday, Islamic half day of rest, closed. I had finished il-Kittab at age of ten as I said; I was ready to read *ᶜEin Yaᶜacob*. In three years that I was in the Turkish school I was well taught, arithmetic, geography, Turkish, and some science, etc., like the Alliance school in Aleppo.

Sant il-Talj, [the year of the "Great Snow"] for 47 days it snowed without let-up. The houses were completely covered over. No work, no transportation. The "Trak" [Turks, natives] were farmers; and in the winters the *river ᶜIfreet* would usually overflow and there was no tilling of the soil. There was no commerce there every winter. There were also many "Gawirdat" [Turkish, for Christians] living there too. When in 1890 [?] the Armenians, Christians were chased away from other parts of Turkey, they came to settle around Killez. [The area of Werfel's *The Forty days of Musa Dagh*]. They were also called "Kanderliyeh," for the rope that encircled the waist of the Armenian monks' robes.

No, there was never any disorder or discrimination toward the Jews; that was reserved for the local Armenians. That was always the way for the Jews under Sultan Abd-il-Ḥamid's long reign; Jews were looked up to. Not infrequently Armenians were slaughtered. Killez, nearby Marᶜash and Zetooney — were full of Armenians. They killed the Armenians as the Nazis slaughtered Jews later. A Jew was never even "scratched." When the Armenians were about to be pogromed Turks would stand in the street with cudgels in hand and shout "Run along, Jews, everyone into his house! No one must dare go out!" I remember one day in the souk, Turks came and said to Jews, "Go on [familiar and affectionate] Abu Dahood, Abu Moosa,

etc., everybody go home, and don't dare step out." An Armenian who had unknowingly appeared was struck by a Turk so violently that his head rolled away over the cobblestones.

Earlier, Jews and Christians could escape Ottoman Army conscription by paying a tiny tax. The Young Turks movement brought what they called *Ḥurriyeh,* Freedom, and military conscription *for everybody!* This was in 1909 when the new Sultan Muḥamad Rashid (V) came to the throne. How we came to go to Egypt? The very day that my brother was married, the army conscription came looking for him! He fled, of course. My father had gone to Alexandretta, port, "Scandaroon," to see him off, and on the impulse, he too boarded the ship. After a few months in Egypt, he sent for us.

My father sold textile articles in and around Killez — as a peddler. He dealt with Armenians; and when my father left the country, I went around to collect his debts from them; received every last "irish," every piaster. They were very honorable, and well-to-do; many dealt in jewelry.

From Killez to Alexandretta, three days by carriage. There were high mountains on the way. Beylan, [a summer resort for some Aleppoans,] was on the way. From the top, as you look down, humans seemed to be the size of ants. Some high mountain passes very narrow, and so dangerous that Yushuᶜa Kreddi, the Jewish *ᶜarbaji,* the carriage driver, had us get out of the carriage to walk a short distance [The same happened to this writer and his family, enroute, 1915, to the U. S. A., between Tripoli and Beirut.] We slept one night at a hot water 'spa' Ḥammam-al-ᶜ*Ameek* — just like Tiberias . . . .

Yes, we did have relatives in Cairo, lots of them, on both sides of my family. My cousin, a Damascan, Elie Ḥakkim, was a clerk in a bank . . . .

We lived in Cairo, where my father began a small textile business in which I also worked. I married there and had an only child, a daughter. After nine years in Egypt and after the end of the War in 1918 soon after, I began preparations to try my luck in the United States, where I finally landed in 1921. After four months in New York, I became convinced that work in New York — peddling, was not for me. Influenced by

relatives who had carried themselves to work in the Southern states, after a short period there as a peddler, I opened up a retail dry goods and fancy linen store. When in one city I did not meet with much success, I moved to other cities in the South which were more promising.

After twenty years or so, I decided to return to New York where I resumed dry goods selling on a modest scale; until a few years ago. With increasing years I gave that up, I retired, to take up residence in the Aḥi Ezer apartments for older folk, where I am in the midst of many of my own Syrian people. In spite of my age, I was born in 1898, I continue to drive my trusty Dodge Dart of many years. "When will you give up this rusty old car, Jack, and buy a new one?" I was asked. I answered that when it stopped running I would simply leave it wherever it was. This answer seemed to satisfy my friendly 'critic'. This was at the "solo" [solo-whist] daytime sessions I attend several days each weekday, at the Sephardic Community Center where we gather.

The Jews of Killez? All have dispersed now, although some still live in Turkey, in Adana, Stamboul, Aleppo and Israel, and a few came to New York.

Neḥemia Ezekiel — Born in Baghdád, Iraq 1950
Interviews in English

"I MAINTAIN THAT THE COMMUNITY IN FLATBUSH IS RELIGIOUSLY THE IMPORTANT ONE IN THE ENTIRE SEPHARADI WORLD"

Although I am an Iraqi, not a Syrian, I have chosen to come live in Flatbush among the Aleppoans and those from Damascus, because of the rare qualities of the Syrians. I'll enlarge on that later.

I was born in Baghdád in what was then a new Jewish hospital called *Meir-Elia,* built just before the big Aliya, the removal of Jews to Israel in 1948-1950. The largest movement, from Morocco, Yemen, Roumania, Iraq, etc., took place around that time. My father was — *Barukh Ha-Shem* ["Blessed is His name," in Hebrew] he and my mother *are* living; in Tel Aviv.

In Baghdád my father had been an agent for real estate properties. When so many Jews left in a hurry — they seized the only opportunity available to them, they left their property in my father's care. The government had no wish to retain the Jews; Israel arranged their exodus, sent planes for them.

I attended Hebrew school — the Menaḥem Saleḥ Daniel Bet Midrash. Then I went to a Christian high school, because of 'political' turmoil at that time in the Jewish high school. I had a tutor who came to my home to give me a religious education. It didn't go too far — Ḥumash, etc. It wasn't on a Yeshiva level. In the period from 1950 to around 1958 Jews were forbidden to leave the country.

Before 1948 there were about 160,000 to 180,000 Jews in the country. Seventy percent were in Baghdád, Basra had 20,000, thousands lived in Musul and the Kurd area. Jews lived together in several areas in Baghdád, according to their means, less, or more prestigious. With such a large community, intermarriages with Muslims sometimes took place — there were "fall-outs.' A Jewish girl who married a Muslim, for example, she would be put in *Ḥerem,* excommunicated. If she were to attempt to attend a synagogue-service she would be thrown out; a Muslim would not be put out.

Jewish relations with Muslims in general? Iraqis are Muslims — Shiites, and Sunnis; and they sometimes responded violently when they got word of Muslim-Jewish clashes in Palestine. These began perhaps in 1924 — and continued through the years. Whenever Iraqis got word of such clashes their attitude to the Jews became hostile and the Jews became fearful of new physical attacks. Conditions were *usually* quiet, yet from time to time Jews were killed, whenever Muslims were stirred by reports of supposed, alleged, Jewish attacks in Palestine. When a radio station was established such reports served to arouse mobs *immediately.* During 1942, World War

II, a pro-Nazi became head of Iraq. A mass slaughter took place, with 600 Jews killed and hundreds of Jewish women raped. This increased nationalist-Jewish feeling and later when Jews were given the privilege to leave the country, most left — and their wealth was expropriated.

There had been considerable wealth among Jews [who had been in the country for 2,500 years]. They were in general at the upper-level financially. "Employers" rather than "employed." There were important bankers, large-scale businessmen, traders, etc., agricultural land-owners, and farmers. Despite that, they were "inferiors", *Ahhl-il-Dhimma*, "Protected People," — after a fashion, who had been taxed heavily to be 'protected'. Actually higher-up officials were bribed substantial sums to try to ensure that attacks on the *Dhimmi* (inferior-'protected') status were not permitted to get out-of-hand by the common mass of Muslims. We were the "under-dogs" to the masses.

The traditional strictly-religious Jewish life began to disintergrate with the coming of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* Schools. They were Jewish, but they stressed the secular; they taught some Hebrew, but *not* religion. Most Jews received their education there. Along with the influence of Great Britian and other Western culture, traditional Jewish observance became increasingly loose. There was more interest in looking smart in Western apparel than in study of the works of Ben Ish Ḥaii, and Rabbi Yosef Ḥayeem, the great religious teachers [Iraqi kabbalists]; more in sophisticated gatherings than in pursuit of Jewish learning. This was a gradual but radical departure from Babel/Baghdád of earlier centuries, when Babél was the most important Eastern Jewish center of learning and religious life — similar in the sanctity to *Eres Yisraél*. Babél was the religious focus of all territories nearby, Persia, India, much of Turkey, etc. I would compare its religious importance to the Syrian community of Flatbush of a smaller scale. I hold that the Syrian community is religiously the most important in the entire Sepharadi world, even more religious than Israel on the whole.

During my years in Baghdád I remember constant harassment of Jews — by 1950 there remained 5,000. Of the gigantically wealthy Jews, the Sassoons, and ᶜEinies, Menaḥem

Saleḥ Daniel, Zilkha, and others; few remained. Those who remained were under constant threats, extortions — "If you do not 'cough-up' I will report you to the government as a Zionist spy, you will be hanged!" I met with antagonism from my fellow-students in school. This situation continued through 1958 and the end of the Kingdom. The King, his prime-minister and other officials were seized by the Baath Party — and were hanged; to establish a 'socialist' republic. Kassem, the new ruler was 'lenient' with the Jews. For the first time the Jews could leave the country and had permission to return to Iraq, their homeland. (For ten years those who left could not return, They had previously had 48 hours in which to quit the country.) When Jews who decided to leave tried to *sell* their property they could not secure a price greater than the equivalent of a month's *rent* — or even the equivalent of a half-a-month's rental. As a real-estate agent my father had much property turned over to him, to try to remit rentals or a fair sales price. Thousands of properties were thrown on the market by those who took advantage of permission to leave. Unfortunately for the eager real estate agent new regulations required that the owner of the property *appear in person;* the consequence was wholesale confiscation, of course.

I was in Baghdád when the Government accused seven prominent businessmen of being 'Zionist Spies,' and hanged them in the market place, in order to confiscate their wealth. This is the most vivid, the most horrible memory, that I carry with me through the years. Every false report concerning Israel brought about greater fears, life had become intolerable. In 1967 Jews attempted to flee the country through Abadán or Basra. Those who didn't succeed were caught, court-martialed, they and those accused of aiding them. They were *publicly hanged.* 'Every' Jew became determined to run for his life; but, where and how? At this time I was imprisoned for three months; I could not apply for a passport, of course, and visited a foreign embassy seeking help. A security officer picked me up at the door. What was my relation with foreigners — spying? Upon my release I was determined to *get out.*

Eventually, in 1970, at the age of twenty I located a smuggler who would help me get across a border, the border of

Kurdistan. I was made to grow a heavy flowing moustache, dressed in Kurdish native clothes. "You are now a mute," he said, "a Kurdish mute. If you open your mouth they will know instantly that you are *not* a Kurd." In addition he removed my eye-glasses. "What Kurdish peasant wears eye-glasses?" After taking me by railroad, a bus, and after two days on a donkey he got me across the Kurdish-Iraqi border into Iran. A student at the university, the donkey-ride was too much for my back. I was immobilized for a matter of *three months*. From Teheran after the three months, I was able to make my way to Israel, with the help of the Jewish Agency office in Iran. I left behind in Baghdád a pitifully small number of Jews, "Hadikal people", numbering 300 or so, old people without organized community life. My father was still in Baghdád — in jail; "a businessman." At the end of his three-year sentence the family was able to escape the country.

In Israel I attended the Technion Institution where I studied engineering. I worked in construction for a few years, and at the end of six years in Israel I decided to join an old classmate friend who had settled in Canada's west, in Calgary, Province of Alberta. I took employment with a builder, to learn western construction methods. Then I began my own construction firm. Life was quite pleasant, except for the *very small* Jewish community there. On top of that, my Sepharadi background made me eager to mingle with my own people. I knew of the Flatbush community when I had come on a visit in 1973 while still living in Israel, and on vacations I took while living in Canada. I felt a strong urge to associate myself with Sepharadic life in the Diaspora — a thriving religious community outside of Israel. I hadn't found a strong Sepharadi affinity in Israel, not to my satisfaction. My medium had been non-religious — but an urge to live in a strongly religious environment attracted me to the Syrian community in Brooklyn from Canada. I enjoyed the visits, at the same time that I hoped to meet a future bride. [Not yet achieved]

Increasingly I felt the urge to participate in a more spiritual life — something that living in Calgary did not offer. Yes, I can say that I was always religious, but not devout; 'semi-orthodox',

as most people may have been in Aleppo, for example [?]. After five or six years in Canada I immigrated to New York.

When I came to Flatbush I was thrilled by the community. It has a basic nucleus. The people stick to their own traditions — Sepharadic. More than that they have *yi-ḥhús*, an ancient Jewish ancestry. They are receptive of other people — Sepharadeem, I enjoyed mingling with them. On and off I have been here for about five years — I had gone back to Israel for a year, to visit my family, etc., and even took a job for a while. In addition to seeing my parents I visited my three brothers and three sisters. They are all married and have chilren, *Barukh Ha-Shem* ("Blessed is His name").

The problem is with finding the 'right' girl to marry in Flatbush. I associate here with a very religious group, in the ᶜAteret Torah, headed by *Ḥakham* Yosef Rafful. The more I learned in religion the more I realized how much I *didn't* know, and the more I wanted to *observe* not through custom alone, but according to rabbinic laws how to live a life as prescribed by our sacred books. [Editor: "??"]

There was no sharp rise in my religiosity. In Baghdád I was the ordinary 'religious' Jew without intense rabbinic studies. In Israel I saw a marked *dilution* in general, of religious life. In Canada the emptiness of genuine religious life made me say to myself "Hey, what am I doing with my life?" I had gone there to make money, but what about my spiritual life? I abandoned everything and left. I didn't want to go back to the religious dilution in Israel. There *was* a choice — the community in Flatbush, a Diaspora community that was cohesive and religiously vibrant; as important spiritually as Baghdád and *Ḥálab* in their best days! To mingle with Ashkenazeem as some do here, means that they will lose their identity as authentic Sepharadeem, something that means a lot to me. That gave me the answer. Since I didn't want to live in Israel, the place of all places is the Syrian community here.

Religiosity in Israel, I think that it is on the rise now, among the Sepharadeem, too. What religion they had brought with them when they came, had been 'cut off', discouraged, by the Government. In general, religious practices had been decreasing in their native countries. The Israeli Government did

all it could to discourage even the traditional religion they carried with them, except the Hassideem, of course. The Government was in the hands of socialists — secularists who influenced most schools in that direction. The Sepharadeem were deliberately dispersed — to try to make them 'Israelis', like the Ashkenazi majority, but on the lowest economic scale. German reparations which put a considerable amount of money into the hands of some Ashkenazeem, this also served to depress the status of the poor Sepharadeem, *by contrast.*

The new-comers among the Baghdádians and others, those who came around 1970, they manage to live together. Those who had come earlier continued to be scattered, some who continued to live in immigrant camps for decades, etc. They were dispersed, in order to dilute their Sepharadic identities. They sought to 'assimilate' them by throwing them into a 'melting pot' through careful, deliberate 'city-planning'. However, of the thousands of Iraqis who came, many make a home in Ramat Gan, a town of 70,000, of which 40,000 had come from Iraq. It is referred to as the *New Baghdád!* The Iraqis, many of them without much religious education in their native land, when they came to Israel, they lost much of their religious practices, strongly influenced by the dominant culture around them. The *Halabiyeh* [those from Aleppo,] they are also somewhat dispersed, although they manage to form somewhat small communities in, and around Tel Aviv and Haifa. Among them too, only a small number can be called quite religious. While 70 percent of the Iraqis came to Israel, the *Ḥalabiyeh* had settled, some of them, in Beirut; others went to South America, New York, Panama, Mexico, as you well know.

Baghdádians in Israel began to advance, some of them. They are hard workers. They are recognized in law and accountancy. Many who were born in Israel and were not given the facility and opportunity for education are on the lowest ranges. Many, if not most taxi-drivers, as an example, are the children of Iraqi [and Moroccan] immigrants. Some are 'floaters', no education, without steady work, some turn to questionable activities . . . .

Now you have added my Baghdád saga to your biographies of Syrians.

Victor Zakay
Interviews 1984, in English

Born in Panama
circa 1930 [?]

"OUR FAMILY SUPERMARKET IN PANAMA IS MORE KOSHER THAN ANY FLATBUSH STORE"

When I first visited Panama? I was born there. I've been living in the States for the last three years with my wife, Jeanne, and my son, Ely. Actually, I had attended several schools in New York, for a period of close to ten years. First at the Yeshiva Torah va Da-ᶜat in Williamsburg, then at City College where I took a degree in engineering. For post-graduate work I attended Purdue University in Indiana. Then I returned home to Panama.

Yes, the Yeshiva Torah va Daᶜat [Ashkenazi] is very orthodox. A rabbi was travelling in Latin America to collect money for this school. He persuaded my father that Torah va Daᶜat was very desirable; two brothers and I were sent there to study. My father was very religious, considered perhaps the most religious in Panama. He died thirteen years ago at the age of eighty-eight. How I got along in Williamsburg in Brooklyn, at the Yeshiva? I'll tell you the truth, it was the biggest surprise of my life. In what sense? I had come from Panama where the majority of the Jewish community is Sepharardi. I came to Williamsburg to find that the majority of Jews are Ashkenazeem — in the entire world. We experienced some difficulties, with the strange food, etc., but youth is able to adjust. We lived in a dormitory, along with many students from foreign countries. There were a lot of other Latin-American Sepharardi students there, so many that we had our own Sepharadi *minyán*. I was there for four years. One of my fellow students, a Syrian by the name of Ḥilou, is now the rabbi of the Damascus Jews in Mexico City; also a Mishᶜaan, who is a "mohél" in Mexico. Language didn't present a problem. I had learned English in my Panama school, since the U. S. was the

dominant influence. In fact many Syrians there speak English. Now some speak Arabic as well, because of recent immigration, I suppose.

My father met and married my mother when he was visiting Palestine in 1925. Her family originated in Smyrna-Izmir, and after the troubles of 1922 between Turks and Greeks, they left for Palestine. We are a large family; we are five brothers and four sisters; most of them live in Panama, but I have a sister in Long Island and another in Chicago. She married an Ashkenazi and went with him to his city.

To the best of my knowledge my father migrated to Panama in 1908. He was born in Palestine; from where his father had come I'm not sure, either Aleppo or Egypt. My father went to South America "seeking greener pastures." For a time he was in Argentina and Cuba, but he settled in Panama. At the beginning he was a peddler; later he opened a store selling general merchandise, retail and wholesale. He had several partners over the years, one of them a Dabbaḥ [an outstanding family now, in Panama]. My father mentioned a Ḥeres who came with him. Colon, the city on the Atlantic, is where most of Panama's commerce was located, the center of shipping and tourism. That is where the Jews from the Orient settled. My father was responsible for bringing the first rabbi to Panama in 1925 — Rabbi Aboughanem. My father built the first synagogue for Oriental Jews. Most of them now live in Panama City, but the Colon Synagoguge continues to function. They have a *minyán,* a very small congregation.

Almost all Jews, all 6,000 of them, are settled in Panama City, Sepharadeem along with Ashkenazeem; 80 percent to 85 percent are from 'Syria,' the others are Ashkenazeem and Spanish/Portugese from the Turkish Empire. Those from Aleppo are perhaps 40 percent, with others from Palestine, Egypt, etc. The Oriental Jews all attend the same synagogue, *Shebet Aḥeem,* of which Sión Lévy is the rabbi. Most congregants live some five or ten minutes' distance from the synagogue which was established early in the center of town. They live in two or three areas, each one maybe a mile apart. The most popular area is called Patilla ["Patiya"], which is a very modern section. Another is Congrejo, the older area of

residence. The other is Obarrio. The synagogue, however, is located in an area called Bilabista [?], which is the very old quarter where they had lived, where there is still a small Jewish population.

There is also a small Ashkenazi house of worship; and one of the Spanish/Portugese, whose members are quite assimilated; intermarriages in their circles are very common.

The Jewish social life revolves around the Desportiva Las Mananita, a social club located about 15 miles from the city center. It has magnificent sports facilities ["Desportiva"], nice grounds, swimming, tennis, etc. There is also a snack bar with *strictly kasher* food. The club is a Sunday place mostly. During the week they gather at the Centro Cultural Hebréo de Panama. Daytime, the women gather for card games; they are joined by the men in the evenings, where they can swim and patronize the dining room for light meals; but they don't have many cultural activities.

The outstanding achievements in the community are the two important Jewish schools. One is called the Instituto Alberto Einstein, established about thirty years ago. It was the only Jewish school until about six years ago when the Academia Hebréa de Panama was founded. This school takes pupils up to the 7th grade; it is the intent to add an additional grade every year. The Einstein takes children from early elementary through high school level. The Instituto Einstein has about 800 students; the Academia Hebréa about 250. The Instituto cannot be called a Yeshiva, like religious schools. They do teach some Hebrew and traditional Jewish history, holidays, etc., but not religion, which is what the Orientals want. Right now "there is a helluva fight" among the Board of Directors. Up to about three years ago the Instituto Einstein was run by five representatives from each of the three synagogue groups. Recently, the Oriental Sepharadeem insisted on greater authority — demanding a more religious program. This had led to a lot of nasty squabbling, which has even reached the civil courts. The community is at odds, according to synagogue-affiliation. This quarrelling has caused much distress, many wounds, unfortunately. Right now the school is actually run by a committee of parents ("la patronate," "los padres"). A basic problem was the large

number of *non-Jewish* students at the Instituto Einstein — about 25 percent. This was seen as a reason why more Jewish education was not given. The school is very highly regarded in all of Panama; many government officials including the President of the Republic enroll their children there. At the insistence of the Ḥalabiyeh, the Aleppoans, and others, the percentage of non-Jewish students has been quietly reduced to about 15 percent, with some increase in religious education. Hopefully this will come down to maybe 10 percent. It's important to have some non-Jewish enrollment so that the Jewish student will realize what it means to live in a country where the vast majority is not Jewish. The new school has no non-Jewish students but that doesn't mean that they have a more orthodox curriculum, however, even though the majority, in the directorate of the Academia is Oriental. There have been some problems in the Einstein; the kids are somewhat spoiled, the discipline was too lax, but efforts are being made to control that.

Synagogue services are very impressive. Even on a weekday morning you'll find thirty or forty men attending, with a *minḥá* [evening] and *ᶜar-beet* service. On Friday evenings there will be over 200 men, and the same number of Saturday morning, with some females. On Yom Kippúr and Rosh Hashaná, and also on Pesaḥ [Passover] you will find maybe 1,000 persons, it's jammed. There is an annex, too, for children's services.

Hygiene in Panama is of a high order. The standard was set through the influence of the American Canal Authority. Water is excellent, it is drawn from several rivers. It's not *quite* as good as it used to be; formerly the water quality was controlled by the Americans; in the last few years it is in the hands of the Panamanians.

The economic activities of the Jewish population are very diversified. Before, it was just storekeeping, retailing. Stores open at eight in the morning, close for two hours at noon and continue until six o'clock. However, there are many who are industrialists, with factories which begin operation at seven in the morning, a half-hour or so for lunch, and then they close at

about four in the afternoon. One of the outstanding enterprises is that of the Dayán brothers, originally from Ḥálab. They manufacture clothing, men's shirts, pants, underwear and I believe they also manufacture women's dresses. They produce brand name articles like Van Heusen, Givenchy, etc. They employ perhaps three hundred or so. There are five or six families which specialize in the manufacture of shoes — Bassant, Harari, Touash, Attieh, Abadi, and Zebede. They produce, and sell in their own stores and to other stores as well. The shoe business seems to be largely in the hands of Syrians, I would say. There is another segment of Syrian enterprise which is located in the city of Colon in the Free Zone [duty-free]. Most of the business of Colon is in the hands of Syrians. There they sell to Panama and do a good deal of exporting to other Latin American countries, and elsewhere. The largest Jewish business in Panama is owned by Ashkenazeem, Russian Jews named Kardensky — seven brothers. They have a big wholesale business in the Free Zone. One of the brothers was kidnapped a few months ago; by Colombians it is suspected. To this day no one knew of his whereabouts, although it is said that negotiations are taking place for his ransom. It is an ominous sign, who knows what may follow?

I've said nothing about the segment of Jewish Syrian professionals in Panama. There are many. There are a lot of medical doctors, many who have become specialists. Others are engineers and lawyers, etc.

I was drawn to engineering because I wanted to be creative. It *was* a big step for me, I didn't know what would be involved. However, I wasn't attracted to my father's business, although I helped there when I was a boy. When you are young nothing stands in your way, and I am very satisfied with my choice of career.

How I apply my engineering education? I'll tell you the truth. When I first got out of studying, I spent my time in building-designing. Then I went in for construction, actually building apartment houses. I leave the designing to someone on my staff. We, my partners and I, construct them and sell the completed building. My partners look after most of the work,

which permits me the opportunity to spend a good deal of time here.

I can't say that the Syrians in Panama are very Zionistic, but they are strongly pro-Israel. They contribute to Israeli-causes generously and of course they are thoroughly pro-Jewish. They use their considerable influence with the Panamanian Government to have it take a pro-Israel stand.

Rabbi Lévy in Panama is a Moroccan or Iraqi; he's been there for about twenty years. Formerly he was also the "shoḥét" and "mohél", but with advancing years, he has given up some duties, although he continues to be most influential in the community life, communally and personally. He seems not to allow anyone to encroach on his very positive authority in the synagogue; he *rules* there.

Many young people, "younger" people, are now very active in the community leadership, but it's still the old timers who are consulted on all matters. There is Mosé Misrachi [Mizraḥi], Jacobo ('Hacobo') Ha-soffér, who is president of the community for many years. Misrachi is most active in the synagogue, and organizations such as the B'nai B'rith, of which he was President for all Latin America; it's known as "Distrito 23." B'nai B'rith is important *outside* of New York's Sepharadi community. In the U. S. the Ashkenazeem carry on such work; in Latin America *all* Jews feel it necessary to actively defend Jewish causes, including, of course, the relatively large Sepharadic segment. In Panama, the Consejo Central Communitario Hebréo de Panama. [The Central Jewish Council] meets regularly, just as in other Latin American countries, to defend Jewish rights, with the active participation of Sepharadeem. In Panama the Jews are very highly regarded by the Government; perhaps their influence, their status, is exaggerated. There are, of course, many successful merchants and industrialists; they are thought to carry great weight outside of Panama — in American government circles, for example. Thus, when the Jewish circles complain of too much Government 'chumminess' with Arabs, the PLO, etc., the authorities give such complaints much consideration.

At times the Jewish Council will take out newspaper

advertisements to state their case. For example, when one time the President, Royo, attended a "non-aligned" meeting in Cuba, he was photographed embracing Yassir Arafat. I was a member of the committee which visited the President to complain. There were all sorts of explanations, apologies; he was 'misunderstood,' etc., etc. On the whole, relations of Jews with the Government are friendly, cordial. It is the tradition for the President to visit the synagogue on the High Holy Days [*just like the Pasha of Aleppo who paid a courtesy visit to the Chief Rabbi*].

Most of the Syrian Jews maintain a *kashér* home. Panama is outstanding in maintaining its kashrut. My family is, I am proud to tell you, 'helpful' in this respect. I give credit to my brothers. Our family owns a *kashér* supermarket, *Comissariato Kashér*. It's been functioning for close to twenty years. My brothers, Moses who is also a shoḥét and moḥél, and Isaac, opened the store. There, *only kashér* meat, chickens, and other foodstuff are sold, domestic and imported. It is something that I don't see even in Brooklyn. Even the leading hotels, the Hilton, etc., now have a *kashér* kitchen and serve weddings and other festivities for as many as 500 persons. There is no *kashér* restaurant but *kashér* snacks are available. The synagogue also built a social hall for weddings, etc. There are several women who privately prepare Syrian dishes for sale, "kibbeh," etc. As to how religious the community is, members of the synagogue, even those who don't observe the Sabbath strictly since they ride a car to go to Saturday services and then go to their businesses, they too close their establishments on Yom Kippúr and Rosh Hashaná, and on Passover [sic]. Of course, there are those who are strict Sabbath observers; they are in the minority — five percent to ten percent. Almost all have *kashér* homes; when they dine out, they may eat anything . . . .

You ask me about the Syrian Jewish life in Deal, New Jersey where I live. Of course, you know of the many synagogues in a small area. That is because wherever there is a large cluster of residents scattered around, close to Deal — Elberon, West Deal, etc., a small synagogue is established. It is

too far to walk to the large and central synagogue in Deal. Without local nearby synagogues, the residents will either not go to services in Deal or may be tempted to use their cars on the Sabbath to go there. There are now *nine such area synagogues* within three miles or so. Also very significant is the Hillel School, a Yeshiva. It has about six hundred Syrian students, as well as some Ashkenazi children. At present it has an elementary school and two grades of high school. It is planned to add a higher grade each year. The teaching is of good quality — and improving. Like other such schools funds are urgently required, and it is a continuing major drive to sustain it. I would guess that 75 percent of the children of school age among the Syrian Sepharadeem attend Hillel.

The Deal Syrian community is a prosperous one, with many parents newly-successful, economically. So they give their children everything they want — cars, lots of spending money, etc., which doesn't help the kids; too much money and too much freedom for these adolescents. The result has brought problems, as can be imagined. Only recently a committee was formed, of which I am a member, to deal with problems of abuse of alchohol and other drugs. These problems are not unique to Syrian kids, of course; they are common, especially to suburban wealthy life, everywhere. Is it widespread? Once committees are found necessary . . . .

There is a trend to ultra-religiosity on the other hand, perhaps as a reaction to the "good life," "permissivesness" and a "me" attitude. Most are not ready to submit to stringent religious rules. Observant individuals are resigned to this — and go about their moderate, customary religiosity. Some non-observant individuals have been won over, as well as some who are 'traditional.' This rise in ultra-orthodox is not unique to Deal Syrian Jews; it is seen also among non-Jews — Fundamentalist Christians, etc., as well as in the Flatbush Syrian community. On the whole I see the Syrian community, in and around Deal, as rather religiously oriented.

I'll tell you, my impression of the Jews in Deal is that they are very similar in many respects to the Jews in Panama; they always want to stick to the old traditions, even though they dress and act like the majority around them. They realize, for

their children's sake, (they may have a fling with some fad or another), but I think that they return to the traditional mode of Syrian life. Of course you always lose a few — a small percentage — who turn to a different style of life, but eventually some come around. Assimilation and religious intermarriage appeals to very few. To follow this course means to *lose their ties* with their families and with the community.

An important factor it seems to me is the necessity for *proper* directions from the rabbis and the leaders. It's not enough for them to attempt to instill guilt-feelings for transgressions. What is necessary is the need to teach religion with the right emphasis, the correct understanding, the *ethical base*, not the superstitions and obsolete 'miracle-stories' of *aggada*. We have to have well-educated, college-graduated rabbis who can talk and be understood by the growing youth, who are themselves, many of them, receiving college and university education.

"Hello Ely." [to his son who had walked in] "I want you to meet Mr. Sutton . . ." such a tall young man. Would you believe that he is only thirteen years old? We had his Bar Mizva at the Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, only a few months ago.

❦

Chapter Four

From and via, Beirut and Damascus

Basil David Cohén — Born in Damascus, 1894
Interviews in English

"WE BOUGHT MEAL TICKETS; FRIDAY-NIGHT DINNERS 11¢, THE SATURDAY MEAL WAS 15¢"

I was born in the Damascus Jewish quarter, *Harit il Yahood.* There were several sections to the quarter, one was Talayeen, another the Taᶜaleh. There were seven large synagogues, and innumerable small "midrasheem," study halls. The house of each of the very rich men had a special hall used as a private synagogue and study hall, where rabbis would convene every day to pray and study. The Farḥi, the Lisbona, the Angel, the Molcho, the Laniado families among others, each had their private religious quarters. The Angels — also called the Shemaᶜya family, had a most beautiful home. Visitors to the city were taken there because it was so famous. I was there, I know the establishment. [See the Lati interview.] My son-in-law Ḥakham Murad Maslaton, *ᶜAlav Hashalom,* "peace to his memory," was the cantor who officiated in the Shemaᶜya home. There was also the F'sohteh family which was prominent, they were also called Abadi; as well as the Sassons.

The attitude of the Muslims toward the Jews was very good, very favorable, including the official world. On the Sabbath they had armed guards at the gates of the Jewish quarter, to make sure that no one disturbed the Jews. Anyone who looked as if he did not belong in the quarter was not permitted to enter. Yes, I know that there were some disorders in the distant past. In my time however there was cordiality toward the Jews. On Fridays, at the Souk, even if there was a long line waiting to make a purchase, Muslims and Jews and Christians, even ten people — they used to move aside, to permit a rabbi to make his purchase first. When a rabbi passed, Muslim merchants sitting in front of their shops, they made a gesture of rising in his honor. They were very good with the

Jews, although a person is reluctant to speak well of the Muslims now. In Damascus we had a "moosheer" [a *rank superior to a "Wali"*] — the governor of the province. Many Jewish notables became friends with these high officials; I am sure that accounted for the peaceful Muslim attitude toward the Jews; no doubt they gave them substantial 'presents'.

Like the "moosheer" and the "wali," our Ḥakham Bashi — our Chief Rabbi, was also appointed from Istanbul [Constantinople] — under the Sultan. Many of the Ḥakham-Bashis were *'Spaniol'*, Sepharadeem, Jews from Salonika, Istanbul or Smyrna. In Damascus perhaps 95 percent of the Jews were very observant [*a figure that is widely disputed*]. No one would think of violating the Shabbat. *All* the butchers were Jewish in the Jewish quarter. I heard that in Aleppo all butchers were *Muslims*, and the Jews would buy their meat from them when they saw the kashér stamp on the carcass.

Yes, there were some girls in Damascus who were not all they should have been, "dancers" and entertainers — a few. But really weren't there some bad girls everywhere?

There was a difference in the religious education of the children — in Damascus the boys were very well drilled in the Bible, while in Aleppo they rushed them on to the study of Talmud. It's not to praise myself; I and others from Damascus were very proficient in the Ḥumash, the Prophets and so on. A boy was *never* allowed to study Talmud until he had mastered the Arba'a-Ve-ᶜisreem, the 24 books of the Tanakh. I'm not knocking Aleppo, *Ḥass-beshalom* [*Heb., God forbid, in effect*] .

. . .

I came to the United States in 1910. I suppose you could say that I was ambitious to make money. I was sixteen years old at the time and I had been working in Beirut for two years. There I had two uncles, both rabbis; one was Ḥakham Shemuel Cohen, the other was named Ḥakham Yehudah — he wrote a book called "Yehudah Yaᶜaleh" and another. I had two maternal aunts there, too, born Zalta. I came to New York to join a brother who was already here. My intent was to study bookkeeping — to add to my education. Up to the age of seven or eight I had been in a "kittab" [*an elementary Hebrew School*], after that I attended the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*

until I became fourteen. My father had been a tailor — making uniforms for Army officers. He just about made a living, it was difficult to provide for our large family. I had gone to Beirut for treatment, to a very big American doctor to treat me for a fall. He was a Dr. Bist, at a very big hospital. In the two years I was in Beirut I worked as assistant manager in a store called Abadi and Katraan, in spite of my youth. I was very lively for my years.

To get to New York, I went to Alexandria then took a ship to Patras, Greece. There I took a ship — steerage — to New York. I came at half-fare because I looked so young, wearing knickers. The heavy flow of Damascus immigrants was at the same time as those from Aleppo, immediately before and after the end of the war — World War I, of course. It was cheap to travel to America then, maybe $10 or $15. We all flocked to "Oriental Jobbers," as the Syrian center. When I came to New York there were very few Damascus Jews — maybe twenty families, Zalta, Srour, Sabbaan, Balaas . . . . I spent a year or two as a peddler in New York, then I went peddling upstate — in Schenectady, Buffalo, Rochester . . . before I went to work in the South. Did I speak English? Not really. I learned as I worked, little by little. In the South the winters were much milder and *Baruch HaShem* [*Blessed is the Name*], I met with some prosperity there. Oh, yes, Thank God, I never deviated from my religion. As soon as I arrived in a city, like Mobile, Alabama, for example, I headed for a kosher butcher, there was one in every city [?]. Or else I would look for the local rabbi, in Savannah, Atlanta, Dallas and such cities. He would direct us to a Jewish home where we slept and ate our meals — all for $3.00 per week, at most $5.00 per week. Believe me, that's all it cost.

The first months when I spent time in New York we used to go to a restaurant on East Broadway to buy a meal ticket for Shabbat, 11¢ for the Friday night meal and 15¢ for the Shabbat dinner. We ate a seven-course dinner — what do you think! A glass of milk was 1¢ — a roll was also 1¢, with a pound of meat costing 12¢ to 15¢. Everything was cheap in those days. Eliahou Arazi originally from Damascus was a wholesaler who supplied the Damascus-immigrant peddlers. In the beginning he used to advise me where to go to sell . . . .

I was the one who helped make a Damascus prayer-place, on East Broadway it was, for the *Yammim Nora-im* [the High Holy Days]. I was the "to(q)'eaᶜh," my *shofar* [*ram's horn*], blowing skill was recognized even in the old country. I used to go around collecting money to support the synagogue — 10¢ or 15¢ per week dues. One shouldn't praise himself but I was the only one who was active. I devised the name of the synagogue Aḥi Ezer, the name we still have now. We kept our own synagogue rather than mingling with the Ḥalabiyeh from Aleppo, because we felt closer to one another, we knew one another from the old country . . . . But, in fact *we learned* from the Ḥalabiyeh, they had more religiously-educated individuals, and they were more skilled in commerce.

I worked in the South for three years, and when I returned to New York, I brought back $3,000 or $4,000. I took out a peddling license for $100 and I prospered then too. I made more than $1,000 that season. Later on 'we' returned to New York to work for the biggest enterprise, "Oriental Jobbers," a retail-wholesale store with seven partners! I devised a system for them; on one side of the stores there were linen articles, headed by *Allah yirḥammon* [God be merciful to their souls], Shaᶜya Dweck and Isaac Esses. I was the buyer, and I brought in dry goods, stockings, shirts and so on. Every article that I bought was exclusively ours — for twenty square blocks! Our competitors never knew where our merchandise came from. My employers liked my activity, it was profitable and I was promised a partnership. When that did not materialize, I left in 1918 to become a partner with "Paris Decorators" — Abe Marcus and Gabe Haber. They had several stores, one of them on busy 125th Street. We parted company in 1925; I would not work on Saturdays as they insisted. I took over one of the stores, in the same line of business — curtains and custom bedspreads, and similar articles. Finally I opened up two more stores, under my own name, "B. D. Cohen." These I liquidated later. Harlem where they had been located was no longer an area for my fine merchandise.

I operated stores making custom bedspreads and draperies around New York for many years, always devoting much of my time to our Damascus Ahi Ezer synagogue and Hebrew school,

and helped to establish our fine Yeshiba with hundreds of children. Later I moved to Florida, for a period of several years.

When I returned to New York, after having been a widower for several years I had married again, the widow of Asher Esses, and lead a happy life with her. I gave up commercial work, to take up working for the synagogue and Yeshiba, which I headed for a number of years. Although I retired, I continue some of this religious work on a volunteer basis.

God has given me fine children, grandchildren and even several great-grandchildren. *Barukh Ha-Sham.*

[*See the oral history of son Eli.*]

Natan Lati — Born 1923, Damascus
Interviews in French, Arabic

"GIVE ME A MAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER EVEN THOUGH HE PROFESSES NO RELIGION"

I came here in 1980 from Beirut after a few years in Tel Aviv. But let me go to the beginning. My late father was a *tadjer*, a merchant, one of the important businessmen in Jewish Damascus. He dealt in *nouveautés*, 'novelty' items of women's fine apparel and textiles, imported from Paris and other European centers. When a Damascus woman was gathering a trousseau for her daughter and wanted the most fashionable, the finest materials, it was to my father's business that she went. His firm was called *Djejahti* and *Lati*. Their establishment was one of the few buildings that had two stories. I recall as a boy that his shop had sixteen salespersons, while other successful shops may have had three, or perhaps four salesmen on the floor. He sold wholesale, as well as retail.

We lived in *Hárit-il-Yahood*, the Jewish Quarter; every Jew lived there regardless of means. To live outside the Quarter meant in effect that one did not wish to be considered a Jew. Yes, there was a Dr. Pinto, who lived away, but only a short distance; it was because he sought some patients who were not Jewish. Yes, the Shemᶜaya (Angel) *'asir*, castle, magnificent as this home was, it was also in the *Ḥárit-il-Yahood*.

There were seven outstandingly rich Jewish families in Damascus, each with a magnificent home. No, the Farhi family was not outstandingly rich, although they were prominent in the life of Jewish Damascus. The rich ones were, Angel *bet* Shemaᶜya, (The House of Shemaᶜya), *bet* Muᶜallem, *bet* Lisbona, *bet* ᶜAmba, *bet* Laniado.... I don't remember the other names. Each had a vast residence, with six or seven interlaced separate *hohsh* [courtyards]. These residences had walls surrounding them, quite drab in appearance, to remain inconspicuous to outsiders, Muslims — and tax-collectors.

The wealth of Syria was mainly in Damascus [?]. It had been a world center of trade. The *Kawafi*, the caravans, would come and go from there, from Europe from *Baḥr-il-Ahbyaad*. [the "White Sea"], the Mediterranean. Ships would tie up in Lebanon from where the European goods were transferred to Damascus. From there caravans would travel into the Asian interior, to Basra in Iraq, to India, to Indonesia and China.... They would return with silks, spices, jewels and other rare commodities. From Damascus these treasures were then shipped to Europe. All caravans were centered in Damascus. [Lati overlooks Aleppo's caravan trade, considered by authorities to have been *the* most important.] The very important families I named, most of them were not Damascene; they were mostly of European origin for the most part — Laniado, Fárḥi, Shemaᶜyá-Angel — they had been, all, European — of Spanish-Portugese-Italian origin. Some of them — the Muᶜallem family, had come from Basra in Mesopotamia-Iraq, they became leaders in Damascus. Especially the Laniado family; one of them had risen to become a *pasha* [a governmental "Lord"] — Yéḥia Pasha Laniado he was called, and there were other Jews who rose to be *pashas* [but never in Aleppo].

Even with caravans going on the Mecca Pilgrimage, they

could not set out without Jewish financing — without Jewish suppliers. In fact all of the *Dawleh ᶜOsmanliéh* [the Ottoman Empire] depended on Jewish financing. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 this importance diminished. Nevertheless Jewish wealth continued for sometime after in Damascus. When the British forces entered in 1918-1919, most of the *Ghoota*, the vast agricultural oasis below Damascus, most of this fertile land was lost to the Laniados, and they too among other wealthy Damascus Jews lost their fortunes; they became poor; and although "they had been wealthier than the Sultan in Istambul," they became like beggars. Many of these formerly-wealthy migrated to Egypt, to a new and hopefully more hospitable climate. Some of them restored their fortunes in Cairo and Alexandria, in commerce and land holdings.

Their homes in Damascus had been marvels of beauty. I had been privileged to see some of them, *bi-il sháraff*, by [my] honor, there is nothing to compare to them. Some of the features of these 'castles' had been imported from Italy; like the marble fountain one can see in the reconstituted, "Damascus Room" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1921, before they lost their wealth, the leading families had entertained one of the Rothschilds who was visiting. Their ladies' apparel was lavishly decorated, jewels . . . etcetera. When he was about to leave he was asked in the customary tradition, what he would please to contribute financially to the needs of the community? He purportedly replied, "In view of the luxury and wealth I see, it seems more fitting that *you* contribute to me!" It was said for example, that servants in their homes would quarrel among themselves as to who would clean the 'Lady's' bedroom. They hoped to find some stray pearl or other valuable that may have been scattered around [!]

The Jews of Damascus, most of them, were craftsmen, working in mother-of-pearl inlay, wood carvings, or in brass objects to which they added silver decorations, etc; they were eminently skilled — renowned for their skill. Much of their production was exported. Even now, such articles produced in the Jewish Quarter will fetch a price three or four times higher than similar objects made outside. The connoisseurs prize the skillful work the Jews produce. The wealthy families of which I

spoke were *tidjar*, merchants, on a world-wide scale, much of their goods were textiles. They shipped East and imported spices, perfumes, silks and so on, as I mentioned earlier. *Actuellement*, they served the land, they benefited the country. All this commerce on a huge scale diminished, dwindled away, with the opening of the Suez Canal. Now the countries in the East could receive and ship goods by boat, much cheaper and much faster than by caravan. When the French came as the League of Nations Mandators in 1921, things looked up for a while for the Jewish populace but the vast majority remained poor; poverty was widespread.

As to the questionable reputation of some of the young Jewish women . . . well, yes, some did become 'dancers,' and so on. It was a necessity for them to seek whatever means possible because of the poverty of their families. I maintain that despite the bad reputation that is spoken of, they were no worse than Jewish young women in Aleppo and elsewhere. Is it a crime to seek food and shelter for their families? Aren't there married women in good circumstances, whose husbands provide well for them, who are "loose," *zono'ht* [Hebrew, prostitutes]? Yes, some of the poor girls did turn to prostitution. There were many such in Aleppo, [?] in Damascus, and in Baghdad. No, I do not condemn such girls. The real shame is in cases where a woman had no financial need and yet turns to loose ways. *ᶜAsheer vé gannáv* [Heb., a rich person who is a thief] can't be excused . . . .

I forgot to mention the earlier disorders and blood-libel attacks on the Jews. In 1840 of course, there was the agitation against the Jews on the charge that they had abducted and killed a Christian priest, one 'Badry Tooma' [Padré Tomas] and had used his blood for the Passover sacrament. This created a world-wide movement in defense of the Jews. Later too, in 1860-1861 there had been the Muslim [Druze-sect] attacks on the Christians — and counter-attacks, with a huge loss of life. When the slaughter ended, it was the turn of the Jews to be attacked, many imprisoned, some killed. They were accused by the Christians of having benefited from the Druze-Christian conflict, and the entire Jewish community had been in fear of

slaughter. Leaders of advanced Western nations — England, France, the United States, rallied to the defense of the threatened Damascus Jews. Finally by appealing to the Sultan in Istambul, the threats ended. It was soon after that Adolphe Crémieux, the eminent Jewish-French statesman, spearheaded the movement that established the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools intended to spread Western [French] culture among the Jews of the Near and Middle East.

When Sheikh Feisal from Arabia had made his way to Damascus in 1919-1920, seeking to assume the kingship of Syria, the French General Gouraud, in charge, would have none of that, and so under cover of darkness Feisal was spirited away to Trans-Jordanian Palestine. He was soon carried to Iraq where his friends the British, permitted him to take the Crown.

I should have pointed out that the Jews of Damascus were, relative to the Muslims, well educated. Their years in the Talmud Torah and other schools — especially the Alliance — made them educationally much superior to the mostly illiterate mass of Muslims. Any of these who wanted a business or family letter written — or read, would ask a Jew to help. "*Ya mu-ʿallem*, Oh Master, please read this — etc, etc." It is thanks largely to the Alliance schools that Jews received some secular education. (Yes, of course there were religious schools, kittab schools.)

I am not an authority on Jewish religion, but I know that Damascus had many eminent rabbis too, and earlier, many renowned Kabbalists, who had lived in not-too-distant Tiberias and Safed; Ḥayyeem Vital, Abu Ḥasseera and others. Some had migrated to Damascus. They are buried in the *Jo-bahr*, the old synagogue where *Eliahou Ha-Nabi* [Elijah] had taken refuge in the cellar; it is there that they are buried. Yes, we did have important rabbis, very religious — to the degree that they may be called fanatic, ultra-Orthodox. We did have an enlightened *Ḥakham Bashi* — a Chief Rabbi who came to preside in Damascus in 1928 or 1930. He was from Bulgaria; a Sepharadi, of course, with the family name of Tadjer, a scholar, holding a doctorate in philosphy. *Actuellement* I would say that there was a gap of 200 or 250 years in modernity, between him and the rabbis of the city. He was very highly regarded by the civil

authorities, and his requests, when they were made, benefited the Jewish community "very sensibly" [in French]. His learning created a gap between him and the traditional rabbinate. Many in the populance resented his modernity; he was much liked by others.

Most rabbis were very traditional in their conduct. Let me give you an example. When I was a child attending the Kittab, the Hebrew school, there was a 'rabbi' (teacher) fond of administering corporal punishment. When he called on a child to recite — whether or not the boy knew the lesson, he was sure to receive an *attleh*, a beating, there was no disputing that. They were cruel, some of them.

The Chief Rabbi wore a black turban. Those who were not of quite full rabbinical status wrapped a colored handkerchief around their *tarbosh*, their fez. One of the rabbis, Ḥakham Mosé Maslaton, a great man, the grandfather of Ḥakham Mordechai *ʿAlav hashalom*, ["peace to his memory, later, head of the Damascus Congregation in Brooklyn], he was a most modest man; he declined to wear a rabbinical turban. He would say, "I do not merit its use, I have not yet reached that level"; a great man. He was the father of several rabbis in Damascus, Ḥakham Azoor [Ezra] and Ḥakham Naʿehm, a great Kabblist, and Ḥakham Yaʿcoob, whose son Mordechai came to New York and is remembered with affection and reverence. I am told that Ḥakham Mosé in Damascus was more than modest, he was humble, and lived not only humbly, but in deep poverty, by choice. Yes, there were many great rabbis in Damascus, I have their photographs . . . .

I don't know, I can't tell you about the religious observances of my antecedants; I don't know. I do know that my father who travelled in Europe and in the Near East on business seven or eight months each year, he was a Sabbath observer, an upholder of tradition. Holidays were observed as holidays, the Sabbath was a sacred day. At one time when I travelled in Europe with my father, I know that he searched for *kashér* eating places.

Had I attended the Alliance school? *Naturellement*; I left it at the age of twelve or so. From there I attended *Mission Laique*, a French secular school which offered more advanced

education than the Alliance. When we arrived in Beirut I continued my *Mission Laique* schooling, then I completed my studies at the Jesuit school. We went to live in Beirut because that had become the center for my father's business. He travelled to Palestine and elsewhere but Beirut was the style-center; (without exaggeration, sixty percent of the "high-style" business in the Near East was in his hands), that way he was closer to his markets. He moved to Beirut and we came to live with him, for thirteen years, where I grew up. After studying at the Jesuits', I went to Europe to study. Was my attendance at the Jesuit school with my father's consent? "Naturally." The Jesuit school was a college. There were two colleges, then a third. There was the Jesuit college and the American University, later another was established in the 1960's, the Lebanon College. The Jesuit instructions were in French, the American University taught in English. There was also a medical [?] school operated by Catholics ("Roman Orthodox").

It was the Saint Joséph College, which was responsible for the advancement of Arabic literature. In the twenties, in 1927-1928, proper Arabic was all but forgotten, in Syria, in Iraq — and even in Egypt. You would pick up a newspaper and find that it was written so simply that it was child-like, until the Lebanese advanced the use of the language. Many had gone to Cairo and wrote for the leading newspapers *The Muqattan*, and *Il Aḥram* . . . George Taᶜlab was the proprietor of *"Il Muqattan"* . . . . So it was the Lebanese and their influence which raised the level of the use of the Arabic language. Even the Encyclopedia and the Great Dictionary (the "Qamoos"), they were the work of the Lebanese, Efron Bistány, and later, his son; yes, Christians. All the advance in the use of Arabic was the work of the Jesuits. Aḥmad Shidya also — he was previously *Paul* Shidya, he converted to Islam, sported a turban and became something like a shaykh. He was one of those who raised the level of the use of Arabic. The poetic movement in Arabic, beginning in the 20's was mostly established by Lebanese. Aḥmad Shawky [a leading poet], when he met with Shaar-Akhooy, Shawky said to him, "If I am called the Emir of poetry, you are King!"

I should have mentioned that as a student in the Damascus intermediate school, the *Mission Laique*, I had an inspiring teacher who taught Arabic. When I left Damascus at the age of thirteen, in competition with students whose specialty was the *Kor-ahn*, [classical] I was far in advance of them due to the love of the language, in which I was disciplined. This spurred my interest in Arabic and my advanced studies later, in law and other studies in Arabic, where a teacher, Khoury, encouraged my interest at the language. He used to take me with him to literary club meetings where the leading intellectuals of Lebanon would meet to discuss French and Arabic literature. Later I collaborated in the writing of a critical volume — comparing French and Arabic literary styles; still later we wrote another volume on the same line. No, it's not true that there is an enormous difference between the literature of the two languages. In fact I can tell you, many great French poets were influenced by Arabic literature, and particularly by Hindu literature. I was swept by this wave of interest in Arabic literary clubs. To hear the delivery of poetry in such beautiful Arabic and French, that was a phenomenon that could not be equalled elsewhere.

Thus, I spent a good part of my seventeen years in Lebanon in the company of Christian literary men, particularly in the mountain towns of Lebanon. There, is the *true* Lebanon. Not in Beirut but in the small centers, there are the true, the pure souls. Beirut is not the true Lebanon — Lebanon is not Beirut. It is in the mountains that the people are noble, true men with feelings and brotherliness, very well educated, *trés chic*; it is there that you feel that you are a man, human and living. Not in ᶜAleh, that is Druze-Muslim. Yes of course, Beirut was a general center, but it is in the mountain locations that you meet the True Man, *the natural man*. It's not that they were rustics without connections in town; it is that in the mountains, it is there that one is appreciated, and can appreciate their fine characteristics and their approach to life, their mode of living. I had many, many friends — everywhere, in every village, in every home . . . I was received like a "little prince." No — actually, I was a "little Jesus" to them. I was welcomed, to eat, to drink with them — at anytime I chose to come. For what

reason? I don't know... it was a mutual liking, it was reciprocal.

As a boy, I had no specific ambition, mostly I thought to follow in my father's footsteps, but on my father's advice — he urged me to learn a skill, craft weaving, *nateej*, I worked in a textile plant in Beirut.

After a time I left; I went to Europe to study for four years. I spent time in the weaving city of Roubaix, France, in the Grand Textile Institute, emerging with a Ph.D. When I returned to Beirut I was persuaded to get married.

With that my intellectual activity ended. My wife would not or could not participate, and did not tolerate my intellectual connections. She did not like it. I put up with that, what was I to do? There was the prestige of my family to uphold. Yes, I had certain small diversions, to go with her to a social club once or twice a week . . . to see the occasional friend, to participate rarely in some cultural function. No, no, it was not as it had been before — I had lived with them, *for* them and they for me — the genuine life.

Then in 1958 the disorders that later shattered Lebanon had begun with the arrival of the P.L.O. and the Palestinians. In 1967 came the "Six-Day War," the Palestinians began to show their brutality and ferocity. Before that period Jews had lived a peaceful, a magnificent life in Lebanon. Conflict between Christians and Moslems? That was all fabricated. The people of the the two religions had lived together in all harmony and peace. The so-called differences were artificially created. Even today there is no genuine enmity between the two peoples. There are *personal leadership ambitions* — which create differences and conflict. They lived together before like brothers; in the social clubs, in entertainment centers, in commerce, everywhere; they ate and worked in harmony; together, in complete harmony. I decided to leave, finished with Lebanon. I went to Europe for a year travelling all over Western Europe. No, it was not with my family, my wife did not like travel, nor Europe. It was she who decided us to go to Israel.

Fortunately, we lived comfortably in Israel, not badly. For us it was an acceptable form of life but it was not Lebanon. I had *lived* Lebanon! Life in Israel was agreeable enough.

However, I must tell you — and it is not from prejudice nor to minimize the value of the Syrians that I saw in Israel. I cannot help telling you that in general our Jews, the Orientals, are materialists; other than money, apart from making money they have few other real interests. [?] My impressions of life in Israel? With whom did I mingle? It was mostly among people from Lebanon and Syria, circles into which my wife carried me. That is how it was, not entirely willingly, but one follows his wife — and her circles. Why did I not seek out Ashkenazi intellectuals? We do not have the same mentality. Among scholars perhaps? No, I am not a scholar, although I have a little culture. I was a member of Likud, yes, but that is as far as it went.

Unfortunately, we Sepharadeem are poorly thought of by the Ashkenazeem. They won't tell you openly, but it is a fact. Because of the many uneducated Iraqis and North Africans you ask? I don't think that is the reason. "You are a "*S'fardi*". That tells a lot. It's not due to lack of education. Those who came from Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, some of them are fairly well educated, yet — "They are "*S'fardim*' " [*Sepharadeem*]. The culture of the Ashkenazeem is different, I ask myself if they do have a culture. Actually, among Sepharadeem there are *a number who are eminent scholars*. A colleague of mine from the Alliance days is an important professor. His family was very poor, with seven or eight children sleeping together in one or two rooms; yes, he is now a very important university professor. He and others like him — have *changed their names*. Another was recognized on television; he too had changed his name.... Why they changed their names? I don't know. [*Made them 'Israeli' to avoid the prejudice against Sepharadeem?*]

The Sepharadeem are poorly thought of, poorly treated. They are made to feel small, inferior. In Lebanon, I was a Jew; in Israel I became a lowly "S'fardi." We are held down. No soldier among us is permitted to rise to a high rank. Even if he is most qualified, an Ashkenazi is brought to replace him in a higher rank. It's unfortunate, but that's the way it is. We discussed this at length in Israel but decided that there is no way to improve the situation, we are 'Arabs' to them.

It is very difficult for Oriental Jews to unite and speak

with one voice. There are Romanian groups in Israel, and Czech organizations, etc. The Oriental Jews seem not able to put aside their *local* origins and make demands on the government with a united voice. It was tried, to form a Syrian political group, but with no success. Every individual wants to be the "Leader." For Syrians, Orientals, anyone who is interested in ideas, in literature, such a person is a "freak". *Il est anormal*, not to say crazy; that's the way it is.

Was Israeli Minister of State Abuhassir dishonest? Aren't the politicians and bankers there *all corrupt*? But they don't let it become public. For the most part their shortcomings are covered over quickly by their Ashkenazi colleagues. They don't go in for petty thefts and bribes, they shoot at tens of millions and even hundreds of millions of Lirót [Israeli former unit of currency]. For the Ashkenazeem, the Sepharadeem are limited to "black labor" — you are their 'porter', confined to lower grades in every area. That's it in a nutshell; that's the way it is! They say, "We are the ones who colonized, who built the land. You came when all the preparations had been completed. We are Westerners, you had been living with the camels in the Arab lands!" There is no solution to the Ashkenazi-Sepharadi tension, none that I can see, at all.

Between you and me, I must tell you that education, culture, is not fitting for us Orientals. We are unreliable, direct descendants of Abrahám, Yiṣḥaq, and Yaᶜacob. . . . If you fall into the hands of a Sepharadi Israeli official, he will torture you with delays, while an Ashkenazi dispatches your matter very quickly [?] if you can explain clearly what you need. [?] We are not good people and we'll never be good, we are too Oriental.

Actually we did not suffer in our life among the Arabs, we led the best life, compared to others. . . we did not undergo pogroms, the Inquisitions, the slaughters by Christians, the Crusaders. We were almost never mistreated by the Muslims. They know that we inspired the Christian faith and that of Islam, beginning in Mecca and Medina.

Aleppoans in New York — and many others too, from the Near East, are commerce-minded, eager to "make a million;"

but beyond that — what? If one is an exception to this drive for monetary success he is considered abnormal. I have been in business for years, but that is not all there is in life. I read a newspaper morning and night, and a periodical or book every night before I go to sleep. "They" don't have any respect for culture, knowledge; "How many stores does he operate?" That seems to be the criteria for "success." "What brand of expensive automobile does he drive? A Mercedes, a Lincoln Continental? How many cars does he own?" No, I don't mingle too much with them, there are times when it's necessary to attend a social function — such as a wedding of a member of my family — or of old friends from Lebanon or Israel. Otherwise, I keep pretty much to myself. For lack of other interesting activity I stay downtown, perhaps in my office, until nine o'clock or later . . . .

I prefer not to trade with New York Syrian Sepharadeem, they are hard, hard, people with whom to do business. I took an oath not to deal with any one of them, even if he were to present me with all his wealth. They are secretive, unrevealing. If you were to call an American businessman, if he cannot satisfy your needs, he will advise you where to go, who to ask for, in contrast to our secretive Syrians. I've stopped importing merchandise that can be sold in the discount-bargain stores operated by our Jewish countrymen, I and my son Georges who is in the business with me. Even if I were to destroy it, trample it underfoot, I will not sell it to our Syrians.

We have no great culture. The great rabbis have expressed every wisdom. They said: "Manners came/comes [supercedes]?. before Torah", *Derekh eres qáadma la-Toráh*. No, these unpleasant characteristics do not spring from living in the Orient, from living with Arabs. The Arabs, even before Muḥammad, were always men of honor and trust.[?] To give you an illustration: A story is told about a village elder who entrusted his weapons to a neighbor for safekeeping. When an enemy of the owner — who was away — came to demand the arms from their keeper he refused. "They can be given only to their owner!" The marauder seized the keeper's son threatening to cut his throat if the father did not surrender the arms. He

persisted in his refusal even though he was certain to see his son slaughtered. [*This may have been characteristic of Bedouin Arabs, but not of those living in cities.* There, it is: *alf qál-bé ua-la ghálbeh; "better to renege a thousand times and not be overcome in one deal", Arabic proverb.*] In *Pirqeh Abot*, the "Ethics of the Fathers," there you find the essence of Jewish morality and ethical conduct. Do we follow these teachings now? The Talmud? It is a compendium, an encyclopedia of contradictory views. The Talmud was influenced by Roman law, and Greek philosophy! No, the theory of Resurrection of the Dead was not taken from the Persians, it came from China and Buddha . . . I don't know what to tell you. . . . I'm familiar with the ideas of all religions, they are all alike. Give me a truly noble man, even if he professes no religion whatever.

Yes, I am what is called a "*Yom Kippúr-Jew*" I go to the synagogue only on *Yom Kippúr* . . . I keep myself busy, I have no patience for social chit-chat. Money and wealth are not of great interest; my concentration is on knowledge and culture. The *best years of my life* were spent in the company of cultured Lebanese-Christian companions, as I told you earlier.

[*Natan Lati died recently.*]

Selma Duek Sutton — Born in Aleppo, 1906
Interviews in Arabic, French

"WHAT A LIFE WE LIVED IN BEIRUT, IT WAS "M'LOOKI" [A ROYAL EXISTENCE]."

My memories are dim about the beginning of World War I, I was only eight years old at that time. I do recall that toward the end of the war, my brother had to hide for several months. He had been a volunteer in the Turkish Army — I don't know

how he got out. I know that at the end of the war he had been going to Istanbul; dressed in an officer's uniform, he was 'negotiating' gold trades. Ottoman paper money was not trusted in Aleppo; Turkish pound notes were sold at a huge discount, in exchange for gold coin. The private bankers in Aleppo sent agents to Istanbul where paper money could be changed for gold pieces *at full value;* this was an illegal operation. The authorities were looking for my brother, that is why he hid until peace came and the matter blew over. The Jewish bankers in Aleppo, many of them made large fortunes during the war, through legitimate trading in coins — silver and gold — and also through the Istanbul operations. A few wives of bankers used to travel with the banknotes to Istanbul. There was less danger, there was less suspicion of women.

My father was Ḥakham Mosé Duek. He was a non-medical doctor, a "practitioner," who could deal with simple ailments. When the malady appeared to be serious "Dr." Duek used to refer them to established physicians — like Dr. Altoonian or others. My brother Abraham worked in the Customs, in charge of the importations of enormous herds of sheep. My grandfather was also a rabbi, Ḥakham Yaᶜacob Duek *ᶜalav-ha Shalom* ["peace to him" — his memory], he was a distinguished rabbi. My other grandfather was a noted rabbi, too, Ḥakham Meir Laniado. I have great ancestors on both sides, and Duek ancestors who had gone to India. [See the notes on Calcutta elsewhere, in "The Search for My Great Grandfather," *this writer's.*]

In Aleppo, my family lived in the area called Bistaan-il Klehb (The Garden of the Dogs), near the Naᶜoora stream, close to the Hotel Baron. It was in an apartment, not a *ḥohsh;* it belonged to Eliahou Beyda.

I had attended the Alliance, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle.* "No, the *Laique,* the superior school had not been established yet. During the war, 1914-1918, the French sponsored Alliance school "pertained to the enemy," so it was closed. A German school functioned instead, but few Jews, few, went there. Since there were 'no schools', some girls attended a small private school operated by the Cattan sisters (unmarried). They were referred to as the Cattan-att [plural of Cattan]. The school was discontinued when the Alliance reopened.

My marriage took place in 1922 — I was sixteen years old, and I was soon taken to Beirut, to my groom's home straight out of school, a child, — *now Mme. Isaac Sutton.* How the marriage came about? His sister was married to one of my brothers! (Isaac had earlier lost most of his money in the financial difficulties of the house of Taweel and Bobo.) I was only a child when I got married; in fact I gained my full height only *after* my marriage.

When I got married in 1922, there was no electric illumination in Ḥálab, nor public transportation other than by carriages, horse-drawn. When a trolley line was established in Ḥálab [circa] 1930, the people *mula-soo,* they were ecstatic. I saw that, on one of my frequent visits. Even water had to be secured from public spigots — when there was no well in the *hohsh.*

My wedding was held in the apartment of Joseph Sasson, in the Djamiliyeh. He was our relative and invited us to use his "salon," a huge room. Chairs were set around the room for the guests. After the ceremony, the invited were offered a variety of sweets, there were no dinners served. Festive dinners *were* held to celebrate, but in our own homes. A pre-wedding ladies' party was usual, an afternoon *ᶜabra* for the ladies of the family and friends, where sweets of every variety were served, as well as "shrab-il-lohz" [a delicious ceremonial drink made of puréed almonds] . . . . The party was in honor of the bride. Sometimes they had an evening party with musicians — a *nobeh.*

The ceremonial *swehnie,* platters, were sent by the groom to the bride-to-be with perfume and silken robes and flowers. There was another tray sent — *Sehneet-il-Na'ish,* this one contained other gifts, as well as a purse with some money — "to pay for the "Ḥammam," the bride's customary bath-house party. In my time henna was no longer in vogue. Yes, of course I had a Ḥammam party; how else? Each of the family friends brought a dish of sweets, as well as delicacies provided by the bride's mother. A Ḥammam party was also arranged for the bridegroom, when he bathed and shaved, etc., a day before the wedding. Yes, there was another custom the night before the wedding. A dozen or so of young "ḥimm-ehleen" [public porters], Jewish, they would present themselves at the groom's door, singing traditional

wedding street-songs [*chanteys*] and looking for a gift — of money. They were never disappointed; who would attempt to cross these rough, needy individuals? They were given supper, desserts — and a little money. Here too, in New York, they marry off their girls very young, just as in Ḥálab of 1922.

After a few months in Ḥálab we went to Beirut, to my husband's home. That is where I lived, that is where I gave birth to my children, that is where I brought them up. We took Lebanese nationality, it was published in the newspapers. It's lucky that we did, because later, the Syrian authorities stepped in and made a lot of trouble for those who had Syrian nationality.

What a life we lived in Beirut! it was "m'looki," [a 'royal' existence], better even! In the late afternoons we used to go to the Jewish club, and toward ten o'clock we had a buffet supper there. It had no pool or sports, it had one floor of a large building, it was in *Hawooz-il-Saᶜatiyeh*, a 'better' area. There was a district called *Waadi Abu Jameel* where the poor Jews lived, just like Baḥsita in Ḥálab.

I married off all my children in Beirut, one son and three daughters. One of them is Celia, a widow of Raymond Stambouli from Damascus; she lived with him in Barcelona, Spain until he died. She came here recently and just left with Nora, my son Miro's American-born wife, to attend a *swehnie* party. The other two daughters married two brothers; Sheila to Sasson ('Argentino') Laniado, and Lilian, to Jacobo Laniado, who live in Buenos Aires. I go to visit them every year.

My son "Miro," Mayer, is named after my grandfather Meir. Miro, the 'baby' of the family left Beirut, and later came to New York; married Nora Sutton, *bint* Mollie and Jack Sutton, while I continued to live in Beirut. I came to see them once or twice, before I decided to live with them in Brooklyn.

Miro and Nora had come to visit me while I still lived in Lebanon. I had rented a lovely home for them. She lived like a queen, his wife. My son had told her, "Nora, you are on vacation, you will not lift a finger. There are servants to do everything." She loved it so! She said, "Although I am an American, if I am asked to live here, I would pack a suitcase in New York and fly to Beirut." How much she enjoyed life there. *Ya ḥabibi!* [an ecstatic "oh, my!"], what a lovely life it was. The mountains were only

ten or twelve minutes from the city, the lovely beaches, ski areas only half an hour away . . . .

Earlier there were a fair number of Jews in Beirut, many of Damascus origin. After the troubles in Syria in 1947 when the State of Israel was established, large, very large numbers flocked to Beirut from Aleppo and Damascus and nearby *Seda* (Sidon). It became a very thriving Jewish community. I was a leader in many charitable organizations, *Bikkur Ḥoleem,* attending the sick, *Moharr-u-Mattaan,* which helped the poor to get married, *Mattan Ba-sehtehr,* that looked after those who would not accept public charity . . . and still others, many.

Our club had a floor above it which was the headquarters of the Kataab, the Christian Phalangists, very friendly to the Jews. Toward the 'end', as we were about to go up to the club one evening, one of them said to us not to be alarmed, because they would be receiving a shipment of arms. A little later that evening they came to rush us out to our homes — "there was some danger . . ." My home was directly across the street. In an hour there was a tremendous explosion in the club-building, the Phalangists had been bombed. Not a single window of my home remained unshattered! The telephone was busy with inquiries about our safety . . . .

I hurried in a break from the curfew to the Argentina Consul to get a visa to join my daughters. Everything had shut down and when things relaxed in a week I went off to Buenos Aires. Most Jews soon left. Now [1982] there are only a few hundred Jews in Beirut. Why do they stay? They are making fortunes in their commerce — like Jameel Mizraḥi, a giant electrical contractor — who can't get themselves to quit, even though there are dangers. [*Some have been assassinated, Mizraḥi and several others.*] The Jews went, a lot of them to Milano, Italy, and to Brazil, New York, and the Argentines.

The Aleppoans are very able, very clever; wherever they go they work hard and prosper. In a conversation with Dr. Joseph ᶜAttieh, a leader of Beirut Jewish life for 40 years, he remarked to me how very able the Ḥalabiyeh are. "Before they even found themselves a home here they hurried to the commercial center, *Khan-il-Shoonah,* to establish a business place." They are so enterprising.

In Beirut — *unlike Syrian Flatbush!* when a wedding was invited for, at six o'clock, everyone invited was *already there.* It may have been held at the elegant Phoenicia Hotel or the Holiday Inn, with a cocktail party or dinner. When my children were married we gave a dinner — with all the food prepared at home — and served at an important hotel. We invited 300 or 400 guests, all were fed *from my own kitchen* — hotels didn't have *kashér* facilities.

Many notables among the Lebanese officials also attended our festivities. Sami-beg-il-Solh, Prime Minister of the Republic, attended my children's weddings. His picture at one wedding appeared in the newspapers the following day, standing with members of the party. Camille Chamoun, "the famous Camille," joked with Sami-beg-il-Solh. "We know that you are fond of the Jewish people, but *must* you pose for pictures with the rabbis?" He replied, "They are not "Sahh-you-niyeh" (Zionists), so, this is their land, they are Lebanese. I love them more than I love you!"

There was also Bishop Mubarak, a Maronite Christian, a saint, he defended Israel so much. A new church was being dedicated in the mountain resort of B'ḥamdoun, a magnificant building, to which a few leading Jews were also invited. At the reception later, with my usual boldness I approached him and said, "My Lord the Bishop, I am here as a representative of the Jewish community to offer my Congratulations." He sprang up to draw me near him. "Come close, sit by me! Where are they, where are they (the Israelis)? Why don't they come? We would welcome them with open arms." We were photographed together. At another special occasion he visited our central synagogue and gave a brief talk. He said, "Your Fathers are our Fathers, your Mothers — our Mothers. Even our Messiah, Jesus, came from your fold!" He was sometimes jokingly referred to as "Rabbi Mubarak." He loved the Jews so much.

Even to our last days in Lebanon there was seldom unpleasantness for the Jews. It was the damned Palestinians, Muslims, who burned and destroyed. They came into Lebanon numbering 100,000 and became a "million and a half," the *misérables* (French). Each man would marry four wives and breed 20 to 30 offspring. The Lebanese all treated us with

affection. The Palestinians destroyed the country — it will take a hundred years to restore it!

When Miro, who lived there then saw the conditions, the city full of Palestinians, he was disturbed, and remarked, "This is the last peaceful year." And so he left.

When the Six-Day war broke out in 1967, while riding a public-taxi, I heard a Muslim exclaim, "Israel? It is 'Amerka,' 'Amerka' [*the U. S.*] that did 'it." The majority of *Muslims* were anti-Israel and pro-P.L.O. But not the Druze Muslims. [*at that time*] They were delighted with the success of Israel and were always most friendly to Jews. One of them said to me, "I want to see Israel whip the Arabs completely before I die!"

[In French:] *Enfin, ca etaient des bons moments* ("well, it was a fine time") Beirut is unforgettable. It was such an enjoyable life we led there.

The Jews in Beirut, yes, some were *relatively* poor, clerks, in banks and shops, etc., but many had their own enterprises, perhaps most. Of course there were important Jews, merchants, private bankers, Aleppoans, like Nehmad, Safra, Shᶜayo, Beyda, and others, who were very wealthy. They were the minority and they were leaders in the religious and social life among the Jews, in Beirut as they had been in Ḥálab. In truth the city was full of banks, everywhere you turned; of every sort and of every nationality, not excepting important Jewish people from Baghdad, like Zikha and others.

In making visits to businessmen in the company of another lady on the committee to collect for a charity, we called on Yaᶜcoob (Jacob) Safra, father of Edmond, [founder of New York's Republic National Bank]. He greeted us with "Welcome, welcome, dear ladies, dear friends. I wish that all my visitors were as welcome as you..." He sent for refreshments, put aside all work to make us welcome. "What service can I render you ladies? Charity? Immediately, it is a favor you are rendering *me*!" he said, as he wrote out a very generous check. We listed Safra's contribution at the top of our list and went on to others. When we went to Mr. Totaḥ he felt obliged to match Safra's contribution, and the same with Mr. Zilkha and others, well able to, and perhaps ashamed to give less than Mr. Safra.

Jacob Safra was an extraordinary man in all his traits. He was a very modest individual, who showed the same consideration and kindliness to the shoe-shine man who served in his office, as to the most important personage. His generosity for communal needs knew no limits. Yet, for his own household, he was most careful in his spending. Why? you may ask. It is because what money he had accumulated had been the fruit of his own hard work. More than that, an orphan boy, he grew up in a home not his own, his uncle reared him. In truth, I have never met anyone so generous and kindly.

On the same occasion, that time when we solicited from Yaᶜkoob Safra, we called on another man, also a multi-millionaire, Khaleel il-Sankari ("the tin-smith"), from Damascus. He had been a modest glazier at the beginning of the Lebanon civil-wars but he did have a large warehouse full of plate glass. He made a huge fortune and continued to add to it. When we called on him, he did not rise to greet us, although he knew us. Immediately he said, "I contributed a lot; I've already given!" We asked him 'what his pleasure is', *Tizkeh Lamizvot*, what would he 'command' to give us. "Well," he said, "as long as you have come, here are $20." We thanked him for his good intentions and left the money with him! This man's attitude is in the greatest contrast to a man like Yaᶜkoob Safra — such a lovely man.

I can not ever forget that life in Beirut.

"Fred" (Ferdinand) Anzarouth - of Montreal
Interviews in French, Arabic, English

Born in Aleppo, 1910

"I WOUND UP IN MONTREAL AFTER A LIFE IN ALEPPO AND BEIRUT"

The war years 1914-1918 were full of misery for many, the

majority, of Jews in Aleppo. Those without a sizeable cash reserve found it difficult to provide for their families. My father, who was a *dallal,* a free-lance broker whose living depended on bringing buyer and seller together, suffered because of the shortage of commodities available for sale.

My mother's sister married to an Esses, became a widow with several small children. Soon after this my mother died leaving several young boys and girls. How simple and logical that my father should marry my widowed aunt. His own children and those of my aunt could be taken care of together, without much more expense. Soon there were new children born, and so in the home in which I grew up, there were *three sets of offspring.*

After the end of the war, 1918 — when I was 8 years old, my father decided to "change the scene"! to try for new luck, by going to "Amerika." On our way we visited Beirut, and wound up living there. I grew up in Lebanon, and lived there for 46 years. Toward the end, with the Arab agitation against Israel and with the large number of Palestinians who came to occupy Lebanon, life presented a measure of grave uncertainty; an uneasiness set in. That is when I decided to emigrate. I chose to begin life again in Montreal where I settled — in 1967. It's 16 years since my family and I made our home in Canada.

I serve the Sepharadi Community there as the Editor of *"La Voix Sepharadi."* The magazine I edit is indeed, as its name states, "The Sepharadic Voice"; it carries news of the Community, and serves also to maintain its cohesiveness. I am the "center of information" tying together the several ethnic groups which comprise Sepharadic life in Quebec. The overwhelming number of Sepharadeem — in Montreal perhaps 20,000 to 25,000 — are from Morocco; I am highly regarded and well-liked by them, even though, mind you, I am from Aleppo, a *Ḥálabi,* a member of the quite small Syrian-Lebanese segment.

In Beirut my father had resumed his broker role, but much later, at a somewhat advanced age, he went into a new enterprise. Was he religious? Not at all. He was a 'free-thinker' and a member of the Masonic Order. Yes, of course, while in Aleppo, he conformed to the pattern of religious practices

common to the Jews of the city. In Beirut, he no longer felt compelled to follow Ḥálab's insistence on synagogue attendance and so on. At the same time, he maintained a thoroughly Jewish order at home in Beirut. While not a religious practitioner, he was well grounded in Hebrew religious texts. Whenever he found himself in a religious study-circle by chance, he was able to discuss the texts with considerable expertness. We observed the holidays, had Kiddúsh Friday nights, but not much more. To give me a 'broader' education, not so very "Jewish-oriented" he enrolled me in a neighborhood school — Christian. Many Jewish Beirutis followed that pattern too; later many sent their children to St. Joseph's University, a French Christian college, in the same way that the 'modern' Jews in Egypt had sent their sons and daughters to Christian educational institutions. Even when it came to my bar mizvá period, he kept putting it off, delaying. He kept changing the Hebrew teachers who were to teach me enough so that I could carry out my role at the bar mizvá ceremony . . . . After a time, at the insistence of his friends, he did enroll me for a short period in the *Alliance Israélite.*

The Jewish population of Beirut when we settled there around 1922-1924, was quite small with perhaps 3,000 or 4,000 persons. Many had originated in Damascus. Beirut is a seaport, and while not as cosmopolitan as it later became, it was certainly more Western than Aleppo — much more modern. When Aleppoan Jews came to settle there in that period and until somewhat later, Aleppoan Jews were looked down upon. The prejudice or envy of Aleppo may have been because of the greater commercial advancement of that city. Those original Jewish Beirutis lived a very modest life, most of them, but they repeated a rhymed saying which was very derogatory:

> Ḥálabi bala na-a-sa
> mitl ḥ'maar bala ḥiassah
>
> An Aleppoan without shortcomings
> is (as rare) as a donkey without a harness[?]

They considered us Aleppoans to be 'bad' in every way — cheaters, liars, everything; but in reality, active, able

businessmen. They mocked our Aleppo speech-patterns as they did in Damascus; our customs — our way of living. But when wealthy, successful Aleppo families fled to Beirut they became looked-up to, the community leaders.

Later developed Jewish life in Beirut was complex; it was highly stratified. On one level there were those who considered themselves *gehbeereem* (Heb.), rich, *akkaabehr* (Arabic), aristocratic. Others were low-class, poor. Those who were in between, who were neither rich nor poor, had a hard time; unable to live like the rich, and yet anxious not be considered "poor." My father was in the "middle." He came of a respectable family, had married an ᶜAdes, who were highly-regarded. My maternal uncles were all well-educated, my father's family was of more modest origin. He never learned to speak French, and when we kids spoke together in French at home, it caused him considerable annoyance. I can tell you that we excelled in French. Everyone except the 'old fashioned' spoke it.

Later, around 1945-1946 and still later when anti-Zionist and Arab nationalism made life very uneasy in Aleppo, "most of them," [?] the Aleppo Jews, migrated to Beirut, and some to Israel and Europe. Large numbers came to Beirut; it became crowded with Ḥalabíyeh. Many were wealthy and established themselves at the pinnacle, the very top of Jewish circles. We enjoyed the coming of large numbers from Ḥálab, so many were old friends — and family. It was a good life then. The children of many families were sent on to higher education, unlike Aleppo; they became very "French," following the general trend. At the same time they had great concern for status and wealth. It is believed that Aleppoans in particular are very sensitive to position and money. Not so my father. We had some difficult times, but when he had money he spent it freely on us.

We had a well-organized Jewish community in Beirut, with synagogues, schools, rabbis, and welfare and other social organizations. There were two schools: the Talmud Torah was a somewhat traditional school where mostly religion was taught. This was frequented by families of the lower income level, and also by some middle-class traditionalists; until the 10th grade. The Alliance Israélite school catered to middle and upper-class

families, and some of those who had graduated from the Talmud Torah. At about age 16, the Alliance graduated its scholars; some of them went to the French government-supported Laique (secular) schools, before going on to university studies, as many of them did.

The principal synagogue, *Maghen Abrahám* — there were many — had been begun a long time ago, partially with funds from the famous David Solomon Sasoon of Baghdád and India, a benefactor of many communities in the Middle East. It was a very handsome and elaborately decorated structure. There were active social-service committees operating, the *Bikur Holeem* Society aiding the sick, *Goutes de Lait* providing food for the poor, *Mattan Ba-Sehtehr* which 'secretly' supported those of good families who had become needy, etc.; a clinic, to treat minor ailments, and the maintenance of six hospital beds in two hospitals. There were some poor although not very many, among the Jews in Beirut, but they had to be taken care of. As the community prospered the hospital beds were maintained but were little used. The community fund had accumulated something like 3 or 4 million dollars when most Jews had fled the ravaged country. The funds are in the hands of Edmond Safra in Geneva. There were organizations for the youth, among which was the *Maccabi Sports Club* with several hundred participants. I was honored with the presidency of the *Maccabi* for several years.

Most Jewish youth were cosmopolitan, received a good education; many attended the several important universities of the city, including St. Joseph, a Christian school, where instructions are in French. The Jewish youth were involved — like their Beirut peers — in a variety of activities, socialist, nationalist, etc. Some were in clubs with strong — but discreet — leanings to Israel. When the Christian Phalange was organized to protect Christians from their Muslim and P.L.O. opponents, some Jewish youth joined, to help protect Jewish inhabitants against *possible* fanatic Muslim harassment. Others, left-wing adherents, argued for the cause of the P.L.O. You can see that it was a lively and varied set of ideas, among Jews as well. Most well-educated Jewish youth looked down on the religious and traditionalist.

The leading 'original' Beirut Jews were members of a few families, Elia, Ḥelwehni, Saᶜadia, etc., who had come much earlier from Damascus and Sidon, most of them. (The early 'natives' were few, "the Dana, the Ḥanna, and the Mann ['Manna']" families.) Before the numerous and wealthy Aleppoans arrived they had been the 'dictators' of the Jewish life of the city. Albert Elia, the beloved President of the Community, was later abducted by Syrian authorities, and carried to Damascus. No one ever heard of him again; it is believed that he died or was assassinated in a Syrian prison. For 24 years, a former Damascene, Dr. Joseph ᶜAttieh, was the popular head of the community.

Jews in Beirut were highly regarded, especially with the immigration of Aleppoan, Damascene, and Iraqui wealth. Those from Ḥálab included Beyda, Schᶜayo, Neḥmad and others. Jacob Safra had come earlier, in 1922, I think. So also did Isaac Sutton. He had married Selma Duek in Ḥálab, soon after World War I and returned from Aleppo to resume his residence in Beirut. Selma, his wife, later became the "queen" of the Jewish Community. She was the activist head of several charity organizations — and was very beautiful! [See her oral testimony elsewhere in these pages.] We had good, even cordial relations with the Muslim and Christian leaders of the country. It is small, everyone knew everyone else. Jews were never molested — due perhaps to the delicate balance of the authority in the country, between Muslims and the Christians — mostly Maronite-Catholic. This served to provide comfort and safety for the Jewish inhabitants.

I don't know what persuaded my father to abandon being a *dallal,* a broker. He began the importing of equipment for groceries and butcher shops — scales, coffee and meat grinders and things like that. I had a printing shop myself, for a long time. I had excelled in drawing and used to make designs and layouts for a publicity office where I worked for several years. As a result I frequented printing plants: *en un moment* [in French] I decided to be my own master and established a printing house. It wasn't bad; I did pretty well at it.

How my wife and I met? One year approaching the

Christmas holidays my printing shop was very busy. We didn't have enough trained help to take care of all the orders. One of my friends, Maurice Barry, who was also a silent partner with me, suggested that his two sisters, educated girls, could perhaps help out. The sisters came in, one about 18, the other a little younger. The older girl, Eva, dazzled me, she was so lovely. A couple of months later my friend invited me to the engagement party of his sister Eva. At the reception, during a conversation with the employer of the engaged young man, I remarked to him that the beautiful girl was becoming engaged to a boy who struck me as "stupid." He said, "It is *you* who is stupid! Why don't you do something about it since you like the girl so much?" The *very next morning* I came back to talk to her. She was astonished when I announced that I wanted to *marry her!* She said, "This is not the time or place for such conversation . . . . We will talk about it some other time . . . ." This was enough encouragement for me! We "talked about it" for a few months, with her parents opposed to the scandal of breaking off an engagement; my father was also opposed. And so it happened. We married. She was 19 years old, and I a little more than 20 years older than she. When I proposed to marry Eva, my father objected. She does not come of a *"good enough family"!* (Her maternal ancestors were all distinguished Rabbis, *Yedid.)* Well, my father, I told you he was broadminded? but he still retained many of *Ḥálab's* old-fashioned traits — he passed some of them on to me I must confess. I loved Eva and I married her.

One day my father asked me to enter his business. My brother was no longer interested in working with him, would I join him? "Sell your press and come manage my business, I am old and can't carry on alone." I did that, and had a stimulating experience in the new field. Soon our firm became the most popular; we supplanted everyone. We made an excellent business of it. Even in mechanical problems, they used to come to me, my workers, to solve problems they had; in short order I was able to tell them what was wrong. I was recognized as an Expert at the government offices. If a scale had my stamp of approval, it was accepted as correct, without hesitation.

The calm and prosperous beautiful country with its sea and nearby elegant mountain resorts began to become increasingly

agitated at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967. Muslims fought with Christians; the P.L.O. had come in. Many of the wealthy Jews who had come some twenty years before began to leave. A climate of uncertainty and insecurity set in for all inhabitants, and especially the potentially vulnerable Jews. On one occasion, Yassir Arafat, fully armed, presented himself at the gate of the Presidential Palace. When the guard refused to admit the armed Arab to the presence of the President, Arafat snarled, "I am of more importance than your President!" The atmosphere was deteriorating.

Another example: one day a Muslim presented himself to my father to collect an *alleged* 20-year-old 'debt' which he claimed was owed by my father. "With the accrued interest for 20 years, you owe $100,000. Pay, or you will be killed!" What was to be done? Somewhat earlier, a Joseph Antebi from *Ḥálab* was faced with a similar demand — when he hesitated to pay, he had been assassinated. Many years before I had done a favor for a government official who was now high in the security forces. He had said, "If ever you have a problem, Fred, let me help, come to me." This is what I did, and gave him the details. He called me soon after. He had spoken to the claimant and had suggested the best solution — a 'peaceful' one, one that was agreed to by the "claimant." I was to make the man a present — of a *scale*, from my father's stock. We did that, of course, but my father was deeply shaken. The following day he left, to visit my brother in Milan. On his way back he stopped in Israel to see relatives. He was attacked by gangsters in Tel Aviv, severely struck on the head and robbed of his money and documents.

When he returned to Beirut, he found me contemplating leaving Lebanon, but strongly urged that I should not go to Israel. I had remarked to Eva, my wife, that conditions were deteriorating in Lebanon; "they are beginning to stink." She agreed on the need to leave, but where? Finally, we decided to resume our life in Montreal, where our knowledge of the French language would immediately put us at ease. I sold my equipment business and in the company of my wife, my small boys, Ralph, Aaron-Hillel, and Bernard, we made our way to Montreal, but without the common difficulty, a long delay in

securing a visa. It took me only a day or two instead of the normal six months or more that others required.

I entered my children in a French-speaking school in Montreal, but was subsequently told that such schools were for Catholics only; all others were required to attend English-speaking institutions. I enrolled them in the Hebrew Academy, a day-school, a Yeshiva. There they received a good English-Hebrew education, in Ashkenazic Hebrew — to my regret. Ashkenazi Hebrew is not 'authentic', but there was no choice. I train them in proper Hebrew — Sepharadic; at home this is how they use the language but *not* without some Ashkenazi-influence. Ralphy, my oldest, spent a year in "BMT," a modern Yeshiva in Israel connected with New York's Yeshiva University, before entering McGill University in Montreal. He is very devout, just like his two younger brothers; but they make no problems for me and their mother about our observing Judaism as we wish to.

There is a small Lebanese-Syrian community here, and among the Lebanese my wife and I are *looked down upon* as *Ḥálabiyeh* — (half a century ago!). We are all looked at as 'strangers' in the midst of the large Moroccan world. The few Egyptians also regard the Syrians as backward, 'uneducated,' just as they did in Egypt.

There are many card-playing groups among the Lebanese-Syrians in Montreal. After the card-playing they turn to the old-world sickness — low-down gossip. There is another Lebanese group which plays cards but then turns to cultural discussions, intellectuals, you might say.

Let me tell you how we Sepharadi Jews are considered by the Quebec Provincial Government. They have the highest regard for us! We are immigrants, yes. However, we came with a fluent 'Parisian' French, and an excellent education in French culture!

After a few years, Ashkenazeem, the vast majority of Jews in Montreal — have finally fully accepted us and our insistance on maintaining our Sephardic heritage and traditions. We are fully integrated now in Montreal's Jewish life, while

safeguarding our special qualities. We receive a share of the Community Fund, as well as a portion of the government subsidy which is made to every ethnic group. Canada provides a fine place in which to live and work. While economic conditions are somewhat difficult now [1983], it is a situation that is world-wide, of course.

Eva was a bookkeeper until she lost her job recently. She is now collecting "unemployment" for a year. But she is studying, computers. When I wanted to buy a new car recently, my boys asked me to pass it up and to buy them a computer instead!

My wife is a true *'Ḥalabíyeh,* even though she was born and brought up in Beirut. Eva is a wonderful *Ḥálabi* cook, too.

❦

Chapter Five

New York, Born in or Long-time Residents

Harry Zebede
Interviews, Deal, 1979

Born in Palestine, 1911

"MY PEDDLER FATHER BEAT ME WHEN I BROUGHT HOME $30. SELLING ESKIMO PIES. 'STOLEN!' "

According to my father, Aslan, I was born in Jerusalem in the Maḥa-neh Yehudá district. My father married 'Victoria' (Marḥúba) Nahón, a 'Spanioliyeh. Her father and mother were born in Ḥebron. It was said that the Zebede family was born and lived in Ḥalab, Aleppo.

Once, he went to Beirut to buy textiles. [?] From there he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While walking around the town, he saw an empty store and on an impulse he rented it. He sold yard-goods, textiles by the yard, as well as other sewing needs.

How had he met my mother, since she had never come to Jerusalem from Ḥebron? When she was sixteen or seventeen she visited relatives in Cairo, where she was sought after by many admirers who wanted to "take her out." One day she received a telegram telling her to return home, to Ḥebron, without delay. Her father, a rabbi, told her that he had found a suitable prospective husband. The marriage broker arranged that the future husband, from Jerusalem, be invited to spend a Shabbat in Ḥebron — where he met the likely "bride." My father and mother liked one another and so they got married in Ḥebron. I was born soon after.

After a year or two of marriage the "Young Turks" military movement required that all young Jews formerly exempt from military service by paying a small fee — a *fkeke'h*, [release] now should be subject to military service. About 1912 [during the Turkish-Italian War] my father was street-gathered into the Army, no questions were asked. A musket, *awass, a t'fingeh*, was thrust into the conscript's hands and he became a

soldier. They marked the recruits off; they marched through the countryside, resting every few hours, day and night. During one night-halt, my father considered his miserable situation.; here he was being led away from home and his new bride, "What am I doing in this situation?" he thought. As they marched on in the dark, the thought of his home and marriage became too much for him. Quietly in the dark he rolled down the embankment while his Army conscript-file marched on. For two days he marched back, along the very road he had come on, back to Jerusalem, back to his home. When he arrived he remained in hiding until nightfall. The he crept into his home to inform my mother that they would secretly be moving away, leaving the country; abandoning everything — home, store, all his goods. Throught the local "shammosh" [sexton], he arranged for a carriage to carry the family away at night, toward escape and freedom. He told me, "We travelled far, maybe for ten days, moving only at night, until we arrived at a seaport [*perhaps Beirut*], where we remained for about a month until a steamer became available to permit us to escape the country." [*Beirut, too, was under Turkish domination, but the conscription of Jews was apparently of no importance in that city.*]

We boarded a steamer which landed us in *Napoli* [Naples] from where we boarded a ship going to "Amerika." The total journey took four months before we reached New York, at this time I was about one year old I guess. The family arrived in New York in 1912 — because World War I began two years later, I was told. We had difficulty in landing. When my father glimpsed the Statue of Liberty, he gave way to the impulse to rid himself of every rememberance of the miserable old country — and proceeded to tear up, to shred, every document in his possession: identity cards, passports, etc., everyhing that smacked of the 'old world.' This created some problems with the authorities . . . .

After we landed, we eventually located my father's sister, who had married someone they called "Agha-babba" [a 'spanioli Turk], I don't remember his family name. They lived at 15 Essex Street, on the Lower East Side. Luckily there was a vacant flat in their tenement house, rent $15.00 per month, into

which we settled — and where we stayed many years.

My father made his way, like all new Syrian immigrants, to "Oriental Jobbers" on Orchard Street, or other similar jobbers. Soon they helped him fill a *chanta* (satchel) full of drry goods, given to him on credit. At the end of the day, he paid for whatever he had sold as a peddler, then he would replace the sold merchandise in preparation for the next day's work. He began to earn $3.00 to $5.00 each day, after long hours of carrying the heavy tablecloths, pillowcases, sheets and similar merchandise, up and down tenement stairs.

When I became six years of age, my mother took me to the local public school, I think it was P.S. 42, at Hester and Orchard Streets. When school hours came to an end at about three o'clock, my father took me by the hand to the *kittab*, the afternoon Hebrew School on Orchard Street and entrusted me to Ḥakham ('rabbi'/teacher) Ḥayeem — I don't remember his full name. There was also Ḥakhams Ezra Baqqaii, Mosé Hidary — and another, who was very strict; he used to hit hard — Ḥakham Isḥaq Killzi. We returned home from the kittab at about seven in the evening.

My father was religious all right, he kept the Sabbath carefully — and so did my mother. Was he a Hebraic scholar? No, but he could read the prayer-book and all that. My father and my mother were never strict with me in anything. They never hit me, they were loving and very easy-going with us, Hyman, my younger brother and me.

On Saturdays my father used to take us, my brother Hymie, four years my junior, and me to the *knees*, the synagogue. No, it was not the synagogue on Orchard Street that I remember. It was a synagogue that was established by Eliahu Shrem — a shammosh (sexton) — he opened a synagogue on Eldrige Street: All the Aleppoans went there [*not very correct*] they called it "Shrem's synagogue."

On Saturdays there were no classes at the Orchard Street Hebrew School, but every month the "gizbareem" [the overseers] would listen to our recitations, to see what we had learned and to check up on the effectiveness of our teachers. They would hear us recite from memory "The Song of Songs" [*usually recited as part of the Sabbath Eve prayer-service*]. We

also learned by heart the Psalms connected with each holiday; and the Book of Ruth and Esther. These we learned in *Shari'ḥḥ* [*translation, somewhat unfamiliar formal Arabic*].

At the Orchard Street school they did not teach much *Shari'ḥḥ* but they did in Ḥakham Maslaṭon's (Damascene) school, where my father transferred me when I became ten years old. I used to run away from the Aleppoan Orchard Street school, I didn't like it; nor the teachers, who sometimes hit us. I had a few friends who also ran away from these classes. Sometimes it was necessary to be taken to school by hand, by our parents. The toilets werre in the outside hallways; on the excuse of needing to go to the toilet, we ran down the stairs and out to the street. To prevent this, sometimes our shoes were removed. That didn't stop some of us, sometimes we would run away barefooted.

That is why my father took me to Ḥakham Murad Maslaṭón's *kittab*, on Delancey Street, with 'Damascus' students, near Forsythe Street. We entered a room in which there were ten or twelve children, with the rabbi walking back and forth as he listened to the children recite. One of the boys caught my eye and invited me to sit beside him. "My name is Dave Bibi," he whispered. My father introduced himself to the rabbi and told him that indeed I had had four years of Aleppoan-schooling on Orchard Street. The rabbi opened a book and asked me to read. "Turn back a few pages, please, rabbi, to pages I am familiar with," I pleaded. "Oh, no, I want to see how well you can read prayers you had *not* studied before." The truth is that me and my buddies had not learned very much. We didn't like the "strict" rabbis, didn't pay attention to the lessons and we were always scheming how we could run away. Ḥakham Maslaṭón turned to my father in surprise at how much I had succeeded in *not* learning in four years of *kittab* on Orchard Street. My father answerred, "Ḥakham, I turn over the *laḥim*, [the flesh] to you, you may return *ʿahdim*, [bones] to me"; [wear away the flesh in punishment if necessary, in order to see that the child learns]. "Oh, no," the rabbi said, "I can see he is a fine boy. I like him already." You can see how wise this rabbi was. I liked this teacher and my fellow students and attended class regularly. He

inspired us to rise at six o'clock in the morning in order to attend the morning service there, before going to public school. I continued to attend the Hebrew school until I was fourteen years old; I can read the Siddur, the prayer book, with ease.

Seward Park High School is where I went, only a half-block away from home on Essex Street. I stayed for four years, to graduate. I was in the company of the Bibi brothers, David and Ruben, Charlie Dushey, Jack Shamosh, the Beyda brothers, Raymond, "Chubbie" (Ralph), and Al, Sammy "Lindy" Laniado [*a Damascus Laniado*], and Hymie Sasson, all of them are dear friends who I have kept to this day.

Then, most Syrian Jews moved to Williamsburg, in Brooklyn, across the East River from the East Side where we lived. We stayed on the East Side until everyone, East Siders and Williamsburgers, everyone, moved later to Bensonhurst. This was know at first as *Brooklyn-il-bi ᶜeedeh* "the distant-Brooklyn," [in contrast to near-by Williamsburg]. Bensonhurst became known as "the See-Beej," reached by the "Sea Beach" subway line of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Co. — the "BRT."

My father continued as a peddler, and when I became a youth of twelve or thirteen I worked on Sundays during the summer, selling Eskimo Pies. The first Sunday I worked selling this ice cream on the beaches of Coney Island, I returned home very happy. I announced, "Pop, I made $30. to day!" He didn't believe me and counted the money carefully, after which he gave a smack on the face, the *first blow*, that left my cheek swollen for two weeks! "Why are you hitting the boy?" my mother asked. He said, "He must be a thief; he could only have *stolen* so much money!" Each Sunday I returned home with $20., $30., which I turned over to my family. My father couldn't believe that I could earn so much in one day, while he earned that sum in a *whole week* of trudging with heavy valises walking up and down the five-and six-storied tenement buildings. To prove it to him, he agreed to go with me to Coney Island one Sunday. The activity impressed him so much that he offered to "go into partnership" with me. This was squelched by my mother. While a young boy would be chased away for

peddling without a city license, she was afraid that my father would be arrested.

Where I bought the Eskimo Pies? At the corner of Essex and Hester Streets there was a small candy stand operated by Tobrowsky,a tall man with a long beard [*typically Russian in appearance but with a seemingly broken nose. Tobrowsky remains in the memory of this writer as "the very image" of Dostoievsky.*] I got my supplies from him, and from Haber's near-by. Haber's was a popular store selling all sorts of merchandise dear to young boys, he was called *Cheap Haaber.* [This store is still operating at the same location.] I used to pick up a heavy pail, loaded with dry ice and the Eskimo Pies and make my way by subway to the beach. Tobrowsky also sold small pieces of candy and old copies of the colored Sunday "funny papers," "Abe Kabbible," "Mutt and Jeff," "Jiggs," "the Katzenjammer Kids," etc., which were hung up. With my 2¢ daily allowance, I went to Tobrowsky for a big assortment of the candies; sometimes I did not select enough and would tell Tobrowsky that he still owed me a half-cent's worth!

When I was younger than the Eskimo Pie business, I traded in selling chewing gum in the evenings. These I bought from *Cheap Haaber* I think; he was a semi-wholesale jober as well as a retailer. I bought gum by the box, and following the advice of the 'experienced' pal, Raymond Beyda, I peddled my gum in restaurants, where the diners could be approached easily — when I was not chased out of the place. Raymond had directed me to Delancey Street where there were many eating places. I went to 2nd Avenue — also with many restaurants. The first time there, I peddled as far as 14th Street; I was afraid to go further in order not to get lost. Raymond became a "big shot"; he gave up selling gum to make more money selling newspapers on the street. Guess who he was working for — the "Turk." While I made $4.00 to $5.00 selling gum, Raymond made more, peddling the papers around the streets, at 2¢ each. The "Turk" [a *Ladino-Spanish Jew*] hired passing boys, "Here, kid, make lots of money selling' noospapers' for me!" I sold newspapers for a short time. My profit was half-cent per copy, "Latest edition, buy your latest!" I used to shout. At other times, we ran around the streets shouting "Wuxtra, Wuxtra!

["Extra" edition, "special" news] read all about bla-bla, etc.!" It was heavy work carry around big bundles of newspapers and I gave it up; I went back to selling gum, and by my smiling courtesy I succeeded in earning as much as $6.00 and $7.00 in an evening; the customers were often generous and would refuse to accept change — to a quarter, a half-dollar . . . .

My brother Hymie could not be gotten to attend school, he hated it, and wanted to run away. He didn't sell gum or newspapers, but at the age of fourteen he decided on a career of selling neckties, the "big shot that he thought himself to be. With a capital of $6.00 or $7.00 he bought ties — at $3.00 per dozen, and took them to sell them "out-of-town" — in Yonkers saloons. He sold out his stock, and continued until he accumulated a capital of $100. With this he bought 30 dozen ties and decided on Albany, New York as the place to sell them. When he arrived he made telephone calls to nearby physicians, telling them that he "represented the International Necktie Company" and asked for permission to show the 'company's' products. "How much are those nice ties?" At $2.00 each they found them quite attractive, and in three or four days he sold them all, the ties that had cost my brother 25¢ each!

By age sixteen, working in Albany, one day we were shocked to see my brother drive up to our tenement *in his own car*, an auto he bought in Albany from his neckties earnings.

I don't know why I didn't follow in my younger brother's footsteps; maybe because I didn't have his nerviness. When I graduated high school, I dreamt of a career in a "dry-goods store" and worked for such a merchant, Morris Dweck, for one year. At the end of the year, Dweck decided to abandon his second store where I was employed, next door to the Salvation Army headquarters on 14th Street. The Depression had begun, the store wasn't doing very well. When he informed the landlord in my presence that he would vacate at the end of the month, on the impulse I offered to take the store myself, at the $200. per month rental. My aunt, who lived in our tenement house, offered me her piggy-back savings to help me to pay the first month's rent; when we counted the accumulated change, it came to $237. Now to stock the store. I went to the merchants, Husney, Mamiye & Hidary, Isaac Sutton and others, who had

supplied my former boss. Everybody knew everybody else. They asked who my father was, they knew him; and several merchants each extended me credit of $200. immediately. I did no better in the store than my former boss, for two long years. Then a friend, David Politi, told me about the possibility of sharing a busy store in Jamaica, Queens; I was taken to see it. The man formerly occupying half the store had gone bankrupt, unable to pay half of the $2,000 per month rent; the other half of the store was devoted to selling women's apparel, I intended to sell household linens and babywear. I scraped up $1000. through a loan and my own tiny capital, paid the first month's rent and two later I 'dressed' the show-window — with my *entire stock.*

By the end of the day I had sold out *every piece of merchandise I owned.* What a fine "100 percent location," a busy intersection, next door to the large Gertz Dept. Store. By 8 o'clock the next morning I was waiting at the door of my wholesale suppliers — carrying away bundles of merchandise. Soon I could order merchandise to be *shipped* to me by truck, and was launched on a successful business. But the man from whom I had rented my share of the store eventually failed to pay the landlord, and soon we were dispossessed. The owner of the property refused to rent to me, merely a boy, even though I was ready to undertake a $24,000 annual rental. (The following month the store was rented for $60,000).

After two years at this fine location, I had a capital of $15,000, with which to operate a new store. I was barely twenty years of age and I was afraid to lose my capital, so I rented a nearby store at $250. per month. However, having tasted the prosperous operation in a really busy location, that I would not rest until I had a fine large store again. I did find the very large store nearby, which I rented with my brother, Hymie. It became a mini-department store in which we were very successful. At the end of the lease the landlord refused to renew and so we had to close up. Hymie and I each rented stores independently in mid-Manhattan. My several later stores didn't do very well and I gave them up.

I now operate a very modest 'store,' week-ends, in a New Jersey "flea-market," where I am able to earn a living, enough

for my needs. I bought a modest house in Deal, nearby. My wife, Shirley — her maiden name was Maleh, worked as a school secretary until she retired recently. She secured a teaching license. Since I can't stand the cold weather of New York anymore, we bought a small cooperative winter apartment in Miami. There I do a little flea-market business. In the summer we occupy the house we bought on the Jersey shore many years ago. My wife's part-time real-estate brokering there, with my own store, permit us a reasonably comfortable life, with my two sons and Joseph and Morris.

Rachél (Raḥel) Sarway — Born in Aleppo
Interviews in Arabic and English — circa 1912

"WHY DID SHE SCRATCH?" SO ELLIS ISLAND HELD US FOR FIVE DAYS

I am the daughter of Abraham Salem who had a grocery store on 20th Avenue in the "old" days, Surely you remember him. We came to America in 1920, but my father had come in 1914. My father had worked for Joseph Sultan (ᶜ*Attár*, the spice seller) in Aleppo and later, in New York he joined him, in the work of the voluntary burial society; he had come to America with Sultan. My father was employed at first by Oriental Jobbers, ᶜ*and il Sha'ra* [*at Haron Sha'ra's*]. Then he went with his brother, to try his luck in Washington, D.C. Soon, my uncle returned to New York and told his father, "I want to marry an American [gentile] girl." "Never!" And it never came to be!

Where did we live in Ḥálab? Certainly not in the Djamiliyeh [*the better Jewish area*]; we lived in a small area near the Great Synagogue, in a poor part of the old city.

In coming to New York the first time, it took us one and a half months at sea. It was a freighter that made many stops. Clearing Ellis Island, my sister happened to scratch her head in the presence of an official. Immediately she was taken hold of, detained for examination. "Why did she scratch?" Although the rest of us were cleared to go to New York, my mother would not leave Ellis Island — for five days — until the authorities decided that the "scratch" was a harmless one.

We landed at 35 Essex Street just above Isaac Gellis' delicatessen. It was on the 6th floor, we had the front three rooms and three in the back. So that we had enough room in which to move around — at $13 per month. My father opened a small grocery store only a few yards away from our home. You think that our $13 rent was cheap? You have no idea what poverty there was. A peddler would sell a table scarf for 50¢, after climbing up and down many tenement floors. Then we moved to 20th Avenue near 65th Street in "Sea Beej,"Bensonhurst, where my father continued his business. Before the period when he spent his full day as a grocer, my father had devoted part of his labor to the synagogue, then came the grocery, died in 1950.

I married Nouri *"Murray"* Sarway in 1924 who had no money whatever. Nowadays "they come with 'silver platters'." In those days we had nothing! Today, the government authorities, the Jewish Philanthropies, Sephardic Bikoor Ḥoleem, come around to new immigrants from Beirut, Aleppo, Israel, Cairo — and ask them their needs; a home, money, furniture, food? They are ready to supply everything. *Khehr!* [*bounty*]. You should see what is served here where I live, in the Senior Center, for lunch for 50¢, chicken, meat and a thousand other things.

At the time we got married my husband had a job on Allen Street, he worked from 7 A.M. to 9 in the evening. Now, can you find a domestic day-worker today, at $3.25 *per hour*? Later he opened a store on Allen Street making sheets and pillowcases. Then, with a partner, they opened a "shop" on Canal Street, a much larger place than the Allen Street store. Although my husband was the brains of the business, his partner decided to push him out. With no resources, not even

relatives he could consult, he ran to my father. My late father *Allah Yirḥammo* [*God have mercy on his soul*] said, "You are lucky, it is your *Nahseeb*, your fate, Whatever they say, agree. You will do well with something else."

Sarway, my husband, started a partnership bringing in some goods from Europe. He was not happy with his partner and dissolved the business. Then, my husband went to Italy himself and found another article to import — handbags. Thank God, he did well.

In later years, in 1964, my husband and I travelled from New York to Beirut. The French Consul advised me not to go to Aleppo, as eager as I was to see the old spots. I would have passport trouble in getting out, since I was not yet an American citizen. I never got to see my Ḥálab again.

Let my tell you about my children and grandchildren, I am so proud of them:

Helen my oldest, married Jack Salem and have Norma, who have Helen and Jackie.

Millie married Sam Braha. They have Lily, Ezra ("Eddie") and Murray ("Nouri").

Morris has Rachel, who married Paul Kopit, and has Tracy, Rose — and another child....

Abe has Rachel, Murray ("Nouri") Rose and Albert

Ralph has Murray ("Nouri"), Charles, Geoffry and Rachel

You see, I can still remember the names of most of them, but I'm sorry to tell you that my memory is not as good as it used to be. *It ḥamd I'l'Ilah* [*Thanks to God*] I am in pretty good health but not as I was before.

The Saraway business continues with very impressive success. Mrs. Sarway has since passed away.

Max A. "Mac" Haddad
Interviews in English

Born in New York (?)
circa 1920

"BUT, POPPA, THIS NEW SUIT IS TOO BIG; THE CUFFS EXTEND *BELOW MY HANDS.*" HE WOULD SAY, 'NEVER MIND, YOU WILL *GROW* IN TO IT' "

I'm sorry now that I didn't take the *kittab* [Hebrew School] on Orchard Street on the East Side, more seriously. You see, we went to the public school from nine o'clock until 3 P.M., and then to the *kittab* from three until eight — [*maybe six?*]; it was night time. I didn't take the *kittab* seriously, it was such a long day with no time to play, to unwind

So what did we do? We used to escape from "Hebrew" [school]. When we said we want to go to the bathroom or to go for a drink, we would run away. Then to keep us — my friends and me, from running away, our shoes were sometimes taken away. But that didn't stop some of us, sometimes we ran away barefooted. Only, when it rained it was uncomfortable to go four blocks to Norfolk Street where I lived. When taking our shoes didn't stop us from running away, they would send someone to escort us when we had to go to the toilet in the hallway. Then, I would sometimes run away by way of the fire-escape. This continued for four or five years. How many kids used to run away? I imagine there were half of those in the school [?]. Some of those boys have grown to be successful, enterprising business men. No, few of them grew up to be religious, very few; although their fathers were rather religious. We had a variety of 'rabbis' (teachers). Everyone who came from Syria with Hebrew education became a 'rabbi', a *ḥakham*, when he didn't wish to be a peddler. Some were experienced teachers; there were *Ḥakham* Isaac Kilzi, Ezra Baqqaᶜi, Ḥakham Mosé Hidary, Ḥakham Ezra Setton . . . Most were not particularly qualified, I imagine.

Some of my clearest memories of that period had to do

with Fridays. It was really something in the Lower East Side community! Late in the day we had to take the *ba'yet* [*the meal for the following day*], down to the bakery somewhere on Essex Street. Saturday morning, after coming out of the *knees* [*synagogue, in Arabic*], we would get the hot meal from the bakery, already cooked overnight.

One night each week, on Thursday nights, my father [Abraham] would take all of us boys to the Baths. We had no shower or bathtub at home so we went to the Public Baths — on Essex Street? We would spend an hour or two there, to get clean. No, it wasn't a Public Bath — maybe it was connected with the Educational Alliance? We didn't pay. Someone must have arranged for us to use the Bath free. Yes, it *was* the Educational Alliance, where I used to go to the Boy Scouts. Those memories are very clear in my mind, the *ba'yet*, semi-cooked dishes we took to the bakery and the evening before when we went to the Bath.

It seems ridiculous in thinking back about those events, unbelievable. Today our children in Flatbush live like "Kings" and "Queens." In those days I looked to the end of the week, to get a *penny* from my Uncle Morris — *for the whole week* — that was my allowance. I used to go to "Cheap Haber" next door to Isaac Gellis' delicatessen, on Essex Street, to get as much candy as I could for a penny. "What do you 'got' for a penny? Don't you have got *fourteen* for a penny?" We used to spread out our "treat," to make it last a little longer. Later we went peddling chewing gum in the restaurants, selling newspapers, chewing gum or candies on the train. I was twelve or thirteen at the time. Peddling took place in the evenings when I should have been studying, doing home work.

I grew up the opposite to my father in religious education. When I attend an *"Irray-yeh"* [a memorial Torah-study session] now, I seat myself next to someone and ask him to point out the page and passage being read. But I made up for it; I made up for it in many ways. Yes, my father was very religious, he was learned. He could read and write Hebrew. My father had been somewhat strict with us, but in words, not with a strap. He laid down the law; on Saturdays we were made to attend synagogue services mornings and afternoons. We refrained from sports,

bicycle riding, skating, spending money — or writing. My father never "carried" on Saturday but he didn't enforce it on us. They were taught, they were brought up very strictly in the old country. They lived with it and continued. We, of course, well, we couldn't follow in their footsteps — we couldn't — we had to buy things . . . .

My mother's influence was strong. She would get me up early in the morning and try to get me to go to synagogue. But Friday nights as young men, we used to go secretly to Roseland Dance Hall . . . . for us it was like any other night; we didn't go to Roseland *every* Friday night. My mother was always prodding me to observe the Sabbath, my brothers too, Hyman, Joe, and later David. (Hymie died many years ago, still a young man.) She used to frown on any violation of the Sabbath. Saturday mornings she used to get me up to go to *Shul.* "Why can't you be like Jack Gemal — see how he goes every Saturday, bright and early?" Jack Gemal and others, she held up to me as examples. Every time I see Jack now, a good friend, I remind him of the Example he was supposed to represent to me as a boy. My mother was firm about other things too. (Today, every woman is 'stronger' than a man, every woman. You can't argue with a woman today; if you win an argument you lose anyway. You get the 'silent treatment', sulking, the 'looks'.)

Few of my boyhood pals are Sabbath observers. Few. They may be religious in their hearts, I don't doubt that. But few are religious practitioners. They were all like me, I had ran away from that; they too. What brought that about? The long hours; go to another school after a full day in public school? Yes, others had long hours too, I know. But I felt that I had to work, to bring money home, we needed it badly. Many times we had no coal . . . . I worked after school; when I made $1.00 or $1.25 a day, I gave every penny of it to my family. We all went out to earn money. Hymie and Jack Sasson, Raymond Beyda, Harry Zebede, Al Beyda, Ralph, his brother, all were part of the group. We all developed along the same lines. It was this early background that made non-practitioners of many of us as we grew up.

I *did* become religious. Of course I was always religious at heart, but now I'm a practitioner. How it happened?

On New Year's eve 1975, Rabbi Abraham Hecht came to my office and brought me a pair of *tephillín* — phylacteries. "Why?" I asked him. He replied that he knew I am a good person, generous in giving to charities, helping some individuals secretly. "You've done a lot of good in the community. You are honest, honorable in your dealings with people. I want to present you with these phylacteries — on one condition. You must promise me to use them every day." I found it difficult to say "no,"; maybe I really didn't *want* to say "no." I promised. Beginning January 1, 1976, I began to attend Sabbath Services every week — weather permitting. Rabbi Hecht liked me so much — I followed his directions. It was not enough to kiss the *mezzuzá* as a I left home, I had, in addition, put on the *tephillín* and recited the morning prayers. I felt more blessed — watched over. It gave me a lot of satisfaction.

Then something happened December 22 of that year, a little more than eleven months after Rabbi Hecht's visit. In one of the Syrian stores — a large one on Fulton Street in Brooklyn — a fire broke out. My daughter was working there as a cashier. She worked on the ground floor. Five minutes before the fire broke out, she had asked for permission to go up to the *fourth* floor to the bathroom. The manager refused to give her permission to leave her post at that moment . . . . Twelve persons lost their lives, on the second floor and the fourth floor. Had she been given permission to go up . . . . She lost her best friend Nancy Ades, who roomed with her in an apartment in the city. When this happened I was "shook up." The Hand of God took care of her — watched over her! Now, I've become dedicated religiously. We all need religion, if not for ourselves, maybe for our children.

The early social center in Bensonhurst that became the Magen David Yeshiva (it was *partly* a yeshiva then), was most highly successful. *Hundreds of marriages came about through this center,* it was highly, highly successful. One day at a Center Committee meeting, we were invaded by a "very important man" in the community, in the company of a couple

of his cronies. "What's this, what's this? No, no, no, this will became a *yeshiva!* This chamber for example, will make four additional classrooms!" etc. — and so it became! The Center was abolished, no reasoning, no arguments carried any weight. The social need of the young men and women was disregarded, and so they went back to gather on the street — Bay Parkway and 68th Street, in front of Meyers' Ice Cream Parlor. Only now, almost 40 years later a social center has been constructed [on Ocean Parkway, corner Avenue S, a large and handsome structure was completed and dedicated in 1980].

Marriage with Ashkenazeem? I estimate it to be under 10 percent; maybe one out of twelve. [*Rabbi Abraham Hecht estimates perhaps 30-35* percent.] More interesting would be to speculate about marriages with Catholics, Italians; [*large numbers of Italians live on nearby blocks*]. Unfortunately, when some Syrian girls couldn't get nice "S-Y" boys — either they were not physically attractive, or shy, or perhaps their reputations were 'not of the best', quite a few of them — at least twenty-five or more marriages have taken place, mostly with "I-T's." [Italians] All are ostracized. Some, because of hardship where the husband could not earn a good living, the girls' families soften up to help them out. I do not think the girls profess any religion — I don't believe they convert.

Something happened to me three or four years ago that shocked me. One of my sons, sixteen years old, was visiting a boy-friend with a Syrian family name. While my son was there, the boy's aunt, his mother's sister, came in — *wearing a cross!* She was Italian. My son questioned me, he was so puzzled. The boy's father, an "S-Y," had married an Italian girl. Yes, among "S-Y" men, too, I would judge that a couple of dozens had married gentiles, "I-T's," Italians, mostly. In Atlantic City, N.has two sons married to gentiles, one son is a physician, the other also a professional. My cousin's daughter, living in another state, married a Protestant preacher's son. In fact, I think that there is no family in the community which hasn't been affected. 'Intermarriage' *with Ashkenazeem* — that I welcome.

I can't tell you what percentage of members of our community are religious, but I think that we have probably the highest percentage of Sabbath attendance at prayer-services in the world. [?] Sabbath observers? I would guess *one out of three.* Others work, while still others go to the race track, the 'smart' boys — the uptown sporty boys go — not too many. But they do other things which violate the Sabbath.

Among us, "middle-aged," card-playing is the most popular pastime; it's a *second religion.* 'Most' play a minimum of three times a week; at the two clubs and in homes. Some women play afternoons, and in the evenings, along with their husbands. "Gin" is the most popular at the clubs. After that it's poker. Here the stakes can be pretty steep. They play "salvo" — table-stakes, *any* sum a player chooses to put down. It's a "killer game" — not a social pastime anymore. Now, a lot of backgammon is played, and by the youngsters too. They play so well that they beat old-timers, some who have played for forty or fifty years.

In my youth, here in Brooklyn, to kiss a Syrian girl was close to becoming engaged. Now? In the last few years, things have changed. With a few it's like "trying them out." They say, "You can't buy shoes without trying them on, can you?" Today's youth — in this age of drugs — know much more about sex than some of their parents, what with "X-Rated" movies, magazines, and so on. Some of the young men, and women, live uptown; the community is changing, they move out, there is nothing to hold some of them. It seems to me there may be fewer marriages between S-Y's in the future. The girls uptown — they live in 'colonies', three or four girls "chip in" and take expensive apartments. My daughter lives uptown, my son too. Of my four children, another daughter also lives uptown, married to an Israeli. The Syrian boys and girls uptown seem to socialize together a lot. One apartment will throw a party and the others flock there. They are good kids but the family influence is not present. However, most of them come home to Brooklyn most weekends.

It's important for our kids to know about our background, our history — it's most important. These kids don't know what

came before, our great history in the old country. Many of them know only from Mercedes, Jaguars . . . with lots of spending money and travel. One of my daughters is in Greece right now; another is traveling in England; still another is a recent graduate of a music college. I don't know from these things; we try to give them the things we missed . . . we try to give them *everything. Maybe it's a mistake?*

Joseph Isaac Shalom — Born in New York 1918
Interviews in English

"NORMAL EXCEPT FOR A FATHER WITH EXTRAORDINARY QUALITIES"

My history is that of the normal man with a background of growing up in the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn; normal except for having had a father with extraordinary qualities. I'll tell about him later. I was born in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn in 1918, shortly before the small Syrian immigrant community moved to Bensonhurst. Around 1918-1920 Bensonhurst was semi-rural, with open fields, and truck farms close to the one-family homes where we Syrians took up residence. We had a nice home, on 67th Street a short distance from the new Magen David Syrian synagogue. Later a Hebrew school was erected alongside of it. That is where I got my elementary Hebrew education. There were many Syrian boys in the public school I attended, I had many friends among them and in New Utrecht high school, too. I was especially friendly with Abe Eliahou Hedaya who became my brother-in-law.

My father was very pious, spent a lot of time on religious studies. He was old fashioned, traditional in the way he brought us up. Ours was to do as he directed, not to ask questions. Nor

did I want to. Until I was in my twenties I was very religiously observant, maybe more so than my father. I had no reservations, no quarrel with my father's views. Not at all.

As children, there were myself, the oldest, Stephen, Henry, and my sisters; I have two sisters, Muriel and Norma. Both are married for many years. Norma married Abe Hedaya, my very close friend. Muriel is married to Joe Attie, who is now a highly-thought-of surgeon. Muriel began as a volunteer at Rockefeller University, working as an assistant to a leading research scientist there. Now she is the director of an important laboratory at the University.

Almost all my friends were Syrian; somehow we clung together. When I was in the Army during World War II, whenever I encountered a fellow-Syrian soldier we became "bosom friends" even though as civilians we had had nothing to do with one another.

It was a great event when we kids were taken on an outing. My father and mother took us to Coney Island, to the beach! Later we used to summer in Bradley Beach, New Jersey, along with the hundreds of Syrian families who somehow chose Bradley as their summer spot. Now it is Deal, not far from Bradley Beach. I live in Deal, except for a few days in the middle of the business week.

I graduated from Columbia University before my army service. That is when I began to be less religious, less observant. I know that my father was unhappy about that, but he never discussed it openly. In spite of that I have warm feelings for religion and the community life.

In 1949 I married Natalie Sitt. No, it wasn't an "arranged marriage," that was beginning to be less usual. I had known her for many years — they lived on our block. When I returned from Army service I found that she had developed into a very attractive young woman. We have four children, Isaac, now age thirty-four, Robert, thirty-one, Leslie, my daughter, twenty six, and Valerie, twenty-four. Isaac is in the business with me, the firm that my father established. He lives in Manhattan but has many Syrian friends. Leslie graduated from Barnard College a few years ago. She resides with my wife, from whom I am now divorced. Valerie was attracted to California where she studies;

she stayed there and is interested in pursuing an acting career.

The community in which we lived in Brooklyn was a very religious one — although not fanatic. It was speculated in the 1930's that with "decreasing religious observance" among some of the youth, in twenty years or so, religiousness in the community will have faded away; we would become secular like most of the Ashkenazeem. Far from it. In general I can say that the community as a whole is more religious, and more united than ever. Some younger rabbis who studied in Israel came here to instill a great deal of orthodoxy. I attribute the current religiosity to several factors, the establishment of Syrian Yeshivas, and the tragic lesson of the Holocaust. Even these individuals who wanted to 'modernize', assimilate, were made aware of their Jewishness. The establishment of the State of Israel helped too, especially the Six Day War in 1967 which strengthened a feeling of pride — and Jewishness.

Syrians are criticized for being "clannish," separating themselves from other groups of Jews — the Ashkenazeem. Compared to other communities, Jewish and others, we Syrians have a lot of exceptional qualities. We are more homogeneous, more traditional, with a minimum problem with drugs, alienation in family life, interfaith marriages, etc. We continue to show great consideration for the needy, mutual support, warm relations in the extended family and a sense of having a place in an orderly community. Community life is vital, prosperous. We must be doing *something* right!

My father had a lot of quiet charm and kindness. Despite his busy commercial activity and leadership position in the community, he was available, accessible, to anyone who needed his help, whether it was financial or problems in their families. Although he frequented the company of Ḥakham Matloub Abadi, Abraham D. Sutton and his son, "Signor" Isaaco Silvera and others, who were very observant and scholarly, he had friendships with men who were not religious and not interested in Jewish book-learning. For example, one of his friends was Jimmy Amzalak who lived in California. [Amzalak's family originated in Gibraltar.] Their relations were such that when my father suggested to the wealthy Amzalak that he donate the cost

of an entire building to the school in Israel founded by that extraordinary Moshé Pardo, Amzalak unhestitatingly paid for the building. Another good friend was Elie Silvera, the non-religious occasional visitor from Paris. There were others whose names I don't remember now . . . .

My father was instrumental in helping Pardo establish his institution. "Mr." Pardo — he rejects a title of 'rabbi' — was a businessman in Israel. In his distress at what was happening to immigrant girls from Arab countries — with no education and no employable skills — "where would they end up?" Pardo gave up his thriving business, to dedicate himself to the welfare of such girls. He opened a school, a boarding school for girls where they would learn to live a somewhat modern religious life, receive an education and also be trained to be able to earn a livelihood. The school is operated on an enlighted system, exposing the girls to modern methods of running a household, etc., in addition to their studies. Pardo's school now has several buildings, with many small 'homes' within them and has 1,200 students. That's quite an accomplishment for "a businessman."

In his quiet way my father had tremendous drive — and vision. Early in the World War II he recognized the importance of the efforts of Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz of the Mirrer Yeshiva and his rescue organization, *Vaad Ha-hassalah.* Abraham Kalmanowitz' fiery activity was to try to rescue Jews from Nazi hands. The charisma and zeal of Abraham Kalmanowitz got him an interview with President Roosevelt to plead for means of negotiating with the Nazis for the release of Jews out of their hands. We know now how feebly the efforts of Abraham Kalmanowitz were supported by leading American Jews — and Palestinian leaders too, like Ben Gurion. My father's support for Abraham Kalmanowitz was unstinting. For example, one night he received a call from Rabbi Kalmanowitz asking for $10,000 immediately. Promptly the next morning that sum was in the hands of *Vaad Ha-hassalah.* How right Abraham Kalmanowitz and my father were. Most of us were insistant on "the primary needs of the war effort."

My father recognized the vital importance of structured religious education for the Syrian community's children. It was his vision that forwarded the view of Yeshiva training for the

Syrian youth; he recognized that a few hours of casual after-school Hebrew education were inadequate. It was his vision and zeal that resulted in the establishment of the Magen David Yeshiva, a Sepharadi school that would instill in the children, in addition to good secular education, a course of Hebrew studies that would perpetuate the traditions and religious practices of our Syrian heritage. Such a school was completely unknown, unthought of in the community. This vision has become perpetuated in the several yeshivot in the community, including a modest-sized yeshiva high school pioneered by Rab Moshé Shamah. A new and much larger high school is now being organized, as well as some new Yeshivot with very Orthodox orientation.

The achievement of which my father was most proud was his founding, in 1946, along with Joseph Eliahou Shamah of Jerusalem, of the string of *Otzar Ha-torah* schools for the youth, in Muslim countries. Recognizing the poor condition of Jews there and of Jewish education in Oriental countries, he feared for the loss of the children. Accordingly he established schools which would teach the children religious studies *and* the learning a trade, in Morocco, Algeria, Persia, Turkey, Libya and other countries. Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz and others also lent their assistance to this effort. Paul Reichmann and his family had settled in Morocco, refugees from the Nazis. Paul, in his early twenties, spent two year assisting in the work of the *Otzar Ha-torah.* The Reichmanns later settled in Toronto to establish "Olympia and York" a tremendously successful enterprise in real estate and financial affairs. At its crest *Otzar Ha-torah* had a total of 20,000 students. I'm proud that my son Isaac (named after my father), is very active in the affairs of the *Otzar.*

In addition,I can add that my father was a great supporter of the new state, Israel; even before its establishment. He poured his money in support of Israeli industry, at a time when most people were hesitant to consider any investment funds there.

The business he established more than sixty-five years ago, I Shalom & Co. continues now, under my direction and with a third-generation "I. Shalom;" [a successor to I. & M. Shalom,

established with his brother Mosé] My son Isaac, is active in the enterprise. My brother Henry retired recently from the firm. Brother Stephen had been in his own activities long before, in banking, real estate and investments. He is most active in United Jewish Appeal and in Sepharadi activities.

My mother, Alice, is in the forefront of United Jewish Appeal work in the Syrian community. Previous to her efforts Syrian women left to their husbands the contribution of money for the "U. J. A." It is she who has made them aware of the need to themselves contribute, to be part of the effort to support Israel and the needy in New York.

For several years Stephen was UJA Chairman of the New York section. Stephen's deep interest in the plight of Syrian Jews, prisoners in Aleppo and Damascus, took him there several times. It was his influence that secured the help of Congressman Stephen Solarz in the plight of Syrian Jews, and it was their joint effort that brought them to President Carter and the State Department to intercede with the Syrian government to release Jewish unmarried women who could no longer secure Jewish husbands — such likely husbands had secretly fled Syria. Thus the "two Stephens" got exit visas for a number of such unmarried women. Everybody read about the "Proxy-brides," all over the world. The girls were released by virtue of the arranged proxy 'marriages' with Syrians in Brooklyn, American citizens. Almost all of them have since married — men of their own choice.

Max ("Maxie") Sutton — Born in Aleppo, circa 1912
Interviews 1982

"I WAS A SKINNY KID OF EIGHTEEN, WITH NINE AUCTIONEERS WORKING FOR ME.

. . . I had a lot of good friends, young fellows I had gone to school with. No, I didn't chose them — they chose me. Hy

Haddad, *Allah yirḥammo* [deceased], "may Allah be merciful to him," was one of them.

One summer a bunch of us fellows went on a trip, by car — to Cape Cod — Hyannis, Onset, Plymouth, Provincetown. On the return we came to Narraganset Pier, a popular summer spot. There I saw a large empty store for which the landlord asked $200 rent for the balance of the summer season. I bargained it down to $185, with a $20 deposit. I telephoned my father who was in the tapestry and bedspread wholesale business. "Pop," I said, "send me all the leftovers you have, all the garbage, I'll get rid of it for you." I wound up the summer with a profit of $340. I gave Pop the leftovers and looked around for some business activity. My father said, "why do you want to do other things, don't I have a good business?" It wasn't what I wanted, as you will see later.

Anyway, I went off to Miami "for a vacation." It was in the winter of 1928; no, it was 1929. I worked in Miami that winter. There was Solly Levy — *Allah yirḥammo,* do you remember him? A nice man, later he was my partner when I worked one summer in the exclusive Estes Park, Colorado. After the Miami trip, I went to work that summer in Wildwood, New Jersey, a popular resort not very far from Atlantic City. "We" found a large store 50 feet by 250 feet deep with a residence upstairs — *shi bijannen,* "nice enough to drive one crazy." My brother Ralph offered to be a partner; I took him on. With such depth to the store, how to make the best use of the space? We operated an "auction house." At one time that season, I employed nine auctioneers! I was young, about eighteen years old! I was just a skinny kid, the boss of these husky men; I paid them $10 per day — and they worked seven days per week. The pay of $70 a week wasn't bad in those days. We paid well-dressed elderly people to sit, "waiting for the auction sale," so that others would be encouraged to come and participate. The auctioneers were showmen who would joke and kid the audience to hold their attention between the "auctioning" of the variety of merchandise we sold. It was entertainment for the vacationers, many of them had nowhere else to go and nothing else to do to pass the time. We did real good.

Like others who did their business in the resort areas, we worked in Florida in the winters, and in the cooler north shore areas, in the summer months. From Wildwood, after a profitable summer, we went to Daytona Beach, Florida. There I was partner with the *marḥoom* (deceased, "dealt with mercifully"), Bob Kaboody, *ibn ʿammiti*, son of my paternal-aunt. Did you know him?, *yaʿrehff ḥallo* ["may he know himself" and not the person addressed].

Later I started to vary the kind of merchandise I sold. I sold everything, in my time. I had men's shops, toy stores, children's wear, ladies apparel, shoe stores, luggage shops, electronics, everything in the world; I had a chain of seven stores at one time. I wound up finally, in the "T Shirt" manufacturing, that's where my sons are now. They run it, I go down only sometimes, because my health is somewhat delicate.

Of course that was when I was still a bachelor. Then I settled down, yes. I had to; I settled down.

One thing in my life, I never cared about money. Why did I work so hard? It was curiosity. I wanted to see what was "the Other Game." Yes, work was a pleasure for me. I was very lively and thin as a young man [the respondent is portly and in his seventies], eager to work.

I'll tell you now why I didn't join my father's wholesale business when he invited me. Pop was very "rough" — he wouldn't listen to anyone's opinion. He was bright, but limited. "Pop," I would say, "other importers are bringing in lots of linen goods"; but no, he liked tapestries and bedspreads, even though these articles were no longer very popular — they were outdated. Competition became very rough. He had received a couple of shipments of Chinese linens — embroidered — which sold out quickly. But Pop stuck to Ramalla, Oceanic, Saidy & Iluck...tapestries. He had a man named LeBon working for him. One day LeBon decided to go into business on his own account. Guess what? He beat his old boss. Better coloring, different styles, different patterns. He had all the original Oriental rugs copied — the Kirmans, "the Tree of Life," "The Lost World," "The Ace of Spades" — that's what they were called. My father went to the weavers in Belgium with whom he had worked for years. "Sorry," they told him, "we are all booked up — with

LeBon!" Can you beat that! I tried to reason with my father to reconsider importing linens. "Look at Mamiye & Hidary, they are so successful, making so much money!" No deal, my father's love was tapestries. I had brought a China agent, named Balfour, to try to interest him in importing fancy linens direct, without having to travel there, he would have had to pay only a 2 percent commission! It was lovely merchandise. No soap.

I was very foolish not do it myself, but I was tied up with three stores in New York, one on Madison Avenue and two stores on Fifth Avenue; I had eighteen persons working for me. In one store alone I sold $2,000 to $3,000 each day, rain or shine. *khabbassna kteer,* "we muddled a lot." Do you know how many stores I had, all in all? I had fifty-eight stores. I have a notebook with the address of each store and how long I stayed in each.

Now my sons Isaac and Jackie run our T-Shirt factory in New Jersey. Whenever I feel up to it, I go in, otherwise, I am free to stay home; I am not in the best of health. But that doesn't prevent me from getting around, a good deal, too. I join friends to play Arabic music, I play the *qanoon,* [zither], I love Oriental traditions, proverbs, stories, music. Life.

Allan Joseph Ashear — Born in New York, 1942
Interviews 1982

"THE PERCENTAGE OF SYRIANS CRITICAL OF THE COMMUNITY? I WOULD PUT IT AT 10 PERCENT TO 15 PERCENT."

In my home here, although my father was quite religious he wasn't very demanding, he gave us considerable latitude. Of course he required and we went along with it, Sabbath and

holiday observance, no lights turned on, no travel during Saturdays. We respected the religious order, while he lived; while *we* lived at home. When we lived away — I lived in the city on my own for a time, we didn't observe the same rules. He knew how we behaved, he knew what we were doing, but he didn't make an issue of it. The only thing that aroused him, made him angry, was fanaticism, ultra-orthodoxy — he couldn't take that. Being very religious wasn't the only important thing for my father; also important was for us to be happy, to fulfill ourselves to our capacity. He taught us through his example; most importantly, that things were "relative", not "absolute." It was good that we learned to look outside the family. My mother, Rae, sometimes remarked in jest, "How did I ever spawn such a bunch?" It was a joke with my brothers and sisters how we turned out . . . .

We have some professionals in the family and there will be more when the children grow up. Sister Sally is married to Fred Tawil of Mayfair Co. Her daughter is a librarian in Chatham, New Jersey. Her second daughter married Ira Bogart, an Ashkenazi; she works for a cable television company; so does my other niece Joyce. All except Joyce have already earned college degrees. She took a leave of absence and has now gone back to college. My young nephew Ezra, thirteen, is at Poly Tech, a very bright boy. He is studying Latin and science and things of that sort. Beyond being very intelligent, he's one of the nicest boys I ever met. Even at the age of seven, [1982] he would laugh at an uncle's jokes, although he didn't find them funny . . . very sensitive and thoughtful . . . gentle, affectionate We are beginning to talk to him of future study; at law, perhaps at Harvard or Yale. Sister Sally's twin — 15 minutes younger — is Betty, married to Mordechai Kassin. Her children, her oldest son Saul, began at Brooklyn College, then he went to the University of Connecticut. He got a Ph.D. in Social Psychology. He's had papers published, edited a book and now teaches at Williams — where the students are far above the level of other colleges he knew. He's very happy there. Betty's children; Sari worked for station WBAB on Long Island; Saul, married Carol Goldner, a lovely girl, who does therapy with retatded children. Saul did bring down some of his papers at

our request. When he began to read to us, everyone had a blank look — we didn't understand what he was talking about. It could have been in another language; it was professional jargon.

The Syrian community — it's very insular, materialistic, provincial; materialistic to the exclusion of almost everything else. Generally, the community has just begun to discover the importance of higher education. I have a relative who doesn't permit his daughter to go to college, it's *not* that he is not able to afford it. I go wild with that sort of attitude. I have no patience with it. Some want their daughters to marry at seventeen, breed children like cows — live a life of luxury and not be able to carry on a decent conversation. Conversation itself is "dangerous." I don't understand such an outlook; it's anti-human. Just because they go to college doesn't mean they have to become drug addicts, don't have to "sleep around." They *need not* turn that way. No, my impression is that the Syrian youth don't run around. Maybe after marriage? The younger generation that I know, doesn't.

To mention political life, years ago during the Viet Nam War some of us attended anti-war rallies, demonstrations in Washington, it was good to be part of such movements. At that time I was in danger of being drafted. Yes, I was student in college, and should have been free from the threat — but — I had 165 credits, when only 128 credits were necessary to graduate. The draft board got after me, they said that since I had 128 credits, I was no longer an undergraduate college student; graduate students were being drafted. At the draft board they said "Oh you Syrians . . . !" The Syrians just didn't want to fight in Viet Nam!

In the Syrian Community . . . the controversy in Flatbush — and in Israel — "You're not a Jew if your mother was not born Jewish," even if she had converted — the community does not accept that person. Well, yes, they are "putting up a protective fence," going beyond the Torah law in order to discourage mixed marriages. But I don't appreciate that attitude. Recently in Deal, according to the story I heard, a synagogue member was invited up to be part of the Torah reading, part of the prayer-service. At the following week's service, the Rabbi

announced that "a terrible mistake has been made," by inviting that man to the Torah-honor. He made a big issue of it; the man's wife, it was discovered, had been a convert to Judaism, not born Jewish. I think that the Rabbi violated a principal Torah law, by causing embarrassment to that man. He was going beyond the Law of Moses in bringing this up as an issue. Moses himself had married Sippora, a non-Jewess. Ruth, too, was not Jewish; and the Messiah is to be her descendant; Rabbi Akiva, the great man, was also a convert . . . .

Many acquaintances — even one of my close friends — have also turned to ultra-orthodoxy. No, his father was not religious. Most of my friends married Jews; but not all of them settle into the communtiy. My good friend Bob Tawil, son of Ralph Tawil, now lives in the community and is religious . . . . Some other friends are not much community-minded. Joe Sultan, Abe Sultan's son, studied at Yale. He is now phychiatrist at Maimonides Hospital. He too married an Ashkenazi girl. He *was* somewhat outside the community — for a while, until his marriage broke up. He then married a Syrian girl, Adjmi, and he's happy with her. I think he now enjoys being part of the community. [See Sultan's own biograpy.]

The percentage of my acquaintances, Syrians, unfriendly to the community? I would say 10 percent or 15 percent. They *say* that they are critical, yet they live in it, go on the Syrian-sponored Puerto Rican Passover vaction trips, etc. My theory is that those with a good education — some of them — and they are not too many — find it so unpleasant that they move away from the communtiy, leaving it 'anti-education. I tell him that he is fighting a losing battle. It is changing, but so slowly. It's not like the Ashkenazi immigration experience.

Ours is a 'truncated' success story, since the community considers its customs to be the only viable way to live, and continues to be afraid of the outside world. It will change in time, I suppose. I have terrible thoughts, that 200 years, in a world making use of robots and with computerized living and so on, this communtiy will not have changed substantially; card parties during the week and on Saturday nights, etc. a strange vision... that they will not have changed even in the next generation. Are the Syrians worldly? I don't know what is

meant by 'worldly.' In my definition of the term, I include an understanding of the world, not just to know about football, business — or to be familiar with luxury shops because they have a lot of money; that's not being worldly.

The rabbis who came here — who are imported here, from Yeshivot in Jerusalem; I don't know where they come from — they aren't able to construct a basic sentence in English, yet they are brought here to lead an American community. They are something of an embarrassment. Rabbi Dwek in Deal? Yes, he is religiously an ultra-Orthodox I suppose, but at least he can communicate in decent English.

There is a feeling outside the community, the Syrians have a reputation for 'close' dealing. No, it's not only in the 5th Avenue gift shops. I had an Ashkenazi friend who worked in a Syrian real estate office. He found the Syrians impossible to deal with. Not only are they hard bargainers, but according to him, they will go back on their word if it suits them. All real estate deals are like that? I wasn't aware of that, I wasn't aware that that is the real estate practice. Smart realtors are aware of this characteristic and they try to *bind everything tightly?* I wasn't aware of that.

Do you know something — I think that in the future there will always be a Syrian core-group, a hard core that will continue, no matter how many will move away in the future. Just as for three hundred years or so the Hasidic groups continued — I don't know how large a group it will be among the Syrians, but there will always be a tenacious body of Syrians who will stick to the old traditions, socially and religiously. Will they represent the definition of Syrians or will it be those apart from the present community, those who have gone outside who define us, the professionals who are doing other things . . . other than playing cards on Saturday nights . . . ? The chances are that old hard-core community will define the group.

A homogeneous community group may make for a secure and perhaps happy life. True. That is the other side of the coin. That is what is thrown up at me when I am critical of the closed Syrian life. Yes, they are close-knit, supportive; that's all to the good. But that may like a bad marriage, metaphorically. It's

suggested that the marriage shouldn't be broken up, "for the sake of the children." It can do more harm for the kids than good. I'm not sure that the status of the Syrians is like a good marriage. They are fulfilled, in a limited way, they have their social needs taken of, they have things to do together. Yet, there is something more — there is something richer existing outside, where they might experience a fuller life.

I'm not a good example, I'm arguing against my own actions, because I sank back into the convenient life here in Flatbush. I lived away from the community for a few years; it was more exciting, more challenging in many ways, but I didn't make a success of it, I fell short. Even going short of it, though, I would hate to think that my daughter — when I have one — when I marry — I wouldn't want my daughter to marry at 17 or 18, and not to go to college. It's on the casual social basis that I have difficulty in the community. Last night I went to pay a condolence call, and although I knew a lot of people who were there, I couldn't carry on a real conversation with any of them. After a few weak phrases, the conversation died away. I was bored out of my wits, and I'm not being a snob in saying that. They are very nice people; but there is a wide cultural gap, educationally and in our interests. Frankly, I don't find myself comfortable in the community. They probably look at me as odd; if so, so be it, that's their business.

I had a New York uncle visiting in Israel. In a conversation with an Ashkenazi Israeli, he was asked about his origin. "Aleppo," he said. The man responded, "Oh, a member of the Elite"!" This is another point of view, of how some people regard the Syrians. In Israel, the Syrians are merchants, etc. and are not looked down upon — much.

A few years ago, I visited Israel and got a Government guide with a car. He took us everywhere well known. One day he took us through a slum area, and he could hardly wait for us to ask him what there was of interest in the area, — why he had brought us there. He blurted out immediately "this is a 'S'fardi' neighborhood!," knowing that we are Sepharadeem! There was no reason for him to go out of his way to squeeze us through this unfortunate spot, except to indicate his view of

Sepharadeem! (Why had the Israeli government done so little over the years to improve these slum areas?) In addition, he was very strongly anti-American, and found every chance to attack the United States — and its Jews. It was not his place to criticize the United States. I am very proud of my country and although I'm not a "flag-waver" and certainly not a chauvinist, I am grateful for what America offered immigrants; and the open spirit of the country. There's real reason to be proud of being an American.

Let me tell you of an interesting episode that happened to me on my trip in Israel. On the same floor as my room at the King David Hotel, I saw a small banquet room, with a magnificent view of the city through its windows. It was called "the Rabin-Kissinger Room," I found out later; it was used for high-level conferences with foreign dignitaries. Immediately I though of my camera and brought it out to capture some of the views. The room was vacant, with the doors open. I wondered whether to leave the doors open or to close them and have privacy for my photo-taking. I opted for the closed doors; a mistake. As I was photographing the gorgeous sunset, a maid entered the room — and left immediately. A man came promptly, to question me, my indentity, and so on. For the first time I experienced what it was to be shadowed; and I *was* followed, I'm sure, for the whole week. Who was I meeting with in Jerusalem (a PLO connection?) Had I planned to survey the scene for possible bomb-plant in the room when there was to be an important international political conference? That I am Jewish did not rule out possible Pro-Arab involvement, since some Jews had spied for the PLO. Yes, another little detail. One day, having written some postal cards, I gave them to the *concierge*, the bell-captain, for mailing. Before I could barely put them into his hands, a man leaped out from behind him and grabbed them, "Certainly sir, I will see that they are mailed". Was he another Agent tracking my every move? It was a most uncomfortable week, to know that wherever I went I was under surveillance. The shadowing stopped shortly before I was about to leave the country.

My great-uncle Shaḥádeh Ashear was not so carefully

watched. It is a legendary story in the family, the story of my grandfather's brother in Aleppo, very early in the century. One day, as a young man he disappeared; no one knew that he meant to leave — nor where he meant to go. I might add that Shaḥádeh was very musical, an accomplished musician on the *qanoon*, the Oriental form of zither; it gives off tones like what I now know as a harpsichord sound. Shaḥádeh disappeared, there was no trace of him throughout the city. Finally, the family had no choice but to give him up as dead. One day, perhaps a dozen years later, he suddenly appeared, to resume his modest pursuits. No one could extract from him the reason for his disappearance. But slowly, over a period of time, the story was put together. It seems to me as I recall the retelling here in New York, that he had had a disagreement with his father — he had somehow been offended. Where had he gone, how had he passed the intervening years? It was gathered that he had made his way to the Balkans, to spend his years with musical 'gypsies'. Apparantly he had distinguished himself with his musicianship and his skill in playing the *qanoon* — and even "performed for the sultan in Istanbul." Shaḥádeh came to New York, too. The quiet, self-contained man that he was, a 'loner' — he did not marry, nor did he have any sort of social life; with a sharp mind — and an ironic attitude . . . .

Shaḥádeh's brother, my grandfather Mosé Ashear, was a prominent individual in the community — he was not a rabbi, although he was addressed as such. He was a cantor and a teacher in the afternoon Hebrew School. In addition, he wrote dozens of religious songs. Actually he wrote the texts, the religious lyrics, which Shaḥádeh set to popular Arabic songs. Many of his songs were written and dedicated to Syrians in the communtiy, on the occasions of the festivity in their families. His songs are still sung today, at semi-religious gatherings and in parts of the synagogue services. There are dozens of his songs printed in the Syrian-Sepharadic song-book of pizmoneem.

The family business in which I now work was founded on the experiences of my father. He had been the China agent for a number of Syrian firms, and after many years he established his own business, accompanied by several of his brothers. At first it

was in the importation of hand-embroidered handkerchiefs. With the closing down of China during World War II and the take-over by the Chinese Communist regime, the business turned to other types of handkerchiefs, and later, scarves, etc., were added.

When I left school my ambition was to pursue a career as writer and design artist. I took an apartment in the city and wrote. To tell you the truth, I did not succeed in making headway. After several years of unsuccessful struggling, I accepted a position in the family business, where I am in charge of designing.

It's not what I wanted to do initially, but that's the way it developed. Not my ideal, but it has some satisfaction — and of course it's no longer a financial struggle. So be it.

Once again, I live at home with my family and in the company of a few congenial friends. I still write, and want to do more, serious work. However, with a full-time responsible position and the hard work I put into it, it is not easy to get much writing done. Truthfully, I don't know how it will all evolve. One day I will meet *the* girl, and one day I will marry, although I am now pushing the age of forty. . . but I have lots of time ahead of me.

[*Invited to review this oral biography recently, Ashear remarked on the characteristic generosity of Syrians. "A niece seeking to raise money for the Ethiopians who are starving, went around the area soliciting funds. Italians living in the neighborhood almost all turned deaf ears. Ashkenazeem, some of them, contributed from $1.00 to $5.00 However, she received warm receptions from Syrians. They contributed $10.00 to $50.00 in many cases."*]

David Eliahou Cohén — Born: 1926
Interviews in English

"I BECAME DEPUTY BOROUGH PRESIDENT OF BROOKLYN IN SPITE OF MY LIMITED EDUCATION"

We used to pray in the Sutton *Knees* [synagogue], my father and us kids, from the time I was about seven years old until that little synagogue discontinued. Before that we prayed in the *Knees* of Ḥakham Seleem Ashkenazi, on 64th Street; yes that is the "Betesh Synagogue." Ashkenazi took it over when Shaul Betesh dropped out. Rabbi Ashkenazi also taught a few *Kittab* classes there for young children. We lived on 64th Street then, until 1932; the Depression "blew us away." We lost the house, it was foreclosed by the Bank.

I remember too that earlier, on the High Holy Days, my maternal grandmother, Signora De Picciotto — a widow for many years, used to have prayer services in her home. I suppose it was an old-world custom for the "Franj" with wealth, to have semi-private services in their own homes. ["Franj" or Francos are Sepharadeem from Europe who settled in Aleppo beginning in the 16th or 17th century. Many were wealthy; The De Picciotto family was enobled by the Austrian emperor; they served as Consuls in Aleppo for many European countries.] Other "Franj" families in New York, Silvera and a few others, usually participated in my grandmother's home, for services. When the Sutton *Knees* was established they went there. I remember the hazzán there, Eliahou Menaged, the "best in the world," for his pleasant voice but particularly for his knowledge of the music — [modes — maqqamat]. Saturday afternoons we kids were permitted to attend the *Big Knees* [Magen David Synagogue], and from there sometimes we sneaked away to more attractive pastimes.

Signor Isaaco Silvera, a "Franji," a 'noble', when he first moved to Midwood — Flatbush, in 1939-1940, did not condescend to attend at the Syrian synagogue; services, they were not always orderly and dignified. He initiated Sabbath

prayer services in a room in the Aperion Manor on Kings Highway. For lack of *Kohaneem* in his tiny services [*Kohaneem 'Cohens'* — are hereditary members of the ancient priestly clan only they could bestow the priestly Blessing in a part of the Prayers], Signor Isaaco arranged for me and my brother, Charlie, to walk the considerable distance from Bensonhurst on Saturday mornings to provide the Blessing.

Abe Sutton used to accompany us. For this the Signor rewarded each of us with 25 cents every week. We were "rich!" We established "a line of credit" with every candy store along the way — of course we would not spend money on a Saturday.

I'm not sure when Syrians came to Flatbush in considerable numbers. My recollection is that it may have been the late 1930's, early '40's . . . "[?]. I became aware of the 'new' settlement then, when a large meeting was held at the 67th Street Synagogue in Bensonhurst, debating the community social center that was being considered. The center was established for a few years on Avenue P and 75th Street. It was very distant to the new and rapidly growing settlement at Ocean Parkway, and not too close to the Bensonhurst residences. How could it conveniently serve the Flatbush area which was becoming important? That's the time when I became aware of the moving away from Bensonhurst — the "Sea Beach" location.

I attended high school until I was sixteen. Then, I went to work full time, the family needed the money badly. Earlier, when I was about twelve years old, my father used to take the family to Atlantic City in the summers, where peddling was "better." My father used to take us along with him to his work. Many residences there were on the first and second floors of the buildings. My father would send us up the stairs to find out if the customer was interested in looking at my father's dry-goods bundles; *then* he would go up himself. His attitude to work was somewhat 'unusual'. As soon as he had earned a few dollars, he would quit for the day. Brother Charlie, two years older, and I were not happy with my father's schedule, so we began to look for jobs on our own, in some Syrian retail stores on the Boardwalk. Before that, for a few weeks we peddled on our own — handkerchiefs. Then we sold newspapers for a while. When it rained for several days in a row, we gave that up and looked

for a job indoors — in some store on the Boardwalk. My father was acquainted with a Syrian storekeeper, that got us employment. It was a seven-days-a-week job — because of the tourist trade, but of course we *would not work on Friday evenings, and the Shabbat,* until evening. We had to work from nine in the morning until the store closed — at midnight. We did get a couple of hours off during the day — to go home for lunch and supper. My first day at work I asked my boss if he could use another employee, my brother Charlie. "Yeah," he said, "bring him in." At the end of the week as he was closing the store at midnight he had not paid the salary. I said, "You forgot to pay?" Yes, he had 'overlooked' it, and handed me $3 — for the week! Charlie was waiting outside when I showed him the $3. He went in to ask for his *salary. "The $3 is for the two of you. It makes no difference to me if you are one or two!"* On that basis I left the job for Charlie, and went to another Jewish Syrian store — Raymond and Al Beyda's. Raymond was receptive — he had one time worked for my father when my father had a thriving store on Allen Street. He hired me — at $4 a week. Immediately I called in Charlie — who was also hired at $4 per week. I stayed with Beyda for four summers.

Let me tell you about my father's attitude to work. It wasn't laziness, no. In the 1920's my father was quite successful in the business he established after some years as a peddler in New York City. He made a good deal of money in an interior decorater shop. In the later 1920's he owned three buidlings on Allen Street, after he married a few years earlier. Judah Sultan was his bookkeeper; [later, Sultan became a prosperous businessman] — my father couldn't read or write. His family in Aintab [a small city, perhaps 100 miles from Aleppo] was quite poor; he didn't get much schooling. He was a very honest person, "very straight." When the Depression began his business went on the rocks. He paid every last bill, every last cent, before he closed up in the early 1930's, unlike some who didn't pay everything they owed. He lost his business, we lost our house. That seemed to shatter him; shatter his spirit. From that time on he was satisfied to work only enough to earn the bare needs of the day. *But that was not enough — we were a family of six, my parents, and us four young sons, Charlie, me,*

Morris and Jack. It seemed to be all that he could do; he wasn't lazy, he couldn't do differently, somehow. In fact he was always a hard worker — and a somewhat difficult family man. He is now ninety-five years old, and until six or seven years ago, he worked in the tiny business he had.

When I left school at age sixteen I worked for Abe and Dave Cohen in their store "Cayne" on 34th Street. Then for a while for Al Mizrahi-Urfali [from the part-Kurdish town of Urfa], in Plainfield, New Jersey. This was in 1942, when we entered the war. I was almost seventeen then. Al left me to look after the store while he spent his time trying to buy merchanidse — which was scarce — with the OPA, and so on. Soon after, Al was drafted into the Army. End of *that* job. I got another job for a year, then *I* was drafted, scheduled to go into the service in a few weeks. Since I needed money badly I got a job with Jack Dweck ("J.D."). Of course, I didn't tell him about being drafted. He offered me $60 a week which I accepted without a word. I set out to rearrange his stock, and I did it very well; I turned up merchandise he didn't even know he had. In a few weeks I told him that I had to leave. He was quite upset. He offered to *double* my salary. Only in later years when he questioned me, "Why did you leave?" I had to tell him that I left to become a soldier.

The war ended in a little more than a year after I entered military service. After trying to job handkerchiefs [to become a jobber — a middle-man] and a little while at some job, I went to work with Hyman and "Moonie" [Solomon] Attie, setting up ladies' hosiery stores — all operated on a highly controlled inventory system; "Moonie" and I were junior partners. He and I spent time finding locations for additional stores. Our operating stores were run by low-salaried employees, thanks to our controlled inventory method, and that way we didn't have to carry a large and expensive stock. But what we were able to buy used to be sold out in a few hours — in only one store. There were lines of customers around the block — with no merchandise to sell them. With six stores we were paying rent for — it was an impossible situation. We had to give up the business. Now, there are highly successful hosiery chains which operate on the inventory-control system we had used.

With Fred Fallas, I bought out the lease of a small cigar store on 30th Street near Broadway and got samples of handkerchiefs which we offered for sale. In one month, we had booked $15,000 worth of business from leading department stores, at a good 'profit'. We had no capital with which to buy the merchandise we had orders for; Fallas' father was to supply our additional capital. Our orders increased; but for three months Fallas' father didn't come through to enable us to buy the merchandise and ship it. They were delaying — thinking to push me out. Finally I agreed to leave, with half of the estimated profit we were to realize. My $3,000 capital resulted in $18,000 when I left. OPA ended, goods became plentiful, and the price of merchandise dropped. Fallas had bought and paid for the merchandise on order — but cancellations showered in on them.

I joined my brother in a retail store in Albany. One day coming from Grand Central Station, in passing, I glimpsed an empty store on 42nd Street, opposite Wurlitzer. I rented it, at the sharply reduced price of a "temporary store." I kept the landlord happy with voluntary increases in the rental, so that it was more or less a permanent leasing. With the dry goods, lace scarfs, etc., my brothers and I later put in a small display of watches, and in a day or two it was sold out. "Why continue to specialize in $2 scarfs, when customers quickly bought $50 and $100 watches, without the agony of the customers 'not being sure' about the color, the design, etc. It was a great success. One day a man came in, in a creased suit, wearing sneakers; he looked like a 'bum'. In a moment he selected watches and wrote out a check drawn on the Grace National Bank and signed it "J.P. Grace." I had seen him handling a sales slip from Wurlitzer and called their credit department. "Very good," they said. Then I phoned the Grace Bank. "Is it a man in a rumpled suit, wearing white sneakers? He is president of the bank, he owns it!" they said.

With the "elastic" lease for the store, I was permitted to sub-lease to others. That is just what I did, renting the store at several times what we were paying. We then rented additional stores on 42nd Street, my brothers and I, until in 1954 my youngest brother, Jack, decided to leave the partnership. He was

always studious, he had had his fill of retail selling. He wanted to study medicine! He did, and is now a psychiatrist connected with New York University Medical Center — Bellevue Hospital. Somehow we all decided to have our own individual stores. I remained with two stores, and for thirty years I have been on my own. I operated an Army-Navy store, selling clothing. I operated at the same time, two "discount" stores, which I later 'sold' to my employees. Meantime, I had become interested in real estate property, buying and selling "tax-payer" buildings [one-story retail structures]. This was very satisfying and so I 'leased' out all my retail stores to my employees, entering into 'sharing-the-profit' agreements. I was no longer tied down with retailing.

By 1956 when I was thirty-one years old I got married and moved to the Ocean Parkway area and became involved with building the large Synagogue that is now Sha'are Zión, but that is an involved story which I will talk about later.

In 1967 or 1968 I became interested in local politics since I was not tied down with being a retailer and since the real estate business left me fairly free to do whatever I wanted. I was already strongly opposed to our involvement in the Viet Nam War. I got up to my ears in opposition to the current Congressman Abraham Multer and wound up running for District Leader in the Democratic Clubhouse. I didn't win but I had an effect. (The next time around Multer was no longer acceptable to the District and dropped out.) Potitical life was very engrossing. I had formed a friendship with the leader of another District, who had later become Borough President for Brooklyn, Sebastian Leone, an interim appointment. When election time came, Leone asked me to run his campaign for Borough President. We won. I became his Executive Assistant and then Deputy Borough President, at $46,000 per year. I was there for about six years. Earlier I had developed a friendship with Congressman Hugh L. Carey and in 1974 Carey decided to run for Governor. He asked me to run his campaign — which we won. Carey offered me a post as his Executive Assistant, but that would have meant spending a lot of time in Albany — I hated the city, from the time when I had a retail store there twenty years earlier. My son was doing television production,

teaching mountain climbing — floundering around, getting "no place." I couldn't accept the post with Governor Carey. I had to look after my family's needs.

I had had the satisfaction in proving myself, my ability in the political world, a guy who had never even finished high school. I sat at the top, prepared the Borough budget, argued at the Board of Estimate. It was very satisfying — but I had had enough. It was time to look closer to home, to help my son establish himself solidly. He now has two stores in the Times Square area, quite good stores; I spend some time with him, advising him, etc.

My principal activity remains in real estate ventures, on my own, or with one or more of my brothers.

A few years ago I was honored with the Presidency of Sha'are Zión Congregation, the central Sepharadic Syrian synagogue in the community. My own time is unscheduled and leaves me all the time to administer our synagogue.

I married "Reggie," Regina Shamoula and *Barukh Ha-Shem* [Blessed is The Name], we are blessed with children and grandchildren. Here are their names individually:

Daughter Eileen is in her late 30's [1984] She married Seymour Escava. Their kids are: Isaac, Gladys [named after Seymour's parents], David [after me], Nathan and Michael. Our son Elliot married Susan Shamah. They have one child, Regina, named after her paternal grandmother, my wife. Son Aaron and my girl Felicia are both newlyweds. My daughter Sari is our only unwed child.

[*David Cohen's father, quite active until a few years ago, died September 1984 at age 101.*]

Rachel ("Rae Ezra") Cohén Born, Brooklyn, circa 1930
Interviews 1983

"I NEVER CEASE TO WONDER AT HOW MUCH TALENT THERE IS AMONG OUR WOMEN, MUCH OF IT UNDEVELOPED, BUT IT IS COMING OUT"

I've been very busy, arranging a fund raising event for the United Jewish Appeal, a tennis tournament to be held at the Deal, New Jersey, Racquet Club July 14. We hope to have an attendance of maybe 400 persons. This time all the contestants will be Syrians. That and my work at Caesar's Bay Bazaar World [establish by *Caesar Salama*, a huge indoor flea-market in Brooklyn], these activities pretty much occupy my time.

I want you to know that I was very upset with *MAGIC CARPET: Aleppo-in-Flatbush*, the book about Syrians and the Syrian community. It seemed to disregard any progress on the part of Syrian women.[?]

But let me tell you about myself. I was brought up mostly in Providence, Rhode Island. My father and mother, Jack and Matilda Missry, had a business there, although I was born in Brooklyn, actually. We were brought up in New England; New Haven, Bridgeport. We lived in New Hampshire — but for the longest period it was in Providence. We were a traveling family; wherever my father thought would be most lucrative, where he could best make a living for his family, he opened a store where he sold linens and fancy handkerchiefs and babywear. It was just after the depression, times were hard. In 1940 we moved to Providence. I stayed there until I got married, in 1952.

I have very warm memories of life in Providence. We had a nice home, with trees around it . . . Providence is a small city with several good colleges; Brown University was close by. We were near Bryant, [College?] and the School for Design; it had many good features. Newport was not far, and also Narraganset Pier, a lovely summer resort, where we "summered." How come? My father opened a summer store catering to the large number of tourists and visitors! It was lots of fun; since I was

one of six children, we had ready-made playmates; besides, several other Syrians opened up summer shops. I had three sisters and two brothers. In Providence, I attended elementary and high school, and Sunday School attached to a Conservative Temple. Ashkenazi, of course, I belonged to the Young Hadassah Group, but only peripherally. I was a very good student; Sunday School taught me about holidays and also some Jewish history. We were taught a little Hebrew, just before we were confirmed at age fifteen.

I had a very enjoyable childhood; in fact I continued to go to the Hebrew School to age eighteen; the teachers were marvelous. They made Temple Services very attractive Friday evenings, with social activity after services. I never missed services. I was more religious there than here in Brooklyn! No, we didn't go on Saturdays, the store was open for business, my parents were busy. Friday evenings too, my parents *didn't* go. It was more for teen-agers. [?] My parents did not have the luxury of religious worship, although inwardly my mother was quite religious. Now that my father is retired and my mother died four years ago, he has become observant. He doesn't miss a Friday evening or Saturday service, doesn't smoke on the Sabbath. . . . He is very active in his synagogue where he lives in North Miami: it may have been his early training.

My father came to the States from Aleppo, at the age of fourteen, around 1912, I think. He worked very hard all his life. My father's brother had come before him and brought him over, then they managed to bring the rest of the family. My father told us how he used to get up at 5:30 in the mornings to tend to furnaces. Later he peddled gum, newspapers — anything to make a little money. I asked him what he did for entertainment, did he go to the movies? Yes, he used to go to the "show." Admission price for kids was "two for a nickel," and a boy with only two cents would wait outside the movie-house asking "who's got three cents?" We kids bypassed all that deprivation. We had an enjoyable childhood. Although we never had a lot, we never felt poor or deprived. Once the war started in 1941 circumstances became a lot easier. But before that, although we had very little, we never felt it. It was probably because of the warmth within the family.

After high school I went to college, to Syracuse University. I should have gone to Brown's sister-school, Pembroke College — my grades were excellent, I could have been admitted at any Ivy League school. A friend living nearby had a sister who attended Syracuse University and used to rave about it. I did want to go to a sleep-away college and so my choice fell on Syracuse. I had an idea to become a nurse, although actually medicine is what I really wanted. In those days, what girl could get into medical school? Besides, there was the cost — it was forbidding. I realized early that nursing was really an attractive career, and so I majored in hospital-dietetics. It required a lot of study, very much like a "pre-med" course.

Going away to college? My father was reluctant, but my mother — she was very supportive. Why? Maybe because she wasn't a Ḥálabiyeh, not a Syrian. Her family had originated in Izmir [Smyrna], in Turkey — 'Spaniol, Ladino' — Sepharadeem. She was eager to have me get the best education possible. They had met in New York. She was a factory sewer at Paris Decorators, a Syrian company from whom my father used to buy merchandise for his store, and so he lured her into marriage. When I was ready for college, finances didn't present a serious problem for the family. My mother had no reluctance to my going away; my father had mixed feelings, since he was of the "old school." In fact, two weeks before I was to leave for school, an aunt in New York telephoned him, very indignant; "It's not done, it's a disgrace, and think of what will *happen to her.*" My mother consoled me, assured me that she would finally get my father's approval.

At Syracuse, my roommate came from a rich family, I had to spend my limited allowance carefully; I spent on books, and on food! (I love to eat!). I completed three years of school — then, I met Ezra. I met him one summer in my father's store, where I was helping out. His brother had been in our store the month before, told Ezra about me and, lo and behold, Ezra appeared. I saw him once, and when I attended a Thanksgiving dance in Flatbush, Ezra was there. He drove me back to Providence. We began dating and you know the rest. (That's why I am referred to as *Rae Ezra*, to differentiate me from other Rae Cohens.)

It never crossed my mind to continue school when I got married. There was all the excitement of a new phase of my life — being a "married women,"setting up house, mingling wth my new, young, exciting in-laws . . . school was a thing in an earlier existence. But in the back of my mind there was the thought that 'some day' . . . I would go back; school and studies always intrigued me. When I had my first child, with no "help" [domestic], I managed to attend some school lectures — non-credit courses. I took painting and other similar courses, at Brooklyn College and sometimes at the New School. That was my day off, when I arranged for care for my child.

I was active in community affairs, too. My sister Beatrice and I helped organize the Syrian B'nai Brith Women's chapter; at one time we had about 350 members. We had a lot of opposition from the [early] Community Center's Sisterhood. Competition! Later the interest evaporated; and finally the chapter was practically abandoned. I didn't slow down too much — my family grew; four little girls, three years apart. Such nice girls; all achievers. The B'nai Brith activity tried to bring in the "outside world," with speakers on Jewish topics, world events, as well as other programs, on child care, psychology of home life, flower arranging and so on. We started a girls' chapter for the younger generation, which was also quite successful — for a time. Many parents discouraged this; some were quite irate. They didn't want their daughters mingling with non-Syrians; — which was their loss. You can educate just so much. I think we did influence the girls — to give to charity, opening their eyes to the outside . . . . We have a lot of leadership participation; I remember that Jeannie France, and Sallee Bijou, [Bigio], were outstanding, among others, particularly in the Youth Group.

[That's my Jackie, lawyer-daughter who just walked in; at her office until nine o'clock]. My sister, Bea Esses now, Jacqueline Esses, Sydelle Shamah, Judy Mamiye, they were all leaders. When we settled in the Beth Torah Synagogue area I became active there, with the youth and with the Sisterhood; I was President when the synagogue building was being completed. Gita Sultan was the inspirer of the Youth Group for

many years. Now, all that has 'moved' to the new Sepharadic Community Center.

All this work I did was very valuable to me, very enriching. It developed a sense of organization, initiative, a business sense. I wrote articles for the organization bulletins, etc. Maybe that's where my ability developed.

No, I didn't work [for gain] after I married. I was too busy — and there was no financial need to work. Yet I never expected to devote my life only to being "a homemaker." When my first girl was only a year-and-a-half old, I thought of the feasibility of becoming an x-ray technician on a part-time basis. I had studied a lot of science in school and considered putting it to some use. I didn't. My community activity and my enlarging family seemed about enough — at that time.

My kids went to public schools; and to afternoon Hebrew schools for a while. That didn't offer them too much stimulation. I went to Rabbi Abraham Hecht and with him we formed a young people's Talmud Torah for girls, with classes twice a week. The synagogue committee was not supportive at that time, this was perhaps twenty years ago. They could see no need for girls to study Torah ("boys, yes, definitely!"). We argued that if girls developed a good Hebrew background, in time they could influence *their* children. My oldest daughter attended and graduated. Then the teachers became very Hassidic, ultra Orthodox and my second daughter dropped out. Barbara, my oldest, had a strong religious feeling. She got it in the Talmud Torah school, as well as the atmosphere in our home, although we were not strict Sabbath observers. Ezra's parents were quite religious, [the late] Aharon and Bahié Cohen; they may have contributed to Barbara's religiousness of that period. She tried to observe a strict Sabbath observance but, alas — she got no encouragement at home. A couple of Saturdays, she stayed home when the family went to the beach, and then — she joined us. In the matter of food, all my kids are kosher — away from home as well. My Barbara went to Europe for six weeks on her honeymoon — ate only kosher food throughout; and the same with a cross-country organized-trip she took earlier. They were probably the only ones to observe *kashrut.*

Daughter Barbara went to Syracuse University (!) and later

transferred to New York University — majored in Spanish. Her husband-to-be, Gary Chasson, an Ashkenazi, was also a student, studying to be an audiologist and speech therapist. When he went to Connecticut for his doctorate, she occupied her time there as a real-estate agent. Then came her babies; and by that time they were settled in New York. Marilyn, my second, went to Brooklyn College — and married Jack Fallak very early — (also!), without graduating. She worked in her father's business for a while — until the babies began to come. Jackie, my number three, went to the University of Pennsylvania, graduated in three years Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa. Then she went on to law school and is now connected with a very prestigious law firm in New York. You can see what a devoted worker she is. Susan, my fourth, went to the Wharton School of Finance and graduated at nineteen, with Honors. She is now working with her father in his tablecloth business, in charge of exports. Now I have not only four daughters, but four granddaughters as well. I'm very proud of my girls, they are good girls, very sensitive to people's feelings.

When two girls were of high school age, Barbara was already in college — the youngest, Susan, was about eleven, I went back to college, to complete my education. Brooklyn College is nearby, it made it convenient. I had worked at B'nai Brith, etc., and I had developed my tennis, it was time to think of my head! I had 93 credits from Syracuse, and I was given 80 of those credits as a "transfer student," which was pretty good. What to major in? To go back to dietetics was not practical; so much had changed since my Syracuse courses, I'd have to begin all over again. The first semester I took one course, the next I carried six credits. In what field? The field of communications appealed to me. I applied to the school's radio station and went on as an announcer. When graduation time came, I was being "kicked out" of school. I regretted that I had been given 80 credits! School was a genuine pleasure and satisfied my craving for knowledge in new fields, music, poetry, etc, all somewhat connected with Communications.

At school, at first I was uncertain how I would get along with teenagers — some of them; me being a mother of four. No

problems whatever, I was very comfortable; I maintained a little reserve and waited for them to seek out my company. When a young fellow-student asked if I would study with her in preparations for some finals. . . my children got hysterical with amusement; but they were proud of me. The 'whole' class came to my house to study for one exam; they brought guitars, etc., and we had a great time together. At the end I carried twelve credits in one semester and after a total of four years in all, I got my degree, my B.A.; I hadn't wanted my family life to suffer with a too great concentration on finishing quickly.

In fact, while I was still in Brooklyn College, two of my daughters got married. We did "the whole bit," visits, *Swehnie* [parties, customary trays of gifts], *everything*, just as though I was a lady of leisure. Schooling helped me tremendously, and I think my children also gained from my being a student. My husband was most supportive, he recognized the value of ideas, knowledge. His formal education had ended with high school, but he had thrown himself into the world, and learned a lot on his own, music, world politics, and so on. He was happy for me — *because I was happy.*

When I was at Brooklyn College, I had to miss some social functions. They found it amusing — "a school girl again!" One or two hostesses were actually insulted because I wasn't free to come. There is less of that now. Now there is a little bit of secret envy on the part of some of them. I never cease to wonder at how much talent there is among our women, a lot of it undeveloped, but it is coming out.

Now that I had my degree, I was eager to put my knowledge to some use — in some sort of work. I knew that without experience the communications world didn't have much use for a beginner so I volunteered my services at radio station WNYC and I was thrown in to do a lot of varied assignments. WNYC is city-owned and was always close to being broke, so they made good use of available volunteer workers. I announced news, helped experienced workers in going out to cover news stories and in interviews, etc. It was exciting to know what was happening before the rest of the world knew it; and when I read a newspaper everything related to everything else. In the course of my work I met people from other branches of the

media, and had made friends. I passed along the word that I want a job — *a paying job.* One day a lead was given to me at a wine-tasting party, which did lead to a job. This was in a public relations agency which placed people on talk shows, etc. It was on a part-time, free-lance basis for about eight months, after which I "made the grade," as a full-fledged member of the staff. Only the "boss" ran "mock-interview" training sessions, but I did a lot of the work. But with his attitude I knew I couldn't get very far. When Caesar's World, the huge week-end market in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, was being born I was asked to take on their advertising and publicity. I was a friend of the entrepreneurs, Caesar Salama, Joe Gindi and others, and they gave me a fairly free hand. We've had almost two million customers in the past year — with about three to four hundred exhibitors. It's open only Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, except pre-Christmas December.

I like earning money — I love it, to be frank about it. After all, it is society's measure of one's ability and usefulness. The matter of being able to earn a living had struck me sharply one day. It's true that I'm educated, intelligent, with some enterprise and I had never had to work to make a living; but what if I didn't have Ezra, my husband . . . ? My work now is a double pleasure. I know that my ability is very marketable, and it's in a field that offers me so much variety, and so much pleasure. The wish to be able to earn is becoming more widespread among a number of Syrian women.

I see the Syrian Sephardic community as having a lot of marvelous features. We are most unique — in the way we live together; it offers a tremendous amount of moral support. It's true that it has limiting features, but it's not 'fatal'; it's healthy, most friendly, supportive — (within limits). It's an extended family, with clear-cut customs, religious framework, courtesy, and a lot of friendliness. We can, it is true, raise our sights a little beyond the somewhat narrow confines, to assimilate some of the features of the outside world, to *benefit from the best of both worlds.* But it's difficult to straddle two cultures; for women in particular. By not being involved with people or ideas outside the community — after all in not going to work, they are

not exposed to personalities and cultures which reflect the larger world . . . . Our women — young, most of them — have intelligence and ability that is not developed. So many are young "old women." I think that there is a feeling of unrecognized frustration on the part of some of them, a feeling of "emptiness." I don't *condemn* those whose favorite activities are card-playing, shopping for fashionable clothes, spending time in a beauty-salon — that's their choice. But they would be happier with more constructive activities, personal development and so on.

There *are* a number of young women — married, and some with grown-up children, who have gone to work. Often it is in their husbands' enterprises. A few opened their own ventures, with some success. My sister Bea Esses is co-owner in Deal of a lovely and prosperous gift shop. There are other enterprises, like travel agencies, lingerie, fine childrens' wear shops; some ventures are also operated from their own homes. And it's not only in business that they are involved. I'll give you some examples: some are writing, like Sydelle Ashear Shamah who has had her science-fiction stories published several times. Barbara Sutton Masry is a dynamic lecturer, on women's consciousness-raising, and family life. My sister-in-law, Rae Dayan, teaches cooking classes in Near East Cuisine. Fritzi Abadi is one of several painters who have become recognized — with successful one-woman shows. Others — many, are involved — in what you can call hobbies, which they work at quite seriously. Gilly Safdeye, the young widow of Joe Safdeye, just recently had a Manhattan gallery showing of her photography. Mozelle Dayan Tawil is also a busy professional photographer. It started as a pastime. Others are designers, some knit beautifully and merchandise their work. There are many quite talented women. Maybe they need more direction, some of them, to channel their ability; first through more education and then by experience.

I visited Buenos Aires for three months some years ago to attend my sister's wedding there. I fell in with a rather wealthy group of Syrians. They are more culturally developed than in Flatbush, with theater-going, and regular attendance at the

opera, a common activity among the unmarried as well as the older people. They are more assimilated and with *much religious intermarriages.* On the whole, though, they lead a close-knit social life similar to ours.

In general, I don't think that the old attitudes are changing all that much among the majority of community members. The women are expressing themselves a little more — they may feel the need to, but there is no radical change, generally. Our women have to realize their self-worth more. Some people consider me an ardent "Women's Lib" advocate. I do believe that women should develop themselves, develop their talents, but I'm not for "unisex." I love the differences between men and women! But that doesn't mean that women's ability should remain suppressed, underdeveloped. They should receive equal pay for equal work, their opinions should be given full consideration, the same as men's ideas . . . .

True, there are some divorces, some separations in the Community. Before, there were almost none. But I don't think they are rampant as they are in American society at large. Our children are still getting married; which is a situation that is not as prevalent among others. I'm not aware of any new looseness among our married couples as there is said to be 'outside.' I keep quite busy so I'm not up on possible gossip. Perhaps in Deal where they are not as deeply involved in community activities, there they may have more idle time and perhaps a few look for 'excitement'; I'm not well-informed on that, although I spend summers there. A lot of our men are still patriarchal, male chauvinists, they wouldn't condone any "playing around" (for their wives).

I appreciate very much the unusual good qualities of the community, much more than when I was young and rather critical. The warmth and closeness I mentioned earlier — the extended-family quality is something I appreciate a lot; it's marvelous. Most of my relatives and friends are only four or five minutes away. In the general society families are scattered — members are seldom able to see one another. It's a very rich quality we have. Thoughtful people are seeking what we have — *and never abandoned.* I treasure it.

My girls are all a source of delight, all four of them.

Barbara, married to Gary Chasson, has three little girls of her own, Melanie, Rachel, named after *me*, and Erica. Marilyn, married to Jack Fallak, has two daughters, Linda and Rachel, (me, again). Jacqueline married Jeffrey Marcus. Susan is married to Charles Irani, and has Gloria. They've made me a grandmother many times over, and always a grandmother *to little girls!*

Joseph Abe Sultan, M.D.
Interviews in English

Born in New York,
circa, 1942-1943

"AS THE FIRST JEWISH SYRIAN IN YALE I WAS DRIVEN TO EXCEL"

I got into the field of psychiatry through my medicine. From my youth I was regarded as having above-average intellect. At that time, there were few Syrian physicans; really few in any professional fields. It was considered a matter of great prestige to be a physician — esteem, money. I'm sure that must have influenced my thinking; and since I was deemed particularly capable — well — why *not*?

My early studies were at the Yeshiva of Flatbush, both elementary level and high school. I led two compartmentalized lives. In elementary and high school I developed a number of very warm friendships with Ashkenazi peers. On my home-block with many Syrian residents, there too I had a large number of Syrian friends with whom I was very close. Perhaps there were ten of us who stuck together, with a strong clan or in-group feeling. But the two groups never 'met', never intermingled. The Ashkenazic friendships were confined to school, never beyond school. I mingled on my block with the Syrians after school and during the summer, when most of us went to New Jersey.

From Yeshiva high school I was admitted to Yale University. From there I was accepted to Albert Einstein Medical School. Coming from Yale with very good grades, I met with no difficulty in getting into medical studies. I had finished Yale in 1964 and my medical studies in 1968.

I should tell you that mine is not a typical experience in the Syrian community, although I grew up in it. For a number of years after completing my medical studies, I "broke away," and only in the relatively recent past did I reconcile with it, returned to it with an altered — and positive — attitude. I will give you details as we get on with my life story.

After medical school a year of internship, two years of hospital service, and two years in the Public Health Service in place of the Army — actually I was a commissioned officer. I did Coast Guard duty as well, a two-month tour of duty on a cutter, a small ship surveying the area around Greenland, serving as a ship doctor. After that three years of psychiatric residency service, and I wound up in this service at Maimonides Hospital; following four months in Israel in connection with the outcome of the Yom Kippúr War in 1973. They needed psychiatric help, especially doctors who could speak Hebrew, as I do.

At first, I was principally interested in medicine, with a fascination with psychology. At Yale I had joined a volunteer group which spent a day each week, as a "companion" to a chronically mentally disturbed patient at a state hospital.

In college, it was an introspective existence, almost monastic, when I think back on it. Yale had a very WASP atmosphere, very different from *anything* I had met with before. I had plunged into strange waters. I even felt thoroughly alienated from my Ashkenazi fellow-students. Throughout the four years, I had only a few friends; yes, Jewish. Even with the Hillel group which I frequented in my first year, even there I felt alienated. The boys there seemed unfriendly to me. I was kosher, and in the dining rooms too, where normally there is a good bit of socializing, there too I felt painfully isolated, eating my kosher dinner alone, out of sealed aluminum containers. The Jewish boys were unlike any I had come up against at the Yeshiva of Flatbush, and in Brooklyn in general. They were

Jews, yes, and I related to them as Jews, but not like those with whom I had been familiar. In many ways they seemed similar *to non-Jews.* I'll give you an example. Across the hall in my dorm there was a Jewish boy — from 'Winetka' or somewhere in the Middle West. He was astonished, he had never seen anything like it; came Saturday he found that I would not turn on the light in my room. What kind of Jew could I be? He could not take it seriously; that one is not permitted to throw a light switch? I *looked* normal. I dressed normally, but came Saturday he found me acting in a peculiar fashion.

I am sure that my university experience had a marked influence on my life. I didn't socialize, I studied hard — it was an isolated life. Once every three or four weeks I returned home to Brooklyn. I experienced such a feeling of isolation, painful social deprivation. I channeled my efforts to my academic endeavors. I felt driven, driven to excel in my studies, I recognized that I was perhaps the first Syrian lad to attend Yale. When I reflect now, it was a result of my social isolation and the recognition that I had the capacity. In the first semester at Yale, I had done so well, that I felt the need to maintain my high level. In fact, then, in the beginning, and throughout my years at Yale I was in the top two-percentile of my classes. It was very nice, "but goodness! what have I wrought"? Being a Syrian was not as much the goad as being Jewish, a member of a minority. That must have added to the "push." Really though, in retrospect, I will say that it was *too much;* if I were to do it now, there would be less intensity in my studies. As time passed I developed a few friends, spent long nights playing "gin" and taking life a little easier — since I was certain that my grades were high enough.

No, I was never conscious that the appeal of my specialty was because of a personal *need;* the need to — in effect — delve into psychiatry to help any personal problems. No doubt my "companion" program in visiting mentally ill patients in my years at Yale was due to an underlying interest in psychology and psychiatry, not because of a need to deal with any personal problems.

My father, Abe, was a high school graduate; apparently very bright. I think he enrolled in Columbia University, with a

dream of becoming a physician some day. However, he began to work in a retail dry goods store and he has continued in dry goods. Later, he and my late Uncle Judah along with my grandfather, established a rather successful wholesale business. My father encouraged me to go into medicine — a substitution for his own dreams, perhaps?

My mother's family, Cattan — with seven children, all migrated to Mexico City. Joseph ("Aslan") my Sultan grandfather — he died when I was twelve, he was very fond of me, and influenced me by his example, his deep devotion to Judaism and the Jewish-Arab tradition.

Amnon Shamosh, the prize-wining Israeli writer, is my cousin. He is the son of my aunt, my mother's sister, who married Solomon [Sussa?] Shamosh, in Syria. Later, in Israel Amnon helped to found a small kibbutz on the borders of the Golan Heights. He is still active in the *Kibbutz Maᶜyan Baruch.* Amnon wrote me that a television program based on his stories is being given in Israel. [An oral biography of Shamosh is elsewhere in this study.]

No, I am not aware of Amnon's short stories appearng in Jewish publications in the United States. *Midstream*? I'm not familiar with it; nor *Commentary*, although I have heard this name mentioned. I don't read much literary stuff — mostly professional papers and publications, more scientific and philosophical, as well as religious material.

"The outlook for the Syrian Community?" That's a big issue, we could discuss it for weeks, I speculate about it. I'll have to preface an answer with "I don't know, no one can be sure." To compare it with ten years ago? I would say that it has had a significant change — from my own personal view point. There has been significant change in my feeling about it, too, the community. Let me explain. Coming out of college and medical school, I was directed away, drifted away for quite a while, several years. But since I've married again, in 1976, a girl from the Syrian community, my viewpoint has altered; with the idea of having children and relocating as part of the community. My first marriage had ended in a friendly divorce. We were married for eighteen months when we decided to end it. The

basis, as I view it, for the separation, and it is reflected in my subsequent action, was a difference in our culures. She is an Ashkenazeet and I grew up as a Syrian — in an oriental Sepharadi culture. Or course, my former wife and I were able to "tune in" on many things, but basically — and in the light of the path I chose afterward, it was the cultural difference that could not be overcome, somehow. Retrospectively, I can go back to say that there was some kind of *conflict*, in terms of how my life was developing. To tell you about the Syrian community, my conclusions must be taken subjectively, because of the changes that took place in my outlook, my thinking. Now I see myself more as an integral part of my early background, having responsibilities and interests, professionally and individually.

It's a fascinating community sociologically, as a group, what it represents in the world today. . . . In many respects it has the qualities of — the best word that describes it — a tribe: a tribe with all the social and cultural attributes of a tribe, with customs, rituals and norms, which are integrally related within the lives of its members. It has social controls and mechanisms that are part of tribal life. This feature of Syrian life in the United States, and the world at large, is breaking down. Industrialization, technology, mass urban population, mass media communication, everywhere you turn you find a breakdown of traditional social order, *a marked deterioration.* We are bombarded with news of killings, the urgency to buy this or that soap or beverage; it is truly dehumanizing, a breakdown of civilized orderly living in the way that I perceive it. People are struggling to ward off these shattering effects. What the outcome can be is still unclear. Even in my professional work dealing with psychotic cases, my viewpoint is influenced by that, too. What I see in my hospital work is so tragic and demoralized; the conditions that exist in families, social disintegration . . . . All this emphasized *my positive attitude* toward the Syrian community. The number of the uncared-for, homeless, street vagrants torn away from traditional family life; individuals that we get, the stories that we hear — all of this — emphasizes the contrast with life in the Syrian community order. Society is breaking down — the

inability — or unwillingness of present-day society to look after its unfortunates. The family structure is eroding, a *basic contributing cause* for this social deterioration. With it comes the breakdown of social order and standards. The internalized, inbred control of right social behavior is no longer fostered, it is increasingly diminishing. More and more numbers have no regard for this moral control. Now, many have the mentality of marauders, who see something they want, and if they can, they seize it if there is a fair chance of not being caught. They will not hesitate, even through the use of violence, or even of killing. There is a sharp decrease of inbred sense of right or wrong — of ethics, and legal standards — of social order. This is what I observe in American society at large, in a significant portion of the population. This is *not* the experience of the Syrians in Flatbush.

The qualities characterizing the Syrian Community will continue and perpetuate its standards I believe, but only if similar groups also will survive — not if it is the only and isolated example; the pressures around it would tear it apart. It does appear that now there is the beginning of a return to this kind of social group, a new regard for family and tradition. These are of course groups that have a religious orientation. It's not the purely religious aspect of the groups that draw my interest. It is the moral and traditional values that they hold which makes them valuable, in my estimation.

As to Syrian youth and their educational attainments — and aspirations; I must confess that I don't have close contact with them. Yet, I can tell you that many parents are now secularly-educationally oriented. They too want their children to have the social status they hear of — that *their* children too, are getting a college education. Among some parents, on the other hand, even those who are not what you can call very religious, very observant, they are having misgivings about their children becoming *thoroughly secular* and in that way becoming alienated from the family and the accustomed traditions. Yes, many of the 'kids' are secularizing to some extent, but this too provides a shield against alienation, because *they are doing it together*. My nephews, for example, are in Columbia University. There's a whole small camp of Syrians there, and in

other colleges *in New York*, so that the secularization process is diluted, since they are all experiencing the same degree of modernization together. They colonize and continue to have ties to other Syrian friends, and thus to the community. The Syrian youth are entering the professions — *together*, in a sense, within a like group, and so they form a part of the community even though it is a somewhat distinctive one through their education experience. It's a sort of community subgroup, although it's not defined, or recognized.

Yes, I have heard that a small number of Syrian girls have taken apartments in the city. They are the somewhat mature, still unmarried young women. Most would prefer to marry within the community, and when that is not realized fairly quickly, they venture out. It is said that even in the city, when they are not out on dates, they choose to socialize together. It's because they choose to maintain their ties to the community, their group preference. Actually it seems to me that these city-bound girls are relatively so few in number that they do not form a significant segment, a threat to the community's continuity. It is a fact that can't be disputed that some of these girls will marry non-Syrians and in some cases will be lost to the community. They will abandon their active ties, particularly when they may live away from the community's centers in Brooklyn and Deal.

Where the community will go in the future, I can only speculate, on what looks like a healthy situation. The existence of a Sephardic High School is a critical element in the communal interpretation of the youth. It adds a positive note to their socialization as Syrians. This is not to say that some may not choose mates who are not a part of the Community, but Sephardic High School experience will integrate more of them in the traditional family pattern. Another element helping to bind and fortify the traditional is the recent construction of the Sephardic Community Center. It is a large and handsome building; everyone I speak to is proud and enthusiastic about it. The community at this time strikes me as vibrant and very healthy, it is showing strength and initiative. To give you an example of this as I see it, with the beginning of the construction of the Community Center, Syrian life took on an

infusion, a renewal. This is evidenced by what has taken place in real estate values — the cost of homes in the immediate area of the Center and principal synagogues. Prices of desirable homes have leaped sky-high. The Syrian residential area is a small one. Since the flight to Deal, New Jersey has abated (commuting inconveniences, etc.), and since the construction of the Center has anchored the community to its geographic location, 'obviously' Flatbush is the place to live in. The competition for desirable residences on the choice 'Syrian' streets has almost tripled, the purchase prices. It is the case of supply and demand. The community is increasing in size by virtue of births, marriages, etc., and since the homes in the area are limited in number, their dollar value reflects the population pressure.

The summer scene in Deal, especially at the Casino poolside — this is a tribal ritual, an intense mating scene... there is a level of strain and tension which takes place in the summer. "Find a mate!" They are thrown into a pressure-cooker need to comply with the demands of the parents — (some of whom cannot easily afford the summer rental of a Deal residence to enable them to get entry into the Casino — and its mating scene). In my opinion, this pressure may contribute a little to some young people's resorting to drugs to relieve the tension.... I'm aware that our community has something of a drug problem with some of its youth. I won't say that it is completely attributable to the mating session. However . . . affluence, perhaps?

The Syrian community as I said, is fascinating — and it's encouraging to see it retain the values of a traditional group. Before an individual will do something wrong, there is the fear of social sanction *within* the group. People are mindful of social control, of peer standards, tradition, the opinion of neighbors and the social group. This aspect of community life, to me it is very positive; precious, really. Today you can consider it like "an endangered species." If you think of it as an organism you can say that its qualities are becoming extinct elsewhere. Among the Syrian Sepharadeem it is a rare entity, that is *surviving*. It has survived up to the present, with vigor and

adaptability. I can only hope that it continues.

Meantime, I continue my work-week as Director of the In-patient Psychiatric Unit at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn, with deep interest.

Eli Basil Cohén — Born 1930, in Brooklyn
Interviews in English

"YOU SOW YOUR WILD OATS, BUT IN TIME... WE ALL SETTLE DOWN, GET MARRIED..."

I was born in 1930 in the Bay Parkway Nursing Home. Lafayette High School graduate; worked for Murray Toussie, Princess Pat as a stock boy — then the Army in 1951, at Fort Dix. Married Selma Mohanna in that time. Her brothers were my best friends, I was in and out of their home. It took a few years to recognize her as an attractive girl. "With me, [wife speaking], it was instantaneous, the minute I saw him." She was only fifteen then, and it was when she became sixteen that we began dating. Soon after we got married, thirty years ago.

We were seven children at home, first three boys, then three girls and another girl. I had a good childhood. I played a lot of ball; I still play, as often as I can, early in the morning. Every sport. I am very athletic.

How it was that I didn't attend the *Shammi*, the Damascus-people's school, since my family is from Damascus? Well, at some point my father had a dispute with the directors and he took us out and placed us in the Ḥálabi, the Aleppoan Hebrew School. The feud lasted ten or fifteen years before he was reconciled; then we went to the Shammi School, located in a private house on 64th Street.

It was two or three years after my bar mizva that we went to the Shawam Synagogue — 64th Street and 20th Avenue, to

Ḥakham Murad Maslaton; he was married to my father's sister, *ʿamiti.* From 3:30 till 7:30 in the evening, right after public school, that's when I went to Hebrew School — the Magen David Talmud Torah (the Aleppoan estalishment) on 67th Street. I went till I was sixteen years old. Rabbi Ezra Mishʿaniyeh gave me a nickname — "Shorty Shortcake," I'm still short! The Talmud Torah was demanding, but just the same it was a good time, along with friends, very nice friends, that I still have.

It was a very happy childhood that I remember. My father was tough in his demands on our *kittab* [*schools, in Arabic*]; if my teacher hit me, even if it was not justified, well, my father whacked me on top of that. We had to toe the line. But really, I'm the better for it.

My parents had it tough, when I was growing up. They were short of money. We all had to work part-time, to help along.

My father worked with Paris [Interior] Decorators at one time. He had been a partner in one of the company's stores, but because he refused to work on Sabbath, he was pushed out of the partnership. However, he was too valuable to release. He took a job with them; just so he would not have to violate the Sabbath.

At other work later, my father travelled on business, all over. Everywhere, except to China, somehow. For a long time he was connected with Shaʿya Shalóm's business. Two or three times a year my father travelled to Europe to buy, and to style the making of hand-embroidered linens. Shalóm chose to send a Beyda, instead of my father, he selected him over my father, that's how my father *didn't* go to China. He is still grateful to this day! During Beyda's stay in Shanghai, the Japanese invaded and along with other Americans, Beyda was interned in those horrible prisoners-of-war camps. The Japs were very cruel. That's how my father didn't get to see China. — and is happy about it.

My father was very-well-to-do at one time, he had three interior decoration stores in the middle-class Harlem of those days. We summered in Rye, New York and other nice watering spots. That was before Bradley Beach, New Jersey became *the*

place for Syrians to go to. (I don't remember the Rye days. I hadn't been born yet!) Later when his interior decorating business went down-hill, he wasn't so well-to-do; although we always lived pretty nicely — our own home and so on. One of the reasons for the slide in business was because he was — and is — a strict Shabbat [Sabbath] observer, and he accepted the circumstances cheerfully. We went along with that, and we lacked nothing. He gave us a good education, all my brothers, my sisters and myself. We all do pretty well, financially. I am a sales executive in a sportswear importing company, Ashkenazi.

My oldest brother rebelled against the strict religious training my father gave us. It was the influence of the crowd he ran with, the crowd that hung around the candy store on 20th Avenue near the Subway station. He refused to attend synagogue services, didn't observe the Shabbat; but he always respected my father. That was a matter of two of three years. My father was furious, but since my brother was eighteen or nineteen years old, there was not much he could do. After that period, he "came back." My father was very smart not to pull him too hard; he was afraid to break the cord and then my brother would never come back. My brother is well established, an insurance agent with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. I think that my brother's period of rebellion was widespread at that time, the period of war, World War II. some went into the Army and when they came out many of them had changed, with a different attitude. My brother — his training at home, that helped bring him back to the fold. You realize how wrong you are. You saw your oats . . . . In time we all get married and settle down.

My father and mother went to Florida, where he opened a retail store on Washington Avenue, in Miami Beach, selling Israeli and religious articles. He was there for 12 years, and when my mother died he came back to New York. He remarried, to a very nice woman, a widow, and they are very happy together. We're all very pleased with this marriage. They travel, and when in New York my father is busy as the Ahi Ezer Synagogue Director; a productive, satisfying life. He's okay. He's very active. I should be, at age eighty-five (?) as vigorous as he is; he is "pushing" ninety years of age —

something like that; we don't know any more and he won't talk!

Earlier there were differences between the Shawaam and the Ḥálabiyeh. Affluence that both groups reached in recent years, and 'intermarriage' — has wiped out differences. Yes, there is a distinction still, but it's not significant; playful joking about origins — about the fact that a person is a Shammi. But it is no longer something to feel bad about. Years ago, the Ḥálabiyeh were more successful, in the majority. In Mexico City, Argentina and other places where there are many Syrians from both cities, it's the Shawaam who are in majority and *they* are the 'upper class', more affluent [?] In New York at first, each community group sometimes ran a dance, *separately*. Now they are done together because it became a *community* affair, at the new Sepharadi Community Center.

I have a fine set of kids. Only Lois married, to Sammy Joe Sutton. She is thirty now. She took a degree in sociology and then a law degree and practiced law for a few years, even after she got married. Her children keep her home now. She has three, Victoria, Joseph and Eli — named after me. My three other children Bert (Basil) twenty-eight, Allan, twenty-four, and Beverly nineteen, are still unmarried. When the time comes. . . . With satisfying work, religious devotion, warm friendships and a *great family* — it's a good life!

[*An oral biography of Eli's father will be found elsewhere in this volume.*]

Ronald "Ronnie" Weinisch — Born in N.Y. City, 1953
Interviews in English

"I WAS BORN AN ASHKENAZI BUT I'VE BECOME MORE THAN HALF A SYRIAN THROUGH MY MARRIAGE"

True I was born an Ashkenazi, but now I'm a semi-Sepharadi. This is how it came about: I had met this Syrian girl,

Alberta Mohanna, seventeen years old, That was 29 years ago. No, she wasn't shy, timid; she was a happy, outgoing girl. She glowed, always smiling, that's what I liked so much. She smiled a lot, maybe to show her pretty dimples. She was vibrant, exciting.

It was a chance meeting, in front of an ice-cream parlor on Bay Parkway where a lot of young "SY" [Sy-rian] people used to hang out. A Jay-Dub" friend [an Ashkenazi] had invited me to visit him in Bensonhurst, he used to hang out with Syrians. We liked one another, she and I, and dated. I visited her home many times, became friendly with her two brothers and three sisters. When I talked marriage to her, she was ready. She said, "You must first talk to my mother; she has to give her consent, that's the way we "SY's' do it." I found out later — she told me, that she had asked her mother to give me a "hard time," to avoid giving me an opportunity to talk to her privately. Whenever I cornered her mother she found that there was "something important" that had to be attended to. Finally, she yielded, and gave me her blessing — and her daughter. She was laughing so much. That was two years after we met.

No, I had never met a Syrian before — I lived on East 5th Street in Manhattan. It was just a happy chance that brought us together. I never knew her father, he had died of a heart attack a few months before my wife was born. It was a very close-knit loving family; maybe it was because their father had died. I never knew another family to be so close together. The boys worked, worked hard, the girls worked too, okay?

Our wedding was not like the usual "SY" [Syrian] one of that period, where they had the ceremony and then passed out small boxes of sugar-coated almonds — and that was all! I wanted an Ashkenazi-style wedding — "a catered affair." My father helped financially, he had worked in the fur-garment industry and had comfortable savings; I and Alberta had been working and her family helped too, and so we had the catered affair. I wanted it for my mother and father's sake. They *had* to invite the cousins and close friends. They "owed" them — to reciprocate.

We had a week's honeymoon at the Nevele Hotel in the Catskills Mountains — "the Honeymoon Heaven." When we

returned from the honeymoon, we both went to work, found and furnished a tiny apartment on Bay Parkway at 64th Street. We mixed with the crowd, friends and family, mostly with her side, although I also had a few Ashkenazi friends. But it seems that you go along with the girl's side among the Syrians. They are lively, lots of fun, and they form a large circle that is always available, close-knit; most of my early friends had married — scattered . . . . We lived nicely but we saved, so that after a few years we were able to afford a whole floor in a two-family house. What luxury, what a place, compared to the tiny apartment.

Syrians customs were certainly unfamiliar to me, they seemed strange, although the people I met were very nice, no doubt about that. I was young, in love with the girl, getting along great with her brothers and their friends. So the unfamiliar, the strange, seemed to be rather ordinary, normal.

That period, when I met Alberta, was shortly after I got out of the Army, during the Korean War. I got a temporary job in the Post Office to tide me over, to give me a little money for a good time, until I knew what I wanted to do, what I *could* do as a high school graduate. The G.I. Bill made it possible to go to school to learn a trade. Somehow a career as a window-dresser, laying out merchandise attractively in store windows, I had heard that it paid well and had plenty of openings. I went for a while, to a school that turned out to be something of a "rip-off" — "The New York School of Window Trimming." However, I tagged along with one of the instructors, helping him without charge in his everyday window dressing in the stores — he was a shoe specialist. Soon after I was offered a job by Joe Serour [a Syrian] in his store close to Union Square, in Manhattan — on 14th Street. On one floor he sold children's wear and on another "yo-yo" articles [game novelties, cameras, radios, and tourist and other small souvenirs]. Joe gave me a job as a salesman.

Alberta's brother Mike had a store in Baltimore for several years, partner with someone. At that time the 'real money' in retailing [Syrian stores] was "out of town." There was less competition than in New York. These storekeepers out of town were "sharp guys;" *Not* that they took advantage of their customers, but they knew how to present their merchandise and

were quite sophisticated in knowing how to make a *good sale.* It's in their blood — they're merchants — just like their fathers, grandfathers, and going way back — it continues to today. It's no different than it was, before. Except that the 'numbers' are different, bigger [the dollar-values]. Mike came back to New York and was renting two stores and asked me to participate in one of the stores. I had worked for Joe Serour for five years, I was well-experienced; I was now "one of the boys." I knew how to "T.O." a customer ["turn over" a difficult customer jto another salesman, with a different, more sympathetic approach], persuade a customer to a higher-priced article, etc. I knew what had to be done, Joe Serour had been an excellent teacher, excellent. Mike, my brother-in-law, was going in with Sam Dushay [a Syrian] who he knew from Baltimore. [*Mohanna and Dushay are both of Damascus origin.*] Mike offered me part of his share in one of the two stores, okay? That's where I got my children's wear merchandise knowledge. Joe Serour's operation on 14th Street was a "hit" operation. Squeeze the most out of customers; Sam Dushay approach — in a smaller city — was a "soft-sell" approach, no high-pressure. He was a keen merchant, no doubt about that, but he believed in giving the customer a bargain, so that he or she would come back. Joe Serour in huge New York had no confidence that the customer would ever be seen again. "Let's not take any chances."

The experience I got through these two merchants was very helpful to me to this day. After six or seven years under my arrangement with Mike, I said to myself, "Hey, it's time to do it for yourself!" I, too, was wide awake, with a *Yiddishe kopf [a keen, "a Jewish head".* I'll open my own store. Which I did, on 18th Avenue in Bensonhurst, in the very neighborhood in which I lived. I took another of my brothers-in-law, Joe Mohanna, as a partner, a well-experienced retail man. After 18 years together, till today, we've never once had a dispute; we respect one another, and one another's opinions, we get along great.

I guess we had $5,000. which each put in, which went into establish the store; rent, security, fixtures. Getting merchandise was no problem. We went to the "SY" merchants, who are big in children's wear. We got credit easily for everything we

needed through the rapport with these businessmen that I build up while working at Joe Serour's, and with Mike; and of course we mingled together in the community. We did it — we succeeded. We worked hard, opened at nine in the morning, closed at nine in the evening. When business was exceptionally good, when it was the shopping season, Easter, Christmas, we also opened on Sundays. We made a success of our business. We started our store on 18th Avenue with 1,200 square feet of floor space. Now it has 9,000 square feet, and soon we expect to enlarge it by another 4,000 square feet, if God will help us. In all, we now have four sizeable stores, selling children's wear and women's casual wear. In addition to 18th Avenue, we have large stores on Kings Highway, on Brighton Beach Avenue and another on 86th Street, all busy shopping areas; much larger than our original 1,200 square feet! Our hard work really paid off.

More important than the stores, I have three beautiful daughters, Barbara, Paulette, married to Hymie Azar, and Eileen. I just got news that before long I will be a grandfather; Paulette has been married two years now. I'm very excited about that, to be a grandfather at such a young age [51]!

I'll tell you why I'm here at the Sepharadic Community Center. I'm "duty officer" for the evening, a volunteer, to help out. I'm on the Board of Directors, and on a couple of committees. One of them is the Membership Committee and another the Collection Committee — which I hate. We have to nudge members, not only for contributions, but also to have them pay pledges made before. The Center is doing great things, I'm proud to be part of it. It's united the community. It was always united, of course, but it has brought the people together, in a friendly 'club'; it's become *the* hub of Syrian activity. There are 1,150 families which are members.

The Collection Committe — the Center is 'in hock', I don't have to tell you; we owe two million dollars. [Now reduced to $700,000]. With an interest rate of 12 percent to 14 percent, the interest alone calls for close to $275,00 a year.

The achievements of the center are great. From the senior citizens who come in numbers, every morning, to chat and to

play cards, to the bus trips for them to Atlantic City — a day's trip which gives them a little variety. This trip, which takes place maybe three or four times a year — such trips keep then alert and healthier. (They love the slot machines). There are other trips in the city. Sundays the Center is a bee hive, especially for young kids' activities, sports, games, classes, club meetings. Our Center is the "Crown Jewel" of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, they helped us design and staff it, and also contribute to its support. Our swimming pool and gymnasium and our membership Health Club are magnificent — everything is of the best. Not only I, but *everyone* is proud of the Center.

In our youth we were what you might call "good kids." Our great sin then was a cigarette, maybe; respectful most of us, serious about our schooling, our work. Life was safe on the streets. Things have changed, tremendously. You could hang out in front of the ice-cream parlor, although it wasn't the ideal place. You can't safely do such things now. We needed a community center ten years ago, twenty, thirty years ago — now we have a fine one, and it is being put to good use. Let me give you a "for-instance." In interviewing a widow for membership, she asked, "Where were you five years ago? Yes, you were *planning* a center — five years ago my son had nowhere to go, he began getting into 'trouble'. He became a drug addict! I have a younger son. I want to avoid the heart ache and tragedy I had with his brother."

Now, we have a good place, an interesting place, which can help to keep young people out of trouble; where they can meet others, in a healthy environment — and an interesting one. For the eighteen-to-twenty-one-year-old youth, the center is not yet a great attraction. They are working, many of them, others are busy with school work. We are trying hard to develop programs which can interest them. The greatest appeal for them now are our magnificent sports facilities. We hope to develop other, more serious programs for them. The younger kids, we offer them a lot, they're very interested; and so are we. They are the *adults of tomorrow.*

I have very good friends who are Syrians; in fact now *all my friends* are Syrians. I feel very close to them, as they feel

about me. At times, not often, I feel a difference — they are Syrians, you are a "Jay Dub," an *iddishi.* [Yiddish speaking] I've been in the community almost thirty years, I am most comfortable in it. Sometimes, some friend will jokingly 'accuse' me of being an Ashkenazi, in good spirit. That's the only time I feel my Ashkenazi origin. They give me a reminder — that I'm not born *one of them;* although they like me a lot.

Yes, I think that my children consider themselves Syrian kids. At times, if they are called "Jay Dubs" because our name is Weinisch, they must feel a *little bit* like outsiders. Less so than I. I lived in two worlds.

My parents died; my brother lives in Florida, my sister lives in Canarsie. I see her frequently, every week or two. She's attended Syrian functions and likes them. If you see it properly [the Community] it's wonderful. You are *part of something.*

As a young man, I was not religious, not at all. Now? Very little; on a scale of 1 to 10, I rate a "1"; [? *see below*] what was I before? a *minus* 5, okay? It's hard to really rate my religious standing. Before I couldn't read, now I *can* read Hebrew. I go to synagogue, mornings and every *shabbat* since my father passed away almost one year ago, to say *Kaddish.* I feel very comfortable in the Syrian synagogue I attend — Beth Torah. Will I continue after the year of mourning is over? I don't know for sure, but I'm inclined to. Yes, I do pray every morning now, with *tallis* and *tephillin.* While I'm still saying *Kaddish* for my father, I go to synagogue every morning. I don't know if that will continue, I'm not making a contract; *Tephillin* every morning? I think so. If I don't, my conscience would bother me.

This Community brings religion to you. When I was young the idea was that if 'you are religious' you couldn't enjoy yourself, you can't have a good time. I see it differently in this Community. My father's home was strictly kosher, my mother wouldn't turn on the lights on Saturdays. Outside I used to eat anything, everything. My home now is kosher, and even when we eat out in the last five years it will be fish. Some will say that that's not kosher, fish, in a non-kosher restaurant. It's kosher enough for me. My Syrian friends too, 80 percent of them; when they eat out, they will order fish. That's a large percentage in this day and age. My son-in-law, Hymie Azar,

influences me toward being more religious, too. His influence and my wish to please him, to some extent . . . .

I know more Syrians than many Syrians do. I probably know more Syrians than my wife. That's because of my business activities with them. I buy a lot of my merchandise from them — sizeable quantities of it. In children's and ladies wear they're important factors. So I know a lot of them socially, I'm a friend through business, also.

I like the community, I admire its people a lot; its closeness, the support for one another. They look to go forward, at the same time that they keep up the traditions. They're united. They're really wonderful. Not every single individual, of course, but as a whole. Look at the Center, the Syrian yeshivas, the charity, the support for Jewish institutions of every kind.

Drawbacks in the community? Not many. Yes, I've heard that drugs are a problem with some youth. Wherever you have lots of money, it's likely to happen. I think the Center will help with the growing youth. Also, the people throw their weight around a little too much, among themselves; a little "showy." I can't blame them too much; they worked hard and have "made it," in a short time; they are entitled to it, a success; it's human nature. I don't have to tell you what's going on with weddings, etc. They go 'overboard' to top previous weddings. I have to confess; when I had a wedding for my daughter, I also tried to make it "super." It's the style in the Community. Another thing I don't think is good is the fact that parties, even youth parties sometimes start at eleven o'clock, and end at three or four.

I see no trends that the Community's traditions are weakening. On the contrary. I see them becoming stronger. I see more religion, for example, than ever before. The "proof of the pudding" are the Syrian religious schools; more space required, another floor, another buildning.

The Yeshiva of Flatbush [Ashkenazic] has more Syrians than "Jay Dubs" [?]. The Yeshivas are instilling religion in the young ones, who in turn are *delivering it back* to the parents; the Community is becoming more and more religious. That's good. The kids are not walking around with *payoss* [earlocks] like the Hassidim; they are modern American children. There's

so much more good being produced in the Community . . . it's hard to find what's really bad. I see more and more kids going to college, to graduate schools. In my early years in the Community there were none; if a kid graduated high school, he was considered "well-educated." Now we have doctors, lawyers . . . maybe a dozen or more are in medical schools. College students are not drifting away. Sometimes they do drift away for a period — but they come back to the fold of the Community, their early training and education bring them back.

My niece Lois Cohen, she married a Sutton. She's the daughter of my brother-in-law Eli Cohen — son of Basil; Eli and I married sisters. Lois has since become a lawyer.

My happy life and successful career all stem from visiting my Ashkenazi friend in Bensonhurst — and meeting Alberta, okay? I am an Ashkenazi, but more than half Syrian now, because of my marriage.

Yvonne Tabboush — Born in Manchester, England 1919
Interviews in English

Y.T. was encounterd at a reception given by Joseph and Gladys Shamah (of Jerusalem and New York) in honor of Clem and Rose Esses of Dublin, brother and sister-in-law of Gladys: Tabboush is related. She speaks crisply in a cultivated English pattern.

". . . MOTHER, YOU ARE BRIBING YOUR OWN CHILDREN WHEN YOU INDUCE THEM TO VISIT YOU WITH, 'I'VE MADE YOU *KIBBÉ*

The fact is, that when the food enticements were put out they would surely come. I set up two resistances in my youth, one was to food, in the sense that — I have a lot friends, we can *go out* to eat, we see each other, we can have a cup of tea. I didn't want to have food used as a main attraction. The other,

later, may explain to you the whole attitude to marriage in my childhood — why I never married.

This was in Manchester, England, of course. We lived in the Didsbury area, along with the several hundred families of Jews who originated in Aleppo. Most families had come in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century, I suppose. [Abraham Btesh an Aleppo merchant originally from Killez visited Manchester in 1843. Manchester was the world-center for textiles at that time. The Syrians came to establish buying offices, to ship directly to their partners at home in Syria].

How my father had gotten to Manchester from Aleppo? Textiles. From Egypt really; after being in Egypt for a few years from Aleppo. Cairo, that's where he met my mother. My father spoke nothing but Arabic then. My mother, "Miss Forte," spoke French, Italian and English, as well as Arabic. Somehow she married him, well below her socially; he wasn't an aristocratic Jewish Italian from Livorno. My mother's story — I always took my mother's stories with two pinches of salt — she decided that since she was a member of a lage family,and without the necessary substantial dowry — a *must* for a good marriage, it would be wise for her to get married quickly. Her family was not very well off then; they kept asking her when would she finally get married? She claimed that she had three suitors, put the three names in a hat — and drew out "Tabboush" — my father.

I have three sisters older than me. One, Nina, was married off by my husband — what am I saying? — by my *father*! She was seventeen years old when my father proposed Jabbra Salem (Syrian) a nice man, wealthy, etc., "up." In short order, she married him.

The day of her engagement party was when I was conceived, and I was born the year that she gave birth to her first child! Really, I was a late arrival; the ninth child, born when my father's *grandchild* arrived. My father had been impotent for some years, but at my sister's engagement party. . . he "got the urge." . . . The house was full of guests for the engagement party, I remember my mother telling me. When "the wife" came by, Daddy said to Mother, "*Yalla, Yalla!* hurry, hurry, up we go!" I thought that my entry into the

world — my conception, on top of all the coat of the guests — was the most disgraceful thing in the world! When I was born my father would tease mother, "Isn't it shameful, that an 'old' woman — the mother of eight children should be going at it again — child bearing?"

I have two fixed ideas, resistances. First, my father married off my sister Nina "like that!" Then my sister Helen who was fifteen was intrigued with all the fuss and glamour of Nina's engagement and marriage — *she* fancied the idea of getting married quickly. With many children left at home, Helen's wish to get married was viewed as *bakht — nahseeb* (Fate-Chance). S. was the most eligible young man in Manchester, rich, handsome, sought after — he came courting Helen. Sent flowers, lots of small gifts — you know; he turned her head completely. She insisted that she wanted to marry him. My mother — and this is something I constantly reproached her for later, "At fifteen!" — she said *Nahseeb*! (Fate)

On the honeymoon S. infected her, it was said. He had reportedly not been completely cured of a sexual disease and passed it to her in the first days of their marriage. She was a beautiful girl; because of the infection — improperly attended to — too late, she never was able to have a child and was in and out of doctors' hands constantly throughout her life. The he took her to Haiti to live — where she contracted amoebic dysentery. They said earlier that she was the most beautiful girl in (Syrian) Manchester.

My sister Janice was sixteen and still in the nursery; in England we had nurseries, with a "Nanny", and the children played in the nursery. (Victor, four, Harry, two and Gladys, the oldest, in the nursery.) My sister Gladys had left school at sixteen, innocent — like all my sisters; Helen too, to the day she got married. They had a big wedding reception at the 'posh' Midland Hotel in Manchester.

No. 3, Gladys — one day father came to her and said "You are going to marry C . . . ." She complained that she didn't wish to marry anyone, yet. In any case C . . . was brought around. One day Gladys took C . . . aside. "Would you mind if I ask you a personal question: do you have a lot of hair on your body?" Gladys equated hairy bodies with *apes* and told that to

C . . . . "Not at all, my dear, my skin is smooth — and free from *any* body hair." Father threatened Gladys that if she didn't agree to marry C . . . he would keep her locked up in the nursery. Finally, she married. On the night of the honeymoon she was horrified at the profusion of his body hair, etc., and ran out of the room, screaming. The evening before there had been a hotel wedding reception, after which the newly weds retired to the "bridal-suite." Very early the next morning mother was awakened by a telephone call from the groom. "Your daughter, she was locked in the bathroom all night. Come get her out!" Mother came and got her out. "Why did you hide in the bathroom?" Mother asked. "I was afraid — something strange was going to take place in bed, and he is so hairy!" Nobody ever explained sex to these people. We were all like that! When I was seventeen someone kissed me — I thought I had become pregnant! We were all brought up in this ridiculous fashion. Nobody ever mentioned sex — a nasty [nahsty] word.

Three sisters married that way — and since my father died when I was eight or nine, there was nobody to push me into marriage a few years afterward. Mother did try gently to persuade me, with a "nice man," the comforts, the jewelry and clothes, and so on. In most marriages then, the husband was fifteen or twenty years older than the "chosen"; very Syrian. My sisters had been brought up in England, mingled with English school girls, had a "nanny." Mother's attitude was that as long as the prospective husbands were "good men," who would provide nice homes, children, comforts of all sorts . . . . I thought to myself "Why do I need a man? I will work and get myself all the good things I want. Jewels? I don't *like* jewelry."

In time I was left at home with the two closest in age to me — Henry and Victor. Whenever Mother went away travelling, she would insist they "look after your little sister, see to it that she eats properly, goes to bed early . . . ." They reproached me for being "a bloody nuisance — a girl." I decided then to do whatever boys can do. I was going out of my way to do better, anything *they* could do. Well, they were going to the Hebrew *Talmud Torah* (after public school) sessions Tuesdays and Sunday. They did the *teffilin* business. [phylacteries after confirmation], just enough to read the prayer book. I must go

too. "But girls don't attend Talmud Torah!" Since *they* wore eyeglasses I had to have them too. "But you don't need glasses!" they would say, "No, I can't see, I need glasses too." So I managed to get glasses, I did everything they could do. They climbed trees and stole fruit, they played cricket. I did the same as they. They gave me dolls, I threw them away. I was a *tomboy*. At Talmud Torah which I insisted on attending, we would read the Song of Songs, pick up "dirty" passages, and titter.

When I was sixteen I left school, I had attended free secondary school. The head mistress called my mother in, I was ready for the 'other' two years towards the higher school certificate which qualifies for university admission. But there was no money in the family. My father had gone bankrupt, my brothers were keeping us. It wouldn't have cost anything; I could have stayed on in school for another two years. "But why should she stay on till age eighteen? She should be married by that time; waste of time; what does a girl need all that education for?" So I left school — at sixteen; I wish I had stayed on for more education. Soon after I left for Egypt on a holiday with my mother, who was eager to see her family after a separation of 30 years. No, it wasn't to marry me off, I was her 'baby'. Victor was in Cambridge — Henry was in Buenos Aires working — now that I had left school she was free to visit her family for three months. We stayed with my uncle Alfred Forte [Italian Sephardeem], very "upper-class"

My uncles from Livorno had continued their residence in Cairo, they were now very well-to-do and so very posh. One was president of the exclusive British Club, another was the Director of the Cox and King news agency. We stayed with Uncle Alfred, who was very conceited. His daughters, too; they treated me rather shabbily — a poor cousin. I was most anxious to get away from that atmosphere, to be on my own.

Soon after we arrived in Cairo my uncles said, "Yvonne is seventeen, it's time to marry her off. How much of a dowry does she have?" "Nothing," my mother replied. They said, "You must write to her brothers to see how much they can provide. You know that without a dowry it is difficult to make

a good marriage." My brothers' views were that "Sister Yvonne, with her charm and intelligence, doesn't really need a dowry!" Against my wishes I was taken to cafés, Groppi's, the Shepherd Hotel and other places, to meet prospective husbands who didn't demand a dowry. None of them was attractive; some, short, others fat . . . . in any case I didn't want to get married, only seventeen years old.

But, I *was* eager to leave Uncle Alfred's home. I wanted to be independent, and looked for some means to earn money. I spoke to Uncle Elie who was very nice, and broadminded; I told him I wanted to work as a journalist (Cox and King was a very important British news agency); I always wanted to write. He was acquainted with the owner of the *Société Orientale de Publicité d'Egypt* which published the *Bourse, the Egyptian Mail,* the *Giornale d'Italia* and one of the Arabic journals. He said, "Send her along." I was introduced to the editor of the English newspaper. My first task was to take the articles in the French *Bourse Egyptienne* which he would mark off for me, to adapt them for the *Mail,* in English of course. After several months he asked, "How much are you earning?" I replied that I was earning *nothing.* Said he, "I'm not going to have staff [stahff] here in 1936, being exploited. You will get one pound per week."

A young man by the name of Eric Bigio working there had a crush on me, was always making passes ["pahsses"] at me, and since he wasn't getting anywhere, he sought to make me suffer. Thus *he* would mark out the articles from the French *Bourse* which I would be required to prepare for the English language paper; he would choose such stories — the most explicit possible, for me to translate. I was very innocent and naive; I would ask for example, looking at the report in French, "How could Ḥassan ibn Ibrahim *violate* Muḥamad Jahbara?" The editor would say to me, "Never mind. You can disregard that story." Or else, when I met with a reference to a *maison close* (house of prostitution) which had been raided, I asked in wonderment what a "closed" house could signify? Goldstand, the editor asked, "Is it that bugger, Eric Bigio, who put you on to the story?" It surprises me now to think of how long I retained my innocent state in the midst of the lively journalistic

office. (How old I was when I did lose my 'innocence'? Pouf, It was many years later!)

All this sharpened a sense of challenge, of competition. "I want to be a success like a man." Even when I thought of marrying — I had kept them off. I would say, "next year, next year, not now." I also had a serious problem, a dichotomy: on the one hand my firmly implanted Jewish-Oriental background and upbringing, contrasted with my life in the midst of English-colonial journalism, and so on.

Later I did go into journalism seriously. I joined the UNESCO section of the United Nations as a writer, public relations officer and translator, until I reached retirement age. That is where I had the opportunity to mingle with officials of many member nations. This was reflected in my friendliness with the lady in the hospital.

I was in the hospital in New York for an operation recently; there was this Egyptian lady I met — her husband was a Palestinian Muslim. I established immediately that I was Jewish — no kind of bad feeling between us — for me people are people. We began chatting while we were waiting to go down to have our surgical operations. Whe she recovered she begged me to come visit her in Bay Ridge [an area in Brooklyn with many Christian Arabs]. I explained that I was going to relatives in Flatbush to recuperate. I explained that they are all "very Jewish," they don't mix much with non-Jews. Of course a Palestinian, even a Christian, would be anti-Israel; perhaps less now in 1980, when the Israelis are defending the Christians in Southern Lebanon? Menachem Begin, I heard him at the U.N. where he was saying how "the Jews are defending the poor Christians of Lebanon when their own fellow-Christians all over the world were letting them be trod underfoot by the P.L.O." It's not hypocrisy? He is not doing it for the sake of the Christians as such, he is doing it for Jewish security. I was standing in the midst of a group of correspondents at the U.N. where I was working; they were all snorting — "Begin is *so* abrasive. Not like Abba Eban or Herzog." The present head of the Israeli delegation, Blum, he's terribly Orthodox. He doesn't have the appeal, the charisma of some of his predecessors. The P.L.O. delegate Terzi, he is extremely charming and *sympa-*

thique — unfortunately. He would greet me with great cordiality — but I didn't care to respond. I didn't want to touch the hands of one of those assassins. We met on many occasions,in small groups of non-aligned conference delegates. Some would come to me with great warmth, I would give them a formal response. I refused to shake hands with one of those P.L.O. individuals.

I used to be full of prejudices about the separateness, the 'backwardness' of the Aleppoan Jews in Brooklyn. But when I took at my American cousin [the widow of Yvonne's cousin], Helen Tabboush, and how well she brought up her children and the way her sons and daughters are bringing up their own families . . . the way they carry on the old traditions in such a pure fashion . . . and how loyal and affectionate they are to one another — it's very admirable; family ties, most precious! You can see that if everyone had done as I had — remained unmarried — close family connections would have disappeared. We'd all go off — many would intermarry. . . . Yet there is enough inner-community marriage — sheepish following, in the Ḥálabi circle here in Flatbush to keep it going for a long time. Of course with the Ashkenazeem — I don't know if they ever lived with the closeness of the Ḥalabiyeh, with the same deep-rooted traditions that were prevalent in the Orient. The Ashkenazeem became far more educationally and professionally directed.

My great-grandfather — Tabboush, was an Aleppo rabbi, the famous poet, *Ḥakham* Raphael Tabboush ᶜAdes, — "Antebi" (from Antab). My father's father married three times. My father came from the first marriage, the deceased Morris Tabboush at whose home I am recuperating, was a product of the second marriage. That's why I and my immediate family didn't know of him, and only in very recent years had I met this cousin.

I remained with UNESCO, travelling all over the world in connection with my work, until I reached early-retirement age. I am sometimes called to Paris or to South America or the Far East, to translate for some special conference. Apart from that I am busy in New York doing volunteer work for social causes which are important to me, such as nuclear disarmament. I own

a house in the south of France which acquired when I was stationed in Paris; I mean to sell it since I live far away. I do have a sharing condominium on a beach in Mexico which I occupy — when I am not travelling to Buenos Aires or to England to see my brothers, sisters, or cousins. I am kept busy. After that I return to my cozy cooperative apartment on the Upper East Side in New York, to mingle with my wide circle of acquaintances and a few friends; and to try to be socially useful.

❀

Chapter Six

Residents in Other Lands

Isaac Dabbaḥ (de Ashkenazi) Born Aleppo, 1902

in company of David Betesh of Mexico
Interviews in Arabic, in Mexico City

(Dabbaḥ about 78 youthful years of age, wealthy merchant, works half days, sons carry on business. Dabbaḥ has completed manuscript about Aleppoan immigrants to Mexico. Included also, Aleppo old-world history gathered from encyclopedias.
A seemingly high-strung and somewhat head-strong personality, Dabbaḥ is thoroughly courtly.

DABBAḤ:

I visited Aleppo in 1926 for three months, which I had left in 1911, at age nine. In my long visit I wandered all over Aleppo, visiting "Joe" Duek's *ohda* office-room frequently. He told me a lot about Ḥálab. Duek, "Ḥ'mehweh", ("English-protected") was "father" to the Orphans' Home and was active — forward, in greeting visitors seeking contributions, he went everywhere . . . Yes, there was electric lighting in that year — but in *only one place.* I asked the proprietor of the establishment, "How is it that you alone have electricity?" It was because he had his own generator, in his establishment "Hotel Baron."

I was only a child when we came to Mexico, there were only two or three Syrian Jewish families. [Dabbaḥ turned deliberately vague as to early Mexican-Syrian population information and later declined to discuss this.] I don't remember . . . I have it in my lists here, the names of various Aleppo and Shawam (Damascene) families. My family's home was a center where most immigrants used to congregate, and to speak of Ḥálab and its stories. I attach great importance to the names of early immigrants. As to 'notables' who came to Mexico, there

were none, really. There were some who went to New York, Picciotto, Shalam, Silvera. Neḥmad did come, but they did not distinguish themselves — they made no contribution whatever, here.

Gindi, who was a green grocer in Ḥálab, in Buenos Aires became most wealthy. In Mexico, too, another Gindi, Saqqa,Ash'ar, became very wealthy. The immigrants to Mexico seemed to have been among the most poor, the lowliest in Ḥálab, while New York drew a few of the better, middle-class, merchant families.

My father was a "circulator" (*daw'eer,* a peddler) in Aleppo. He sold textiles — *khaam,* cotton cloth. Those who came here were *mastooreen,* discreetly poor; none were remembered for their background in Ḥálab. The poor are no longer poor.

In 1936-1937 we had no formal community - organization. I was instrumental in establishing one. There were 160 families; when someone came to collect money for community needs, he was spurned. "Who appointed you?" (In this period I lost my parents. They both died in a matter of twenty-eighty days. I nearly went crazy with grief. I had lived in the same building with them, an only son.) I was invited to join the community leadership. After a year and a half, I saw that the community commanded little respect. I proposed that we should register our committee officially with the Government, in order to have "character" and recognition. This met with opposition; one leader said, "We want to have no unnecessary dealings with the alien authorities; we lead our own lives . . . we don't need official interference." There was an outstanding resident, Abraham Yakkin, originally from Jerusalem. He said to the disputing group, "Why not let Senor Dabbaḥ speak, why not hear what he has to say, then we can do what we wish." My opinion prevailed and the community was registered and officially recognized.

Sedaqqa-u-marpé (same name as in Ḥálab), a charitable and medical-aid society, is functioning in Mexico. A Syrian young woman who was a university student asked me to tell her the history of the founding of the organization, information she wanted for a paper she was preparing. I had been the

organizer and knew all about its founding. Another time when I was at *Stappan*[?] I was approached by an acquaintance. "Señor Dabbaḥ, what can I tell my children about our life and origins, in Mexico and in Syria? We have no records, no books about us. There is no one but you — a member of the elders — you are the only one who can record it." I replied that I would not say "yes" or "no". I will think about the matter; it is a difficult task. After a period, perhaps a month or month and a half . . . I had considerable leisure, I thought of it. Should I leave an entire community without a record of its life and past, not knowing from where and when it had come? I decided that if I were to write anything it would have to be from the very beginning, from the earliest available history of Aleppo. I would go back to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. Some people think that Ḥalabiyeh (Aleppoans), etc. came there as a result of the Spanish Expulsion. Most don't have a concept of "where they are going or coming." I determined to do it, to write the history, no matter if it consumed a year or a year and a half. I approached the Women's Organization, asked them if they wished to undertake the distribution of the book. For my part, I would write it, publish it and present it to them. Let them sell copies and benefit their endeavors. I would not accept a *n'ḥasseh* [a Syrian old-time copper coin] for my work. My facts were aided by the 86 year old Ḥakham Moussán who has since died, and Ḥakham Sadqa Harari, and Jameel ᶜAra'atingi. Later I brought them together to listen to my text, to verify the correctness of my manuscript. "I ask you to examine carefully, and attest, by signing your names in the book." They found all in perfect order — except that I had omitted mention of *Ezra Ha-Sopher* (the Scribe) whose history is connected with Tédef [a village a day's distance from Aleppo by carriage].

Syrian-Jewish Education

In Mexico City, there are perhaps 1,600 Aleppoan families now. Until this time there have been no Aleppoan schools here; there were schools of the Ashkenazeem, the "Iddish" but now the Ḥalabiyeh are building a very large, important school, *Magen David* (the same name as the earlier Brooklyn

Synagogue), the school has 40,000 square meters. In time the school will be teaching Jewish tradition, ("tradicion"), but not religion — it will not be like a yeshiva. In a matter of a few years, four or five years, they hope to have perhaps 2,000 students. A yeshiva devotes equal time to secular studies and to religious Toráh. The Jewish schools here devote three-quarters of their study time to secular education and perhaps 20 pecent to Jewish *tradition*, history, etc. which necessarily includes some religious matter, but *not prayers*, and the like.

I spoke to Picciotto and to Solomon Labatón and others to try to persuade a *religious* element in the school — to no avail, not even *one* hour. I suggested a survey; not carried out. It was thought that 70 percent, would want their children to have some limited religious knowledge — to know how to pray, etc. Nevertheless, no *religious* education was admitted.

In fact, there has been quite a controversy about this. A number of people have withdrawn their children to send them to a school with a greater emphasis on Toráh, religious education. Do you know how many Jewish schools there are in Buenos Aires? Sixty! [?] Almost all of them follow the old curriculum. Betto Neḥmad was here recently . . . . I must tell you that he is very pleased with our school. When I organized the community committee so many years ago, it involved a school. Isaac Shalóm [a New York leader] offered assistance in building such a school. It was approved by our rabbis here, that there would be six hours of "Spanioli" (Spanish, secular) and one hour of Jewish studies. Betto Neḥmad said, "I am the one who is most happy about the new school, because it was your plan, your dream." Yes, 42 years ago I hoped for such a school that is now being built. *Religion* is felt in the heart . . . tradition passes.

As to being very religious, I am not. *Rosh Hashaná* and *Yom Kippúr* I go to the synagogue; at other time, rarely. As soon as I arise, I put on my *tephillin* (phylacteries). When I come home even late at night, I do not fail to recite evening prayers. My religious training remains with me. Many who were taught only *tradition* may be aware that it is *Yom Kippur* but that doesn't prevent them from eating.

Intermarriage

[Later the discussion turned to the extent of intermarriage. Dabbaḥ maintained that the percentage is "very small"; but with David Betesh's rebuttal he conceded to "perhaps 10 percent." It appears that there are *few* families which are not "tainted." Many in certain family circles marry Catholics (eight in one family).]

Many Jewish-Syrian homes bring in kasher meat, others do not. When a child sees the example of parents who do not observe — when the boy does not see his father don *tephillin* in the morning — why should he do so? Unfortunately, we do not have a forceful leader to influence the community. If a child, God forbid, should marry a Mexican [Christian] they go crazy — the parents. But actually they themselves are inducing, encouraging, such an outcome.

Which brings to mind one episode that took place in France. A Jewish girl eager to be married came to her father and announced her engagement to a Christian. "Daughter," he said, "don't you know that we are Jewish?" She said, "Pappa, you declare that we are Jewish, but we do nothing that marks us as Jews!" In desperation, he went to a rabbi for help. She asked for privacy and said to the rabbi, "You have come because I wish to marry a *non-Jew*. Yes, they say that Jews observe a form of restricted food called *kosher*, in our home there is no such observance. Nor Jewish prayers. Nor customs. Passover and Yom Kippur are mentioned as "old history." Now that I am approaching a happy marriage, I am asked to sacrifice to the *notion* of being Jewish!"

Here too, in Mexico, if you place a child in the company of Mexicans [Christians] they will ultimately intermarry. I have a nephew who is now attached to a girl of Turkish-Jewish origin whom he knows from school; but if he were to spend time in the company of Christians . . . Even traditional Jewish schooling has some value, but tradition is not religion and may pass away.

Keter Toráh, a yeshiva, a religious school, orthodox, is yielding a more religious young generation. The leader of another religious school, *Yavné*, asked, "What is the traditional

schooling? This schooling that you are giving your children is causing a fire to burn your hearts. You are leading them to marriage with Christians, which you find personally so tragic."

Take the example of H. M., who tried so desperately to have his children marry Jews — to no avail. It broke his heart — as it does others. At a synagogue service I met this man. I was seated to the front, he, in the rear, for his shame in a niece's recent marriage to a Mexican. He is a prominent man, very wealthy. It is 30 or 35 years that *he* intermarried and continues to be heartbroken. He asked when my book will appear, as he is very eager to buy copies and to spread circulation. All because he is bitter about the ignorance of our history which caused the intermarriages.

DAVID BETESH:

I know that a Jewish mother's offspring are Jewish; a Christian's are not. But that is not necessarily so in practice. My wife's sister is married to a Mexican (non-Jewish). She has become thoroughly "Mexican." Her children *look* Jewish; yet her son married a Christian. My brother-in-law's (J. H.) brother also married a Christian, he has three daughters. All married Christians. This H. repented his Christian marriage and insisted to marry off his children to Jews. He married his two daughters and one son to Jews. When I received wedding invitations, I refused to have anything to do with them, though I am not at all religious. It is like a man walking into a supermarket with his son. How can he shoplift — and yet teach and expect his child to be honest? An example must be set. For example, I have a friend (male) who married a Christian and yet insisted on marrying his children and did to Jews(!) Another instance, a Mexican Christian woman married a French Jew who has since died. She was much inclined to Jewishness (but would not convert). She married off two or three of her children to Jews(!) It's a fact that male Syrian Jews who marry Mexicans may repent; when a Jewish girl marries a Mexican, she is totally lost.

DABBAḤ

"C" who lived in Patchuca, [some distance from the capital] married a Mexican woman, a distinguished person, Leonore, who inclined to Judaism. She agreed to conversion and became Jewish — *thoroughly* Jewish. Leonore was very popular in Mexico City. (*Ḥakham* Murdoch Attié did so much against intermarriage.) In Patchuca "C" saw his daughter doing a "Paseo" [promenade] one evening with a Mexican. He called her home and gave her a tremendous slap. "Don't you know that even your mother is a now Jewish, and you are consorting with a Christian!" "Father," she said, "now I must tell you: Mother is more Catholic than ever! She never fails to attend Mass. Why shouldn't I associate with my nice young man? You married a Christian, my mother is a practicing Catholic. I do not want to deceive you." Within six months "C" died of a heart attack. This is like a chain, when the link is broken, when one marries out, members of the family follow. The children of Ḥakham A. T. turned out *rotten*. In some families four married out. "M's" children, one followed the other [episodes mentioned are those which are *notorious*.]

Many were "scorched by fire" when the prospect of intermarriage arose. They may smile outwardly but they are heartbroken. What can they expect when the children are not taught religion, what is to be expected by such parents?

Why do I attend synagoge services rarely? I will tell you, as I told you earlier about the formation of the community committee. There were twelve or fourteen individuals who opposed my views, who opposed me. They were the noisy ones who created the turbulance, quarrels, and even sometimes physical encounters during the prayer services. [shades of early Bensonhurst synagogue scenes!] After four terms, I became impatient with all the senseless turmoil. I withdrew, but I was entreated to participate, even if not as the head. Others charged that I was using wiles in order to be begged to come back . . .

(End of recorded material)

[*Dabbaḥ asked that the tape recorder be turnecd off. He*

feared that Sutton, the visitor, a 'journalist', having published a book, would hurry back to New York and quickly publish Dabbaḥ's own historical material before Dabbaḥ's book appeared.]

Dabbaḥ's book in Spanish has since appeared, largely concerned with year-by-year history of organizational activity, as well as Syrian Jewish history, drawn as he told this writer, from Jewish encyclopedias.

Niseem Laniado Born in Aleppo, circa 1919-1920
Interviews, Arabic and Hebrew

"ALLAH ᶜAT-TAH-NA IDJ-REHN WA EE-DEHN . . . GOD GAVE US FEET AND HANDS . . . [WITH WHICH TO WORK]"

I sought a working life in Israel. From Ḥalab where I was born, I had gone to Lebanon and from there I made my way on foot into Israel, secretly of course, across the border from *Marj il ᶜyoun*, Matrila[?]. I and my brothers. First we went to Zaḥleh in Lebanon; yes, that is *north* of Beirut, but we didn't want anyone to suspect our destination. From Beirut the smuggler took us to Zaḥleh where we posed as Boy Scouts, carrying knapsacks, etc. At night he took us to *Marj il ᶜyoun*. There he opened the hood of the car to indicate that it was disabled. From there he led us on to the Israeli frontier on foot, and across to Kibbutz K'far Gilᶜadi. We were a party of 28 persons there; Nais, a Druze Muslim the smuggler, counted heads and collected one pound Sterling from each of us. This time, the final stage of the trip took four hours. (I had crossed to Israel several times before.)

I had ten brothers and sisters, and when I was in Palestine each time, my heart 'burned' with worry about them in Ḥálab,

in the event there was a war. I had been in the Etzel, the Begin underground, and in 1947 I returned to Ḥálab to escort them to safety in Israel. One time before, I escorted a couple of them to Israel and finally in 1952 my mother came with the last of them.

In 1949, after the end of the War of Independence, we had taken a house in Israel and furnished it. That is where finally we were able to receive my mother when she came. Money? Well, my three brothers and I were all working.

What I worked at? Well, *ya sidi* ['*my lord*'], I worked in a toy and doll factory where I photographed the various styles, and helped to design some, particularly the doll-heads. That had begun in 1944; then I had returned to Aleppo. In Israel after the 1948 war, etc., I became a policeman for five years. My young brothers were in schools, learning agriculture, one in *Mikveh Yisrael,* another in *Naᶜar Ha-daati,* near Haifa, in *K'far Ḥasideem.* I did it to support the family. In 1954, my cousin, "bint khal-ti" [maternal aunt's daughter], was in an agriculture Moshab, I went to visit her and was intrigued with her work; she had a small piece of land that she cultivated. Before I got out of the police service I had married. When my mother came to Israel in 1952, she had come with a relative, a young woman by the name of Cohén. My mother recommended I marry her; I did.

I went to my cousin's Moshab with my wife, and took up work there, agricultural work. I was there for years, planting, reaping. Later, we had a field of our own, we kept chickens and geese; we used to force-feed the geese to enlarge their livers. They were used to make *foie gras.* Each of us in that Moshab owned privately, 10 dunams of fruit groves, and ten for vegetable planting; I grew beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, everything. The groves gave Jaffa oranges — something like 500 trees. The land had been divided into 83 shares between those who had been on the Moshab. When the land of the Arabs was taken over the distribution took place on the basis of lottery, each share having ten dunams of groves and ten of fields. Our luck was to draw poor land. The trees should have been planted about 25 feet apart but the Arabs had crowded them about 12 feet apart. The result was that our grove was not very healthy and gave a small yield, of poor quality. We should have cut

down half the trees; although we cut some down, we continued to have poor yields.

Yes, the government attempted to help us, through agricultural specialists. But with poor groves it didn't help much. Forty-year-old groves — the trees were 'tired.' *Ya khawája* [*well, sir*], we were an assorted lot of people, each on his land, all who had been working on the Moshab when the land became available for distribution. As I told you, our luck in the lottery-distribution wasn't good. Some had better plots, growing a different type of fruit, lemons, etc. It permitted a profit. Our oranges had to be harvested in April. Winter and its storms caused our unripe oranges to fall immaturely. We gave up.

My experience? When I first left the Police I had been given a 'pension' of close to a thousand pound sterling, that was a lot of money in those days. I used it to contract for the harvest of some groves. It was an early winter and a severe one, with flooding. The fruit was devastated and I saw my money swept away. Then I went into the Moshab and eventually took over the 20 *dunams*. As I told you, my wife and I, we just had no luck, and we had to turn away.

Went to live in Bené Berak, where I still have my home. I began to work at *immanoot*, art pieces. I molded religious scenes of Israel in plaster and sold them; the Western Wall, etc. You see, all my life I enjoyed doing a little bit of sculpture, some art, and photography. It was my hobby. Finally I took to jewelry-designing. It's now 12 years that I make wax-molds of jewelry, which I sell, to manufacturers who use them to make rubber molds for mass production. I work in my studio for a couple of months, and bring my models to sell to jewelry manufacturers here in New York. I've made 34 trips; when I dispose of models I go back to Israel to design more. The manufacturers tell me what they need, they give me catalogues of the types they are selling, which they want me to make; I take their orders and return with original models. They are important manufacturers, who sell annually maybe thirty or fifty or a hundred million dollars, each of them. I have booked so many orders now that I must return home, sooner than I expected. Some of the articles

they make sell for thousands of dollars, in gold, with precious and semi-precious stones; earrings, bracelets, necklaces.

The Ḥalabiyeh, the Aleppoans in Israel? Well as you know, they came to Israel without much Western education, they loved trade. *Be-emet,* in truth, few had Western education. Most of them now have businesses, factories, shops, wholesale trading, everything, in commerce. Take my brothers, for example . . . they have factories, manufacturing plastics, clothing. They, just like many other Aleppoans, have become quite prosperous. Take the Gindi family with their large-scale building activities — they are multi-millionaires.

The 'discrimination' toward Sepharadeem is not without logic; I will speak the truth. (Here in the Syrian community in Brooklyn there are many millionaires. What do they give, how much, to the State of Israel?) The hundreds of thousands who survived the Concentration Camps, they came with the greatest need. It was logical for the Authorities to favor such people, those who had suffered so tragically. Their fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, their children, their relatives, had all been destroyed. They *had* to be helped before others, the Jews of the Orient who did not undergo holocausts, in Arab lands. Children of these Orientals are now making strides, but their parents, yes, they got little consideration. Today, the favoritism, *protectzia,* unfortunately, continues, *in favor of Ashkenazeem.* It is an old pattern that is hard to shake off, but it is improving little by little; especially since the Sepharadeem are being recognized as a political force.

In Haifa, in Carmel, you find three or four hundred Ḥalabiyeh, merchants, storekeepers, selling shoes, vegetables, etc. They can afford to travel abroad twice a year; they are wealthy, their homes are lovely, their wives well dressed.

In the beginning when Ḥalabiyeh first came, life *was* hard — for everyone. There were shortages of everything. Now there is not a thing that they are lacking. Ḥalabiyeh in Israel are 'few' in numbers, twenty to thirty thousands, maybe? They hardly 'show.' The Shawam (from Damascus) too, are even fewer. Can you compare them to the Iraqis with 200,000, or the Moroccans

with perhaps 250,000 — or the Yemenites? All are *mub-soo-teen* ['happy', wealthy], these Ḥalabiyeh.

Damascus still has maybe 4,500 Jews — Ḥálab under 500. The Shawam cling to their city, despite periods of difficulty. There too, there are many who are doing well — prosperous. Damascus Jews were always 'poorer' than Aleppo's. The Jews of Ḥálab were merchants of consequence. Aleppo was one of the foremost mercantile cities, with a dozen or more large *khans*, caravanseries. None in Damascus. *Souks*, yes, but large-scale trade as in Aleppo's *khans* — none existed in Damascus. I marvel at Aleppo's old-time commerce. The city had also supplied the needs of the out-lying country, shipping to Iran, Iraq, southern Turkey. Much of this trade was done by Jewish merchants.

My schooling? I attended the Aleppo *Alliance*, until the age of fifteen. Even earlier I began part-time work at the important Fathi Antoki's business, a fine Muslim. When I left school it was to work for Antoki, where my father *Allah yirhamo* ["God have mercy" — on his soul], was employed for many years. They dealt in everything, textiles, gold, wheat — everything. My father was their principal salesman. *Ya Sidi*, a hundred universities cannot teach you trading, such as you learn by doing — *maᶜaseet* (Heb). The market teaches better than a university. At Antoki I worked for five years, learning business, respect for my superiors. Since I was an ardent Zionist, I left, to visit Israel. My brother took my place. *Ha-torashtiyut* (Heb., genes), was it an inborn quality — my taste for art, my hobby? That is what led me to designing; *mo-aḥ Yehudi*, Jewish brains... they are genetic.

How is it that my father didn't do what other Ḥalabiyeh did — go into his own business? He got married at age twenty-one, and did go into his own business, in 1920. With the end of the war, merchandise began to pour in — prices dropped a lot. My father's business was caught in this squeeze. He had to give up his business — afraid to trade because of the market-prices for goods. I too, in 1939 (World War II), when I went to work for Antoki, I did not benefit like those in their own businesses.

A man who owned three bales of textiles was able to trade — and eventually to become wealthy. Some who were *dallals*, brokers, they too got rich. We didn't know how to trade, my father was not in a position to teach us trading; he had been intimidated by his unfortunate entry into business much earlier and continued as an employee of Fathi Antoki for dozens of years. I had gone to a dentist who drilled into a tooth, causing me agonizing pain. I have never again stepped into a dentist's office, even though my teeth are all decaying. It was like that with my father's business, he didn't dare venture again.

Anyhow, I am happy with my work. It is not as gainful as a successful business, but I am doing creative work, in a field I love. I earn enough to permit me a comfortable life. What is more important?

Ralph Ezra Sitt — Born in New York 1905
Interviewed during a visit to N.Y.

HARLEM WAS "MUY TRANQUILO" THEN; MOSTLY JEWS LIVED THERE

I live in Peru — Lima, Peru. I will tell you how I got there, the full story of the Sitt family wandering.

I was born 1905 in Harlem 111th Street at 7th Avenue. A fine area in that period — 77 years ago. My father had come in 1892 from Aleppo, the very first Syrian Jew in New York; when he first came there were no Syrian Jews at all. He frequented the company of Lebanese and Syrian Christians. As a member of the Masonic Order in Bay Ridge, one of his "brothers" arranged for him to meet the daughter of a Jewish member. That's how he came to marry Miss Phillips whose family had come from Manchester, England. (Originally they were Lithuanians, The Phillips were Orthodox, Jewish

Orthodox). My parents, they were married in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, the first wedding to be held in the new building on Central Park West.

We lived in Harlem from 1905 to 1924. Our last address in the area was across the street from Columbia University.

Harlem was *"muy tranquilo"* then, mostly Jews lived there. The Blacks lived in Harlem, yes, but all were above 135th Street. I went to school there, all white, and mostly Jewish. The Irish lived to the West of 8th Avenue, near the elevated train structure. We had no trouble with them, they were friendly enough. Gangs existed then too, but they were confined to the East Side of Harlem; we had no gangs in our area; middle class. In our days in Harlem there were no Syrian Jews. Harlem was just fine. My father lived close to his mother-and-father-in-law.

My grandfather on my mother's side was a tailor, a custom tailor, my mother told me. When they first came in 1871, my grandfather was making uniforms for the Union Pacific Railroad men, and so they went to Omaha, Nebraska. That location didn't quite suit my grandmother — few Jews, no kosher meat. They hurried back to New York.

My father's father? Well, he had died in Aleppo at the age of twenty five, the victim of a cholera epidemic, shortly before my father was to be born. I don't know what my grandfather worked at. I suppose he was also in the textile business (chuckle) like all other Syrian Jews! My father was brought up by his widowed mother. He was twenty-five years old when he came here in 1892. He came to work in the great Fair — the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. There,he was in the tobacco business, selling Egyptian and other fancy cigarettes. [Brother Irving, spoke to this writer of his selling jewelry] He figured to make "a couple of million" . . . He heard about the coming Exposition somehow, in Aleppo. He wanted to get away, this gave him the opportunity; he had *had enough.* According to what he told us he had some money, maybe $4000 or $5000 — which he carried in gold, in a money belt around his waist. I recall something about his having worked in the City Treasurer's Office in Aleppo . . . He was a smart man, very capable. My father was a friend of the tobacco Schinázi who wanted him as a partner — an offer which my father turned

down. That was his first great mistake. [Schinazi, a Turkish-Greek Jew became highly successful, particularly with the one time very popular "Egyptian Prettiest" cigarettes.] He, got organized, and married in 1897. My brother was born three years later. My father continued in the tobacco business for a while. Soon after he became an exporter of textiles, to Syrian Jews in South America. In addition, he turned to the manufacture of hand-embroidered linens. [See Eli Hedaya's oral biography, pt. II, Hedaya had become Ezra Sitt's partner, *to Hedaya's Sorrow.*] He opened a factory with a Lebanese partner, in Yokohama, Japan. He sold his merchandise to Syrian Jewish merchants on Allen Street, among others. That lasted until the end of the war, in 1919. He was exporting at the same time, and had a sizeable business, exporting to his Aleppo friends in Buenos Aires, Colombia, Chile, Peru, and to Haiti, which had a number of Syrian Jewish merchants in the textile business. Later, he lost everything, in the same places where he had made lots of money, in the export textile business. This was during the depression, when the bottom fell out. His customers had no money with which to pay him.

When I was a kid I would go down to his place of business on Saturdays. He would take me out to lunch in Oriental restaurants on Washington Street, near Rector Street. That's where I developed a taste for Syrian food, and I eat it whenever I get a chance to on my visits to New York.

Yes, I remember that he was in business at one time with Simon Sitt; that was the trouble. The truth is that Simon was working for my father, they weren't partners. Simon Sitt was a wonderful salesman, a marvelous salesman. My old man, if you'll excuse the expression, was the "inside man," planning, manufacturing, taking care of the books, and so on. They were doing just fine. Simon wanted a share in the business, he wanted to become a partner. That's where my father made *another* big mistake in judgement. My father turned him down and so they "split," as they say. My father's enterprise went down the drain. Simon left to establish his own company. That was in the late 1920's. I worked for my father — as an office boy. I was about nineteen or twenty years old.

The only religious connection my father had was as a member of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue on West 70th Street (where my friend Marc Angel is rabbi now). He was married there, as I told you. My brother and I went there to Sunday School, We were both Bar Mitzva there. We used to ride the 8th Avenue Trolley to go to Sunday School, it ran along Central Park West. We observed some holidays, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and let's see . . . Succott, Pesaḥ . . . Pop worked on Saturdays, but not on the holidays; he went to Synagogue then. My grandmother never ate a meal in our house, it wasn't kosher — it wasn't kosher enough.

My grandmother didn't even come to my Bar Mitzva because she would have had to ride a trolley on the Sabbath. Yes, sure, our house was kosher. I suppose we had a separate set of dishes for Passover; of that I'm sure. Kosher meat was easy to get; there were kosher butchers all around. "Bacon and eggs" for breakfast? Not at home — only in hotels or restaurants! My father — eating ham and eggs? I don't remember, but I know that he ate lobsters, a lot.

Well, yes, my father did speak another language in addition to Arabic and Hebrew. He spoke some French, which he had studied in Aleppo at the Alliance School [the *Alliance Isráelite Universelle*]. I remember seeing him writing letters in Arabic, but using Hebrew characters [similar to Rashi script, commonplace among Jews in Aleppo and in Cairo 1000 years before, as evidenced by the Geniza Fragments]. He used to write all his clients in Arabic, with Hebrew lettering. I remember the copies I made of those letters. No, it wasn't through photo-copying, that didn't come until almost a lifetime later. We would wet the letter and put it into a "press." Not great, but it made serviceable copies. I was of no help to my father in his correspondence, I know no Arabic and Hebrew. Was it rather "prophetic" that while I couldn't help with the correspondence to Spanish-speaking countries, I was destined to lead my last twenty years in Spanish-speaking countries?

After graduating high school, I went to work for my father as I said earlier, and went to college at night for some time. My brother Irving graduated from Colombia University. Yes, I did

have a sister, but that is a very sad story. She died at the age of five, in 1914, we were out at Bradley Beach, yes.[!]

My recollection of that period? Well, we rented a house out there in 1914. I recall going swimming every day, fishing too, in Shark River. That was the year that World War I was declared. When my sister died out there, we came back to New York, of course. She is buried in Shearith Israel's cemetery at Cypress Hills. How we travelled to Bradley Beach? In those days you took a boat-train. It left Cedar Street in New York, the boat did, to Sandy Hook, then by a train that wound up in Sea Bright. It took an hour (?). Very pleasant. My father commuted every day.

I was in the U.S. Army, you know. I got out as a colonel, a full colonel, a "chicken-colonel," not a lieutenant colonel; an important Transportation Corps Master. I got out of the Army in 1948, actually. Earlier, I "went" with a lovely girl in Panama (where I worked for the U.S. government), that they called the "Oklahoma Peach." She was a civilian employee of the War Department in Panama, anxious to get far from Oklahoma, from the Parson family (she was a Parson, you know). I was thirty-eight years old then, it was either then or never, I guess, when we finally got married. I had been in Panama for three or four years when I decided that I wanted to go see the War, World War II. I decided to come back to the States, mustered into active service from my reserve status. I was assigned to Oakland or Alemada. Well, she came up too; and we decided to get married. This created something of a problem, because she was not Jewish, you know, and since my father had come from Aleppo, with all its religion . . . but my father had died a few years before, in 1940, so we just went ahead. She had a "fast conversion" to Judaism, by a rabbi, a naval chaplain. Meantime, I didn't go overseas, and delayed more — and then I was appointed Executive Officer at the Alemada Port of Embarkation. My wife became pregnant at almost the same time that I got orders to go to Italy. Of course I went. She came East, to live with my mother on 112th Street. Then the war came to an end and I came back after my son was born. We called him Allan which we thought was the nearest "Western" equivalent to "Ezra," my father's name, — what my mother had wanted.

Actually I found out about my son's birth in a notice in the Army's "Stars and Stripes," newspaper. How do you like that! I was waiting for a telegram to tell me about the birth — it came, three weeks later. But the "Stars and Stripes" had a piece saying that "a baby boy had been born to Colonel Sitt." So we got drunk over the news. I came home to 112th Street to my wife, baby, my mother, and I had an uncle, too.

I was shifted from one Command Post to another for three years. My wife was having "fits" being out in the wilderness in effect, in the Army camps. In 1948 we decided to get out and we did. Oh, yes, my wife had been working, as a civilian, all those years, just as she had done in Panama.

She loved South America, somehow. She thought it was "wonderful." While we were still living with my mother I hunted around; I answered an "ad" and was called in for an interview. It was for some place they told me is "high and dry." It was in Chile, which belonged — that whole area — to the Anaconda Copper Co., the biggest open-pit copper mine in the world. We were there for three years, and as we said in New York, "that was enough, already!" The altitude was 10,000 feet; my wife couldn't take it anymore; so I looked for something else. It was an interesting job, a most interesting job, I must say. But we had to leave.

Since my wife loved South America, we went to Santiago, to Buenos Aires, to Montevideo, and finally decided to go to Lima; that's in Peru, of course. "What to do?" Well, I answered an ad in the Lima newspaper. Someone was looking for an investor with money for the import and export business, someone who had 50,000 " solders" [?] I did have some money, that I was able to save up in the Army. He was an Italian from Genoa; an honorable man — he could have taken me. Well, we invested a few thousand bucks in Negri's business, importing costume-jewelry. My wife worked there, while I looked for something to do. We had put the kid in school, she was free — what with a maid, a cook, a laundress and a gardener, all costing "peanuts."

I finally hooked up with the American consultants Klein &

Sacks, the "Klein Commission," called down to help straighten out the Peruvian government mess, under President Odria. I worked in the Port Authority there as executive assistant to the American port expert; worked there for seven years, until 1958. I would wonder sometimes; here my father had originated in Aleppo, knew nothing of ports or port procedures; and here is the son in far-away Lima, directing the entire operations of a port; customs, shipping and what-not! I still think about it from time to time. In the meantime I organized a plastic factory, with the help of a New York friend, Charles Runstein, in 1954, even while with the Port Authority. I left that job in 1958 to devote my full time to the plastics venture, which I've been doing since. It's not hard work, really. We extrude poly vinyl chloride — "PVC." My son is running the business. Since I had been in the Air Corps, he had wanted to be a pilot. When he was fifteen we sent him to the States, he went to a military school — "the Citadel" in Charleston, South Carolina. Because of a surf-board accident he hurt his knee. That closed out the Air Corps, and when he returned to Lima, he decided to enter the business.

The size of my enterprise? it's "moderate," not bad. Competition? *None to speak of.* They don't have the know-how down there. Charlie Runstein was a partner for a while, I knew him from my time in Puerto Rico in 1931. That's an interesting story — with Charlie — but it is too long to tell . . . He was in the export business in New York but he had a friend in the plastics business who helped us to get started. The business grew and grew and *grew.* That's what we're doing now, a nice life, comfortable. That's the "sad story." I work from ten to five. I don't really work hard; some afternoons we go sailing. I loved sailing even as a boy, in New York. So, Saturdays and Sundays we're on the water. My evenings are spent reading, including the *New York Times* when I get it; or we go to cocktail parties, we have dinner parties . . .

We have all kinds of clubs. I belong to the "Hebraica," that's a Jewish country club, a very fine establishment, with twenty tennis courts and an Olympic size pool, and a fine restaurant, really. I belong to the yacht club, naturally.

The relations of the Jews to the Catholic population? Well,

we leave one another alone! No one actively bothers the Jews, and really the Jews stay pretty much together socially.

We have quite a few Christian Lebanese, we get along with them just fine. They're in the textile business, like Jews everywhere! We have a total of 3,000 Jews and four synagogues; the Benicencia [?], the Sephardic, the German one from 1870, the biggest, the enormous "Grande Synagogue," and a small one in my neighborhood; B'nai Brith, and other organizations. I go to the synagogue twice a year. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur — and *that is it* . I think that there is kosher meat because there are some orthodox people there — Ashkenazic. I suppose they do have. [Flown from Miami?] I don't eat kosher meat, so I don't know for sure.

Allan, my son, married a Peruvian girl; they get along fine. She keeps saying that she means to convert to Judaism, but that's as far as it goes; I don't believe it for a minute. Yes, she *does* look Peruvian. Here look at these pictures. I have fourteen of them on me. This one is of Allan, his wife and their baby. She asked me what was my father's name. "Ezra," I told her; and that's the name she gave my grandchild, Ezra Sitt, part Aleppoan, part Protestant Oklahoma, and part Catholic Peruvian! He looks just like my father, compare him with this photo of my father.

I come up here to New York every year or two, for about six months. I have friends, and since I'm a widower, I make new friends, among them are widows and divorcees; why not?

I've had a nice visit here and now I'm ready to go home.

Amnon Shamosh Born in Aleppo, living in Israel
Interview in English, Arabic

[*Amnon Shamosh is the winner of the Israeli Agnon Literary Prize. He produces poetry, novels, short stories, children's books, as well as most-popular television material. He writes in Hebrew and has been translated into English, Spanish, French, etc. His books are available in the U. S.*]

On a visit to New York, October 1984 Amnon Shamosh now an Israeli was requested to sit for an oral history. The following information developed.

"I BROUGHT ALONG TO ISRAEL NOT ONLY THE NEW AMNON BUT ALSO THE SHAMOSH FAMILY AND ALEPPO"

My clearest memory of my father is of him lying in bed paralyzed. The story in the family was that the paralysis began when he fled the market where he had a goldsmith's stand. Rumors were flying that the Arabs were harassing the Jews and so, fearing that something might happen to him, he quickly closed his shop and ran home; when he arrived he collapsed. I spent my childhood in the fantastic city of Aleppo, in the north of Syria. We lived in constant fear, and there were valid reasons for this fear. Father never recovered from his sickness. He passed away when I was seven. Ever since I have carried with me the image of Father confined to his bed, in pain. As for the period before this, Father in the market or sitting on the little stool in the coffee house with the narghileh, these pictures are vaguer, obscured by a sort of dreamy haze.

I do not remember my father's family, not even my grandfather and grandmother on *his* side. We lost contact with them. Since I was the youngest son in the family, and as my father died at such early age and, perhaps, for other reasons, our relationship was much closer with my mother's large family which had also been in Aleppo for generations.

I know little more of my father's family than that they have not left the Middle East since the time of the Exile; the family wandered through Turkey, Syria and Egypt, passing through Safed, Tiberias and Jerusalem, of course. The name Shamosh is, apparently, the Arabic construct form of the Hebrew word *shamosh* (synagogue beadle). We used to say in Arabic "shamosh-el-knis", (shamosh of the synagogue). Presumably one of my ancestors was once the synagogue shamosh.

My father's family belonged to that section of the community known as the Mustaᶜarabeem, who had developed within the Arabic culture and had become part of it. Over the generations a symbiotic relationship developed between them and the local Arabs. They were joined by waves of immigration of Sephardi Jews whose ancestors had come from Spain.

My mother's family were Francos, "Franj," European. Even the names bear witness to this. Her family name was Cabasso, and on her mother's side, Neḥmad. If we take these three names: Shamosh — the Hebrew term in the Arabic form Cabasso — pure Spanish; and Neḥmad — pure Hebrew, we find, an interesting blend formed by the meeting of three cultures — the Hebrew, Arabic and European. The European influence became, in the course of time, purely French, especially following the establishment of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools network, not to mention the period of the French mandate.

The Alliance, was, in fact, the agent of a dictatorial culture. Its [French] cultural missionary purpose was obvious in all its activities. On the one hand one may marvel at the fantastic things they did, for they indeed brought [western] culture and education to the Jews of the Orient, but on the other hand, being the faithful agent of cultural imperialism, they brought this culture with a French nuance.

I remember myself in Aleppo constantly running away. When Arab children threw stones at us, instruction from home were not to respond but to run away. Otherwise we would bring disaster on us all. Even if you could hit back, and there were such situations, don't! You only get into trouble, and drag your family into trouble and danger. We looked down on the

Arabs, the natives. At the same time we looked up to the French. They were the rulers, representatives of Western culture and the enlightened world. Anything French was admired. Jewish children would salute the French officers passing in the street and cry: "Vive la France!" They treated us as efficient and active tools at their disposal, particularly in the cultural realm. With the Arabs we had good neighborly relations, tempered by "respect him, but suspect him," and also "you can't trust a gentile." If we lived in Jewish neighborhoods, these were 'ghettos' by choice. There were joint business ventures and polite day-to-day contacts. There were good relations between our intelligentsia and theirs. As a child, I knew good friends of my older brothers, Muslims and Christians of position, in the Arab world of politics, culture and society. There was no Jew-hating as there was in the Christian world, or European-style anti-Semitism. There was jealousy of success, envy of the foreigner who progresses faster; there were some violent characters who spread fear, but not much more than that. If, for example, we examine the famous "Damascus blood libel," we can clearly see that those who composed the plot and stirred it up were the Christian priests . . . .

Before my father fell ill, when he began to lose customers due to the mechanization of his trade, my oldest brothers were sent to find a new country for us. They left for Mexico several years before I was born. I never saw Yosef, the oldest, except in photographs. He passed away in Mexico when he was in his fifties, without our ever having met.

My second brother, Shlomo, lives today in Mexico City, engaged in trade. Forty-five years after my birth, a few years ago, we met for the first time. He came to visit me at the Kibbutz . . . . However, as soon as I began to speak to him, it became clear that his values, in the widest and deepest sense, were quite different from mine. I asked myself if we are truly brothers. I wondered what would have happened if I had immigrated after them to Mexico: would I then live like him, think like him, behave like him and have same outlook about the world, about men and society and education?

Mother went to live with my brothers in Mexico, stayed

there a few years, and then returned to us in Israel. She returned full of stories. She was a woman who knew how to tell a tale, and make it spicy. She told us many stories, but we did not listen.

Mother was widowed while still young. She tells how she was taken straight from school to the *Ḥupá* [Bridal Canopy]. There was a large age difference between her and my father, and although it was difficult for her to break away from the studies she loved, her love for Musa Shamosh, and the honor of being his wife, overcame everything.

The history of my family is quite typical. My two oldest brothers were sent, as I have mentioned, to Mexico, and for two months rocked in an immigrants' boat. They set out, two young men, accompanied by three aunts and two uncles on my mother's side; they looked after each other through all the difficult and bitter years. When I reached Mexico in 1975, I found a large family of some five hundred close relatives — aunts, uncles and first cousins, all of them linked by ties of marriage, society and livelihood, all of them helping and supporting each other and visiting with each other. There was also jealousy and gossip, as it is the way of the world. The aim of my journey was to seek out the culture of *Aram Sobá* (which is Aleppo), and I found it well-preserved there.

My two brothers left in the twenties. It was at that time that the spirit of Zionism began to be felt amongst us, and the third, fourth and fifth of my brothers (there were another two sisters, and finally myself) began to gravitate toward Zion. My third brother, Yitzhak, of Blessed Memory, founded a Zionist organization called "Pirḥei Yisrael" (The Flowers of Israel) at the age of sixteen and a half. He was the president, and was assisted by a secretary, a treasurer, and a committee who attempted to make contact with the Committee of the Sepharadic Community in Jerusalem, in Zión.

There were two branches in our family. One went to America, the other to Israel; one was involved in trade and commerce, the other had an intellectual-cultural orientation. My brother Yitzḥak graduated in Law from the University of Beirut and became a popular and successful lawyer, but his heart was drawn to literature and while still a student he began to write

articles in Arabic for important journals published in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. [*Yitzḥak became a professor at the Hebrew University.... and had his translations from Hebrew to Arabic of Klausner's book, "New Hebrew Literature, 1781-1939", published recently: a "first".* Due to his publications and his reputation, he was invited by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to come and teach Modern Arabic Language and Literature. That was in 1973.

About two years earlier my brother Tuvia had immigrated to Israel. He settled in Tel Aviv and upon the founding of the Histadrut Arabic-language weekly "Ḥakikat al-ᶜAmar" was appointed deputy editor. He remained in this position for many years and later transferred to the daily paper "El Yom." Thus the two Zionist brothers became Arabic Orientalists in Israel. This branch was joined by my brother Yaakov, the fifth in number, who put his knowledge of languages, primarily Arabic, at the disposal of the Security Services.

With the death of my father, a heavy burden fell on my older brothers who were still at home. The eldest had to go to teach in a remote Arab villge, living in terrible isolation and difficult conditions in order to earn some money to support the family. He remembered that experience till his dying day. The second oldest had to discontinue his University studies. This was the beginning of a period of tension at home: less joy, more worry, and more effort on my part, a child of seven, not to cause unnecessary expenses. This concern accompanied the whole of my childhood: my trousers must not wear out, my eyeglasses must not break; so that they will not have to buy me new clothes. The situation did not improve in Israel either. We lived with my brother Tuvia in Tel Aviv, where I grew up. Our oldest brother was far away, in Mexico. The oldest son has a natural status with its concomitant rights and duties which nobody questions, but once he is not there and the birthright passes to another, tensions arise.

I was never hit or slapped by my parents. Perhaps, as the child of their old age I was spoiled more than usual. On the other hand, there was an accented signal between my mother and myself — when I did not behave properly (if, for example, I put out my hand to take a chocolate without first saying "No,

thank you, I don't want any") I would receive a hidden pinch from her. It was agreed that this was between the two of us, no outsider must ever know....

Mother was the intellectual of the family, despite her interrupted schooling. She went to school until the age of fifteen, a not inconsiderable period for a girl at the turn of the century. After this she continued studying alone. She read and wrote a great deal. She loved writing letters and I have a few of these still. She wrote in French of course. In our circles they would speak Arabic, write French and pray in Hebrew. They also 'philosophized' in Hebrew. Their sayings and mottos were basically Hebrew, spiced with Arabic or Ladino. Mother read until her last days, using a magnifying glass. She always followed what was happening in the world. She read books and newspapers, and argued excitedly on every question and event. Stories held a special place in her world. I well remember her telling stories but do not recall the stories themselves. When she visited me at the Kibbutz and told her tales, I was so involved in my own world of the present and future, in improving the flock of sheep, in the social and cultural problems of the Kibbutz, that I always said "Yes, yes, I hear you" but never actually listened to what she was saying. Today this makes me weep.

My parents were married through a *khattahb* [professional matchmaker] as was my sister Julia who was married in Aleppo. My other sister, Adina, married in Israel, without a 'Shadchan.' She met her husband at the youth movement in Tel Aviv. As an alert child, I was, to an extent, involved in the matchmaking process of my older sister, and I have even described this in one of my stories. I listened carefully to everything the Matchmaker said, and took part in the family discussions. It was exciting, and instructive.

Matchmaking is an institution endowed with enormous wisdom. I began thinking about this wisdom very much later, after having passed through the various stages of rebellion and estrangements. Only when I grew up and achieved a certain degree of maturity did I begin to understand. I do not recommend readopting the method, but it is important to understand that it was not the product of stupidity or backwardness . . . .

Looking back on what I have been relating it seems to me that basically the Jewish family is the same everywhere, only the processes it undergoes may be faster in one place and slower in another. On the surface I have been talking about an Aleppo family, an Oriental-Sepharadi family. But if we examine things more deeply we find that it is almost identical to the family of two generations ago in Eastern Europe, or three generations ago in Western or Central Europe. The number of children, the relationships within the family, methods of education and matchmaking, the mutual aid and the family economy, all these are more similar than different.

We immigrated to Israel of our own free will, in the true sense of the words. My older brother Yitzḥak was faced with the choice of being a representative of Syrian Jewry in the Syrian Parliament (the candidacy had been officially offered him), or accepting the appointment which had been offered him by the Hebrew University in Jeruasalem; he chose the latter. Two other brothers, younger than him, were already in Israel, and their reports were enthusiastic. All of the brothers who reached Israel had something in common — something which had apparently been inherited from our father, the artist-craftsman, and from mother, the intellectual, who read and wrote so much. The Psalms and the songs of the Festival Prayer Books were common to both Father and Mother, but in mother's case there were also the proverbs of La Fontaine, and legends, poems and rhymed riddles in spicy French. Perhaps my love of painting, sculpture and oriental ornamentation came to me from my father, the artist of the golden embroidery. And perhaps it is due to my mother that I so love and absorb Western culture. East and West dwelt with us in mutual respect, and continue to live within me in peace, on condition that neither insult the other. I believe that in this too, I am like my brothers.

In my parents' home there was a true encounter between cultures: East and West, Hebrew, Arabic and French cultures. My father had two sets of clothes, which can be seen in old photographs. He had a tarbosh [fez] and an umbaz [robe] tied with a wide girdle, and he also had a western suit and bow-tie. His selection was made according to the company to which he

had been invited, and the type of event. Mother always dressed in French clothes. She never wore oriental clothes, but always dresses that were made up at home according to journals from Paris, stylish hats and coats, with a great deal of tinkling gold bracelets, the sound of the Orient, and perfumes and rouge direct from Paris. The atmosphere was basically Levantine, but its degree varied from community to community, from one neighborhood to another and from house to house. It is too simplistic to assume that Levantinism has no content or interior.

We must give the credit that is due to those Alliance schools which trained children to love Racine, Molière and La Fontaine, to love beauty and freedom, and which gave an education to nearly every Jewish child in the East. [?]

The move to Israel was the realization of a great dream, but at the same time it was an awakening from that dream. The greatest wonder for the Jewish child from the Diaspora was a city wholly Jewish, entirely Hebrew — Tel Aviv. The experience of redemption, for me, focussed on the Hebrew language. But together with the joy of redemption, the intoxication of finally being in Eretz-Yisrael, there crept in the painful feeling that I was being looked down upon. True, this was done fondly, paternalistically. People would say: "You don't look at all like a Syrian. Were you really born in Aleppo? It's hard to believe! You don't look. . . You don't sound. . ." Yet the person who says such things, says them honestly, with goodwill. He surely believes that he is paying you a compliment. This hurt me, of course, it was the first slap in the face. I have tried to express this in some of my stories. But I did not attempt to hide the other side of things. The Aleppo boy Naᶜim, in the story "Naᶜim's Lessons" was called upon to give Arabic lessons to a Jewish woman from Germany, a doctor who had come to settle in the city. In fact, it is *he* who learns from her. Through her he gets to know his city, and to appreciate the community; to be proud of the legends that his grandfather tells, of the ancient synagogue, the art treasures and spiritual and cultural treasures in his city. He had never recognized them, had despised them, while she, the daughter of a collector of Judaica, reveals to Naᶜim the city of Aleppo with its great culture. In this story I

point out that, in fact, our tendency to look up to everything European, we have carried with us from childhood in our bundles of possessions; it is a tendency acquired through the education we received from French cultural imperialism. We brought this attitude with us to Israel, before we had ever heard the term Ashkenazi, and here it was reinforced. The solution therefore is not in the hands of any outside person. The way people regard us is certainly important, but more important and decisive is how we regard ourselves.

The story "Pictures from the Elementary School," a partially autobiographical work, begins with the words "I forbade my mother to speak to me in Arabic in the street." My problems were mainly in school, with my teachers and classmates, whether older or younger than myself, who were full of good intentions "to make a human being out of me." I knew I was already a human being, without their assistance. One of the teachers once looked at my card and asked me when I immigrated from Russia. To him I looked more Russian than Syrian. The blood rushed to my head in anger; should I tell him?! I replied: "Almost a year ago." Then I stood up again (I was always laughed at for standing up. I was used to standing when speaking to a teacher), and said: "You made a mistake, Sir. I didn't immigrate from Russia, but from Syria." He stared at me and said: "It's not possible!"

Let us return to Israel, to the problems that surround us. I mentioned earlier the hurt and the insult. I want to clarify this: The insult was not personal. I personally got on well with the other kids. The insult was to the *group*. Without noticing what they were doing, my best friends more than once insulted the group to which I belong, for better or worse. The question of belonging was not at all simple. Here is an extract from the story I mentioned earlier:

> "My feet were drawn, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, my soul was drawn to the "Ohel Moᶜed" Synagogue, an attractive Sepharadi synagogue not far from our home in south Tel Aviv. My mother convinced herself that her son was finally returning to faith's bosom, and prepared for me a talit

> bag made of velvet, made sure there was a Siddur [Prayer Book] and talit [Prayer Shawl] inside, and saw me off saying "Allah máᶜak (God be with you)," through her tears. Looking back, it is quite obvious to me that in doing this I was seeking the safety of a group *without Ashkenazim.*

My class mates soon learned what I was doing on Shabbat. There was disagreement among the boys. One turned up his nose on hearing "Synagogue," another's eyes popped out on hearing "Sephardi," one mocked the prayers, and another the singing. I realized that I must choose between the two worlds — and I chose the new. On Shabbat, everyone goes to the beach, they said. I too began going to the beach although I did not know how to swim. My Sabbaths became secular beach days.

I chose the new, but not through denial of the old. Wherever I went — the youth movement, the Palmach, the Kibbutz (where I still live today) — I brought along my entire self; not merely the new Amnon, but also the Shamosh family and Aleppo; everything. Everyone knew. I spoke to my mother in Arabic in the Kibbutz dining room, while she added some Aleppo dishes to our Kibbutz menu. Not only did I not hide or deny my origins, but felt I should emphasize them, although not out of conceit.

I am proud of my city, *Aram Sobá,* and of the well-rooted Jewish culture which flourished there. But the separatism of the Aleppo communities around the world is foreign to me, and I am amazed at their arrogance towards anyone who is not "one of us." Today I live in *Kibbutz Maᶜayan Baruch,*in the Upper Galilee. Geographically I am as close to Syria as possible; spiritually, I am far from the culture, the way of life and thought and the value system which characterized Jewish society in Syria. I am still nostalgic about Aleppo, I would very much like to go back and see the town; but I do not miss the way of life there, which exists no longer. In my stories I try to show it in its true light, I do not try to revive it. May it rest in peace.

❦

BOOK III

A SEPHARADI MISCELLANY

The Aleppo Codex

The Extraordinary History of The Jewish World's Most Sacred Treasure

THE discovery in 1947 of the Qumran and similar scrolls later, in the caves near the Dead Sea, provided the world a first-hand illuminating look into the ancient past. The Scrolls may be seen in the "Israel Museum in Jerusalem, in shatter-proof glass cases. There is, however, another, little-known ancient document, the *Aleppo Codex*, whose importance and sanctity are so overwhelming that not only is it *not* on display, it is almost totally inaccessible. The awe in which the *Codex* is held cannot be exaggerated; many authorities deem it to be only "a little less sacred than the Tablets from Mount Sinai." Like the Dead Sea Scrolls, this document was brought out of hiding in 1947, but to be exposed to incendiary burning.

A codex is, of course, a hand-written document in book form, which is usually, but not always, of a religious text.

The *Aleppo Codex* contained the full text of the Bible, all 24 Books (parts of which were burned later in the shocking incendiary fire.) This work is also referred to as the Codex of ben Ashér; in Aleppo itself it was called the *Keter*, or "Crown," or "the Crown of the Torah." The full title could be the Codex or "Crown", of Aharón ben Moshé ben Ashér. It is a fact, however, that ben Ashér did not write the Codex. But as we will see, he played a more significant role in its preparation.

The importance of the *Aleppo Codex* is based on what is considered its supreme authority. It is believed to contain the most correct "handed-down tradition" *Massorah,* of the Torah, leading back to Moses. This tradition corrects small deviations from the text as originally handed down. Ben Ashér (circa 900 C.E.) is credited with providing this most authentic *Massorah.*

The legacy of Aleppo's traditional belief — and elusive substantiation — is that the Codex was written by Ezra the Scribe in the 4th Century B.C.E. The now burned Colophon of the Aleppo Codex — the scribe's notes attached to a volume giving details about its creation — was said to have contained a prayer for the *preservation,* not *restoration,* of the Temple in Jerusalem. This is the basis for the belief in Aleppo that it was Ezra who had written this *Keter.*

A respected and highly reliable rabbi in the Aleppo community, Meir Neḥmad, had purportedly transcribed the Colophon, and published it in a pamphlet in 1932. In a recent visit to Mexico City, I discussed the *Keter* with Rabbi Sadeq Harari, a former Aleppoan, expressing my regret at the loss of Nehmad's testimony. Rabbi Harari told me that he owns a copy and would send a photocopy to me in New York. At this writing, the material I received did not reveal the text of the Colophon, with support for the 4th century B.C.E. origin.

The more commonly accepted view is that it was written in 850-880 C.E. by Rabbi *Shelomó,* known as *ben Buyaᶜia,* a noted scribe, who lived perhaps in Tiberias, then a center for Torah enscribing. The "pointing" and the *Massorah* were the work of the highly revered Rabbi Aharón ben Moshé ben Ashér. The "pointing" consists of the addition of cantillation marks to indicate how the text is to be chanted and phrased, and vowelling marks — *taᶜa'meem* and *nequdot* — such as is seen in printed Bibles.

Many such Codices are known to have been written. Most have disappeared — a few into private collections, others into oblivion. After the Aleppo Codex, next in importance are two such works, one in the Leningrad Library, supplied by the Karaite collector Firkovich (with a questionable personal reputation) acquired long before the Revolution. The other is the *Karaite* or *Cairo Codex,* which was in the news recently;

permission had been granted to remove this Codex to Jerusalem. In many generations since the founding of the Karaite schism or movement by rabbi ᶜAnan in the 8th Century, it produced Biblical scholars and Karaite rabbis. While almost always deemed to be 'heretical' by mainstream Jewry, in a few generations Karaites and their scholars were respected, almost fully equal in rabbinic communities. Thus, pious and wealthy Karaites are known to have commissioned the enscribing of Codices by Karaite or Orthodox mainstream experts. It is now firmly determined that the *Keter* was not the work of a Karaite scribe as had been thought possible.

For whatever the circumstances, the Aleppo Codex was in Jerusalem toward the end of the eleventh century. The presence of the Crusaders had made Jerusalem a bloody battleground for the contending armies of Muslims and Christians. Thus, when the Seljuk Turks came thundering from the north in 1077 C.E., they sacked Jerusalem on their victorious way to Egypt, taking with them everything of value — including the sacred Codex. Some authorities maintain that it was the Crusaders who seized the Codex in Jerusalem, and carried it off to Egypt in 1099 C.E. In either case, in every land when Jewish prisoners/slaves were brought to a city, the Jews there hastened to collect money with which to ransom them. When the Codex arrived in Egypt the Jewish population of Cairo hurried to amass the enormous gold ransom demanded. They succeeded finally, and placed the Codex in the Jerusalemite Synagogue. It was there that Maimonides, *Ha Rambam* studied it, and accepting it as the *supreme authority* based on it the now standard rules for writing a Sepher Toráh in his book of laws, *Hilkhot Sepher Toráh.*

Later scribes frequently quoted from the Colophon of the *Aleppo Codex,* as proof of having taken their text of the Bible from this accurate source. Rabbi Yoséf Karo of Safed ("Maran"), author of the definitive *Shulḥan ᶜArúkh* sent a copy of this Codex to Rabbi Moshé Isserles ("Muram", "Rema") his Ashkenazic counterpart at Cracow in 1558-9. Isserles copied out the text of his own personal Sefer Toráh from this manuscript because it was "most authentic" — containing the Colophon to the Aleppo Codex.

When did the Codex reach Aleppo from Cairo? This is not certain. Aleppo, it will be recalled, enjoyed a revered reputation for learning and religiosity. (Maimonides, who was familiar with the city through frequent correspondence with a friend there, praises it *most highly* in his "Letter to Lunel"). It was a magnet that drew Saᶜadia from his native Fayoum in Egypt to settle among the Jews of the city. He stayed only a few years (circa 915-25 C.E.) however, yielding to the "call" to assume the seat of Gaon in Baghdád, (Babylon) which was the Jewish capital of the world. Somewhat later, Aleppo welcomed Yoséf ibn ᶜAknin, who left Cairo to settle in *Aram Soba* (the rabbinic name for the city). It was to Aleppo, to his disciple and dear friend ibn ᶜAknin that Maimonides sent "Guide for the Perplexed," (*Moré Nebookheem*), which he had written for his "beloved Yoséf". Thus a cornerstone of Jewish philosophy was first seen, given to the world — in Aleppo. In 1375 a descendant of Maimonides, Rabbi David (Ha-Nageed), [the son of R. Joshua, the son of R. Abraham, the son of R. David, the son of R. Abraham, the immediate son of Maimonides], left Cairo for Palestine. He then lived in Damascus for a short period, but settled in Aleppo. He was said to have carried with him many manuscripts of his illustrious ancestor, including Maimonides' *Commentary* to the *Mishnáh*, and perhaps also, the *Keter*, itself.

Because of the "high antiquity" of which Russell wrote in 1754, and the widely recognized sanctity of the manuscript, it was carefully guarded in a vault of the ancient Great Synagogue of the city, most respectfully protected against possible intruders. So great was its sanctity, that in the case of a dispute, an oath taken before the *Keter* was sufficient and conclusive evidence. Dr. Alexander Russell was Health Officer in Aleppo for thirteen years in the service of English Gentlemen-Traders who had been chartered by Queen Elizabeth I, in 1580. Russell, a careful and thorough observer, (confirmed in part through this writer's intimate knowledge of the city), wrote his *A Natural History of Aleppo* in 1754, (republished 1796). In this work he remarked:

> "They have a synagogue . . . where a manuscript of the Old Testament is preserved, which, as they pretend, is of very high antiquity. The Jews assign

> two reasons for ascribing such high antiquity to the M.S. Bible preserved in the synagogue at Aleppo. The one, the concurrent tradition of their Rabbis, and their submission to its authority in the various readings of disputed passages; they produce instances of deputations sent from Europe on purpose to consult it.
> The other is that at the end of the M.S. there is a prayer for the *preservation* of the Temple; whence they conclude that it must have been written before the Expedition of Titus, because after that period, their prayers were offered up for the restauation, not preservation of the Temple in Jerusalem."

Rabbi Shelomó Raphael Laniado (d. 1783-4) of a long line of distinguished Aleppoan rabbis wrote of the Keter in one of his responsa, *Kisseh Shelomó;* (note that Sepharadi authors' names are customarily part of the title of the work). He stated ". . . It is the custom in our city that he who says so, he who does not accept the assessment of his means [for the purpose of the congregational tax,] must swear by the *Keter Toráh,* how much he has, and then he pays according to his oath . . . and this is an ancient custom". In his book *Holékh Tameem U Poᶜel Sedeq,* Rabbi ᶜAmram Yeshaᶜya Dayan wrote of the Codex in 1847-8, that it is kept in one of the "shrines" or Arks of the Great Synagogue. "In the Shrine on the Southeastern side there is a niche containing four "Crowns of the Toráh", some being texts of the whole Bible, some only of the Pentateuch, and on one of them it is written *"that it was found among the booty taken from Jerusalem"*, may it be rebuilt and restored . . . He who incurs an oath by the Law swears there upon the Codices." (original italics)

Further information, and the fact that the Codex was removed from this specific shrine was revealed in a letter from Ḥakham Yisḥaq Sheḥebar, one of the scholars of Ḥálab, who now officiates in Buenos Aires. In writing to Itzḥaq Ben-Zvi, President of Israel, Sheḥebar stated:

> . . . no Jew had the presumption to go near it [The *Keter*]. Thus its great sanctity in the eyes of the masses preserved it intact all the time . . . It was feared that some *suspicious looking* people in the

> guise of tourists and scholars would steal or *photograph it.* For these reasons they decided in recent years to make a special iron box for it, and they put it in this box with the other manuscripts of the Bible [other codices that were kept in the synagogue] There were two keys to this box. Both were not given to even the most trusted *gabbai,* but one key was given to each of two wealthy and important members of the community, so that *the box could only be opened in the presence of both of them together and under the supervision of the Council of the Congregation.* The box was placed on a large stone slab in the *Cave of Elijah the Prophet in the Great Synagogue . . .*

David Sasson from Aleppo, via a long sojourn in Iran reminisced to me recently of foreigners who had visited his father, a scholar; "some of them from the Vatican", when they came to do Biblical research. Isaac Goldman's grandfather, an Ashkenazi who had settled in Aleppo was also a host to an unknown Jewish European scholar, *"very learned"* in Torâh and Talmudic studies; he spent several weeks in Aleppo seeking to see the great sacred treasures. At the end, the visitor confessed to Goldman that he was indeed a Catholic priest, who pretended to be Jewish as the sole means of gaining access to Aleppo's sacred writings [as we read in Goldman's oral biography].

The Codex remained in safety and undisturbed in Aleppo for centuries. In recent years (circa 1946) a *coup d'état* had taken place in Damascus, the national capital. One of the deposed Cabinet officers was a Muslim Aleppoan, and fearful for his life he fled the country — with the *Keter, which he had stolen.* Subsequently an amnesty was declared, the Cabinet officer was assured of immunity and returned to Syria, with the *Keter,* which he restored to the Jewish community. However, he was speedily tried for treason, and soon — hanged; fulfilling a part of the curse contained in the Colophon, against possible theft of the *Keter.*

Soon after, local Muslim nationalists began anti-Zionist agitation due to the dread of the establishment of a State of

Israel; although the Muslims of the city had lived in harmony and with respect for the Jewish population for centuries. A new spirit, doubtlessly fanned by the more fanatical temperament of the Damascus Islamics, stirred a small anti-Zionist segment, which directed itself against all Jews, Zionist or not. Additionally alarming was the uncertainty for the safety of the *Keter*, since the authorities had recently warned of dire consequences if the Codex, of which they knew the historic value, was removed.

Among the leading members of the Jewish Community was Murad Faḥam. Although his family had lived in Aleppo for centuries, by reason of the Iranian citizenship which was inherited by the family they enjoyed special privileges, extra-territorial rights, etc., which foreign citizenship commanded. Faḥam was wealthy, owning thousands of sheep and hundreds of cows, required for his manufacture of cheese which he supplied in the city of close to a million inhabitants. Because of his courage in speaking up on behalf of his community, an edict was promulgated to deport him within seven days; he was ordered to return to Iran, permitted to take nothing with him. He arrived in Teheran a stranger and penniless, a modern Job, compelled at first to sleep in one of the synagogues. With intelligence and resourcefulness, Faḥam soon had his situation brought to the attention of the Shah. The "King of Kings" was furious with the feeble authorities of Syria, who dared to mistreat one of his own subjects. With threats, he demanded of Syrian President Ḥafez al-Assad, and arranged the restoration of Faḥam to his native Aleppo.

There was uneasy, uncertain peace for the Jewish community, until November 29, 1947, when the establishment of a Jewish state was decreed by the United Nations. This sparked on orders from Damascus, an orchestrated attack upon all synagogues, Jewish schools, and some homes and shops, throughout the city. Government fuel-trucks circulated pouring gasoline, which was set on fire. The Holy Scrolls and Sacred Books had been collected in the courtyards of the houses of worship, including the Great Synagogue — including also its great treasure the "Crown of the Toráh," and set on fire. An outstanding rabbi, Mosé Mizraḥi, witnessing this horrifying

desecration, placed a chair in the midst of the sacred texts, determined to surrender his life. Two Muslims youths, supervising the conflagration urged the "Khakham" (the Ḥakham, — rabbi) away from the flames, to no avail. Finally, they carried the chair on which he was seated out of the courtyard to safety. "Khakham," they chided in a friendly manner, "we were ordered to burn the synagogues, not to take human life." A Jewish onlooker succeeded in snatching the partly burned Codex and ran off with it to a hiding place.

Earlier that morning, in alarm at the feverish Nationalist and anti-Jewish demonstrations, two Jewish community leaders had hurried to the mayor, with whom they were on cordial terms, to express their concern and alarm. "Have no fear," he reassured them, "*by evening* all will be quiet". The burnings and looting had been ordered by Damascus for *that day* in Aleppo. In the capital no such outrages were prepared, because of possible bad publicity in the city which contained many embassies and foreign news correspondents.

The Jewish populace was in anxiety, in fear of violent, murderous attacks on them. Toward evening they fled to their homes to bolt their doors and shutters. Others hurried to make their escape, to take the night train to Lebanon. Still others, many others, it was related to me by eye-witnesses and participants, took refuge—spent the night in the homes of their Muslim, and sometimes Christian neighbors. Because homes of Jews had been previously marked for easy identification by the anti-Zionist hordes, Muslim neighbors placed their own names on the doors of many such homes.

In alarm at the wild disorders and fires raging throughout the city, Muslims had joined Jewish leaders in petitioning the mayor to put an end to the rioting. A curfew was declared; military troops were posted in Jewish areas, by evening the city was quiet.

In the following days many Jews hurriedly left their homes to seek safety in Beirut, from both Aleppo and Damascus. Soon after the *Ḥawádes* ("news"—evil tidings, as the period of disaster was covertly referred to by the Jews), a series of edicts were promulgated, the beginning of severe repressions, loss of many rights, beatings, torture and imprisonment for attempting

to leave the country. The *Mukhábara*, the secret "intelligence" and repressive agency was everywhere.

The new terror, added to the memory of the theft of the *Keter* only a few years before, plunged the Jewish community into great apprehension for the safety of this sacred book. Now in their possession, partly burned, what if the *Keter* was once again to be in some danger of harm or confiscation? An aborted attempt to spirit away the *Keter* out of the country could result in the death for the perpetrator and persecution for all the Jewish inhabitants. What was to be done?

Faḥam had become disenchanted with life in Aleppo and decided to emigrate—a privilege no Syrian Jew could exercise then in the 1940's, and a prohibition which continues almost forty years later, to this day. With characteristic courage and with the fearful consent of the community leaders, Faḥam packed the *Keter* among the bales of his possessions and left. At the frontier, he was stopped for customs examination. The inspector pointed to one of the bales and demanded that it be opened—*the bale containing the Keter.* As he related the incident to me in Aleppo-in-Flatbush, he could not permit fear to overcome him, but instead, in seeming fury he shouted: "I am under the protection of the Shah and through him of President Hafez al-Assad. Dare to touch my goods and I promise to see you hung!" Petty bureaucrats in the East are in constant fear of superiors; despite chagrin and frustration, he could not be certain of escape from dire punishment. "Take your goods and get out, you filthy Zionist Jew!"

Faḥam made his way to Israel, trembling because of the awesome possession in his charge, his fearful responsibility; what if it were stolen or otherwise damaged? His sacred burden created uncertainty as to whom he could trust with the safety of so precious a manuscript. Finally he was led to President Izḥaq Ben-Zvi, a devoutly religious individual and a scholar, who placed the sacred work in the Ben-Zvi Institute. It was placed into a specially built underground vault; and because of its importance it became as inaccessible there as it had been in the Great Synagogue of Ḥálab/Aleppo.

Efforts were made to help the destitute Faḥam. Did he wish for capital with which to begin an enterprise? Would he accept

a pension on which he could live in comfort? All offers were rejected by the pious Faḥam. Did not the Tradition based on the Colophon indicate a "a curse on him who steals it, harms it, or benefits through it?" Ultimately Faḥam decided to emigrate,to New York, via Buenos Aires, where he has relatives. Faḥam, of humble demeanor, was seen at prayers mornings and evenings, or leading a small group in the study of a Toráh text, at the Sha'are' Zión Congregation, in the heart of Aleppo,Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

A controversy arose in Israel concerning possession or ownership of the *Keter*. The yeshiva *Porát Yoséf*, at the Western Wall, is traditionally a center of Aleppo rabbis and study, and thus considers itself the rightful heir of Aleppo's religious culture—and its former possession—the sacred *Keter*. Contention regarding ownership continued for several years; only recently, upon the resolution of these differences was it possible to make the *Keter* available for study—through a facsimile printing of a few hundred copies. The very first book was presented in an impressive ceremony, fittingly to Murad Faḥam—the rescuer of the most sacred text in the Jewish world. [Faḥam has since died.]

[The "*Keter*" which Murad Faḥam carried away had the following sections missing, burned in the fire in the Great Synagogue:

A. The Colophon

B. *Gen. I, I-Deut.* XXVIII, 16

C. *Former Prophets*: Kings, XIV, 21, XVIII, 13

Latter Prophets: Jeremiah, XXIX, 9, to XXXI, 35. Also, XXXII 2-4, 9-11, 21-24

Minor Prophets: Amos, VIII, 12, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah V, I, Zephonia, the last verse, Haggai I, to Zech, IX, 17

D. *Hagiographa*: Chronicles, 2, Chron. XXVI 19 to XXXV, 7

Psalms XV, I - XXV, 2

Song of Songs up to III, II

Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra are entirely missing].

What other Jewish Community anywhere, can take pride in such a sacred document as the Aleppo Codex, Keter Aram Sobá—*of ben Ashér?*



Pizmoneem, Their Creators, Their Singers

Since occasional references have been made to *pizmoneem* it will be helpful to discuss them, since they are a part of the cherished traditions of Near and Middle East Jewry. Pizmoneem (pizmon, singular) are religious Songs of Praise, in Hebrew, sung unaccompanied, according to specific *maqamát*, "modes", or 'moods'. They are *not* an integral part of Sabbath and holidays prayers — although sung in the synagogue on occasion. Pizmoneem differ somewhat from *baqqashot*, Songs of Supplication, which sometimes precede prayers. *Zemirot* is another term, for similar songs or chants, more common among Ashkenazeem. Psalms, shared by all Jews, are termed *zemirot* and are chanted to specific 'modes' — which differ in varying geographic locations. Each section of the Bible — Pentateuch, Prophets and the Ketoobeem (Later Writings) has its specific mode of chanting. These too, differ from East to West and between localities.

The native music of the East, unwritten and transmitted orally, is based on scales which differ from those of Western music. [See below for expanded details.] Early Byzantine and Western church-music such as Gregorian chants — or plain-song beginning in the 6th century, are also based on "modes", influenced by Oriental synagogue music. So too, are many subsequent early folk-songs. The Western world developed written music over the centuries, increasingly complex to accommodate increasingly developed compositions — thus, the five-line staff, with black notes and white ones, keys, sharps and flats, etc.

Maqams may have originated in India — in the land of "*ragas*", co-opted by Persians and Arabs — just as 'Arabic' numerals were developed in India — with the crucial "zero" and "decimal" contributed by Arab science. While there are said to be perhaps a hundred maqams only a dozen or so are in common use — each bearing the Near/Middle East geographic name of the area to which it is attributed, — Ḥejjaz, ᶜAjjam

(Persia), Nahh-wand, Seega, Bayaat, Saba, Rusdt, etc.

Indian ragas now have a measure of popularity in the West among some sophisticated music-lovers, popularized by ʿOodi and Ravi Shankar, contemporary gifted Indian musicians. Ragas (maqams) have penetrated the music of the Beattles and other popular forms of Rock compositions. However, beyond a few elementary similarities, music-anthropologists have a hard time, as Donal Henehan of the N.Y. Times indicated, finding points on which musicians around the world can agree. Within his own strongly established musical culture each composer has limited choices to make, and when attempts are made to bridge the differences they have not been very successful. Alan Hohvaness, an American-Armenian composer has written several enchanting symphonic works which suggest the maqams; he uses Oriental themes — Middle Eastern, Javanese, and Japanese. A comparatively recent symphonic concerto written by a an Indian musician has its general form based on Hindu ragas — maqams, with questionable organic success.

The subtle system of maqam scales encourages florid improvisations, within traditional bounds. When heard in the pure classical style, ragas/maqams can impress and even excite knowledgeable Western listeners, through their grace and virtuosity. (Dr. Alexander Russell in Aleppo in 1740-1753, was *not* knowledgeable). In any case, the meditative improvisational function of the maqam is difficult to achieve in a conventional symphonic form. The Hindu concerto-composer in attempting to blend his native idiom with a Western symphonic pattern was compelled to make serious compromises; his concerto modulates — changing keys from time to time — which no classic ragas are supposed to do. He attempts un-Oriental devices such as chords and canons, suggesting Western counterpoint, [playing one theme against another — simultaneously]; and harmonies — which do not exist in Eastern music. *The maqam restricts itself to a single unharmonized melodic or improvizational line.*

In much earlier centuries, maqams which are now traditionally associated with Middle East music were largely, *poetic forms.* For example, the 12th-13th century the spanish

Rabbi Yehudá al-Ḥarizi wrote in this poetic form. His best-known work is the Hebrew long poem "Al-Taḥkemoni," with more than fifty rhymed long 'stanzas.' One of them is devoted to Aleppo, in which he mentions the presence of "gifted singers and poets." (So, too, does Benjamin of Tudela, elsewhere.) Al-Ḥarizi was a rabbinic scholar, a bold, earthy picaresque traveller, translator from Hebrew in to Arabic and vice-versa, poet, and philologist, with fervent love for Hebrew. His scholarship is evidenced in his translating into Hebrew the Arabic original of *Moré Nebookheem* (The Guide For the Perplexed), which Maimonides/Ha-Rambam had written for ibn ᶜAknin, "a cherished pupil and friend" who had chosen Aleppo as his home, and where this great philosophic work was to be given to the world. "Rambam" (the acronym for "Rabbi Moshé bar Maimon"), favored the translation of Shemuél ibn Tibbón of Southern France. He was delighted with it and wrote the translator that, had he himself written "The Guide" in Hebrew it would have been exactly as ibn Tibbon rendered it. (Alas, for al-Ḥarizi's effort.)

Some pizmoneem do form a supplemental part of the Sepharadi Liturgy, on Rosh Hashaná and Yom Kippúr. They are the creations of Shelomó ibn Gabirol, and other 11th and 12th century poets — Yehudá Ha-Levi, Abraham Ḥazzán, Yehudá ᶜAbbás, Yiṣḥaq al-Lisáni, and Abraham ibn ᶜEzra (curiously referred to as "ibn *ᶜÁzra*" by Near East Jews). Other related pizmoneem are poetic renditions of the 613 Mizvot, (Toráh-ordained "*Do's*" and "*Don'ts*"). These are sung at home by the devout, during *Shabbuᶜot* (Pentecost holiday), when the handing-down of the Toráh at Mount Sinai is celebrated. *Ammón Yom Zeh,* and *Shemór Libbi Maᶜa-neh* are outstanding in popularity — among the devout and scholarly.

Pizmoneem and Festive Events

Singing of pizmoneem in synagogues on Sabbath mornings is usual in the celebration of an important event in the life of a congregant — the birth of a child, a bar mizvá, an engagement to be married and when appearing after being

married. On such occasions the celebrant is "invited up" to share in the reading of the Toráh — he is offered a *ᶜAliya.* When the Invitation is announced, it is customary for some in the congregation to join in singing one or two pizmoneem, created in previous periods, commemorating similar celebrations. They are sung — unaccompanied of course, from memory by many, or from the huge community-book of pizmoneem.

In parts of the prayer-service itself the melodies of some pizmoneem are used in sung-sections of the prayers. The Ḥazzán has only to sound a few words for the congregation to join in singing one of the countless melodies.

Sung-portions of the *Shaḥ-reet* section of morning Sabbath and holiday services are *Nishmat Kol Ḥai, Shavᶜat ᶜAniyeem, Semeḥeem Be-seh-tahm, Mim-misrayeem Géaltanoo,* the *Qedushá* and *Keter.* Unlike Ashkenazi services, the Ḥazzán chants the entire service aloud; it is when one of the sung-sections is reached that the congregation joins him aloud.

Pizmoneem Creators and Singers

Nothing specific is known of Aleppo's and Damascus' "gifted singers and poets" until we come to Rabbi Yisraél Najjára of the late 16th century. Prior to his return to Orthodoxy, he had wandered for many years among Arab and perhaps Persian tribesmen, in pursuit of his love for music. As an esteemed scholarly rabbi in Saféd, and in Damascus where he settled later, he became renowned for his output of lovely pizmoneem — among which is well known *Ya Rabon ᶜAlam ve ᶜAlmaya.* His printed song-book "Zemirot Yisraél" contains more than a hundred of his creations.

In the ensuing years little or nothing is known of pizmoneem writers until close to a hundred years ago, after which we inherit songs by several Aleppoan rabbis: Mordechai and Yaᶜacob ᶜAbadi, Mordechai Labatón, and Ḥakham Rafael "Antebi" (from ᶜAintab, originally) Tabboush. Their pizmoneem, traditionally, are set to the melodies of well-known Arabic songs of the period, and are popular among pizmoneem-singers in Flatbush, as in all other Syrian communities

throughout the world. Ḥakham Mosé Ashear (Ash-ar) 1877-1940, an immigrant to New York's Lower East Side, circa 1910, wrote prolifically, there and when the community moved to Bensonhurst, in Brooklyn. He turned out lovely pizmoneem, each to mark a celebration in the life of more prominent wealthier fellow-immigrants. The songs, written in Hebrew made it a point to include a word which resembled the family name of the celebrant, or else a biblical reference with mention of his given name. A cash honorarium was customary. Ashear usually attempted to begin his text with a Hebrew word closely resembling the opening of the original Arabic title. An Arabic song beginning with "Ya Naḥeel", for example, begins the Hebrew with "Ya Oḥeel"; or, "Mesapé," for the Arabic "Ya Sapha". Ashear employed melodies of Arabic songs, *mostly*. However his love of all music led him to set some of his lyrics to polkas, marches (Western), and to the tunes of the Neapolitan "Santa Lucia", to "Maryland, My Maryland" ("Oh, Tannenbaum") "My Country 'tis of thee," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," etc. He attributed some pizmoneem-melodies to "Opera." (With some knowledge of operas, from Monteverdi to Stravinsky, we have succeeded in locating only one "Opera" source). Sung sections of the liturgy may surface to the tunes of Ashear's Western borrowings. A very popular pizmon, written by Tabboush in honor of Ashear's marriage in Aleppo, appears in *Magic Carpet* with Western-music notation set by my nephew Joseph ("ibn") Ralph A.D. Sutton, and with the Hebrew lyrics. Since the demise of Mosé Ashear not many pizmoneem have been written; a few by Ezekiel H. Albeg, and currently, by Eduard Farḥi, the Chief Cantor of Sha'aré Zión Congregation. Farḥi's colorful oral biography appears elsewhere in this volume. However Sepharadeem from Arab lands now living in Israel, are showing initiative in creating some pizmoneem.

Pizmoneem in Flatbush

The inhabitants of Aleppo have a wide-spread reputation as music-lovers, (as we read in the oral biography of Morris Antebi). In Syria, those most dedicated are experts in maqams,

and who may play the *ᶜood*, (the 'guitar' with a pear-shaped back) — the lute. Others were masters of the *(q)-a-noon*, the Oriental-tuned zither (which produces a harpsichord-like plucked-string sound). In Syrian-Flatbush too, there are a few, non-professionals, who also play these instruments, and are knowledgeable in maqams. [The instrumentalist or vocalist begins his music in a specific maqam upon which he will build, often with florid improvisations, infrequently modulating into other "modes", but always ending with the original maqam.]

Pizmoneem and maqams were of *relatively* little importance in the earlier days of the Jewish Syrians here. With the self-esteem and confidence which has developed in the flourishing community, interest in pizmoneem and maqamat has grown, to the extent that in the Syrian yeshivot, classes are given to perpetuate the pizmoneem tradition. These are taught by some cantors of the community synagogues, Eduard Farḥi, Meyer "Micky" Kairy, Rabbi Raphael Elnadaff, Meyer Lévy and perhaps others.

Active interest in pizmoneem in the larger synagogues has developed informal groups which meet privately for the pleasure of singing familiar pizmoneem, and to learn less popular old works. In Beth Torah congregation some of the participants are, synagogue-cantor Isaac Cabasso, David A. Tawil, (knowledgeable in Theory), Moe Gindi, Harry A. Tawil, Chabbetai Chraime, Isaac M. Sutton, Yiṣḥaq Sofer, Steven Sofer, Allan Sofer, Saul E. Tawil, Ezra Ashkenazi, Morris Arking (ᶜArátingi), Mal Serure and others. Deep love of traditional music is so markedly evidenced at Beth Torah that the monthly calendar distributed by the Synagogue indicated for each Sabbath and holiday, the appropriate maqam traditionally used, to accord with the mood of the Toráh text of the week, and to which sung sections of the prayers are also set. At Sha'aré Zión active pizmoneem lovers and singers include Isaac Goldman, Louis A. Massry, Joe Gindi, the brothers David and Max Tawil, Victor Antebi, Joseph Saff, Moe A. Tawil, Abraham Dangour (Moroccan[?], born in Aleppo), Albert Sabaan, as well as others. Occasionally participating in these informal Saturday between afternoon

prayer intervals are the synagogue-cantors Eduard Farḥi and Yeḥiel Naḥári.

The current pizmoneem song-book *Sheer Wish-baḥa Hallel Ve-Zimrá* to which reference has been made, has six-hundred pages and more than that number of songs, edited by the venerable Gabriel A. Shrem, (recently deceased), with the collaboration of Sam Cattan, President of the Magen David Publishing — Sepharadic Heritage Society. Alongside the title, the original Arabic name of the song is usually given, as well as the maqam, and sometimes *an indication* as to the author, "Moshé"; "Abraham", etc.. With a knowledge of a number of pizmoneem which I learned at my father's Sabbath table, I confess to being familiar with only a miniscule portion of the book's contents. Cantor Isaac Cabasso told me that he knows perhaps half of its songs.

In the course of researching the autobiographic "My Search for my Great-grandfather" reportedly born in India, which appears elsewhere in this volume, I discovered that the Calcutta (Sepharadi) Jewish community had twice printed pizmoneem books there, more than a hundred years ago.

Undoubtedly, the huge Jewish community of Baghdád also had pizmoneem and pizmoneen books. However, Baghdád music is totally unknown in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. There are very few Baghdádians in this community, none of whom is religiously distinguished. (That once-thriving Calcutta community established by Aleppoans and Iraqis has been almost totally dispersed, scattered.)

Most Sepharadi communities originating in the Near and Middle East now view Brooklyn as the center of the traditional culture.

We are indebted to the esteemed and scholarly David A. Tawil for the following detailed information on the scales of maqam music.

"Today, Arabic music has three basic types of scales and from these scales there are many derivatives. The three scales are based on a seven tone system and the eighth (octave) tone is the same as the tonic (first), e.g. CDEFGABC - which is the

same as in our western (occidental) music. The tone or interval is the musical distance between two sounds.

The system of major and minor scales (Western), are used in addition to the unique Arabic system of scale formation. The major and minor scale systems are based on the theory of dividing the octave into 12 semi (half) tones. The Arabic system is based on the theory of dividing the octave into 24 quarter tones. Thus we find that the three basic scales are:

1. - *The major scale and its derivatives.*
2. - *The minor scale and its derivatives.*
3. - *The Rusdt scale and its derivatives.*

When the octave in the Rusdt scale is divided into 24 tones, the use of ¾ tone intervals are used along with ½ and whole tones in the makeup of a scale. A ¼ tone interval is seldom used. However, it's the ¾ tone interval that is most characteristic in the Arabic musical scales.

It is indeed difficult to uncover a modern community so deeply devoted to a perpetuation of its ancient traditions.

❀

Sepharadeem and Ashkenazeem; Sepharadeem and Other Sepharadeem; Their Similarities, Their Differences

IT is perhaps timely to examine differences which separate Sepharadeem and Ashkenazeem; dissimilarities which some seem to consider very important, and which divide the two major groups of the Jewish world.

First the similarities, the attributes which both groups have in common. Both accept the Bible, the Talmud, and the same Code of Law in almost exactly the same form. Kashrut, (dietary rules), marriage and divorce, observance of the Sabbath and holidays. All their prayers are almost identical, except that there is sometimes, a small adjustment in order of the text. The two groups each have a very few songs of praise or entreaty which do not appear in the other's prayer books. One such Ashkenazi song is *Un Saneh Tokef*, chanted in the *Musaf* section of New Year and Day of Atonement prayers. It is held in awesome reverence — but is completely unknown to Sepharadeem. (What stunned amazement was exhibited when I first inquired about it from Ashkenazi friends). Where then do differences evidence themselves?

Differing Pronunciation of Hebrew

Perhaps the greatest obstacles to complete identity lies in the differing pronunciation of Hebrew, intrinsic to all phases of Jewish religious life. Sepharadeem have lived in countries which speak Arabic, and have a pattern of pronunciation of Hebrew

which they inherited from perhaps two thousand years ago, or longer. In ancient Israel/Palestine, Babylon, Muslim Spain, and elsewhere, through the centuries, Hebrew was pronounced in a pattern closely resembling Arabic, since both languages are *closely related,* and stem from a common Semitic origin. Ashkenazeem, who drifted from Western and Central Europe to Slavic lands in the 14th and 15th centuries, developed Hebrew pronunciation increasingly at variance with that spoken in its birthplace. They place pronunciation stresses which differ from the accepted *Masoretic* voweling and cantillation, ("handed-down" tradition, from Moses, the Law Giver, it is believed). The State of Israel deemed Sepharadi pronunciation the correct, the authentic one, and its *usage* is supposedly general throughout the land. However, immigrants of 'recent' Ashkenazic roots intrude their East European Yiddish background to create 'dialects.' They have not yet succeeded in fully mastering correct Sepharadi pronunciation; (particularly the *ᶜayeen* and *ḥet,* the 'touch-stones' of authentic pronunciation), and *placing accents* correctly; (for example, "Rekhov ben *Ye-hOOda*" should be, correctly, "*Reḥov ben Yehoo-DA*").

Most Jews in Europe and the Americas stem from Ashkenazi, East European background, and most continue to pronounce Hebrew as was done prior to their emigration from Eastern Europe. Until recent decades Sepharadi pronunciation of Hebrew was virtually unintelligible to them. Conversely, on the early Lower East Side, Jewish immigrants from Sepharadic countries were unable to follow the Ashkenazi cantors' prayers, and as soon as possible formed their own houses of worship, such as we see in Flatbush and elsewhere. Differing pronunciation of religious texts continues to this day and creates a seemingly unsurmountable obstacle to joint worship and other religious intermingling.

Same Code of Law

Since both groups follow the same religious texts almost totally, the existing differences *can be said to be minor.* The Code of Jewish Law which both groups follow is the *Shulḥán ᶜArúkh* (the "Laidout Table"), compiled by Rabbi Yosef Karo

("Maram") in Safed, and published in 1565 C.E., Rabbi Moshé Isserles (commonly referred to as "Muram" or "Rema/Rama") of Cracow, Poland — a contemporary, offered small Ahskenazi additions to Karo's work. They became incorporated in the *Shulḥan ᶜArúkh*, — in foot-noted glosses entitled "Hagaha/Mappah," and represent minor differences. These emendations made Karo's Code fully acceptable to the Ashkenazeem as the official standard codification.

Primacy of Local Religious Customs

Jewish local customs in varying areas and cities, *minhag ha ᶜeer*, are deemed to have the authority of Law, and even to supercede standard law when not in violation of the cardinal spirit of the *Shulḥán ᶜArúkh*. Thus Jewish Law is fundamentally the same for both Ashkenazeem and Sepharadeem, with the exception of local customs of a minor order. But, most Ashkenazeem are aghast that Sepharadeem will consume rice on Passover; for them it is tantamount to not observing the religious holiday, it is if they are eating leavened food. Yet, the *Shulḥán ᶜArúkh* permits consumption of rice; Rabbi Isserles' foot-note merely discourages it — *for Ashkenazeem*. Out of consideration for Ashkenazi guests at a Seder, some Sepharadeem refrain from serving rice — a standard dish on festive occasions among those of the Near and Middle East.

R. Gershom's '1000' Year Edict

Yet another difference between Sepharadeem and Ashkenazeem has become moot, no longer relevant. Tenth Century Rabbi ("Rabbenu") Gershom in the Ashkenazic Rhineland, (purportedly he died the day of Rashi's birth) was a highly powerful issuer of *Takkanot*, religious decrees. One such historic pronouncement has come down to our own days. Because of the oppressive Christian environment in which his community lived, and perhaps because Christians were highly critical of some Jews marrying more than one wife, (envious?) Rabbenu Gershom issued an awesome *Ḥerem* decree (anathema, excommunication), that Ashkenazi Jews be forbidden to have more than one wife from that day onward;

and that the decree be valid for *'one thousand' years,* commencing 1062 C.E. . The decree was rigidly observed by Ashkenazem; Sepharadeem, all of whom lived in Muslim lands where polygamy was legal, were exempt from the rulings. The Decree was also commonly respected by Sepharadeem; although in the East a Jew whose wife was sterile or had produced only female offspring was free to take *a second wife;* or was permitted to divorce her after ten "fruitless" years had elapsed. (Ashkenazeem, too, are ritually permitted a divorce by reason of a lack of some progeny.)

This writer was privileged to have *three* living, functioning, grandmothers simultaneously. After the passage of the *halachically* stipulated time, not having given birth to a male child *Signora* ᶜKhattoun (née Bigio) became the *Senior* wife of *my maternal grandfather* Solomon Silvera. She was accorded great deference and respect by the second Signora, Bolissa Oro (née) ᶜAdes, a 'commoner'; in addition to one Sutton grandmother.

The Priestly Blessing

Another difference in custom is *Birkat Kohaneem,* the Priestly Blessing, Num. 6:23-27, contained in every *Siddur,* the prayer-book, for use every day. It is *fully observed* by Syrian Sepharadeem, daily, and twice on the Sabbath and holiday morning services, in the *Shaḥareet* and *Musáf* sections. The *Kohaneem* in the congregation (descendants of the *Kohén*/priestly clan), proceed to the front of the synagogue, place their *taleteem,* their prayer shawls, over their heads and bless the congregants, repeating the words of the Blessing as they are individually sung by the cantor (often an opportunity for him to floridly display his musical skill). As I understand it from Rabbi Dr. Zevulun Lieberman, unlike Sepharadeem who go through this ceremony *every day of the year,* Ashkenazeem do so only twice yearly, in the *Musaf* section of Rosh Hashaná and Yom Kippur services. In Israel, Rabbi Lieberman observed, Ashkenazeem in Jerusalem celebrate this ceremony at the *Kotel,* the Western Wall, on Passover and Shabuᶜot (Pentecost), in the company of equally huge numbers of Sepharadeem who also

pray there. (At other times the Ashkenazi cantor routinely recites the Blessing).

Necessity to Have Head Covered

Sepharadeem too, use a headcovering during prayers and when reciting benedictions. This is in accordance with standard religious custom. At other times, most do not see the necessity to keep the head covered; *halakha* does not demand it. The requirement of headcovering for males at all times has been the subject of considerable disputes, but is not ordained *halachically;* it is *minhag haᶜeer,* the traditional custom of the town or region — among Ashkenazeem principally — which brings about the insistence on headcovering at all times. Ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazeem even insist on wearing a *hat* when benedictions are recited during meals, a skull-cap is not deemed sufficient. Most observant Ashkenazeem view a male bare head as tantamount to being irreligious.

Naming the Newborn

Nothing in the Jewish Code of Law presents directions for the naming of a newborn child. Among Sepharadeem (and Muslims) it is traditional to honor the new father's father by naming the first male offspring after him; the first female child is given the name of her paternal grandmother. The mother's family is not overlooked, however, the second male child is named after the maternal grandfather; the second female child is given the name of the mother's mother. Thus in a family with five or six male children, grandfather "Ezra," for example, is honored in the homes of each of his sons, each of them will have an "Ezra," as the name of *his* first son. This has been the tradition for countless centuries. A glimpse at the Brooklyn telephone directory will perhaps show several "Ezra" Gindi or Cohen or Beyda, etc., (Ezra being the paternal grandfather's name). (Ezra may have sometimes become "Edward," Abraham, an "Allen, Arnold," etc. The Hebrew name of the individual remains Ezra or Abraham, of course.) He is Ezra/'Edward' *ibn* — the son of, 'Ruben' and so he will frequently bear the name

Edward "R." Gindi. His cousin, son of a paternal uncle 'Simon', may be Edwin "S." Gindi.

Ashkenazeem following their tradition shun naming a newborn child after any living person; it is commonly thought to be "unlawful" — avoided, as possibly carrying "bad luck" (?) However it is not unlawful according to Jewish Law. Without knowledge of this, most Ashkenazeem are scandalized that Sepharadeem will name a child after a *living person*!

What is her "Jewish name?", Ashkenazeem will ask, when told that a female's name is "Tehra" or "Salḥa", (Arabic names, often anglicized to Terry and Sally, etc.). It is not a requirement that a "Jewish" name be given among Syrian Sepharadeem. The name is that of a grandmother, she is given the name in honor of one of her female grandparents, as mentioned earlier.

An older and now less-used Jewish Syrian name-usage indicates the honor and importance of having a male offspring, a tradition that continues among Muslims. We read in the oral biographies that one of our Jews is referred to as "Abu Seleem" — ("the father of Seleem or Shelomo," his first male child). In current newspaper reports of Arab terrorist figures, they are also referred to as "Abu Ḥassan", or "Abu Nidal", etc., their so-called 'war-names'. Actually such titles merely mean to reflect the honor that an individual is popularly accorded — that he (or she — the mother, who is "Imm Ḥassan") has a male offspring.

Extended research into differences between the Sepharadi and Ashkenazi groups failed to uncover more than small religious disparities, based on *minhag ha-ᶜeer*, "the custom of the locality." However, minor as it seems, the differing pronunciation of Hebrew continues to form a major barrier to Sepharadi-Ashkenazi intermingling.

Three Categories of Sepharadeem

Let us now turn to a timely consideration of *inter-Sepharadi* distinctions. These as will be seen, are in three major categories.

The "Land of Sepharad" is mentioned in Genesis (as is "The Land of Ashkenaz"). Except for a passing mention in the Book of Obadiá, nowhere else in Biblical literature can we find additional mention of these lands, and *nowhere are there indications as to their location.* It is conjectured by some scholars that they were located "north of *Eres Yisrael* . . . near Armenia." According to commonly accepted tradition, "Sepharad" is Spain. Thus, for some, since Jews of Oriental lands had not issued from Spain in 1492, they cannot be considered Sepharadeem. However, Jews had accompanied and followed the Arab conquest of Spain in the 8th century, C.E., and *had originated* in the Near and Middle East. In Spain, they continued to speak Arabic and led a thoroughly Arabic life as they had done in the lands *from which they had come,* until the last centuries of Jewish Spanish life. Thus, Eastern Jews (who had not migrated to Spain), were "Sepharadeem" by language, customs and religious observance, even without a Spanish connection.

Now to examine our three categories of Sepharadeem.

1. Judeo-Spanish — Greek-Turkish Sepharadeem

The largest numbers of Jews who left Spain in 1492, and Portugal in 1497, migrated to the welcoming territories of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey, Greece, as well as North Africa, Syria, etc.) which was eager for modernization through the European technical skills of the Spanish Jews; and in smaller numbers to the ducal states of Italy, Sicily, and elsewhere in Europe, where Jews were to lead an uneasy, and sometimes precarious life. Jews, made welcome by the Turkish authorities settled in Turkish Istanbul and Izmir (Smyrna), and in Greek Crete, Rhodes, Janina, and in great numbers in Salonika and its environs; as well as in the Balkans — Bulgaria, Albania, Yugo-Slavia — all under Turkish domination. For their entire history, they led a mostly respected and unmolested existence (until the Nazi holocaust).

Sepharadeem in and around Istanbul, Izmir and Salonika constituted some of the largest concentration of Jews anywhere. They maintained not only their religious heritage, but also the

Spanish language and customs they brought with them — as well as developed European education. In the later epochs of Jewish life in Spain they had no longer spoken Arabic because of the expanding conquests by the Christian Spanish forces, a factor which spurred greater Jewish secular learning. In Ottoman lands where they were closely settled, they spoke *Ladino* over the centuries, the 15th century Spanish they had brought with them. Within it, expressions and some words from Hebrew, Arabic and Turkish had become intermingled. Few areas saw such a thriving Jewish life as in Salonika, Izmir and Istanbul. Salonika had a population of close to 70,000 Jews, with "countless" (thirty) synagogues, each from the Spanish/Portugese city or province from where they had come — including, the largest one, *comprised of German Jews,* refugees from Western and Central European Christian savagery; and others, later from Sicily and Italy. The city had Hebrew printing houses which brought out rabbinic books for much of the Middle East; many religious, and in time some secular schools, newspapers in *Ladino* — and later, some in Turkish. Theirs was a European culture, unparalled in any Ottoman-dominated land. The position of the Jews in the economic life of Salonika was of such importance that the city's commerce was said to have come to a standstill on the Sabbath. The immigrants adopted many Levantine dishes while retaining their Spanish — originally Middle East — cuisine.

Jews from these areas are referred to as Greek-Turkish,' *Spaniol.* Jews native to the region prior to the arrival of the Spaniards are referred to as *Romaniotes,* since Greece and Greeks are termed "Roumi" in the Levant. Tragically the Hitler holocaust reduced the number of Jews in Greece to 600.

Turkish-Greek Sepharadeem lived a self-ruled, unmolested, traditional life, like most other Jewish subjects of the Ottoman power. The revolution of the "Young Turks" army officers in 1908 brought about general military conscription, to include Jews, who previously had been exempt by payment of a small tax. This calamity, added to the world-wide financial and commercial depression which caused much misery, prompted many to seek a better life elsewhere. Many migrated, largely to

North and South American cities, where earlier immigrants had settled. The majority of those who could gain admission to the United States settled in New York. Others set out to cities where friends and relatives had migrated, to Seattle (a center for *Ladino* speaking emigrants particularly from Rhodes), California, cities in the Middle West and in the South.

2. *"Spanish-Portuguese" Sepharadeem*

Considerable numbers of refugees from Spain and Portugal had migrated to Holland and other European centers in 1492 and 1496-7. Later they were followed by *Marranos,* Jews who had outwardly become Catholic while secretly preserving their Judaism. When their true faith was discovered by the Inquisition they were imprisoned and burnt at the stake in *auto da fe's,* martyrs, for their belief. In time, when the Inquisitors became more militant, as was possible. Marranos began to escape to lands where they could openly reclaim their Jewish heritage. They too, made their way to Amsterdam, the important Jewish center with religious freedom, and in smaller numbers to other European capitals, following in the footsteps of those who had fled earlier. All are referred to as "Spanish-Portuguese." Many Marranos were wealthy and added to their wealth, becoming part of high financial and social circles, (with subsequent assimilation and intermarriage).

Other "Spanish-Portuguese" Sepharadeem migrated and settled in Brazil, Mexico and other countries dominated by Spain and Portugal but where the Inquisition had not arrived. With its subsequent arrival and with renewed persecution, the Sepharadeem were compelled to escape; some returning to Europe, while others settled in the Caribbean region. A very small number, 23 individuals, came to New York (New Amsterdam, then) in 1654. Pieter Stuyvesant, the anti-Semitic Dutch governor, sought to exclude them and wrote to Amsterdam's West India Company, the chartered "owner" of the Colony, asking for support for his decision of exclusion of Jews. He was not aware that Jews were influential partners in the chartered company, and was ordered to permit settlement of the 23 Jews from Recife, Brazil. (The colorful history of the

"Spanish-Portuguese" is the subject of Birmingham's *The Grandees.*)

Here they established *Shearith Israél* (Remainder of Israel) *Congregation* immediately upon landing. It is now located at 70th Street and Central Park West, in New York City. The scholarly and dynamic Rabbi Dr. Marc Angel and the venerable Rev Dr. Louis C. Gerstein are its spiritual co-leaders. The "Spanish and Portugese Synagogue," as it is popularly referred to, is considered the spiritual headquarters of all (non-Arabic-originated) Sepharadeem in the United States.

3. Sepharadi Jews of Arab Lands; Judeo-Arabs

Jews of the Near and Middle East, are a third group, native to their lands for thousands of years, likely from the period of the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel and the Judean state. Exiles from Spain added to the Jewish populations when they settled in near-by Morocco. Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, where there were existing important Jewish centers (North Africa is considered "Middle East"). Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Iraq (Mesopotamia), are other lands of the Near and Middle East where the Spanish settled, in varying numbers.

After the rise of Islam in the 7th Century, C.E., all Jews living in Arab dominated lands spoke Arabic — and their culture and cuisine was that of their Muslim neighbors; and *thus they possessed no transmigrated distinctive Jewish language such as Ladino or Yiddish.* It was religion alone which distinguished them from the other natives of their countries. They are sometimes referred to as *musta-ᶜarab-een* — "Arabized," although these Jews were natives long before the Arab conquests of the 7th century.

In sum, all Jews who are *not* Ashkenazeem (principally those from of Western, Central and Eastern Europe) are considered to be Sepharadeem. Some European Jews insist, however, that Jews of the East *are not* Sepharadeem. "They should be termed 'Jews of Eastern lands'"; although as was indicated, Jews living in Spain, "Sepharadeem", had *originated* in the Middle East and had returned there.

It may be noted that Syrian Jews, paricularly those of Aleppo, cling more tenaciously to traditional Orthodoxy than most Sepharadeem from other areas; and there is generally, less secularization and much less assimilation and intermarriage among them. More than others, Sepharadeem from Arabic speaking lands tend to cling together socially as well as religiously. There is no intermingling with the Spanish-Portuguese, nor much with Greek-Turkish Sepharadeem with whom they share a background of life in a Muslim world, albeit not an *Arab* one; some warmth exists between the Arabic-speaking Sepharadeem and those of Turkey/Greece. Additionally, both had lived close together in early Lower East Side days (and had shared the disdain of the Ashkenazeem); while each maintained a social distance from the other group.

It is well to remember that to speak of "Sepharadeem" is to refer to three different groups or societies, sharing common fundamental characteristics, but with some *differing* attributes.

Additionally, small pockets of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe follow some rituals according to R. Yosef Karo, rather than R. Moshé Isserles; and accordingly are identified as "*S'fardim*" in their order of prayers (*only*).

(At this writing I have not yet seen Rabbi Dr. Marc Angel's recent book, *Rythms of Jewish Living; A Sephardic Approach.* No doubt it cogently and authoritatively deals with some characteristics of Sepharadi Jews touched upon above.)

❦

The Search For My Great-Grandfather In India

My family [this writer's] immigrated to the United States from Aleppo in three contingents beginning in 1909-1910. The last one arrived in 1915; I was part of the rear-guard. The quest for my ancestor leads to several countries and distances of close to seven or eight thousand miles. Distances, travel, is not uncommon among Sepharadeem, as we see. However, the unexpected discovery of an unknown great-grandfather "born in India" (?) is not, in fact, an everyday event.

Sepharadeem of the Near East have been emissaries and colonizers throughout the ages. Jews from Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent saw perhaps their greatest success in the glory of Jewish life in Spain. Although Jews had lived on the Iberian Peninsula even earlier than the conquest by the Islamics in the 8th century, vast numbers of Jews accompanied and followed the victorious Arabs, to create, in *some periods,* a truly Golden Age, *in others, to undergo persecution and massacres.* Near East Jews spread eastward as well — as far as China. There in the crowded city of Kaifeng they created a viable Jewish community, living harmoniously side-by-side with the other Chinese for many centuries — culminating now in total assimilation. (Jews from late-medieval centers in Western and Central Europe also migrated and colonized the vast Slavic and Baltic lands, to reach in time populations of many millions.)

The Jews of Syria, they too have scattered their colonizers in the past two hundred years, and earlier. Aleppo and Damascus were important centers from where their Jews had re-settled and flourished; in modern Egypt, in industrial Manchester, England, and soon after in the Americas, North and South, always with a quite extraordinary continuity of Syrian customs and tradition — and with some commercial

distinction. It was Ḥakham David Yeḥizqél Ráḥabi from Aleppo, whose travel some three hundred years ago brought him to the dark-skinned *Bené Yisráel* native Jews of India, on its western shores. They claimed to have lived there from the days of the Destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. The *Bené Yisráel* knew nothing of the Talmud, nor of Rabbinnical teachings and common Jewish customs and observances. It was Ḥakham David from *Ḥálab/Aleppo,* who guided them, instructed them and carried them forward to the developed Jewish religious world. (Most have now migrated to Israel).

It must be recalled that Jewish commerce with India reaches back many centuries, long before Maimonides' brother travelled there in the 12th century in his trading in precious stones and jewelry. Rabbi Ráḥabi had gone there as a resident merchant, agent of the Netherland East India Company. There, he achieved great wealth; along with other Near East Jews and some Ashkenazeem as well — from England. Somewhat later, others from Aleppo, Basra and Baghdád settled in parts of India to trade,with success and distinction. It was through inadvertence, by chance, that I was galvanized to delve into the history of Jews of the Near East in Indi, — and to search for my great-grandfather whose name *I had never before heard mentioned* . . . Therewith hangs my story.

A few years ago I received a communication from London from Mrs. Lydia Collins, previously unknown, telling me that she had read a borrowed copy of *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* and wished to own a copy of the book on Syrian Jewry. A correspondence began, in which I related incidentally that my father, in 1907 in Aleppo — our family's place of residence for countless generations — had presented a Petition to the British Consul, as I heard in New York as a boy. In it he made a claim for restoration to him of British nationality. He based this on his own father's having held such "papers" at one time. In the Ottoman Empire of which Syria was a part, foreign nationality and the extra-territorial rights which came with it apparently had considerable commercial advantage. To my surprise and delight, Lydia Collins forwarded me a copy of my father's Petition of 1907 and an *earlier* Petition of 1877,

executed by *his* father. In it my grandfather — whose British nationality had somehow been terminated — requested its re-instatement, based on his claim that *his* father, my great-grandfather "Ezra", had been born in India and thus the family was entitled to British nationality. (Great-grandfather Ezra had 'returned' to his family's mother-city Aleppo, in 1820; he died in 1859.) With this information I was galvanized and began the search for my newly - discovered great-grandfather's birthplace and early years in India. Where to begin?

First I turned to a book authored by now-cherished friends living in London, England, migrants from Calcutta. They had been intrigued by the material in my *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush* because of a sentimental attachment to Aleppo for its role in helping to establish Calcutta's Jewish community. They sought me out when visiting New York recently, and Flower Jacob Elias and her daughter Judith Elias Cooper had presented me with a copy of their history, *The Jews of Calcutta.* In this fascinating book, I recalled now, Calcutta's community was begun around 1795 by an Aleppoan merchant, Shalóm Cohén — Shalóm ibn Aharon ibn ᶜObadia Ha-Cohén. The Elias book mentioned that Shalóm had kept a Diary in which names of several Aleppo families occur, who had come to Calcutta. I was on fire with curiosity — did it contain mention of my great-grandfather? I wrote to Flower Elias immediately inquiring about the Diary.

Shalóm Cohén's Diary had never been published, the property of the recently deceased Ḥakham Solomon Sassoon [son of David, the late revered world renowned scholar and philanthropist]. The Sassoons had accumulated a fabled library, a treasury of rare Judaica. Mrs. Elias apparently had been presented with a copy of the Diary; and to my deep gratitude — and complete surprise, she promptly sent me a reproduction. It was written in Arabic in the *nus'alam* script similar to *Rashi* script, as seen in Cario Geniza material, and which Jews in Syria use to this day. The Diary begins with Shalóm's departure from *Ḥálab* in 1789. It discloses his travels and final settlement in Calcutta, in the company of Yaᶜacob Sitéhon ('Setton'/Sutton) a qualified *shoḥet* [slaughterer of animals according to ritual]. Later he records the arrival of another

Sitéhon — the full, authentic family name, (no mention of "Ezra" in *his* name), with whom he entered into limited partnership. Other Aleppo family names are indeed mentioned, Tebeleh, Shᶜaib, Laniado, and Duek. No mention, however, of Ezra, my great-grandfather. The aged Ḥakham Ezekiel Musliaḥ, the Keeper of Calcutta's Jewish historical records, now lives in Philadelphia, since most Jews left Calcutta in 1947 when Great Britain yielded India. Alas, no circumcision or other records mention my great-grandfather. Perhaps he had been born elsewhere in India? I continue my search.

The fascinating story of Shalóm Cohén and the Sepharadi settlement in Calcutta we owe to Moshé ibn Shimᶜon Duek's book *Kaneh Middah,* (mentioned in David Sassoon's *History of the Jews of Baghdád).* In it Duek related: Shalóm Cohén had married Sathie Duek who stayed behind except for short trips to visit her husband in Baghdád and Basra when he first left Aleppo. When he sent for her to come to Calcutta where he had settled, she categorically refused; "If they were to give me the wealth of all India I will not live in Calcutta." Under such a condition rabbinic law permitted him to take a second wife, in Calcutta. *Najima Simḥa* gave him several children and was again pregnant when Sathie had a change of heart and went to join Shalóm in Calcutta. Previously unable to conceive, upon her arrival Sathie promptly 'became with child.' Sathie and the younger wife lived together in harmony and deep affection.

In time, Shalóm's daughter Lunah [*from which wife?*] approached the age of thirteen. It was time to marry her off — but to whom, in Calcutta? Accordingly, he wrote to his brother-in-law in Aleppo, Shimᶜon Moshé Duek, (Sathie's brother) asking him to send him "one of his sons" as a husband for his daughter. The son, Moshé ibn Shimᶜon later wrote, "When the letter reached my father he rejoiced greatly because of their great friendship from the days of their youth when they had grown up together in the same *ḥohsh* [a courtyard residence sometimes accommodating several families], with great affection. When he read the letter my father replied to Shalóm, "My friend, my brother, my dear son Moshé, the Light of my Eyes, the Crown of my Head, the choicest of

young men — is yours. I trust in your affection, that you will keep your eye on him; from this day he is *your son.*" Moshé ibn Shimᶜon set out for Calcutta, aged twenty-one, to arrive on the eve of the *Sukkot* Festival, 1806, at the home of Shalóm Cohén. Moshé ibn Shimᶜon wrote later, "We met, and I did obeisance before him and kissed his hand. He also kissed and embraced me as a father his son, and likewise did all the relatives in the household. We sat down to talk *ᶜin-yaná deh yomá* [Aramaic, matters of the day] all half of the night that was left. In the morning we rose early to go to the *bet ha-kenneset* [the synagogue], of my father-in-law to-be, *ᶜAh-teret rosh-ee* [Crown of my Head], which was in his own home. We prayed, according to custom, and I gave Praise and Thanksgiving for Life and Peace and for having arrived safely at my destination. Blessed is He who does good and deals kindly, who has rendered all kindness unto me." [A customary prayer of thanksgiving for "safe arrival," usually said at a Sefer Torah reading in the synagogue].

Less than three months later Moshé ibn Shimᶜon Duek wed Lunah" . . . My Dove, my perfect one — Miss Lunah — 'of women in the tents' may she be blessed; daughter of *ᶜam-mi* [paternal uncle — the customary Arabic term for father-in-law] Crown of my Head. I lived with her and she found favor in my eyes [!], she, also, loved me as her soul . . . After the wedding my father-in-law gave into my hands and possession all his affairs, and all his secretaries and servants were under my control, for he saw that I was suited for this. I put great effort in dealing with his vast affairs, and he was pleased with my efforts. . . ."

Not only in commerce was Moshé Shimᶜon Duek able; he became a *mohél* [circumcisor], writer of Ketubott [marriage pacts], and served as principal Ḥakham and beloved Father of the Community, never accepting a *rupee* for his services, until the end of his years at age seventy-seven. He was succeeded later by his grandson Eliahu (ibn) Moshé Duek who led the community as their rabbi, but without ordination.

Rabbi Abraham Shrem, the distinguished Dean of the *Porát Yoséf* Yeshiva in Jerusalem, related to me that a very large sum of money had been put down as an Endowment with which to later construct the yeshiva building. He pointed out that the doner, "Mr. Shalóm" had been *from India.* Was he a descendant of the husband of Sathie Duek and father of our "Dove, Miss Lunah"?

A colorful phase of Syrian Jewish colonization.

But meanwhile . . . I'm still in search of the birth and early years in India, of great-grandfather Ezra. Perhaps in Surat . . .? In Bombay. . . .?

❦

BOOK IV

AN APPENDIX

AN EXCURSION INTO JUDEO-ARABIC

An Excursion Into Judeo-Arabic

Learning a new language opens the doors to new experiences in a different culture. Arabic has a special place in the background of the Sepharadi Jews from the Near East. Many, perhaps most of these Jews now in New York do not speak their 'native' tongue, which was the language of fathers and grandfathers — the only language the elders spoke earlier. Their children, the generations of American-born offspring were most eager to Americanize, to assimilate to the culture of the English-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe, for the greater part. They were eager to shed the handicaps their parents had undergone. 'Why can't we be like *them*?", the speakers of Yiddish and English. The young Syrians sought to escape the condescension directed at "Greenhorns" and "Arabs," who could not speak English properly. In addition they formed part of a small community which could not even pronounce Hebrew prayers 'intelligibly' because of their strange Sepharadi style. Paradoxically, at the same time that the new generation sought to 'Americanize,' they took psychological shelter from the critical Ashkenazeem, and used among themselves a 'secret' language; the few phrases they knew in Arabic, the language of the parents' homes. Today, the offspring of Syria immigrants moving up the commercial ladder with generous rewards, now cherish the home and community's traditional culture with its rich oriental flavor (while relishing non-Syrian fields of entertainment). Unconsciously perhaps — they appear to prize the limited, very limited, vocabulary that remains from early years.

A somber reason is suggested by some in Aleppo-in-Flatbush for a need to revive community acquaintance with Arabic. They view two factors as crucial to the continuation of the healthy and distinctive group-life. The first is social closeness, which serves to bind the Sepharadeem together, creating a feeling of community and encouraging strong family bonds. The group has been referred to as a large extended-family, having warm relationships with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives, as well as friends. They regard as important still another factor which serves to bind together members of the community — the distinctive religious customs and traditions of the Near East from where they stem. These include the distinctive pronunciation of Hebrew as it has been used for thousands of years in its birthplace in the Near East — an integral element of prayers and other religious observances. The Ashkenazi pronunciation

of Hebrew, for historic reasons, is different and is unintelligible to Sepharadeem, and vice-versa. The culture of the Near East, again differing from that of Ashkenazeem, contributes to the separatism, and induces a preservation of ancient Near East customs and traditions.

The almost total decline in the use of Yiddish with its cultural and historic bond is thought to have contributed to the alarming increase of intermarriage among American Ashkenazeem — as well as elsewhere. The rate of intermarriage with gentiles ranges up to 65% in some cities. With the national average placed at a little over 40%; understandably New York's rate is relatively low.

What Hitler could not achieve is being done for him by broadminded Jewish men and women.

With the possibility of complete abandonment of the Arabic culture, Aleppo-in-Flatbush will remain, at best, "another" Jewish community, and thus, subject to the same secular erosion that has struck Ashkenazeem. With this dreadful possibility facing the community, the nurturing of the Arabic language and culture in Flatbush, appears to some as an important measure for the survival of the ancient traditional both social and religious life.

Since there are no existing convenient means of improving, or acquiring the knowledge of the Arabic language — the tongue and culture which is part of the "S-Y" heritage, this writer has accepted the challenge, the task, and exhilaration — to throw together a simple, basic assortment of Arabic words and terms — *with no grammar.* This Arabic is the so-called "Judeo-Arabic" used by the Jews of Aleppo and Damascus, at 'street-level.' What we will read does not differ much from the language spoken by most Islamics as well as Jews, who had not benefitted from much schooling. (At the same time Jews who had attended the Alliance for extended periods, and others, who had spent their late teens in larger Hebrew institutions, mastered good Arabic. Why not brush up the language level a bit, so that, limited as is the vocabularly, "why not [this author thought], make it a little more correct, so that it may be used everywhere in which Arabic is spoken?" The Arabic of Aleppo-in-Flatbush is that brought with them by early immigrants, who for the greatest part had had little or no schooling in the language. Those who were privileged whose parents could afford lessons, as was stated, mastered correct and thorough language lessons. My Arabic was acquired long ago in my parental

home in Brooklyn — at the modest level of a some formal Arabic instructions acquired by my father. Only now, with the arrival of numerous escapees from Syria was I confronted with many unknown words, in casual conversations with them. Our text, then, will be confined to words which are most often used in common speech. You may be dismayed at the many words which (at first) appear to be totally unknown. You will be pleased, however, to recognize some familiar language. More pleasurable prospects: if you know Hebrew fairly well you will soon discover how much Arabic and Hebrew (and Aramaic or Targum) have in common. They all have a common, Semitic base. Take the human body as an example: If you know the Hebrew for "foot, hand, head, eye, ear, nose, finger, etc.," you 'speak' Arabic — they are so much alike. (Remember, however, that every language has a distinctive, broadly different vocabularly). You will surely enjoy your effort to learn a little Arabic in this text. Remember, too that *every* new language requires a measure of determined repetition — there is no way around that. But — "you can do it." There is no harm in getting a little help, in the beginning).

High expectations? It is only fair to reiterate that I am unschooled and untaught in Arabic; that I have spent nine-tenth of my life in Brooklyn. Thanks to the fact that my father and mother could communicate only in Arabic, and because of my natural curiosity and sensitivity to languages and cultures, I have the boldness to invite you to share my knowledge of an expressive language.

In addition I plead with knowledgeable scholars of Arabic for their forgiveness for my audacity — and errors.

Of course there are limitations in seriously seeking to learn a language in this haphazard method. If you wish to know more of Arabic — grammar, etc. you may wish to study a language book. The 'best' one I encountered is "*Eastern Arabic; An introduction to the spoken Arabic of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon*" by Rice and Sa'id. (Syrian Arabic is the most correct, apart from the antique, Chaucer-like *Naḥa-wii* — which no one *speaks* now). The textbook is a paper-back and not expensive. It is found in every shop specializing in Arabic music and books. In Brooklyn, Mr. Raschid and his fine sons can supply the book, at 191 Atlantic Avenue.

Simply stated there are two separate Arabic languages. One is the classical Naha-wii, the other is the common conversational form. Many of our parents, and Muslims with almost no education (the majority), used the lowest level of the language — but *not* a *vulgar* level. Dr. Alex Russell writing of Aleppo in 1756 Aleppo noted that

Muslims, Christians and Jews each spoke Arabic with slight differences. He noted that the Jewish Arabic was, in his opinion, the 'roughest', when spoken by the very poor [and uneducated].

The 150 Arabic proverbs which you will now meet, comprise a truly tiny sampling. Anis Freyha a Lebanese sociologist, with a knowledge of approximately 4,000, proverbs, estimates that there may be a like number of Arabic proverbs not recorded by him. Proverbs contain a wealth of folk-lore, wisdom, cynicism, guile, vicious advice, as well as a large amount of high-minded practical counsel. As I demonstrate, there are proverbs which give contradictory advice, as well as a variety of social sentiments, standards.

Proverbs are characteristically concise, terse, usually rhymed, and are widely known in all walks of life, by young and old, by women and men. One has only to begin to quote a proverb, when those in the gathering will quickly complete it — and perhaps quote a proverb with contradictory advice. Quoting one proverb will unleash a flood of others from standers-by. Curiously,very similar proverbs are found in lands very distant from one another and with totally different cultures. Similar folk-lore, it seems, is found everywhere. In Arabic lands it can be bold and bawdy as you can read in unexpurgated editions of the "Arabian Nights" — but *not* in these, our well-mannered examples.

A few brief observations on the words, the vocabularly to follow — which may appear to be "impossible to pronounce." This writer, with little respect for old-established rules of transliteration, has the audacity to use his own original version of pronunciation and, how Arabic expressions should be written in English. (What 'trouble' I had with great authorities, [European Arabist scholars] because of my independence!) Arabic words have been arbitrarily — but logically — broken up to make the pronunciation of the word almost absolutely error-proof.

Additionally, you will meet with terms like "(q)il-lo" — "tell him" and also "(q')ah-reeb" — "close, near." The letter "(q)" is a correct classical part of these words — but is almost never sounded except in the most formal Naha-wii speech, and in Iraq. When you encounter these "(q)'s", *you can disregard them* (or substitute a little "uh" for them. They are included to allow you a, free-of-charge, knowledge of the correct version of the word — although not, usually *not* sounded. Clear, dear Reader? *In-sha-allah* (one word!) an expression meaning "hope-to-God."

Despite the many broken up words, you must learn to pronounce

them *quickly*, and thereby find that they do sound like Arabic words with which you may have some acquaintance. Don't expect to sound like a master — at the very beginning. With a little practice, friendly help and — *perseverence* you will soon be surprised (*and very pleased*) with your progress.

Two letters in the Arabic (and Hebrew) alphabet demand special attention — the *ᶜayeen* and the *ḥet*, deep-throat sounds different from one another. To be correctly sounded it is helpful to have grown up in an Oriental home, or to have studied in a Sephardic school, but *from non-Ashkenazi* teachers. Otherwise you must suffer a little, until you master the sounds. Without these attributes you will continue to sound the *ᶜayeen* as though it is an "aleph" and the ḥet as though it is a "heh." These, correctly sounded letters, are the touch-stones of "genuine" correct pronunciation, in both Arabic and Hebrew.

Know too, dear Reader, that in Israel it considered very *chic*, very sophisticated,for the younger element to learn and speak Arabic. In this material which you will be studying *you will not* acquire the racy expressions that Israelis hurry to learn first.

Onward to the Arabic; *t'fahd-a-loo*, "please 'favor' us."

Common Expressions

I; you (f. singl.); you (m. sing.); you (plural); she;	ana; intee; inta / inteh intoo; hoow-eh; hee-ya;
we; he;	nuḥn-ah;
they	hom-men / hin-nen
father, mother	abb, ohm / imm
grandfather, grandmother ("lady")	jidd; sitt
uncles and aunts:	
father's brother, father's sister	ᶜam; ᶜam-meh
mother's brother, mother's sister	khaal; khaal-eh
son; daughter (also, "girl")	ibn; bint
my son's son; my daughter's girl	ibn ibni; bint binti
children, a man, a woman	aw-laad; rajol / rijjal; mur-ah
relatives; friends	ahhl / (q)'ar-ahy-been; ahs-ḥahb
"hello"; [greeting as to a 'relative']	ahhl-aan; [rooḥ] maᶜh il
["good-bye", go] with peace	salaam-eh
"how do you feel?"	"kaif (m.) ḥaa-lak? (f.) haa-lehk?"
"I am happy; we praise God"	"mub-soot; m'nish-kor il Ruhb" [Allah]
"a (good) morning of kindliness"	"sabaaḥ il khehr"
ans: "a hundred mornings greet you"	meet sabaaḥ yi-sub-bi-ḥaak
please [through your favor]	min fuhdl-ahk
help yourself, participate, favor us / me	t'fuhd-ahl
an (good) evening of bounty	massa il khehr
ans: an evening of bounty and kindliness	massa il khehr, wa kara-meh
(Good night) may you (pl.) awaken to bounty / peace	tis ba-ḥoo ᶜala khehr
ans: and you among them	wa intoo min-na-hom
thank you, "praises"; I am obliged (to you)	shuk-rahn; ana mam-noon-ahk

Some Common and Idiomatic Expressions

they praised you	hom-men (hin-nen) shah-kah-rook
("Praise is to God")	("il shukr i'la All'ah"
she embarrassed us	hee-(ya) khadj-a-lat-na
(they humiliated him), "threw down his blood"	kabboo-loh dam-mo
flash of an eye	lam-ḥit il ᶜehyn
Yes, (courteous usage); (I) came to visit	na-ᶜam; (ai-wa, eh) jeet a-zoor.
please, (m. & f. pl.) 'favor' (come), to honor us	t'fahd-ah-loo, sha-ri-foona
"the honor is (ours) to us"	il sharaf l'in-na/la-il-na
don't become (f. sing.) boring ("heavy spirited")	la t'seer-i sa-(q)'eel-eh, (t'eel-eh)
(they) are (spirited) 'light-blooded'	(hom-men) damm-ohn kha-feef
(they) understand quickly	b'yif-ham-oo (q)'ah-wahm
light (spirited), like a bird	kha-feef, mitl ᶜahs-foor
(I am) hungry	(ana) joo-ᶜan
(I am) not hungry	(ana) ma joo-ᶜaan/ma-ni jooᶜaan
(I am) thirsty	(ana) ᶜaht-shahn
(I am) tired	(ana) taᶜh-baan
(I am) not tired	(ana) ma-ni taᶜh-baan
something important	shé'h duh-roor-i
impossible; maybe	musta-ḥeel; yom-kehn
necessary, not necessary	laa-zehm, ma laa-zehm
There is/are, within, in;in the. . .	fee, bi; bee-il,/b'il. . .
there isn't/aren't	ma-fee
there/he/it/wasn't	ma kaan
there is something (present). . .	fee shé'h. . .

here; not here	ho-w-n; ma-w ho-w-n
there is not 'something' [nothing]	ma fee shé'h
something small; large	shéh zi-gheer; ki-beer
early (in the morning); tomorrow	buk-keer; buk-ra
(I) am late;	(ana) moo-ᶜaw-a(q)'h
I am tardy	(ana) moo-akh-ahr
tardiness, lateness	ᶜoo-(q)'a, ookh-ra
in a hurry/quickly	b'il ᶜadj-leh/ah-wahm
slowly, deliberately	ᶜala mahh-il
now	ha-la'/hal-ehyt [hal-an, classic, formal]
after/afterward; immediately	baᶜid/baᶜ-dehn; ḥa-lan
before; before he. . .	(q)'ablan; (q)'abl ma hoo(weh). . .
in the future	b'il mus-ta(q)'behl
wait a minute	is-tan-na da(q)'a / da(q)'ee-(q)'a
wait a second; flash of the eye	is-tan-na laḥ-da; lam-ḥit il ᶜehyn
this is a cheap. . .(m.)	haa-da ri-khees. . .
this (f.) is not expensive	haa-di ma-w ghaa-li-ya
the house is near	il behyt (q)'ah-reeb
the place is far	il muht-raḥ bee-ᶜeed
cold milk (m.); hot coffee (f.)	ḥa-leeb baa-rehd; (q)'ahh-weh sukh-neh
warm day/cool	ni-hahr daa-fi; rit-ehb
cold/winter; summer/warmth	ba-rd/shi-tteh; sehy-f/da-fa
the cup is full, the plate is empty	il kaas ma-laan, il saḥ-in fah-di
the work, is hard; easy	il shughl, sah-ᶜib; haay-ehn

the chair, (m.) is light/heavy	il kur-see, kha-feef/tee-(q)'eel
the door (m.) is open/closed	il baab maf-tooḥ/m'sak-kar
the box (f.) is open;closed	il ᶜuhl-beh maf-tooḥ-a; m'sak-kar-a
she is right/'justice' is with her"	maᶜ(h)-a ḥa(q)'/ il ḥa(q)' maᶜ(h)a
he is wrong, (mistaken)	hoo-eh ghal-tahn
the book (m.) is old,	il kit-ab ᶜa-ti(q)'h
the pen (m.) is new	il (q)'a-lam j'deed
characteristics [natural qualities]	at-bah-yeᶜh
person/self; habit/customs	shukhs/naffs; ᶜaa-deh, ᶜaa-wa-yehd
(a) blessing, (he) to bless; (a) curse, (he) curses	barak-eh, yi-baa-rek; daᶜweh, bid-ᶜee
sadness; he is saddened (offended) by him	za-ᶜal; b'yiz-ᶜaal min-no
pleased by/gladdened/("joyed") in. . .	yit-bisset min/yi-fraaḥ fi. . .
contentment, enjoyment; sorrow	ha-na; laaz'zi-yeh; ah-hrr
work; fatigue; rest; confidence	shoghl; ta-ᶜaab; ree-a-ḥa; ama-neh
turn to the right; look to the left	dohw-ehr ᶜal yameen; tuhl-eᶜh ᶜal shi-maal
go (return) backward; walk forward	ir-jaᶜh 'la wa-ra; im-shee 'la (q)'id-dam
(elders) notables; learning, scholar	ah-kah-behr; ᶜillim; ᶜaa-lehm
innocent; guilt; "he is guilty"	barri; zamb; "hoo-weh maz-noob"
humble; pride ("of self") vain. (m. sing); "prides himself"	lah-ti; kibree-yeht nafs. "sha-yef fi ha-lo"
intelligent; simple, (not too intelligent)	fa-heem; bah-seet

agree, consent; "God 'consent' on you"	ruhd-a, "Allah yuhr-da "ᶜa-lek"
success; "she is successful"	najaaḥ, "hee-ya naaj-ḥa"
failure, ("fall"); bankruptcy	wa-(q)'ᶜh; taaf-lees,
the establishment is a 'failure'	il mu-ḥal mu-afles
but, there is, hope	fa(-q)'at, fi, ᶜash-am
injustice; benevolence;	zulm; kher-i-yeh
he is a cruel man	hoo-weh rij-jal as-si
easy; difficult	haa-y-ehn; sah-ᶜib
shut; open	m'saa-kar; maf-tooḥ
wrong; correct	ghah-laht; muz-bout
old; new	(q)'a-deem; j'deed
beautiful; ugly	k'wayes; bish-eᶜh;
good; bad, (evil)	m'leeḥ; boohm, (ᶜah-tel)
better; worse	aḥ-san; ab-wam
with; without	maa-ᶜh; ba-la / min-doon
little; much	(q)'a-leel; k'teer
from; to; until	min; il-a; ḥit-ta
during, ('stretch')	bi mid-deht
no one; everyone	(wa)-la wa-ḥadd; kuhl-wa-ḥadd, (a-ḥad)
strong, thin	(q)'aw-ee; d'ᶜeef
here; there	ho-w-n; ho-w-n-eek

Nature and Some Elements

nature	tah-bi-ᶜa
world	doon-ya / ᶜalam
sky	sam-a
sun	shams
moon	(q)'ah-mahr
stars	ni-joom
star	nij-meh
oceans	ib-ḥḥor
ocean	baḥḥr
lake	baḥ-rah
mountain	ja-bal
forest	wah-ᶜhir
field	fas-ḥa
valley	wad-di
hill	tel / ja-ba-leh
tree-trees	saj-ra; as-jaar
wind, air	ha-wa
cloud, rain	ghehm; mut-ahr
thunder, lightning	ra-ᶜid burr-i'h(uh)
water; storm	muh'y; zohb-ᶜa
stream, waves	saa'yeh; mo-(w)-j
well; spring	man-baaᶜh; ᶜaiyn
warm weather	tah-(q)'s daa-fi
day	nihaar, yo-w-m
week; month	joomᶜa; shaa-hr
hour; minute	saa-ᶜa; laḥḥ-da
rocks	sakh-irr
stones	ḥah-jahr
coal	fa-ḥim
wood, timber	duff, kha-shaab ḥah-tahb
soil; mud	trah-b; tuhy-n
steam; smoke	ha-baal, dookh-aan
fire	nah-r
a fire	ḥa-ri-(q)'a
"light the fire"	"ish-ᶜol il nah-r"
iron, steel	ḥa-deed; boo-lad
chain	jan-zeer
rope	ḥabl-(eh)
ladder	sul-am
wall	ḥeh-yt
roof	stoo-ḥ
window	shub-aak
stairs	dar-aj
building	ᶜah-mahr-(ah)
dwelling	beh-y-t, sook-na
rooms	(q)'oo-wah-d
room	(q)'oh-w-da

Old Jewish Forms of Some Arabic Expressions

b'yi-ḥan-ehf [m., sing.]	curries favor
b'yi-tun-esh	pretends to be unhearing
b'yi-magh-yehb	leaves, secretly
b'yi-dab-behr	manages to
b'it kum-mehr [f.,s.]	cleans home thoroughly
in-ji-ḥi [m.,s.]	sit!
drohb il kalb	(go!) beat the dog
miz il kheht	(go, scram!) pull the string
it-kho-za'h	(sit!) become impaled
sho-ehl [t'eel]	boring 'heavy'
m'har-gal	very poorly dressed
ᶜaddoo-ween!	[woe] enemies
ᶜiz-rah-yeen	"the devil!"
kani maani	helter skelter
zohehr u mo-hehr	'ugly', to look at
kish bur-ra [scram!]	'ventilate' outside
moht-ti!	may it be my death! (mothers' express
baᶜh-di	[live] after me!
ti'bir-ni	may you bury me
amoot f'dehk	may I die instead of you
il moht yi'ish-o	may death 'reap' him
w'lee ᶜala am-ti	woe to me [my face]
ᶜama ḥeh-si	blindness...[disaster?]
shiḥ-wahr	the ultimate in dirtiness
il cha-ra	[what are] the means
ḥa-za-na	the poor ones!
ḥa-zah-tah	the poor ones!
m'sah-khah-méh	the (willingly) defiled female!
fa-lo ᶜan-do	[damned] may he keep his fate
fi ᶜehn il ᶜadoo	in the eyes of the enemy ["fives," etc.]



Days and Numerals

one, two, three	waa-ḥed, t'nehn, talat-teh
four, five, six	ar-ba-ᶜa, kham-sa, sit-teh
seven, eight, nine, ten	sab-ḥah, t'man-yah, tis-ḥa, ash-rah
a quarter, a half	rib-biᶜh, nohs/nis
three-quarters; a third	talat-ar-baᶜh, til-t
(the) morning, 'noon', night	il sah-baḥ/il sub-iḥ; il duhhr, il lehyl
the day; the month; the year	il yohm/il ni-haahr; il shahhr; il sa-na
on (the day of) Friday ... the Muslims, congregate in the Mosque ("meeting place")	bi ni-hhahr il jomm-ḥa, il Islaam b'yin-joom-oo, b'il jaam-eᶜh
(The day of Sunday [one]	yohm/ni-haahr il aḥ-ad
the day of Monday [two]	yohm/ni-haahr il ti-neh-yn
the day of Tuesday [three]	yohm/ni-haahr il ta laa-ta
the day of Wednesday [four]	yohm/ni-haahr il aarbaᶜa
the day of Thursday [five]	yohm/ni-haahr il kham-ees/khaa-mess
the day of Friday [gathering]	yohm/ni-haahr il jom-ᶜah
the day of Saturday [Sabt-"rest"]	yohm/ni-haahr il Sa-bt
(interchangeable) daytime, or, day	ni-hahr, aw, yohm
A diamond? examine it (f. sing.) in the daytime	al-maaz? if-ḥass-(h)a b'il (ni-haar)/n'haar,
by the light of day	ᶜala doww il n'hahr
once, twice, three times	mur-ra, mur-i-tehn, talat murr-aht
first, second, third	aw-al, taa-ni, taa-leht
fourth, fifth, sixth	rah-beᶜh, khamehs, sa-teht
seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth	saab-eᶜh, taam-ehn, taas-eᶜh, ᶜahsh-ehr
ten	ᶜashra-a
eleven (one + ten)	ḥid-aᶜshar
twelve (two + ten)	t'n-aᶜshar

thirteen (three + ten)	t'lat-aᶜshar
fourteen (four + ten)	arba-t-aᶜshar
fifteen (five + ten)	khams-t-aᶜshar
sixteen (six + ten)	sit-aᶜshar
seventeen (seven + ten)	sab a-t-aᶜshar
eighteen (eight + ten)	t'min-t'aᶜshar
nineteen (nine + ten)	tis a-t-aᶜshar
twenty	ᶜi-sh-reen
twenty-one ("one and twenty"), etc.	wa-ḥed wa ᶜish-reen
thirty, forty	talaat-een; arba ᶜeen
fifty, sixty	khams-een; sitt'-een
seventy, eighty	sab-ᶜeen; t'many-een
ninety, hundred	tisᶜh-een; mi-ya
hundred and one	mi-ya w' wa-ḥed
two hundred, one thousand	miy-tehn; alf
two thousand, three thousand	alf-ehyn; talat-a-laaf

Some Greetings

I; you; you (for sing.)	a-na; inta; inti
he; she,	hoo/hoo-wa; hee-ya
we; you (m. pl.); (f. pl.)	niḥ-na/nuḥ-na; intoo
they (m. & f.)	hom-ehn/hin-ehn
hello/greetings, as to a relative	ahh-lan; (wa sahh-lsn)
'friendly' greetings; how's your 'state'	mar-ḥa-ba, kehyf ḥa-ak?
good morning ("a down of peace, etc.")	sabaḥ il khehr
ans, a hundred dawns 'dawn on you'	meet sabaḥ sub-ah-ḥahk
good evening, ("an evening of peace, etc.")	masa il khehr

Eating and Feasting

The first meal of the day, is breakfast	ah-waal akl-eh bil n'haar (hoo) il f'taahr (f'toor)
it is said, that breakfast is the most necessary meal of the day	min-(q)'aal, inn,il f'tahr akl-eh il aktar dur-ri - roo-yeh bil n'haar
at breakfast, we eat: eggs, cheese, yoghurt and the like	ᶜan il f'tahr, m'naa'kohl: behyd, jib-n(eh) lab-an wa kazza-lehk
we drink: milk, coffee, or tea	m'nish-rahb ḥaleeb, (q)'ahh-wa aw ch-ah-y
noon-time, we eat "whatever"	bil doohhr, m'naa'kohl "mahh-makkaan"
in the evening, we dine, most times, together, with our family	ᶜand il mass-a, m'nit-ᶜaash-a, aktareet-il aw(q)'aat, sawa, maᶜh il ᶜaay-leh
Especially, on Friday nights, "the sabbath eve," and on Saturday, we eat dishes (cooked food) that is very tasty.	kh'soo-sahn, n'haar-il-johmᶜa bil lehyl, lehyl't il Sabt, wa bi-nihaar-il-Sabt m'naa'kohl tah-beekh tai-yehb kiteer
first, we sanctify (say the sanctifications) over the wine, and the bread	awaal-an, min (q)'add-es ᶜal nibbeeb wa il khobz
after, we eat some appetizers - "maa-za"	baᶜd-ehn, m'naa'kohl m(q)'ab-el, maa-za
the "maa-za", may, include in it, all sorts of things ("varieties and colors")	il maa-za, yee-jooz, yakkoon fi-ha, ashkaal (wa) alwaan
with the "maa-za" is drunk a little alcohol, whisky, or, sometimes, a little arak	maᶜh il maa-za bi-yin-shirr-ehb shwaye-t khommrah — whisky, aw, aw(q)'aat, shwaya-t ᶜaar-aa(q)

After, the dinner comes:	ba^{c}d-ehn, bi-yi-ji il ^{c}ash-a:
Rice, vegetables with meat; or snap beans, mushrooms, fava-beans, peas, okra, artichokes truffles, and so on	rohz (rizz), khod-ra ma^{c}ha lahm(eh); aw faa-w-lah, alfoo-raahb (mushrooms!) fool, beez-eh, bam(y)eh shohki, camaa-ya, wa-kazaal-ehk
Also, chicken, from the oven with a vegetable on the side	kamaan, faar-kha (jaj-eh), min il furr-n, maa^{c}h khodd-ra ^{c}al ta-raf
meat balls, in all sizes and shapes	kubbeh (kabaab) bi kuhl ee-yaas, wa kas-sm
there are, sour balls and meat-balls of the 'Sultan' and gravy'd balls,	fi, kubbeh ḥaam'da, wa kubbeh't il sultaahn, wa kubbeh mu^{c}aa(q)'ah-deh
"stuffed" (stuffed vegetables) usually contain rice and chopped meat and spices	miḥ-shee (khid-ra miḥ-shee-yeh) ^{c}aadat-an, fi-(ha) rohz, laḥma m'af-room-eh, wa too-ahb-e
with the dinner, (there is), always, a nice salad	maa^{c}h il ^{c}ash-a, fi, mid-waam, salata k'weh-yisseh
desert ("clearing the mouth"), is not as important (great), like the cooked food	shaht-fit il tohm (fohm) ma-w mu-himm-eh, mit-il il taah-beekh

At The Table; Food, etc.

almond	lo(w)z	jam	mu-rubb-ah
appetizer	ma-za	juice	ᶜah-sir
apples	touf-aḥ		
apricot	mish-mosh	knife	sa-keen
banana	mohz	milk	ḥa-leeb
beans, fava	fool	napkin	foo-ta
bread	khibiz	noodles	shᶜeh-ri-
butter	zib-deh	"	yeh; rish-ta
canteloup	but-teekh	oil	zehyt
carrots	juz-ar	olive	zehy-toon
celery	krafs	okra	bam-ya
cheese	jib-n(eh)	onion	bus-ahl
chick peas	ḥum-mos	oranges	bur-di(q)'an
chicken	jaj-(eh)		
coffee	(q)'ahh-wa(eh)	peas	bee-zeh
cookies	maᶜh-mouhl	peach	dur-aa-ehn
corn	door-a	pear	n'jah-s
cucumber	khyahr	pepper	fil-fol
		pickles	m'khal-al
eggs,	behyd(a)		
eggplant	ban-jaan	rice	riz, rohz
fig	teen	salad	suhla-tah
fish	sam-ak	salt	mil-iḥ
fork	shoh-keh	squash	koo-sa
fruit	f'weh-ki	(stuffed)	miḥ-she koo-sa
		soup	mar-(q)'ah
garlic	toom	spices	b'hahr (aht)
grapes	ᶜin-ab	spoon	ma-ᶜli-(q)'a
grape vine	wara(q)'h		
-leaves	-dweh-li	tea	ch-ah-y
		tomatoes	bana-dohr-a
honey	ᶜas-al		

vegetables, (greens)	khohd-ra	yab-ra'h	stuffed grape-leaves
		yohgurt	la-ban
water	muh-y(a)	" drier	l'ab-neh
water-melon	jab-as		
wheat (cracked)	bur-gh-ol		



At the Doctor

Where is the doctor's office?	wehn/fehn mak-tab il ḥa-keem?
I (am) in pain	ana maw-jooᶜh
I have a head-ache	ᶜandi waj-jaᶜh rahs
(you, m. sing.) call him quickly, in a hurry	indahh-lo, (q)'-a-wahm!, b'il ᶜadj-leh
(I) don't feel well	maw ᶜala kehyfi
I am not happy, sick	ma'ni mub-sout, mreed
I am dizzy, fainting	ana daa-yekh/m'suf-rehn
my back hurts me	dahh-ri b'yu-jaᶜh-ni
I have a "seizure of the stomach (constipation)	ᶜandi mas-kit il muᶜdeh
it hurts here...	b'tu-jaᶜh hown(i)
I am feverish	ana sukh'n
I am vomiting	ana ᶜamm bun-to-(q)'h
is there a hernia? hemorhoids	fi f'ta-(q)'h?; b'weh-seer
an ulcer ("a tear")? a swelling?	khor-ha? wuh-ram?
I (have) a "cold"	ana m'rush-ah
would to 'Allah', not pneumonia! ("oil-sickness")	in sha'lla, ma-w zeht-i-ya!
There is a wound in my arm	fi jur-riḥ b'i zand-y
The doctor examines [for me]:	il ḥa-keem b'yf-ḥas-li:
the blood and the urine	il damm, wa il-bohl (*sh-khakh* in vulgar)
he listens [quiets] to my heart	b'yis-noh ᶜala (q)'al-bi
a picture on the wall shows:	soor-a ᶜal heht, b'ti-far-ji:
the head, the face	il rahs, il wud-jihh/(il
and the hair	wi'ch wa il shah-ᶜir
the back, the side,	il dahhr, il ja-nab,
the arms, one arm	il zin-ood, zind waa-ḥehd

shoulder, shoulders	kit-if, k'taaf
the bone, the elbow, the heel	il ᶜah-dim, il kuᶜh, il ka-ᶜb,
one bone, my bones	ᶜah-d-meh waa-ḥid-eh, ᶜi-dahm-i
the eye, the "two eyes",	il ᶜehyn, il ᶜehn-tehn,
my eyes, the ear, the ears,	ᶜee-yu-ni, il ohd-in, il da-nehyn
knees, knee	rik-ab, rik-beh
a hand, and, (several) hands	eed, wa eed-ehn
a thigh, thighs	fakh-deh, f'khad
a finger, fingers	(q)'is-ib-ᶜah, (q)'asah-bi-ᶜh
and, my toes ("fingers of my foot")	wa, (q)'assa-bee-ᶜh rij-li
he examines the stomach and the intestines	b'yif-ḥas il muᶜh-deh wa il m'saa-reen
also the liver and the kidney	kaman, il muᶜh-la'/ki-bid, wa il kil-yeh
the foot, carries, the body	il rij-il/ijjr, b'tiḥmehl il jis-m
the doctor reassured me ('confidenced' me)	il ḥa-keem tuhm-mun-ni
he said: there is "nothing	(q)'ahl: "ma-fi shé
[under danger] newsworthy"	(she) ta-ḥit khab-ar"
he said: "take aspirins, the	(q)'ahl: "khohd aspireen,
the best medicine in the world—	aḥ-saan da-wa b'il duhn-ya
—there (is) nothing like it ('him,' m. sing;) in the globe/in the world; for pain of the back	ma-fee mit-lo b'il ᶜa-laam/b'il duhn-ya, mi-shan wa jaᶜh il dahhr
do you wish to learn the body?	bit-reed tit-ᶜaal-am il jism?
by my guest — ("extend me the favor")!	it'-fuhd-ahl
mouth, lip, lips,	foom/toom, shif-feh, sh'fahf
a tooth, teeth,	sihn, s'nehn;

and the tongue	wa il lis-aan/l'saan
the neck, is with the head	il ra(q)'beh, maᶜh il rahs
the hair (is) on the head	il shaᶜir ᶜal rahs
in the face: are the eyebrows, the eyes; and the nostrils in the nose	bil wod-jehh/wich: ḥu-weh-jehb, il ᶜee-youn; wa il mana-kheer f'il ohnf/inf
and, the mouth, and the eye-lash, eye-lashes	wa, il foom/timm, wa il jif-in, j'foon (pl.)
all the body is covered, with the skin (leather)	kuhl il jis-im mu-ghat-ta, b'il jild
the nerves are on the inside	il ᶜah-sahb min joo-wa
also, the spine ("of the back")	kaman, sin-sil-ut il dahh-ir
and the brain	wa il mokh/mikh
the brain is the location of, (where 'falls') the mind	il mohk/mikh, maw-(q)'aaᶜh /mar-kaz; il zihh-in
(is it that) you 'think' that...?	(hal) b'tif-tiker in...?
the dentist ("doctor of teeth")	ḥa-keem snay-n/snan
optometrist/opthalmologist ("doctor of eyes") looks after the eyes	ḥa-keem il ᶜee-youn, b'yi tuhl-eᶜh ᶜal nud-aar
(he) prescribes eye-glasses, cures disease	b'you-sohf nud-dar-aht, b'yi-tuhy-ehb mur-ahd
the dentist, examines, each ("all") tooth	ḥa-keem-il-snan, b'yif-ḥass, kuhl sin
he fills a cavity or, cavities ("holes")	b'yi - ᶜab - bi bikh-sh, aw b-khaash
and general diseases of the mouth	wa ja-meeᶜh, muh-rahd il toom/foom

❦

At The Seashore

[*Note: sentences are deliberately broken up to facilitate translation*]

One year, we went,	san'eh waḥid-eh, rohḥna, ni-sah-yehf
to summer, at the "sea-shore"(edge)	ᶜala "ḥa-f-it il baḥḥrr"
We took a home, we rented it,	akhad-na behyt, sta'jar-naa,
We took it, by "rental" for a period (stretch) of, two months	akhad-ná, bil "uj-ra", illa mid-deht, shahhr-eyn
The house (was) furnished and had in it, everything, necessary, for comfort (relaxation).	Il behyt maf-roosh, wa fee(h)o, kuhl shé'h/shee, da-roor-i, lil ri-ya-ḥa.
Many of our friends, also,	kteer-een min ahs-ḥaab-na, kaman,
rented homes, in the same place	s'taa'-ja-roo b'yoot, fi zaat il mar-kaz.
Many of our relatives, and our friends,	kteer-een min (q)'arah-y-been-na wa ahs-ḥahb-na,
(are) owners of [property,] there, the sea shore ("edge of the sea")	mal-aakeh [milk], ho-w-neek, ᶜala ḥafit il baḥḥr
Some of them, live there in these homes, all the year others, only, during the summer months.	min(i-ho)m, saak-neen fi hal b'yoot, kuhl ill san-hh gher-hem, bas (fa(q)'at), bi ish-hor il suhyf (seh-yf)
Accordingly, we used to, meet with them, (continually.)	bi-zaa-lek, kuhn-na nin-jime ʢh ma ʢh-hom
When they used to, have (by them) an "occasion";	l'am-a kaan yee-seehr, ᶜand (h)om "moo-sehm"
they used to, invite, everybody	kaanoo, yi ʢh-zim-oo, il ja-meeʢh
And there was, found, at their (home), large crowds	wakaan, yil-ta-(q)'a, ᶜand (ih)om, jum-hoor kib-beer

There was (also) present ("found"), at times, an orchestra for dancing

kaan yil-ta-(q)'a,
aw-at, noh-beh lil rah(q)'s.

And at times, also, an Arabic ensemble, with a well-known vocalist (m.), or a singer (f.), of repute

wa aw(q)'aat, ka-maan,
noh-beh ᶜArab-i-yeh,
maᶜh soh-weet, mahᶜ-roof,
aw m'ghann-i-ya,
mash-hoor-a

❀

A Trip To Canada

What is there,more pleasurable, than travel?	ehsh fi, alaaz, min Il saf-ar?
Firstly, one changes, the location (the scene), and, the views	(q)'awal-an, waa-ḥad bi'y'ghaar-yer, il mar-kaz, wa, il ma-nah-zehr
As if, every concern (worry), is forgotten	ka-in, kuhl haam, in-ta-sa
First, comes the delight in the preparation it is our intent, to 'go somewhere'; to travel; but, (to) where?	awal-an, fi laz-ziyeh, b'il is-tiḥ-dahr neet-na, nit-masha; ni-saa-fer; fa(q)'at, ila wehyn, (fehyn)?
Some of us, wish, for far away places	min-nin-a b'yish-ti-hoo, ʿala ma-tah-reḥ bʿaad
others, want, a sea-shore (resort) nearby	ghehr, b'y-reed-oo, ḥafit-baḥḥrr (q)'arib-eh
At the end, we agreed, to visit Montreal; it is a famous city, and not distant	bil aah-kher, ʿta-mad-na, n'zoor Montreal hee-ya balad mash-hoo-ra, wa ma-w bi-ʿeed-a
Secondly, it (she) is in a foreign (strange) country; there, we are able, to practice, in the French language	tan-i-yaan, hee-ya fi do-w-leh gha-reeb-a; hohn-eek, m'ni(q)'dehr, nit-jar-baa'h, fi ligha il Fran-sa wiya
And in addition ("on top of that"), we will see new scenes	wa-fo(q) minna, ni-shoof munah-zer jid-ad
(Should) we go in an airplane, or by railroad?	(hal)-ni-rooḥ bi tahy-a-ra, aw bi sik-ket il ḥad-eed?
At the end, we decided, to go by auto; easier, and more expedient ("lighter in blood, spirit") It is not necessary to be 'dragged', to the station, and after, to ride the train, or the airplane	bil aah-kher, i ʿta-madd-na, n'rooḥ b'il say-ara;· as-hal, wa "a-khaf dam" ma-w da-roor-i nin-shiḥ-eht, ila il mu-ḥaa-a, wa-baʿd-ehn, nir-kab il'(q)'at'r, aw il tahy-a-ra

(We) avoided ("passed"), the buying, of a ticket, and its cost, its expense	foot-na/-fitna mish-ta-ra, il tas-ka-ra, wa-ḥa-(q)'a-(ha), masroof-ha
We left our home, and set down, at the door of the hotel, in Canada	ta-rak-na behyt-na, wa ḥa-tehyn-a, ᶜala bab il fan-da-(q)', bi Canada
(We were) registered, at the desk, and went up, to our rooms	it-(q)'ay-ad-na, ᶜand il maak-tab-eh, wa tu-lf̄h-na, ila (q)'oo-wud-na
After we had supper, we (went) around a little, in the streets, and (then) went up, to sleep	baᶜid ma-itᶜash-ehy-na, door-na shway-eh, b'il sikkak, wa t-lf̄h-na in'naam
The next day, we bought, a "Tourist-book" and began to tour, exactly, like other tourists!	taa-ni ni-haar, ish-ta-rehyna, "Kit-aab soo-waa-ḥi", wa b'deen-a ni-sooḥ, ta-maam, mitl ghehr soo-waaḥ!
The city of Montreal pertains to the Province (State) of Quebec [in the country of] Canada	*balad* Montreal bi't-khiss *wala-yat* Quebec, bi Canada
The inhabitants of Quebec Province are of French origin, and accordingly, they speak (converse in) French (from hundreds of years)	sook-aan walayat Quebec, ahsl'h'om Fransa-wi-yeh, wa bi-zaalek, b'yiḥ-koo, Frans-a-wee, (min mee-yaat s'neen)
The French (people) from Paris, (it is) difficult 'on them' to understand Quebec-oise	il Frans-a-wee-yeh min Paris, sah-ᶜib ᶜa-leh-hom, yif-ham-u *"Quebec-oise"*
And we, also, who learned French, in the schools, didn't understand them well.	wa niḥna, kamaan, illi tu-ᶜaalam-na Frans-a-wee, b'il ma-da-ress, ma f'him-na-hom m'neeḥ
Anyhow ("under all circumstances"), we enjoyed, trying to speak, with them	ᶜala kuhl ḥaal, it-bas-sut-na, n'jaar-eb nuḥ-ki maᶜ(a)-hom (maᶜon)
In other years, we travelled to lands, more distant; and some, closer	bi-gher sin-neen, sa-far-na ila (q)'ah-rah-di ab-ᶜaad; wa min-(h)om, ah-(q)'-rahb

A Trip To Israel
Overseas Travel

One year, we wanted to visit, the Holy City (Jerusalem), to go, to Israel.	sanna wa-ḥidd-eh, ridd-na ni-zoor, il (Q)-'ohds, ni-rooḥ, ila Yisraa-eel.
On the way, (either in going, or on the return), we would tour also, the cities of Europe	ᶜal darb, (aw bil roh-ḥa, aw bil radj-ᶜa), n'sooḥ kamaan, bi b'laad "Oh-rohp-a"
This trip ('travel') is not travelled, by car	hal saf-ra, ma b'tit-sa-far, bil sa-ya-ra
It is necessary (that we) 'to' voyage, either by ship on the ocean, or by airplane.	laa-zem in-saa-fer, aw bi mar-kaab ('ba-bor'), ᶜal baḥḥrr, aw bi tahy-yah-ra.
Ocean travel, these days, (is) difficult; (there are) few ships, go to Israel	sa-faar il baḥḥr, hal ee-yaam, sah-ᶜb; (q)'aleel ma-raa-keb, b'yi-rooḥoo 'ja Israa-eel,
And also, when, they are found, they take ('stretch') a long time; they take two weeks, at the least	wa kamaan, la-ma, yil-ta(q)'oh, b'yi-tahw-il-oo mid-deh kib-eer-eh; bi'ya-khodu jum-ᶜa-tehyn, b'il (q)'aleel.
The trip, by airplane, (is) quicker; it lasts, only, one night (f.), or one day (m.)	il saf-ra b'il tahy-yah-ra, aᶜh-jal; bit-tahw-ehl baas/fa(q)'at, lehy-la waa-ḥ-id-eh, aw yohm wa-ḥed
Accordingly, it permits us, more time, to tour.	bi-za-lehk, bi tis-maḥ-lin-a, wa-(q)-it ak-taar, la ni-sooḥḥ.
Most planes, 'going out' (to foreign lands), begin from Kennedy 'air-port', something (like), a third of an hour, from our home	ak-taar-eet tahy-yah-raaht, l'il khaa-rehj, b'yibdo min mu-ḥa-tt-eht "Kennedy," she'h mit'l, tilt saᶜ-a, min behyt-na

We mounted the airplane, at three o'clock, in the afternoon, and "greeted the morning," next day, in Tel Aviv at nine o'clock; Israeli time.

r'kibna il tahy-yah-rah, il saaʕa talaat-eh, ba ʕd il doohhr, wa as-baḥ-na, taa-ni ni-haar, bi Tel-Aviv, bi il saaʕa tisʕa; wa (q)'t Isra-eel

(Three o'clock in the afternoon in New York, is like, eight o'clock

At night, In Israel)
therefore, the trip lasted only, eleven hours

(il saa-a ta-laateh ba-id-il-doohhr bi New York, mitl, il sa-ca t'manyeh b'il-lehl, bi "Israeel".)
la-za-lehk, il sa-f-ra taw-w-ah-lat bas, ḥee-daʃ-shar sa-ᶜa.

All of us, longed, to see Jerusalem ("the Holy") first thing; Immediately after our arrival, we 'rented' a taxi, directly, to take us, to (Jerusalem) "The Holy City"

kool'na, mish-t-hi-yeen, ni-shoof il (Q)'ohds, aw-aal she'-h; wa ḥaa-lan baᶜid wi-soolna, is-taa'-jar-na "taxi", doh-ghri, la ya-khod-na, l'il
(Q) ohds.

Other than a "private taxi", there is also, a public -taxi; (which) takes, assorted strangers; (who don't know one another)

min ghehr 'taxi khi-soos-i', fi kamaan, "taxi ʕee-moom-i"; bi-yaa-khod, ghor-aba mu-shaak-a-leen; (il-li ma b'ya ʕi-foo bah ʕd)

This "taxi" is called a "sheroot" and costs less than a private ("special") taxi

hal "taxi" b'yit-sam-a "she'hroot', wa bi kaal-ehf a-(q)'al min
"taxi khi-soos-i"

The trip, (to Jerusalem) lasts, around, three-quarters of an hour

il saf-ra, bit-tah-wehl, ḥa-wa-leh, ta-laat-ar-baʃh saa-ᶜa

The taxi delivered us, to the Hotel Kings, in the center (middle) of the city

il "taxi" wa-daa-na, il la man-zal (fondak) "Kings", bi-wust (nus) il ba-lad

After we registered, and took rooms, immediately, we inquired, about the location of "the Wall"; that is, "the Western Wall," (in Hebrew)

baʢd-ma it-(q)'a-yaad-na, wa a-khad-na (q)'oo-wahd, ḥaa-lan, sa-(q)'al-na, ʿala maw-(q)-a ʢh il "koh-tehl"; hoo "Koh-tel Hama ʿar-ah-bi" (bil ʢbreet)

They guided us, to the road, and with all joy, we betook ourselves (one another), and began to walk.

da-loo-na, ᶜal tah-ri(q)'h, wa bi-kool bahs-tee-ya, a-kh-ad-na bah-ᶜid-na, wa bi-deena nihm-shi.

"The Wall", its location is in the "Old City," around which, (there) is an ancient wall

il "Koh-tel" maw-(q)'aᶜ(h)o bi "ba-lad il (q)'a-deem-a", illi da-waar-ha, ḥeht (q)'-a-deem

Upon our entrance, into the Old City, (it was) as through, we had entered, the bosom, of an (old) Oriental environment ('climate')

bi-dikhool-na, illa "ba-lad il (q) a deem-a," ka-inn, da-khal-na, biᶜib, ma-naa-kh shar-(q)'i.

The old road, the street, which leads to the "Wall", is (she) goes downward; and on every side, there are shops.

il tah-ree-(q) ilᶜa-tee(q)', il sook-eh, il-li bit-dil lil "Ko-tel, heeya naa-z-il-eh; wa min kuhl tuhr-af, fi daka-keen.

Almost all their proprietors are "Arabs", either Muslims or Christians.

ta-(q)'reeb-ahn kuhl as-ḥab-hom ᶜAr-bahn; aw Islam aw massi-ḥi-yeh/ na-sah-rah.

They sell, all kinds of things, (of) every sort, food, and also [Arab-style] wearing apparel, and souvenir (rememberance) things, made in the land, in 'Jerusalem'.

bi b'i-ʢoo, kuhl ash-yaa-(q)', min kuhl sinf, maa'-koo-lat, wa kamaan mal boos, wa ash-ghall iz-tiz-kaar-i-yeh', "ma ʢh-mool-een bil (q)'aard," b'il (Q)-ohds.

The merchants, the sellers, all of them speak English and Hebrew , (at least, a little)

il tid-jaar, il baay-aᶜeen, kuhl-i (h)om b'yiḥ-koo Inglizi waᶜIbr-reet, (b'il (q)'a-leel, shwa-ya).

The street, is narrow, and full of people walking; some of them are tourists; others residents (of the city) 'Europeans' (Westerners) and Arabs

il souk-eh (sik-keh), day-(q)'a, wa mala-neh ᶜa-lam mash-yeen; min-(a) hom sou-aaḥḥ; gher-(h)-om, bala-di-yeh, ("aw-rop-a-li-yeh", wa ᶜAr-bahn)

Some of them (Arabs), are wearing the apparel of the East

min(a) hom (ᶜAr-bahn), lab-i-seen mal-boos il shar(q)h

Some of them are walking with (their) donkeys, (asses), loaded with merchandise, or vegetables, (greens)

min(a)-hom maash-yeen maᶜh dj-ḥehsh (ḥah-meer), mu-ḥam-ma-leen bah-dah-ᶜah, aw khod-rah

Just, as was found, "from" hundreds of years (ago), or thousands of years, or more.

ta-maam, mitl ma-kaan yil-ta-(q)-a, min miy-at sneen, aw, ala-fat s'neen, aw ak-tar.

At the end of the road, one approaches, a large plaza, and at its end, is the "sacred Wall" ["Kotel Hamaᶜara-bi," the 'Western Wall']

bi ah-khert il ta-ree(q)'h, il waa-ḥed bi-(q)'aar-ehb, ila meed-daan kibeer, wa bi ah-kher-to, "il Koh-tel il moo-(q)'ad-as"

The "Wall", is the only place (part); which is remaining, from the Sacred Temple [?], which King Ḥerod 'built', (or restored, repaired it)

Il Ḥeht (Arab.), sho-(q)'feh il wa-ḥḥ-eed-eh, ilazi (illi) ba-(q)'yaan-eh, min "Behyt ha-mi(q)'dash"[?], illi ba-na-(hoo) il sultan Ḥerod; (aw, suhl-laḥ-ho)

In front of the Wall, are found crowds (a mass) of Jews, of all nationalities, from all the lands of the world

(q)id-aam "il Ḥeht," bi-yil-ta-(q)'a jam-hoor Ya-hood, min kuhl adj-nass, min kuhl (q)'ah-rah-di il doon-ya

Some of them have come to visit, and to look. Others stand, (and) pray.

min-a(h)om jaa-yeen yi-zoor-oo, wa yit-farr-ah-joo; gher-(h)om b'yi-(q)'a-foo, b'yi-suhl-loo

The "Old City" was only a section of Jerusalem,kin the days of the Temple, 2000 years ago;	"ba-lad il (q)-adeem-eh" kan-at fa(q)'at sho(q)'fehn min il (Q')-ohds, bi ee-yaam "Behyt il mu(q)'ad-ass", min alf-ain sann-eh;
And there is yet, still, found many old structures, from hundreds of years (ago), or, older	wa baʿid, lis-a, b'yil-ta(q)-ah, kiteer ᶜamaar (q)'adeem, min mi-yaat sineen, aw, aʿh-ta-(q)'.
In the area of "The Wall",(Heb.) facing the Wall, (Arab.) there is a lovely building and famous	ḥa-waal-eh il "Koh-tel," wa-jehh "il Ḥehyt" fi ᶜamara za-reef-a wa mash-hoor-a
'She' it is the Jewish college; its name, "Yeshiva Porat Yosef", Aleppoan	heey-a killi-ya ya-hood-i-yeh; ism-a-(ha,) "Yeshiva Porat Yo-sehf"; Ḥálab-i-yeh.
Its architect is the famous architect, Moshé Safdié	mu-han-dez-ha, il mu-han-dez il mash-hoor, Moshé Saf-di-yeh,
Safdié (became) renowned for the building of "Habitat", which he built, on the Montreal Exposition	Saf-di-yeh in-sha-hhar bi ᶜammar "Habitat", illi (il-laa-zi) ban-a, bi "Maʿraahd Montreal"
The Safdié family (is) originally from Aleppo	ᶜa-yil't Saf-di-yeh ahs-la-ha min Ḥálab
Above the wall, there is an open piece of land, where the Temple was	foh-(q)-h min il "Ḥeht", fi fas-ḥa kibeer-eh, fehyn kaan "Beht-Ha-Mi(q)-daash"
Now, there is not ("name" of) any mark, of the Temple other than the "Wall", [which was *not* attached to the Temple]	hal-a'/halé́ht, ma fi ism ee-shaar min "Behyt Ha mi-(q)'-daash, "min gheher il ḥet

There are, however, two mosques; one has the name of "the Mosque of ʿOmar"; and the second has the name "The ʿAksa"

fi, fa-(q)aat, tinain ji-wa-meʿh; waa-ḥad ismo- (hoo) "jaa-mehʿh ʿAh-mar"; wa il taa-nee ismo- (hoo) "jaa-mehʿh il ʿAksa"

The "Mosque of ʿOmar" stands, in the very place, where (there was) the building (of) "the 'most' Holy"

"jaa-mehʿh ʿAh-mar" waah-(q)'ehf fi zaat il mow-(q)'aʿh fehn kaan ʿam-aa-r-at "il ak-tar mu-(q) 'ad-a-seh"

Most of the Jewish people, do not go up, to this open piece of land, [the plaza] they do not want, to step, on this sacred soil

aktar-eet il Ya-hood, ma b'yit-laa-ʿoo, illa haal fas-ḥa, ma bi-yee-reedoo, yi-doos-oo, ʿala hal (q)'-aard il mu-(q)'aad-as-eh

Outside of the Old City, Jerusalem is a large city.

bar-raht "balad il (q)-ah-deema," il (Q)'ods, balad k'beer-eh.

In it (are) Ashkenazeem and Sepharadeem.

fi-ha Ashkenazeem wa Sepharadeem

(In Jerusalem) as in the rest of Israel, there are more Sepharadeem than Ashkenazeem

(b'il(Q)ohds); mitl ba-(q)'eet Israel, fi ak-tar Sepharadeem min Ashkenazeem

It contains, thousands of residents, who had come, from the lands of the Orient, (Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Morocco, Yemen Greece and so on, (and therefore), they are named "Sepharadeem".

fi-ha, alaf-aat sook-kan, illi kan-oo jah-yeen,min (q)'ah-rahd-i il sharq. (Sooriya, il ʿIraq, Toor-ki-ya, il Mogh-reb, Yeman, Yoh-naan; wa ka zaa-lehk, hoom-ehn b'yit-sam-oh "Sepharad-eem"

The town is full of people, and (it has) in it great activity

il ba-laad ma-la-neh ʿaa-laam, wa fi-ha ḥara-k-eh ʿah-zeem-eh

However, ('despite', 'with this') the city is quiet, and its climate (f.) is delightful.

maʿh zaa-lek, il ba-laad haad-yeh, wa ma-nakh-ha la-zeez.

Its air is pure, because, it ("she") is, on top (heads) of mountains	hawa-ha saah-fi, bi-ḥehs hi-ya, ᶜala rahs j'baal
the largest city in Israel, (she,) is Tel Aviv, (greater) in the count, of its people. [?]	ak-bar ba-laad bi Yisra-eel, hi-ya Tel Aviv, biᶜad-ad, ahha-li-ha. [?]
Tel Aviv is a new city, which was founded, only, (from) seventy five years ago	Tel Aviv ba-laad jeedeed-eh, illi (ilazzi) it-as-sa-set, fa(q)at, min sab-ᶜeen sana
Many of the industries of Israel are found, around Tel Aviv; and the town is crowded	K'teer min ash-ghal Yis-ra-eel, b'yil-ta(q)oh, ḥa-wa-leh Tel Aviv; wa il ba-laad maz-ḥoom-eh
in the center of the city, around Dizengoff Square, there are cafes on the sidewalks, such as are seen, in Paris; (on the side-walk)	bi-wast-il ba-lad ḥa-wa-leh Dizengoff Square, fi-(q)a-ha-weeᶜal rasah-yehf, mitl-ma b'yin-shaaf, fi 'Bariz'; (ᶜal rah-seef)
The people of Tel Aviv, consider,kthe residents of Jerusalem like 'peasants'; although, Jerusalem is the center of education [knowledge], intellectual (life), and religion	a-haa-li Tel Aviv, bi-yiḥ-soob-oo, sik-kaan il (Q)-ohds, mitl fal-a-ḥeen; wa-loo, il (Q)ohds mar-kaz il ᶜilim, il ᶜa(q)-li-ya, wa d'ya-ni-yeh
The Holy City (Jerusalem) is sacred, holy to three religions.	Il (Q)'ods ḥareem-eh, (mu-(q)a-da-seh) ila talat diyan-at
The three of them, were 'born' in the, Near East.	talat-it-(ḥ)om, khil-(q)'oo bi "shar(q)'h il (q)'areeb"
Outside of Jerusalem, there are many sacred locations	bur-raht il (Q)'ohds, fi ja-meeᶜh matah-reḥ m'(q)'ad-a-seen
and views-vistas of beauty, to a (great) degree ['step']	wa ma-nah-zer miḥs-neen, la dara-jeh

Some Common Nouns

animal	waaḥ-sh	cover	gha-ta
apple	tuf-aaḥ	cow	ba(q)'ra
army	jehy-sh / ᶜaskar-i-yeh	curtain	bur-da-ya
autumn	kha-leef	dictionary	(q)'a-moos
author	mu-al-ehf	dirt, soil	trahb
answer	ja-waab	dirt, dirty	wuh-sakh
auto	sahy-ara	ditch	joor-ah
bag	kees	door	baab
basket	if-feh	dog	kalb
bed	sreer,takht	drum	tubl
bee	naḥl; zum-boot	drum (lap)	dur-bak-keh
bird	tehr; ᶜas-foor	duck	buht (buht-ah)
belt	cum-ar	elephant	feel
blanket	ḥrahm	enemy	ᶜḥad-oo
bottle	(q)'a-neen-a	envelope	mu-ghal-af
bottom, depth	(q)'ah-raahr	faith	a-maan
box, trunk	san-doo(q)'h	family	ᶜaay-leh
box, small	ᶜil-ba	feather	reesh(eh)
branch	ghis-n	fence	s-yehj
broom	mik-in-seh	flag	'ban-dehr-a'
brush	fur-sha(yeh)	flies	doob-an
button	zuhrr	fox	taᶜ-lab
cat	(q)'oot (ah)	friend	sah-ḥehb
cage	(q)'uf-ahs	floor	(q)'ahrd
ceiling	sa(q)'f	furniture	'moo-bil-ya'
center	wust	fame	shohhrr
chair	kohr-see	fish	sam-ak
chicken	ja-jeh, far-kha	fruit	fweh-kee
clock/watch	saa-ᶜa	freezer	tal-a-jeh
closet	tah-(q)'ah; makh-zan	freedom	ḥoor-i-yeh
cloud	ghehm	"polit.	is-li(q)'-lal
conscience	duh-meer	game(a)	looᶜh-beh
coal	faḥm	glove	d'weh-n-eh
collar	yaa(q)'a, to(q)'h	grapes	ᶜoon-ab / ᶜin-eb
comb	musht	glass	eez-az ('izez)
corn	dir-a/dur-a	grass	ḥa-sheesh

guitar, wood	ᶜood	nest	ᶜish
hall	(q)'a-ᶜah	noise	ghoh-shé
hammer	(q)'ad-oom	number	ra(q)'am
handkerchief	man-deel, maḥ-rah-meh	package	ḥaz-meh, sir-rah
		page	sa-fee-ḥa, pasteh
hole	bokh-sh	paint	d'haan
home	behyt	paper	wah-rah'(q)h
honor	shar-af	park, garden	boos-taan
horse	far-as, ḥ-sahn,	parrot	bagh-ba-ghaah
island	jee-zeer-eh	paste	leez'a(uh)
jar	murt-bahn	peach	kho-w-kh
justice	ᶜad-'l	peace	sol-ḥ
key	muf-taaḥ	pear	in-jahs
knot	ᶜoo(q)'-deh	pin	'ibr-eh, dab-oos
leaf	wahr-(q)ah	people	shuᶜb, naa-s
lemon	lehy-moon	person(s)	shukh-s, naa-s
lightning	bur-i'h	piece	sha(q)'feh
lock	if-il	pig	khan-zeer
letter, mail	mak-toob	place	mu-ḥal, mar-kaz
letter, alph.	ḥirf	plan	tar-seem
lettuce	khas franji	pocket	jeh-b
lion	sa-biᶜh, as-ad	poem	shiᶜh-r
map	khaahr-ta	poet	shah-ᶜehr
marble	mar-mar	police	mu-ḥah-fez
meat	laḥm(eh)	pumpkin (a)	(q)'ar-ᶜha
matches	kohb-reet	question	su-aal
medicine	da-wa	rabbit	ar-nab
mouse	fah-rah	rain	mutt-ahr
money	floos, mah-sah-ri	rat	jar-dohn
middle	wust	refrigerator	bar-a-deh
mountain	jab-al	relatives	ahh'l
mirror	m'rahy-eh	residence	sook-neh
monkey	saᶜh-daan	road	tur-ee(q)'h, sik-keh
mosquito	na-moos, ba-'(u'h)	roof	stooḥ
music (art of)	faan il al-ḥaan	root	shirsh
nail	bus-mahr	rope	ḥabl-eh
nail (finger)	doofr	scissors	mu-(q)'as / m'(q)as
nationality	jin-si-yeh	screw	bor-ghi
needle	ib-reh	screwdriver	muf-taḥ b'raa-ghi

seed	bizr	thing	ghar-ahd
ship	mar-kab, ba-bohr	thumb	is-biᶜ-it il k'beereh
shovel	ja-roof	thunder	raᶜh-id
snow	talj	tie (to)	ru-b't
side	jan-ab	tiger	nim-ir
singer(m.)	mu-ghan-ni	time	za-maan, wa(q)'t
snake	'ḥai-yeh'	tool	ᶜid-eh
smoke	dookh-aan	top (head)	rah-s
soap	sah-boon	toy	laᶜoob(eh)
summer	seh-f/sehy-f	tunnel	sir-daab
sea, ocean	baḥr	turkey	deek Hindi
soldier	ᶜas-ka-ri	umbrella	shams-i-yeh
song	ghan-niya	violin	k'min-ja
soup	mar-(q)'a	voice	so-w-t
sidewalk	rah-seef	wall	ḥeht
springtime	ruh-beeᶜh	war	ḥarb
stamp, (post.)	bar-eed	wood	duf, kha-shab
stamp (seal)	dam-gha	wagon	ᶜara bi-yeh
street	sookeh, shaa-reᶜh	whistle	suff-ah-rah
story	ḥi-ka-ya	winter	shit-eh
table	soofra	window	shub-aak
tail	dan-ab	wolf	deeb
tent	khehm/eh	zero	siph-ir
telegraph	bir-a-(q)'a	zither	(q)'a-noon

Some Common Adjectives and Adverbs

ability	(q)'ada-ra	everyday	koohl ni-haahr
above	fow(q)'h	everything	koohl she'h
across (width)	ᶜar-d	fast	ᶜadj-l (eh)
after	ba-ᶜd	front of	(q)'id-daam
all, every	koohl ('kil')	fat	smeen
alone	mit-waḥ-ehd	foolishness	jad-ba-n'eh
almost	ta(q)'reeb-ahn	fresh	tah-zah
always	mid-waṃ, da-i-man	full	ma-laan
another	ghehr, ta-a-ni	funny	mid-ḥek
around	ḥa-wa-leh	good	m-neeḥ
bad (object)	boum	happiness, joy	buhst
bad person	ᶜaah-tehl	hard (quality)	ma-kehn
below	taḥt	heavy	t-(q)'eel
better	aḥ-san	hungry	joo-ᶜaan
bravery	jir-ᶜa	healthy	miᶜh-fi
before	(q)'abl	high	ᶜaa-li
bitter	muhrr/mihr	honor	shar-af
behind	wuh-rah	impossible	mus-taḥeel
conscience	duh-meer	integrity	zim-meh
cleverness	sha-tah-ra	life	ḥa-ya, ᶜee-sha
clean	n'deef	light	kha-feef
cleanliness	na-dah-feh	last	aah-khehr
cool	riht-ehb	later	baᶜhd-(ehn)
crooked	aaᶜh-waj	lively	ḥir-ehk
coarse	khish-ehn	next to, (side)	jamb
compassionate	ḥa-noon	new	ji-deed
cruelty	zuh-l-m	never	abb-a'-dan
death	moht/mo-w-t	nice	kway-ehs
delicate	na-ḥeef	now	hal-la'(uh)(an)
deep (color)	ghaa-me'h	only	bas, fa(q)'at
deep (depth)	ghum-i'(uh)	old (object)	(q)'a-deem
difficult	sah-ᶜihb	old (age)	kib-ir
dirty	woos-ehkh	once	mur-rah
dry	naa-shef	outside	bur-rah
early	buk-eer	over (position)	fo(q)'h
empty	fah-di	poor	fa-(q)'eer

poverty	fuh-(q)'r
quick; fast	(q)'a-wahm; ᶜadj-leh
quiet	haa-di
quietness	hadaa-weh
regret	na-dam
rich	ghani, zan-geen
ripe	mis-ti-wee
rough	khish-ehn
sadness	za-ᶜal
sad	zaᶜool-i/ḥa-zi-ni
same	zaat
safe	saa-lehm
savage	mus-ta-w-ḥehsh
seldom	naa-dehr
sharp	ḥadd
sick	m'reed
side	ja-nab
slow	mit-mahh-hal / ᶜala mahh-l
soon	ᶜan (q)'ah-reeb
soft	tuhr-i
some (of)	ba-ᶜid-min
sour	ḥah-mihd
straight	seh-wee/dugh-ri
sure	mu-ak-ad/ak-keed
sweet	ḥil-oo
thin	ra-fee-ᶜh
thirst	ᶜaht-ahsh
tiredness	ta-ᶜh-ahb
unlikely	cha-teen
under	taḥt
wealth	ghana-weh, zan-ga-neh
warmth	da-fa
worse	ab-wam
wetness	nad-aa-weh
wild	mus-ta-w-ḥehsh
without	min-doon/ba-la

❦

Present Tense of Some Verbs

STEM-ROOT		I	YOU (Sing.)	HE SH
		Ana	Male-*Inta*	*Hoo-wa-Hee*
Engl.	*Arab.*		Fem. *Inti.*	
1. Answer	ja-waab	b'yi-ja-wehb	m.) b'it-jaa-wehb	m.) b'yi-ja-w
			f.) b'it-jaa-wi-bi	f.) b'it-ja-we
2. Ask	su-aal	b'as-al	m.) b'yis-al	b'yis-al
			f.) b'tis-a-l'-i	b't-is-al
3. Borrow	ᶜee-yeh	b'ast-ᶜeer	m.) b'tist-ᶜeer	b'yi-st-ᶜeer
	-reh		f.) b'tist-ᶜeer-i	b'tist-ᶜeer
4. Buy	mush-tara	b'ash-tir-ee	m.) b'tish-tir-i	b'yish-ti-ree
			f.) " "	b'tish-tir-ee
5. Call	nuh-dihh	b'an-dahh	m.) b'tin-dahh	b'yin-dahh
			f.) b'tin-da-hi	b'tin-dahh
6. Close	tas-keer	b'a-sak-kehr	m.) b'it sak-kehr	b'yi-sak-keh
			f.) b'it sak-kee-ree	b'it-sak-kehr
7. Come	jaay-eh	b'aj-i	m.) b'tij-i	b'yi-ji
			f.) b'tij-i	b'ti-ji
8. Count	ᶜaa-dad	b'a-ᶜidd	m.) b'it-ᶜidd	b'yi-ᶜidd
			f.) b'it-ᶜidd-i	b'it-ᶜidd
9. Drink	shirb	b'ash-rahb	m.) b'tish-rahb	b'yi-sh-rahb
			f.) b'tish-rahbi	b'tish-rahb
10. Eat	akl	b'aa-kol	f.) b'ta'a-kohl	b'y-aa-kol
			f.) b'ta'a-kil-i	b'ta'-kol
11. Find	tah-weesh	ba-ḥa-w-esh	m.) b'it-ḥa-w-esh	b'yi-ḥa-w-es
			f.) b'it-ḥa-w-ishi	b'it-ḥa-w-es
12. Forget	na-sa	b'an-sa	m.) b'tin-sa	b'y-in-sa
			f.) b'tin-seh	b'tin-sa
13. Give	ᶜaht-a	b'aᶜh-ti	m.) b'taᶜh-ti	b'yaᶜh-ti
			f.) " "	b'taᶜh-ti
14. Go	roḥ-ḥa	b'aa-rooḥ	m.) bit-rooḥ	b'yi-rooḥ
			f.) bit-rooḥ-i	b'it-rooḥ
15. Have	ᶜand	ᶜan-di	m.)ᶜan-dak	ᶜan-do
			f.) ᶜan-dehk	ᶜan-da
16. Hear	sa-maᶜh	b'as-maᶜh	m.) b'tis-maaᶜh	b'yis-maᶜh
			f.) b'tis-maaᶜh-i	b'tis-maᶜh
17. Know	ᶜirf	b'aᶜh-rehf	m.) b'taᶜh-rehf	b'y-aᶜh-reh
			f.) b'taᶜh-ri-fi	b'taᶜh-rehf

WE *Nooḥ-na* *Niḥ-na*	YOU pl., m. & f. *Intoo*	THEY *Hin-ehn* *Hom-ehn*
1. min-ja-wehb	b'it-jaa-wiboo	b'yi-ja-wi-boo
2. m'nis-al	b'tis-a-loo	b'yis-a-loo
3. m'nist-ᶜeer	b'tist-ᶜee-roo	b'yist-ᶜee-roo
4. m'nish-tir-ie	b'tish-tir-oo	b'yish-tir-oo
5. m'nin-dahh	b'tinn-da-hoo	b'yin-da-hoo
6. m'n-saak-kehr	b'it-sak-ee-roo	b'yi-saak-kir-oo
7. m'n-nij-ee	b'tij-oo	b'yij-oo
8. min-ᶜidd	bit-ᶜidd-oo	b'yi-ᶜidd-oo
9. m'nish-rahb	b'tish-rah-boo	b'yish-rahb-oo
10. m'na'-kol	b'ta'k-il-oo	b'ya'kil-oo
11. min-ḥa-w-esh	bit-ḥa-w-ish-oo	b'yi-ḥa-w-ish-oo
12. m'nin-sa	b'tin-so	b'yin-soh
13. m'nahᶜ-ti	b'tahᶜ-t-oo	b'yahᶜ-too
14. m'n-rooḥ	bit-roo-ḥoo	b'y-roo-ḥoo
15. ᶜand'na	ᶜand-(i)-kom	ᶜand-(h)om
16. m'nis-maᶜh	b'tis-ma-ᶜoo	b'yis-ma-oo
17. m'naᶜh-rehf	btaᶜh-ri-foo	b'yah-ᶜh-ri-foo

STEM-ROOT		I	YOU (Sing.)	HE SHE
		Ana	Male-*Inta*	*Hoo-wa-Hee-y*
Engl.	*Arab.*		Fem. *Inti.*	
18. Lift	ruhf-iᶜh	b-ahr-fahᶜh	m.) b′tir-faaᶜh f.) b′tir-faa-ᶜee	b′yir-fahᶜh b′tir-fahᶜh
19. Live	ᶜee-sheh	b′a-ᶜeesh	m.) b′itᶜeesh f.) b′it-ᶜee-shi	b′yi-ᶜeesh bit′-ᶜeesh
20. Love Like	mu-ḥab-eh		m.) b′it ḥibb f.) b′it-ḥibb-i	bi-ḥibb bit-ḥibb
21. Make	ᶜaa-mal	b′aᶜh-maal	m.) b′iᶜh-mal f.) b′iᶜh-ma-li	b′yiᶜh-mal b′iᶜh-mal
22. Meet	ma-(q)′a-bal-eh	ba-(q)′a-behl	m.) b′tit(q)′a-bal f.) b′tit-(q)′a-ba-li	b′yi-(q)′aa-beh bit′aa-behl
23 Open	fat′ḥ	b-af-taḥ	m.) b′tif-taḥ f.) b′tif-ta-ḥi	b′y-if-taḥ b′tif-taḥ
24. Pass	tiᶜh-daay	ba-ᶜaad-y	m.) bit-ᶜar-ddi f.) ″ ″	b′yi-ᶜaad-i bit-ᶜadd-i
25. Pay	da-fiᶜh	bad-faᶜh	m.) b′yid-faᶜh f.) b′tid-faᶜh-i	b′yid-faᶜh btit-fa-ᶜhi
26. Quarrel	m′kha-na-(q)′a	ba-khaa-ne(q)′h	m.) b′tit-khaa-na(q)′ f.) b′tit-khaa-na(q)′i	b′yi-khaa-ne(q bit-khaa-ne(q)
27. Read	(q)′raay-eh	b′a(q)′-rah	m.) b′ti(q)′ra f.) b′ti(q)′reh	b′yi-(q)′-rah b′ti(q)′-rh
28. Rem-ember	zikr	b′at-zak-kar	m.) b′tit-zak-ar f.) b′tit-zak-ar-i	b′yit-zak-kar b′tit-za-kar
29. Run	ra-gid	b′ar-gohd	m.) b′tir-gohd f.) b′tir-gid-i	b′yir-gohd b′tir-gohd
30. See	shoh-w-f	b′a-shoof	m.) b′it-shoof f.) b′it-shoof-i	b′yi-shoof b′it-shoof
31. Sell	behᶜh	ba-beeᶜh	m.) b′it-beeᶜh f.) b′it-beeᶜh-i	b′yi-beeᶜh b′it-beeᶜh
32. Send	ba-ᶜht	b′ab-ᶜat	m.) b′tib-ᶜat f.) b′tib-ᶜat-i	b′yib-ᶜat b′tib-ᶜat-i
33. Sleep	nohm	ba-naam	m.) bit-naam f.) bit-nam-i	b′yi-naam b′it-naami

WE	YOU	THEY
Nooḥ-na *Niḥ-na*	pl., m. & f. *Intoo*	*Hin-ehn* *Hom-ehn*
18. m'nir-fahᶜh	b'tir-fah-ᶜoo	b'yir-fahᶜh-oo
19. min-ᶜeesh	b'itᶜee-shoo	b'yi-ᶜeesh-oo
20. min-ḥibb	b'it-ḥibb-oo	b'yi-ḥibb-oo
21. m'niᶜh-mal	b'ti-ᶜh-ma-loo	b'yiᶜh-mal-oo
22. min-(q)'aa-behl	b'tit-(q)'aa-bal-oo	b'yi-(q)'aa-bil-oo
23. m'n-if-taḥ	b'tif-ta-ḥoo	b'yif-taḥ-oo
24. min-ᶜadd-di	bit-ᶜadd-oo	b'yi-ᶜaad-oo
25. m'nid-faᶜh	b'tit-fa-ᶜoo	b'yid-fa-ᶜoo
26. min-khaa-ne(q)'	b'tit-khaa-na-(q)'-oo	bi-khaa-ni(q)'oo
27. m'ni(q)'-rah	b'ti(q)'roh	b'yi(q)'-roh
28. m'nit-zak-kar	b'tit-zak-a-roo	b'y-it-zak-kar-oo
29. m'nir-gohd	b'tir-gid-oo	b'yir-gid-oo
30. min-shoof	b'it-shoo-foo	b'yi-shoof-oo
31. min-beeᶜh	b'it-bee-ᶜoo	b'yi-bee-ᶜoo
32. m'nib-ᶜat	b'tib-ᶜat-oo	b'yib-ᶜa-too
33. min-naam	b'it-naam-oo	b'yi-na-moo

STEM-ROOT		I	YOU (Sing.)	HE SHE
		Ana	Male-*Inta*	*Hoo-wa-Hee-ya*
Engl.	*Arab.*		Fem. *Inti.*	
34. Smell	shum/shim	ba-shim-m	m.) b'it shim-m f.) b'it shim-mi	b'yi-shim-m bit-shim-m
35. Smoke	dukh-aan	ba-dakh-ehn	m.) b'it dakh-ehn f.) b'it dakh-in-i	b'yi-dakh-ehn bit-daa-khen
36. Speak	ḥa-ki	b'aḥ-ki	m.) bi-tiḥ-ki f.) " "	b'y-iḥ-ki b'tiḥ-ki
37. Swear	ḥil-faan	b'aaḥ-lehf	m.) bi-tiḥ-lef f.) b'tiḥ-lif-fi	b'yiḥ-lehf b'tiḥ-lehf
38. Swim	s'bi-ḥa	b'as-baḥ	m.) b'tis-baḥ f.) b'tis-ba-ḥi	b'y-is-baḥ b'tis-baḥ
39. Take	a-khid	b'aa-khohd	m.) b'taa'khod f.) b'taa'khod-i	b'yaa-khod b'taa-khod
40. Taste	d'waah (q)'h	ba-doo'(q)h	m.) b'it doo(q)' f.) b'it doo'(q)'i	b'yi-doo'(q)'h bit-doo'(q)'h
41. Think	fikr	b'af-tik-ehr	m.) b'tif-tik-er f.) b'tif-tik-ri	b'yif-tik-ehr b'tif-ti-kehr
42. Travel	saf-ar	b'a-saa-fehr	m.) b'it saaf-ehr f.) b'it saaf-ir-i	b'yi-saa-fehr bit-saa-fehr
43. Wait	stan-na	b'as-tan-na	m.) b'tis-tan-na f.) b'tis-tan-neh	b'yis-tan-a b'tis-tan-a
44. Wake -up	feh-(q)'-an	bu-fee-(q)'h	m.) bit-fee(q)'h f.) bit-fee(q)'-i	b'yi-fee-(q)'h bit-fee-(q)'h
45. Walk	muh-shoo	b'am-shi	m.) bi-tim-shee f.) " "	b'yim-shi b'tim-shi
46. Write	k'tee-beh	b'ak-tohb	m.) b'tik-tohb f.) b'tik-it-bi	b'yik-tohb b'tik-tohb

WE	YOU	THEY
Nooḥ-na *Niḥ-na*	pl., m. & f. *Intoo*	*Hin-ehn* *Hom-ehn*
34. min-shim-i	b'it shim-moo	b'yi-shim-oo
35. min-ḍa-khen	b'it-ḍakh-ee-oo	b'yi-da-khin-oo
36. m'niḥ-ki	bi-tiḥ-koo	b'yi-ḥ-koo
37. m'nis-baḥ	tis-ba-ḥoo	b'yi-s-baḥoo
38. m'naa-khohd	b'taa-khid-oo	b'ya'-khi-doo
39. min-doo(q)'h	b'it-doo-(q)'oo	byi-doo(q)'-oo
40. m'nif ti-kehr	bi-tif-tik-roo	b'yif-tik-roo
41. min-saa-fehr	b'it-saaf-ir-oo	b'yi-saa-fir-oo
42. m'niḥ-lehf	bi-tiḥ-li-foo	b'yiḥ-li-foo
43. m'nis-tan-na	b'tis-taan-o	b'yis-tan-o
44. min-fi(q)'h	bit-fee(q)'oo	byi-fee(q)'-oo
45. m'nim-shi	bi-tim-shoo	b'yim-shoo
46. m'nik-tohb	b'tik-ti-boo	b'yik-ti-boo

Some Common Verbs

a) root, b) command, (male, sing.) c) to create male and female plural command form, add or substitute "oo" to b), the male command form. e.g; b) is "is(q)'al" [ask]; add "oo" to create c) "is(q)'al-oo", plural command.

Only "a)" and "b)" verb forms appear in most words given.

ROOT

To:			
Ask	a) soo(q)'aal	climb	tuh-liᶜh
	b) is(q)'al		it-lahᶜh
	c) is(q)'al-oo	close	tas-keer
answer	a) ja-waab		sak-ehr
	b) jaa-wehb	come	juh-yeh
bake	kha-beez		ta-ᶜaa
	ikh-behz	cooking	ta-beekh
blow	nafkh		it-bokh
	in-fokh	count	ᶜad-ad
break	ka-sir		ᶜidd
	ik-sehr	cover	a) tigh-tahy
bring	jeh-baan		b) ghat-ti
	jeeb		c) ghat-oo
build	ᶜah-maah-r	cut	(q)'ahs
	ᶜahm-ehr		(q)'iss
burn	ḥa-ree(q)'h	dance	ra(q)'s
	iḥ-ro(q)'h		ir-(q)'ohs
buy	a) mish-ta-ra	dig	ḥah-fr
	b) ish-tir-ee		iḥ-fohr
	c) ish-tir-oo	doing	ᶜa-mal
call	na-dihh		iᶜh-mal
	in-dahh	draw (art)	tuhs-weer
carry	ḥam-il		suh-wehr
	iḥ-mehl	dress	libs
catch	kamsh		il-behs
	ik-mesh	drink	shurb
choose	tin(q)'aay		ish-rahb
	na(q)'i	drive	sow-(q)'an
			soo(q)'h

eat	akl	jump	tuff, nuht
	i-i-kol ('kol')		tifh, niht
fall	wa-(q)'iᶜh	know	ᶜah-rah-f
	oo-(q)'aᶜh		iᶜh-rahf
feed	a) it-taᶜh-mo	laugh	duḥ-ḥuk
	b) taᶜh-mi		id-ḥahk
	c) taᶜh-moo	learn	ᶜilm
feel	aḥ-saa-s		it-ᶜal-am
	ḥiss	leave	say-baan
find	taḥ-weesh		seeb
	ḥa-w-esh	leave (go)	roh-ḥa
fix	ḥa-w-esh		rooḥ
	tus-leeḥ	lift	ruf-ᶜh
	sul-leḥ		ir-faᶜh
flying	teh-rahn	listen	a) sa-ma-ᶜh
	teer		b) is-ma-ᶜh
going	roḥ-ḥa		c) is-ma-ᶜh-oo
	rooḥ	look	tuht-leeᶜh
give	a) ᶜah-tah		tuhl-eᶜh
	b) ᶜaht-i	love	mu-ḥab-eh
	c) ᶜaht-oo		ḥibb
grow	tir-bahy		ᶜa-mal
	rub-bi		iᶜh-mal
hang	taᶜh-lee(q)'	mix	khul-t
	ᶜal-e(q)'h		ikh-loht
hear	sam-aᶜh	need	ᶜaa-zeh
	is-maᶜh		iᶜh-taaz
heat-up	tid-faay	open	fa-tiḥ
	daf-ee		if-taḥ
help	sa-ᶜa-deh	plant	zur-ᶜh
	sa-ᶜehd		iz-rahᶜh
hit	dur-rb	play	li-ᶜb
	id-rohb		il-ᶜab
hold	id-Aohb	pull	shadd
	mas-k		shidd, is-ḥab
	im-sek	push	dafsh
hope	ᶜa-sham,		id-fohsh
	it-ᶜash-am	put	ḥuht
hurt	wa-jaᶜh		ḥuit, ḥit
	wojj-eᶜh		

read	(q)′ra-y-eh
	i(q)′h-rah
rest	ree-ya-ḥa
	′streeḥ
ride	rikb
	ir-kab
run	ra-gd
	ir-gohd
say	(q)′ow-l-aan
	(q)′ool
see	shohf
	shoof
sell	beh-ᶜh
	beeᶜh
send	ba-ᶜht
	ib-ᶜat
sewing	khi-ya-tah
	kha-y-eht
sing	a) magh-na
	b) ghann-ni
	c) ghann-oo
sit	(q)′aᶜhd
	i(q)′ ᶜohd
ship (send)	shaḥn
	ish-ḥan
sleep	nohm
	namm
smell	shum
	shim
speak	ḥa-ki
	iḥ-kki
stay	ba(q)′a
	ib-(q)′a
stop, (stand)	wa-(q)′f
	ou-(q)′ahf
swim	s′bi-ḥa
	is-baḥ
take	akh-d
	khohd
talk (words)	ka-laam
	t′kal-am
talk (2)	ḥak-i
	iḥ-kee
taste	d-wah-(q)′h
	doo-(q)′(uh)
teach	ta-ᶜleem
	ᶜal-lehm
tear (object)	sha(q)′h
	shi-(q)′h
tell (report)	tahkh-beer
	khub-ehr
think	fik-r
	if-tik-ehr
throw	zuht / ḥad′f
	zitt / iḥ-dohf
touch	daa-(q)′(uh)
	di-(q)′h
try	tuhj-reeb
	jar-ehb
use	is-tiᶜh-maal
	is-taᶜh-mehl
visit	zya-ra
	zoor
wait (patience)	suh-br
	is-bohr
wake-up	feh-(q)′-aan
	fee(q)′h
walk	mash-oo
	im-shee
want (to)	ra-ghilb
	ir-ghab
write	a) kteeb-eh
	b) ik-tohb
	c) ik-tohb-oo
work	sho-ghl
	ish-ti-ghehl

Proverbs

LA-W KAN IL KALAM MIN FOOD-DAH / IL SEE-KOOT MIN DA-HAB

Even if speech is (made) of silver, silence is of gold.

IL ᶜILLIM B'IL ZA-GHAR / MITL NA(Q)'SH, ᶜAL ḤA-JAR; IL ᶜILLIM B'IL KUB-AR / MITL NA(Q)'SH ᶜAL MUHY

Learning in youth is like carving a stone, learning at an advanced age is like carving on water.

IZA KAN-LAK GHA-RAHD ᶜAND KALB, (Q)'OOL-O, "YA SIDI"

If you have a request to make to a dog, address him, "My lord."

ᶜALA (Q)'AD FREHSH-AK MID IDJR-EHK

Stretch your legs to the length of your bed.

LAMA-A YIJI IL SUB-I, / SUL-I ᶜAL NABI

When the boy-infant comes (is born), (it will be time to) pray that he will be a prophet.

TA-JEHR WA M'NAJ-EHM MA B'YI-SEER

A merchant and soothsayer (in one individual) is 'unlikely'.

ILLI B'TIT-BOKH-HO, B'TA'A-KIL-HO

What you cook is what you will eat.

MAAL IL ḤARAAM MA B'YI-DOOM

Illegal wealth does not endure.

IL INSAAN MA B'YI(Q)'DEHR YIḤMEL BATIKH-TEHYN BI EED WAḤED-EH

A person cannot carry two melons in one hand.

YOHM B'IL ᶜAALI / WA YOHM BIL WAH-TI;
SAᶜA ᶜAS-AL / SAᶜA BUS-AHL
One day "high", one day "low"; one hour is like honey, anothers like onions.

"YAREHT, YAREHT", ᶜIMRO MA ᶜAHM-AR BEHYT
"Would that" ... ("I wish"; "If only," etc.) never built a house.

IL Ḥ'MAHR B'YIR-TI-BET BI R'SA-NO / IL INSAAN BI LI-SAAN-O
A donkey is tied (restrained) by his reins, a person by his tongue.

ILI B'YI-DI(Q)' ᶜAL BAAB / B'YIS-MA-ᶜH JA-WAAB
He who knocks on a door will receive a response.

I-ᶜMAL KHEHR WA IRMEE ᶜAL BAḤR
Do good and fling it in the ocean ("cast thy bread...").

IL MAJ-NOON B'YIḤ-KI, ILᶜAA-(Q)'EHL, B'YIS-MAᶜH
The crazy one speaks on, the wise person listens.

SAᶜA ILA, RUBB-AHK / WA SAᶜA ILA (Q)'ALB-AK
(Devote) an hour to your Creator, an hour to your heart's desire.

IL ZAA-YEHD AKHOO IL NAH-(Q)'EHS.
Too much is "brother" to too little.

IḤFAHZ (Q)'IRSH-AK IL AHB-YAHD / ILA YOHM-AK IL AS-WAD
Take care of your "white" piaster, against your "black" day.

LA T'BEEᶜH JILD IL DIB (Q)'ABL MA TIK-MISH-O
Don't sell the bear-skin before you capture the beast.

IL ᶜAJ-LEH MIN IL SHAI-TAHN / IL TA-A-NEH MIN IL RAḤ-MAAN
Haste is from the Devil, orderliness is from the Compassionate.

IL RIZ(Q)' BI IL ᶜA-MAL / WA LA-W BI IL AM-AL
Possessions result from doing, and not from wishing.

L'IL FAHEEM B'YIK-FEE A-SHAARA
To the intelligent, a hint is sufficient.

KUHL ḤARA-KEH / FI-HA BARAK-EH
Every movement contains a blessing.

KITRIT IL ḤARA-KEH- / MA FI-HA BARAK-EH
Too much movement does not bring blessings.

B'IL TA-(Q)-A-NEH / AMA-NEH
In orderliness there is security.

SAL-EHM ᶜAJEEN-AK L'IL KHAB-AZ WA-LA-W AKAL NUHS-O
Entrust your dough to a baker (a professional),
even though he eats (steals) half.

IL ᶜAH-SAH-YEH MIN IL JAN-NEH
The stick (with which to punish) is from Heaven.

IBᶜEHD ᶜAN IL SHURR WA GHAN-EE-LO
Distance yourself from a quarrel — and sing (rejoice).

IL KASAL MA B'YI-TAᶜMI ᶜAS-AL (BUS-AHL)
Laziness does not produce honey (onions).

IL SUB-BIR MIF-TAḤ IL FUR-AJ
Patience is the key to success.

KALB-EHN, B'YI-(Q)'TIL-OO, ASSAD (SABᶜH)
Two dogs can kill a lion ("In unity . . . ").

TOOLIT IL BAAL / BIT-HID J'BAAL
Deliberateness can bring down mountains.

IL FAAT . . . MAAT
What is past . . . is "dead".

ID-ROHB IL TUHYN (TEEN) ᶜAL ḤEHT,
IN MA LIZ-EH(Q)', B'YI-ᶜAL-EHM
Fling the plaster on the wall, if it doesn't stick, it will leave a mark. (No effort is entirely lost).

(Q)'AHSA-BIᶜH-AK MA-W KUHL-I-HOM MITL BAH-ᶜD
(MA-W FARD-I-YAAS)
Your fingers are not all alike; not the same size.

ISTAN-A YA G'DEESH, / ḤIT-A YIN-BOHT IL ḤA-SHEESH
Wait, young donkey, until the grass sprouts (haste is useless).

IL-ḤA(Q)' KAHR ABOOK, WA-LA-W ḤARAH-M-I
Follow your father's trade, even if he is a burglar. (old tradition).

IL SAH-DEE-(Q)', BI WA-(Q)'T IL DEE-(Q)'AH
The true friend (is revealed) in time of distress.

IZA SAḤEB-AK MIN ᶜAS-AL, LA TIL-ḤA-SO KUHL-O
If your friend is made of honey, do not lick it all.

EHSH FI AḤLA MIN IL ḤALA-WEH ? / IL SUHL-ḤA BAᶜID IL ᶜADA-WEH
What is sweeter that halava? Friendship after enmity.

ILI NEET-O YIS-TREEḤ
B'YI-(Q)'OOL ᶜALA KUHL-SHEH "MLEEḤ" (M'NEEḤ)
He who aims for a restful life, says, "Everything is good."

KAMA TI-DOON / TOON-DAAN
As you judge (others), so will you be judged.

ILI ᶜALAM-NI WA-LOO ḤIRF, ASEER-LO (LA-HOO) ᶜABD
Who teaches me — even one letter, I will be as a slave to him.

DAAR (BEHYT) BALA JAHR, / B'YIS-WA ALF DEENAR
A dwelling without a (close) neighbor is worth a 1000 Dinars (old coinage).

SHᶜEER BALAD-AK WA-LA-W (Q)'AMḤ GHA-REEB
The oats of your own town (are better) than "foreign" wheat.

IS(Q)'AL ᶜAL JAAHR / (Q)'ABL MA TIS (Q)'AL ᶜAL DAAR
Investigate the prospective neighbor before the dwelling.

IS(Q)'AL ᶜAN IL RAFEE-(Q)' / (Q)'ABL MATIS(Q)'AL ᶜAL TAH-REE(Q)'
Ask about the travel-companion [for safety] before you inquire about the road.

YA JAH-RI, INTA FI DAAR-AK / WA ANA FI DAAR-I
"Oh neighbor, you (stay) in your own dwelling, and I in my own residence.

JAHR-AK IL (Q)'AREEB, WA-LA AKH-OOK IL BᶜEED
A close neighbor, rather (is better) than a distant brother.

ILI ᶜAA-SHAR AL (Q)'OHM ARBA-ᶜEEN YOHM SAHR MIN-A-HOHM WA FI-HOHM
He who lives within a group for forty days becomes one of them.

KUHL RI-KHEES GHAA-LI
Everything cheap is [winds up being] expensive.

YA MOOSTAR-KHES ᶜAL LAḤM, ᶜAND IL MAR-(Q)'A B'TIN-DAAM
You seeker of cheap meat, you will regret it in the soup.

JANN-EH BALA NAAS / MA B'TIN-DAAS
Paradise without people (companionship) cannot be endured.

ZIRT SER-AH-YAT IL SUHL-TAHN, WA MITL BEHYTI MA FI
I visited the Sultan's palace, but there is nothing (so good) as my own home.

ILI ḤASA-BAK BI SIᶜH-ROH, MA ZUL-AH-MAHK
He who considers you as himself does not do you an injustice.

FARKH IL BUHT SAABEEH, (ᶜAW-AAM)
The offspring of a duck is a swimmer (floater).

ILI MA B'YAᶜH-REHF YIR(Q)'OS, BYI-(Q)'OOL
"IL (Q)'AHRD ᶜOH-W-JA"
He who doesn't know how to dance says "the floor is un-even, crooked".

ILI TAH-LEB AKL MA BYISH-BAᶜH / WA TAH-LEB MAAL MA B'YIK-FA
He whose stress is on food is never satisified, and the seeker of wealth never has enough.

IL KAZ-AB (GA-DAAB) ḤABLO (Q)'AH-SEER
The liar is ever on a short rope.

MA B'TAᶜH-REF KHER-I / ḤITTA TᶜASHER GHER-I
You never know (appreciate) my goodness, until you frequent others.

EED ILI MA B'TI(Q)'DER ᶜA-LEH-HA, BOOS-A,
WA IDᶜI ᶜA-LEH-HA B'IL KASR
The hand (power) which you cannot overcome, kiss it (submit to it) and curse it that it be broken.

ILI B'YIN-TIKEHL ᶜALA JAH-RO, B'YI NAAM JOO-ᶜAAN
He who depends on his neighbor goes to sleep hungry.

IZA-KAN RAA-JEᶜH MIN IL SAF-AAR, JEEB
ILA AHH-LAAK WA-LA-W ḤA-JAR-A
When returning from a trip. bring your family (a present) even though only a stone.

IL DIBB BI ᶜEHYN IMMO GHA-ZAAL
The bear (proverbially 'clumsy'), is like a deer in his mother's eyes.

MA (A)ḤAD BI(Q)'OOL ᶜALA ZEHYTO ᶜIK-ER
No one (a seller) says that his oil is murky (inferior).

ABKI ᶜAL ḤEHYT ILI BIDDO SAN-A-DAAT
I "weep" for a wall that requires support.

ILI NEET-O YIS-KAAR, MA B'YI-ᶜID (Q)'ID-DAAḤ
He who is determined to become intoxicated doesn't count the drinks.

IL RAM-AD AḤ-SAN MIN IL ᶜAMA
An eye infection [common in the Orient], is better than blindness.

IL Z'BAA-LEH B'TIN-FOSH ḤA-LA
Garbage puffs itself.

IL B'YA'KOL ᶜISSI, MA-W MITL IL B'YI'ᶜIDD-HOM
He who eats (receives) the strokes (of a punishment-beating) is not like the one who (only) counts them.

IL ᶜAA-SHEH' AᶜMA, WA-LA-W KAN BAH-SEER (FA-HEEM)
A lover is blind even though he is bright-eyed (intelligent).

YINᶜAL TO(Q)' DA-HAB, ILI B'YAKH-N-(Q)' LAAB-SO
Cursed is the gold necklace that chokes its wearer (addiction to luxury, etc.)

ḤARAH-MI (Ḥ'RAH-MI) IL BEHYT, MA B'IN-NITTEHR
A thief within the household cannot be guarded against.

BIT-BEEᶜH BIL DEHYN? ZEEN-LI RUHT-LEHYN.
"Oh, you sell on credit? Weigh out two ruhtls" [each 7 lbs; a lot].

KUHL DEEK ᶜALA MAZ-BIL-TO, SAH-YAḤ
Every rooster is a loud crower on his own pile of garbage.

ḤUHT-OO DAN-AAB IL KALB B'IL (Q)'AA-LEHB
ARBA-ᶜEEN SAN-EH, TIHL-EᶜH AᶜH-WAJ
They put the dog's tail in a mold for forty years, it emerged curved.

IS(Q)'AL MU-JUR-REHB WA LA TIS(Q)'AL ḤA-KEEM
Ask one who tried [a home remedy] rather than ask a physician.

DA(Q)'IT MU-ᶜALEHM B'TIS-WA ALF / WA-LA-W SHALF
The touch of a master is worth a thousand, even if it is off-handed.

IL BA-KHEEL MITL Ḥ'MAAR MU-ḤAM-AL DA-HAB
The miser is like a donkey that is loaded with gold (of no use to him).

MA B'YI-ḤIK JILD-O MITL DIF-RO
Nothing scratches one's itch so well as his own nail.

ILI FI EEDO SUNᶜAH MITL MA-LEK, (Q)'ALᶜA
He who has a profession in hand, is like the master of a fortress.

IL AKL, ᶜALA (Q)'AD IL MU-ḤAB-EH
A good appetite (eating) is an indication of affection.

IL SKEH-FA-TI ḤAA-FI, IL KHA-YAHT ᶜAR-YAAN, WA IL NA-JAAR BAB-O MAKH-LOOᶜH
The shoemaker is barefooted, the tailor is naked, the carpenter's door is shaky (one should take care of his own needs first).

KALB ḤIRR, AḤSAN MIN ASSAD (SABIᶜH) MAHR-BOOT
A free dog is better than a tied (caged) lion.

KOOL SHEH MAM-NOOᶜH, MAR-GHOOB
Everything forbidden is sought after.

KITROO IL EEDEHYN — SHAHT IL ᶜA-DES
With too many hands the lentil-soup will be scorched.

IL BAKHEEL B'YA-KHOD-AK ᶜAL NAH-HIR, WA B'YI-RAJ-I-ᶜAK ᶜAHT-SHAHN
The miser will take you to the river, and will return you thirsty.

DUH-RUB-NI WA BAKA, SABA(Q)'NI WA ISH-TA-KA
He struck me and wept and anticipated me in filing a complaint.

IL KASLAN SHA-WEER
The lazy one is an advice-giver.

KOHL MA TISH-TI-HI NAF-SAK, WA ILBES LIBS IL NAAS
Eat whatever your heart desires, but dress like the rest of the people.

ILBES ḤA-SEER-EH, WA LA LIBS ᶜEE-YA-REH
Wear clothes (even) of straw, and not borrowed finery.

T'GHADA WA T'HAD-A / T-ᶜASH-SHA WA T'MASH-SHA
Lunch [main meal in some climates] and rest, sup and promenade.

ALF BAH-KHOOR MA B'YI-GHAT-TOO ᶜALA HAW-YEH (FAS-WEH) WA-ḤID-EH
A thousand incense-burners will not overcome the odor of one 'stomach gas'.

IBNO, ALA KITFO, WA B'YI'FAT-TESH ᶜA-LEH
His son is in his arms, yet he goes searching for him.

ILI ᶜANDO MAAL-O, MITL BINT IL SUHL-TAHN ᶜAROOS-TO
He who has possessions is like one with a princess as his bride.

IL BEDAWI B'YI-AHKHER ISTIN-(Q)A-MO ARBA-ᶜEEN SANA, WA B'YI (Q)'OOL, "YINᶜAL ABU IL ᶜAJ-LEH"
The bedouin (peasant, nomad) delays his revenge forty years and exclaims "Damn such haste!"

JI-ḤA JAAB-HO / WA JI-ḤA AKAL-HO
Ji-ḥa (a fabled character) brought the food and Ji-ḥa ate it.

MIN BARRA R'KHAM / MIN JOO-WA S-KHAHM
The exterior is marble, the interior is filth.

WAḤAD ḤA-MEL DA(Q)'NO WA IL TA-NI TA-ᶜHBAAN FI HA
One "carries" (has) a beard, another complains of its "weight". (A busybody intrudes himself in the affairs of others.)

WAḤAD B'YI'KOON BI'L (Q)'LEHT, WA IL TA-NNI B'YI (Q)'OULO "KHOD-LAK WARDEH!"

One may be in a cess-pool (in trouble), another says: "Take this rose!"

LU(Q)'MEH IL ZAAY-DEH / MA ILA AFAAY-DEH

That extra mouthful of food serves no useful purpose.

BEHYDA IL-YOHM, AḤSAN MIN JA-JEH BUK-RAH

An egg today ('in hand') is better than a hen tomorrow.

ᶜAS-FOOR BIL YADD AḤSAN MIN ᶜASHRA ᶜAL SAJ-RA

A bird in hand is better than ten on the tree.

(Q)'A-LOOLA L'IL (Q)'IT-(AH), WASAKH-HA B'YIN-FAAᶜH, ḤAFRAT WA TUM-MUTT-O

They told the cat that her waste, feces, are useful, she dug and buried them. (dog in the manger)

SAKAT-NA-LO, DAKHAL HOO-WA WA Ḥ'MAHR-O

Because we were discreet (polite) with him, he entered along with his donkey.

IL BA-KHEEL, B'YI-KHAHF YI-MASH-I BUT-NO, SHI LA MA YI-JOOᶜH

The miser hesitates to move his bowels, for fear of becoming hungry.

(Q)'ALBI ᶜALA WALAD-I WA (Q)'ALB WALAD-I ᶜAL ḤAJ-AR

My heart is (concerned) over my son, his heart over rocks.

IL ᶜANDO JA-JEH, BI DAI-YI-NOO BEHYDA

One who owns a hen is able to borrow an egg.

KHOD IL AH-SEEL / WA LA-W ᶜAL ḤA-SEER

Marry a person with good lineage, even though on a straw mat.

SHA-HIR ILI MA ᶜANDAK FEE ḤIS-AAB, LA TI-ᶜID I-YA-MO
A month in which you have no accounts (trade), don't count its days.

ᶜASFOOR KIFFEL ZARZOUR WA TINEHN-HOM TEE-AHR
The sparrow stood security for (guaranteed) the swallow, but both are flighty.

AḤSAN MAT(Q)'AL SAMM / WA-LA ḤAB-BEY-ET HAMM
A heavy weight of poison is preferable to even a grain of worry.

BEHYDA MIN BEHYDA B'TIFSAD
A bad egg can spoil another.

ᶜAJ-WEHT ZEHY-TOON-EH B'TISNOD KHAAB-YA
The stone (pit) of an olive (insignificant) can support a large jar.

MA WOO(Q)'-EᶜH IL SUK-KAR B'IL MUHY
The sugar has not fallen into water (not too late; not irrevocable).

L'AISH IL JAM-AL ᶜEHYNE'H B'YI-MUS-U? BI-ḤE'S DA-LI-LO JAḤSH.
Why do the camel's eyes tear? Because his leader is a jackass [Every caravan has a donkey at the head; camel's eyes are liquid, watery.]

ALF (Q)'ALBEH, WA LA GHAL-BEH
A thousand changes of mind [are better] than being worsted one time.

MIN IL WAR-DEH SHOHK-EH, WA MIN SHOHK-EH WAR-DEH
From the rose (grows) a thorn, from the thorn, a rose

L'AISH ᶜAM BTIB-KI, ANA A-BOOK. BI-ḤES INTA AB-I / ABOOY-A, ANA BAB-KI
Why are you weeping, I am your father. It is because you are my father that I weep

BO(W)ST IL EE-DA-AN, DI-ḤI(Q)'H / ᶜ AL D'(Q)'OON

Kissing of (elder's) hands (a customary sign of respect and submission) is (sometimes) a mark of insincerity and derision



Index

Subjects

ᶜ*Aaqqabeh* (in Aleppo), 178
Abadi and Katraan, 325
ᶜ*Abra*, 340
Academia Hebrea de Panama, 315
Agudath Israel, 91
Aḥava vé Aḥva Congregation and Synagogue, 95, 96
Aḥi Ezer Apartments, 306;
  Congregation, 80;
  Synagogue, 67, 324;
  Yeshiva, 88, 91
ᶜ*Ain Yaᶜacob*, 53
Akabehr, 134, 348
Albert Einstein Medical School, 407
ᶜAleh (resort), 141, 239, 333
Aleppo 4, 18, 37, 46;
  Abraham and, 18;
  anti-Jewish violence in, 37, 169, 203, 207, 208-209, 224, 237,-238; 472-475
  climate, 49;
  commerce and trade in, 18, 24, 26-29, 51, 140, 216, 339;
  cultural life in, 228;
  co-education in, 190, 204;
  education in, 53-56, 131, 149, 150, 165, 189, 203-206, 218, 229-231, 284, 339;
  electric lighting in, 434;
  female education in, 56, 57, 175, 189;
  family life in, 39, 192, 218, 224, 236;
  French trading colonies in, 26,;
  housing in, 39, 47, 130, 139, 122, 192;
  Italian Sepharadeem in, 26;
  Jewish-Muslim relations in, 38, 133-135, 151, 167, 200, 206, 2190220, 222-224, 225;
  Jewish quarters in, 199, 233, 339, 363;
  Jews remaining in, 77, 216, 217-221, 222;
  marriage in, 5, 40, 135, 136, 161, 190-191, 233, 340;
  medical care, 47-49;
  medieval 17-20;
  migration from, 58-59, 125, 127, 163, 186;
  migration to, 163;
  modern, 221, 225, 226, 228;
  music and musicians in, 228;
  Muslims in, 155, 195;
  rabbis in, 33-34;
  religious life and traditions in, 132, 160, 205, 234-235, 236;
  social class in, 73, 285;
  souks in, 52, 188, 225;
  Spanish "Sepharadeem" in, 18, 25;
  statistics of, 4, 23, 33, 110, 164;
  trolley cars, 160, 340
Aleppo Codex, 36, 110, 467-477
Aleppoan immigrants, 10-11, 12, 13, 14-15, 18
Aleppo-in-Flatbush. *See* Flatbush
Aleppoan rabbinical seminary (*Porát Yosef*), 99
Allen Street, 260-261, 264, 265, 281
Alliance Israélite Universelle, 11, 53, 55, 131, 132, 203-204, 205, 284, 308, 330, 339
Alouite Muslims, 227, 229
American Discount Stores, 104
Ammon Yom Zeh, 480
Anti-Semitism, 37, 169, 203, 207, 208, 224, 237-238
Anza and Beyda, 188
Aperion Manor (Brooklyn, N.Y.), 390
Apostate, Jewish, 236
Arab conquest, 20-24
Arabic language, 32;
  in Damascus, 332;
  immigrants to New York and, 122, 332
Aram Soba, 18, 26, 463, *See* also Aleppo
Argentina, Aleppoans in, 146;
  other Syrian Jews in, 62, 144, 148
Armenians, 27, 194, 304
Ashkenazeem, 8;
  in Aleppo, 46, 160;
  in Flatbush, 146;
  Sepharadeem and, 73, 100;

Syrians and, 63, 117;
in the U.S., 96; yeshiva in Flatbush
Ashkenazi. *See* Ashkenazeem
Asmara, Ethiopia, 290, 291
Assimilation, 96, 97, 98, 117
Atlantic City, New Jersey, 266

B ᶜaalbek, 141
Babél. *See* Bagdád, 21
Bab-il-Nasser, 208
Bagdád, 20, 21;
Jews of, 500;
loss of religious practices in, 312
Bab Jnehn, 178
Bahseeta, 164
Baklawa, 245
Bazrah, 232
Beirut, 140, 143, 147;
Jews in, 140, 143, 176, 210, 238, 342;
smuggling Syrian Jews to Israel from, 142;
statistics, 342;
Syrian Jews in, 140, 347;
youth in, 349;
Beirut, University of, 457
Bené Akiva (social club), 290
Bené Barak, 443
Bené Israel See India, Jews of
Bené Yosef Synagogue, 82
Benicencia Synagogue (Lima, Peru), 453
Bensonhurst, 65-70, 372;
Aleppoans in, 65, 66;
Damascus Jews in, 67, 68;
early social centers in, 369-37-, 390;
synagogues, 67, 154;
Sepharadi Yeshiva, 69;
souk 68;
Syrian community center, 68-69;
Youth, 68
Ben-Zvi Institute, 475
Berit Milah 155
Bet Deen, 33, 129, 165, 185
Bet Midrash, 67;
in Aleppo, 207
Bet Nasi, 26
Beth Torah Synagogue, 82
B'hamdoun, 239, 343
Bikkur Holeem, 115, 342, 349
Birkat Kohaneem, 489
Birmingham, Alabama, 245
Bistan il Klehb, 189
Bistanji, 134
Blood libel, 162, 329
Bludan (resort), 226, 228
B'nai Brith, 70, 399, 401
Bradley Beach, New Jersey, 12, 75, 415
Brazil, Lebanese Jews in, 211;
Sepharadeem in, 494;
Syrian Jews in, 147, 210, 211
Brekheet-o, 235
"Bride price," 180
Brooklyn, statistics of, 1, 14. *See* also Bensonhurst, Flatbush, Williamsburg
Brooklyn College, 399, 401, 402
Buenos Aires, Aleppoan Jews in 146, 174;
Damascene Jews in, 146. See also Argentina, other Syrian Jews in
Byzantines. *See* Greek Orthodox

Caesar's Bay Bazaar World, 396, 403
Cairo Codex, 468
Cairo, Egypt, Aleppoans in, 288, 287;
anti-Jewish activities in, 272;
Ashkenazeem in, 290;
Jews in 268-271;
Jewish life in, 268-271, 289-291;
religiousness of Jews in, 291. *See* also Egypt.
Cairo Geniza. *See* Geniza of Fostat
Calcutta, Aleppoans in 32
Caraville Restaurant, 78
Card playing, in Aleppo, 42, 44, 235;
Carribbean, Sepharadi migration to, 494
Catholic scholars, 181
Cave of the Just, 48, 129
Century-21 department stores, 104
Charity and Healing Association, 49. See also *Sedaqa u Marpeh*
Charlotte, North Carolina, 245
Chatham and Phoenix Bank, 259
Christians, in Aleppo, 194;
attitudes towards Jews, 37, 167;
in Beirut, 238, 342, 343;
in Turkey, 304
Cicurel department store, 272
City College, 313
Club d'Alep, 207
Codex of ben Asher. *See* Aleppo Codex
Community life, 49
Congrejo (Panama City), 314
Conscription, 60-61, 166, 193, 305, 355
Constantinople, 162
Covenant of ᶜUmar, 35
Cox and King News Agency, 429
Cuba, Syrian Jews in, 273, 274, 275, 281
Columbian Exposition, 447
Crusades 26, 469
Cuisine, Middle Eastern, 493

Daaher Quarter, 268
Damascus,
attitudes towards Jews in, 322;
housing in, 46, 47, 328;
Jews in, 231, 327, 323, 328;
Jews from, in Argentina, 146;
Jews from, in Bensonhurst, 67;

Jews from, in Mexico City, 417;
Jews from on Lower East Side; modern, 221-222, 226
Daniel Jones Furniture, 263
Daniel, Mehaḥem Saleḥ, 307
Deal, New Jersey, 12, 75-76, 77, 249;
religious education in, 93;
synagogues, 82-83;
Syrian community in, 319-321
Deal Municipal Casino, 75
Dhimmis ('Protected' Jews and Christians), 34, 35
Divorce, 1, 185, 186
Djejahti and Lati, 326
Djamiliyeh, 33, 47, 77, 139, 165, 172, 178, 190, 220, 228
Dooki (Cairo), 289
Drugs, 295
Druze, 141, 333
Duane Reade Drugs, 104

Education, 294;
co-ed, 88;
female, 88, 101;
religious, 87-93, 375;
in Aleppo, 218;
in Damascus, 323
ᶜEed il Jahr, 235 *See* also *Ḥag Ha-Illa-not*
Egypt,
anti-Jewish activity in, 272;
Aleppoans in, 268, 288, 289;
Ashkenazeem in, 290;
Jews and Jewish life in, 268-272, 288-291;
from in Flatbush, 81, 115, 154
Emigration, from Egypt, 15;
from Lebanon, 15;
from Syria 14, 15
England, 144, *See* also Manchester, England
Entertainment, 43-45
Eres (Eretz) Yisrael, 253
Etzel, 299, 442

Farah - Sasson, 78
Fayoum, Egypt, 470
Firn Chiroh, 164
First Temple, destruction of, 498
Flatbush, 77-79;
Ashkenazeem in, 77, 83, 88;
Christians in, 77;
co-education, 88;
community buildings, 77;
community characteristics, 73;
Damascus Jews in, 79, 88;
Egyptian Jews in, 81;
Iraqi Jews in, 311;
Jewish education, 87-92, 294;
Lebanese Jews in, 81;
new immigrants, 109, 115, 226;
professionals, 102;
ultra-Orthodox, 89, 91, 116;
religion in, 293, 294;
religious polarization in, 95-97;
Sabbath services in, 83-84, 90;
senior citizens, 13, 14;
social class, 78-79;
souk, 78;
synagogues, 80-82;
Syrians in, 12, 390;
women in, 105, 293
Francos. *See* Franj
Franj, 30, 31, 58, 174, 285
Fund Raising, 85

Gabbai, 472
Gaon, 21, 470
Gehbeereem, 348
Gigante (supermarket), 212
Games, children's, 54
Gimbel Brothers, 287
Geniza of Fostat (Cairo), 2, 22, 290
Geniza period, 22
Grace National Bank, 393
Gouttes de Lait, 349
Great Neck, New York, 76
Great Synagogue, 18, 19, 15, 66, 110, 132, 160, 161, 164, 168
Greek Orthodox, 27, 238
Guide for the Perplexed, 24

"Hagaha/Mappah," 488
Haganna, 299
Ḥag ha Illa-not. *See* ᶜEed il Jahr
"Ḥakikat al-ᶜAmar," 458
Ḥakham Bashi, 33, 38, 65, 66
Ḥálab. *See* Aleppo
Ḥalabi Religious Court, 132
Ḥalabiyeh, 444. *See* also Aleppoans
Ḥammam, 240
Ḥar Ha-Lebanon Synagogue, 81
Ḥarit-il-Yahood, 48, 52, 164, 199, 290, 322
Ḥarlem, New York, 446-447
Ḥasideem, distinguished from Ḥasidim, 99
Ḥasidim, 99
Ḥatem and Nahass, 260
Healing practices, 47-49
Hebraica (social club), 452
Hebrew language, 486;
Masoretic vowelling, 486;
Sepharadic pronunciation, 487, 491;
Hebrew University, 458
Hebron, 253, 300;
massacre in, 196
Hedaya Importing Company, 265
Heliopolis, 289
Ḥerem, 307, 488

Hilkhot Sepher Torah, 469
Holekh Tameen U Po ʿel Sedeq, 471
Holidays, 234, 235
Holon (grocers), 79
Hong Kong, Syrian Jews in, 105, 148
"House of the Prince," *See* Bet Nasi

"Iboul", 224
Ibn Ezra Synagogue, 268-290
Iddish, 273. *See* also Ashkenazeem
Illeh, 164
Ilton, Georgia, 243
Immigrants, 78-79;
contrasted with recent arrivals, 114-115, 122;
early on Lower East Side, 17, 18, 61-70;
Syrian 10-12, 13-16
India, Jews of, 498, 499
Infant's Home of Brooklyn, 154
Inquisition, 494
Instituto Alberto Einstein (Panama), 314
Intermarriage, Ashkenazeem and, 11, 71, 84, 370;
in Argentina, 147, 450;
in Brazil, 214, 215;
Jewish - Muslim, 307;
in Mexico, 214;
rate of, 93-94
in Venezuela, 214, 215;
Syrians and, 84, 370
International Sepharadic Fund, 85
Iraq, anti-Jewish activity in, 307-309;
escape from, 309-310;
Jewish life in, 308;
Jewish-Muslim relations, 307, 309-310
See Ishreh. See Purim
Israel, Aleppoans in, 312;
Ashkenazi-Sepharadi tension in, 335, 336;
Baghdadians in, 312;
Sepharadeem in, 9, 15, 311-312, 335;
U.S. Syrian Jews' support of, 117
Israeli underground. *See* Etzel
Istanbul, 174. *See* also Turkey
Izmir. *See* Smyrna

Jadaʿh, Habib, & Shʿayo, 138
Jalloom, 127
"Jay Dub", 423
Jerusalem, 19, 255, 297, 298, 301, 355, 469
Jerusalemite Synagogue, 469
Jeshurun Synagogue, 146
Jewish Community House, 69
Joab's Synagogue. See Great Synagogue
Johbar Synagogue, 49, 355
Jordache, 105
Judea, flight of Jews from, 19

Kabbalism, 98
Kaff-il-Aḥmar, 177
Kaiseriyeh, 134
Kaneh Middáh, 500
Karaites, 21, 468, 469
Karaite Codex. *See* Cairo Codex
Kashrut, 147
Keter, 467, 481. *See* Aleppo Codex
Keter Torah, 438. *See* Aleppo Codex
Khans, 51
Khan-il-Shoonah, 342
Kataab, 342
K'far Ḥasideem, 442
Khut-tahb (marriage broker), 233
Kibbeh, 425
Kibbeh b'masso, 235
Kibbutz K'far Gil ʿadi, 441
Kibbutz Gush Etzion, 300
Killez, Turkey. *See* Turkey
Kittab Sariyeh Anzaroot, 165, 188
Knis't il Djamiliyeh Synagogue, 207
Knisit-il-Kibbireh. See Great Synagogue.
Kobe, Japan, Syrian Jews in, 148
Kohaneem, 489
Koran (Kor'an), 168
Korea, Syrian Jewish merchants in, 104
Kol Yisrael Synagogue, 81
Krayem Synagogue, 289ja018
Ladino, 493
Lavage Synagogue, 147
Lebanon, Jews, 81-82, 106, 334, 335;
emigration from 15;
cultural life, 333;
Jews from in Flatbush, 154;
Leḥi, 299;
Leningrad, 468
Los Angeles, Syrian Jews in, 71
Lower East Side, Aleppoans on, 67, 126, 258, 259, 260, 356;
Damascus Jews on, 324-325;
immigration 62-63, 67;
life on, 152, 153, 258;
Syrian Jews on, 10, 11, 17, 487
Lunel, France, Jews of 23
Lycée Francais, 205, 339

Maccabi Sports Club, 349
Macy's Department Store, 283, 286, 287
Madeira Lace Shop, 266
Maghen Abrahám Synagogue, 349
Magen David Bulletin, 70
Magen David Synagogue, 65, 154
Magen David Talmud Torah, 301, 415
Magen David Yeshiva, 69-70, 87-88, 90, 91, 156
Magic Carpet, Aleppo-in-Flatbush, 2, 4, 7, 46, 101, 108, 124, 262

Mahaneh Yehudá, 301, 356
Maimonides Hospital, 407
Makhon Ha-Ketab, 280
Malbeesh ᶜaroomeem, 298
Manaus, Brazil, 210
Manchester, England, 138, 264, 497;
  Syrian Jews in, 58
Manzool, 188, 200
Maringo, 191
Marj ᶜil youn, 441
Market places. *See* souks
Marriage, 42, 363, 373, 428;
  arranged, 233-234, 355;
  ceremonies and customs, 135-136, 155, 161, 191, 263, 402, 418.
  See also intermarriage
Marzipan. *See mas-a-ban*
Mas-a-ban (marzipan), 191
Massacres, 194, 196, 497
Massorah, 468
Matchmaking, 459
Mattan Ba-Sehtehr, 349
Mehᶜa-raht ha-sadi-(q)'eem. *See* Cave of the Just
Meir-Elia Hospital, 307
Meyer's Ice Cream Parlor, 68
Mexico, anti-Semitism in, 213;
  early settlement in, 240-241;
  Jewish education in, 212-213;
  religiousity, 213-214;
  Syrian community in, 61, 211-214
Midrash Hakham ᶜAbood Harari, 131
Migrations, 9, 58-60
Mikdash Melech, 89, 90
Mikveh, 200
Mikveh Yisrael, 442
Minhag ha ᶜeer, 490
Mirrer Yeshiva, 81, 271, 272, 273
Mission Laique, 190, 331. See also *Lycée Francais*
Moharr-u-Mattaan, 342
Morocco, 288
Moshab, 442
Moussan Miracle. See *Nehs Moussan*
"Mozika," 136
Mukhabara (Secret Police), 219, 227
"Museum of the Book", 467
Muslims, 200, in Aleppo, 36, 229;
  attitudes towards Jews, 36, 37, 127, 132, 134, 151, 161, 167, 194-195, 206
Muslim Brotherhood, 272, 273
Musta-ᶜArab-een, 25, 30

Naᶜar Ha-daati, 442
Names, 490
Narraganset Pier, 378
Navat Yisrael, 280
Nehs Moussan, 161,
New Amsterdam Dutch Colony, Jews from Recife, Brazil in, 494
New Orleans, Louisiana, 243
New Testament, 168
New York, pioneer Syrian Jewish settlement in, 59
New York Association of New Americans (NYANA), 217
New York University, 401
Nobeh, 191

Odd Fellows, 70
Ohel Moᶜed Synagogue, 462
ᶜOod, 482
"Oriental Jobbers," 325, 357
Oriental Restaurants, 448
"Orosdi-Beck", 177
Orphan's Home (Aleppo), 434
Orthodoxy, in Flatbush 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93-94, 116;
  Syrian, 96, 98, 99
Ottoman Empire, 25-36, 492, 498

Palermo Synagogue (Argentina), 146-147
Palmach, 463
Palestinians, 343;
  P.L.O. 15, 334, 352, 432
Panama, attitude towards Jews in, 319;
  Commissariato Kashér in, 319;
  Consejo Central Comunitario Hebreo, 318;
  economic activities of Jews in, 316-317;
  Jewish education in, 315-316;
  Sepharadi in, 313-320;
  Spanish/Portuguese in, 315;
  Synagogue services, 316
"Pan de Spania", 161
Pardo's School, 375
Parents and children, 295
Paris Interior Decorators, 415
Passover, 235, 489
Pastimes, 44, 235, 257
Patilla (Panama City), 314
Peddlers, 259, 435
Persecutions, 497. See also anti-Semitism
Peru, Jews in, 446, 451;
  synagogues in, 453
Petition for British Nationality, 498
Phalangists, Christian, 342, 349
Phillip Bond and Norden, 259
Pizmoneem, 43, 147, 150, 478-482;
  in Flatbush, 482-484
Polygamy, 489
Porát Yosef Yeshiva, 99, 476
Poverty, 40, 41, 190, 435
Professions, Syrian, 101-103
"Protected" Jews and Christians. *See* Dhimmis.

Purim, 182, 234-235

Qassir-il-Nil, 289

Rabbis, in Aleppo, 33, 34;
in Damascus, 330-331;
respect for, 95;
Rabbinate Center (Cairo), 296
Radanites, 22
Rainbow Shops, 104
Ramalla Trading Co., 379
Rambam Synagogue (Cairo), 290
Religiosity, 116, 117, 148, 295, 374;
of Aleppoans, 148;
in Flatbush, 311;
in Israel, 311;
renaissance in, 294
Religious observance, among Syrians, 86-89
Republic National Bank, 104
Reshit Ḥokhma, 255
Responsa, rabbinic, 98
Rhodes, 162
Ritual bathing, 136, 200 *See Mikveh*
Rizz b-ᶜassal, 235
Roma (Mexico City), 212
Ruben and Hedaya, 261
Rye, New York, 415

S & A Stores, 104
Sabᶜh ᶜOh-jat ("The Seven Turns"), 164
Saidy Iluck, 379
Safra Institute of Sephardic Studies, 108
Salonika, 162
Samara Brothers, 265
Samartians, 25
Santiago, Chile, 451
Saqqattiyeh, 207
Scandroon, 134
Scarsdale, New York, Sephardic synagogue in, 108
Sea Beach, 67, 153-154
Secularization, 93-94, 96, 98, 117
Sedaqa u Marpeh, 49, 150, 151, 174, 178, 435
Sepharadeem, of Arab lands, 495-496;
Greek-Turkish, 492-494, 496
differences with Ashkenazeem, 335;
Judeo-Spanish, 492;
refugees in Israel, 2, 335;
Spanish-Portuguese, 494-495
Sepharadi Voice, 109
Sephardic Archives, 106-107
Sephardic Bikur Holeem, 156
Sephardic Community Center, 80, 106-109
Sephardic High School, 88, 89, 90, 91, 156
Sephardic Social Center, 77
Shaam, il. See Damascus
Sháare Zión Congregation, 80, 214
Sutton, A.D. Library, 67
Sháare Torah School, 294
Sháare Zion Synagogue, 80
Shabbu ᶜot (Pentecost holiday), 480, 489
"Shahb-bandar," 44
I. Shalom & Co., 266
Shammi Shcool, 414
Shawam. See Damascus Jews
Shawam Synagogue. 414
Sh ᶜayo Family Lane, 164
Shearith Israel Congregation, 495
Shrab-il-lohz, 340
Sidnawi Department Store, 272
Six Day War, 334, 352, 374
Smyrna, 162, 398
Social class, in Aleppo, 73, 285;
in Beirut, 348;
in Damascus;
in immigrant Syrian community, 73-74
Société Orientale de Publicité d'Egypte, 430
Sofar, 239
Souks, in Aleppo, 225;
in Bensonhurst, 68;
in Flatbush, 78
Souk-il-Gimrog, 188
Souk-il-Soos, 207
South Bronx, 262
Spain, Sepharadeem from, in Aleppo, 25;
expulsion from, 436;
Jews from in Syria, 18
Spaniol, 25, 187
Suez War, 15, 269, 289
Sunni Muslims, 227, 229
Swehnie, 340
Syria, class in, 41-42, 45;
emigration from, 195, 221, 228;
escapes from, 142-143, 186, 196-197;
immigrants from, on Lower East Side, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 478;
Jewish life in, 127-128, 132;
Jews in, today, 110-115, 202, 215-220;
persecution in, 111-112;
poor in, 40-41, 183, 190, 200, 202, 237;
recent immigrants from, 73, 113-115;
religious life in, 43, 44, 164;
trade with the Orient, 22;
Zionism in, 57
Syrian community, characteristics, 12, 73-76;
business enterprises in, 103-105;
future of, 295, 384;
intergroup marriages 73;
recent immigrants to, 73;
religious life 85, 86, 87, 97, 98, 116, 117, 295, 423;
religious education, 424;

Taᶜaleh (Damascus), 322
"Al-Tahkemoni", 480

Taiwan, Syrian Jewish merchants in, 105
Talayeen (Damascus) 322
Talmud Torah Schools, 67
Technion Institution, 310
Tedef, Turkey, sacred synagogues in, 162
Trahb il Hillok, 136
Trolley cars, in Aleppo, 160, 340
Truiet (Mexico City), 212
Turkey, army and conscription, 193;
  Jewish life in, 303, 304
Turkish baths, in Aleppo, 52
Turks, Seljuk, 469

UNESCO, 431
United Jewish Appeal (UJA), 377, 397
United Nations, 431
University of Pennsylvania, 401
Urfa, 132

Victory Silk Undergarment Company, 153
Viet Nam War, 383
"Vos-vos," 290

Wharton School of Business, 401
Wildwood, New Jersey, 378
Williamsburgh, Syrian immigrants in, 12, 63
Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 245
Wittingham College, 144
Women, 101, 105, 107, 109, 155, 156, 399, 404-405;
  of ill-repute, 43, 188
  World's Fairs, 59

Yad Ha-ḥazaqa, 132
Yahh-doot, in Brooklyn, 147
Yale University, 406, 407
Yavne, 438
Yeshiva ʿAteret Torah, 89, 90
Yeshiva, Bensonhurst, 40;
  Flatbush, 88, 406
Yeshiva Torah va Daʿat, 313
Yiddishe kopf, 420
Yom Kippur War, 407
Young Turks, 305, 355, 493

Zionism 14,
  in Egypt, 269;
  in Syria, 57, 348
  Youth, 295, in Syria, 349
Zahlé, 141
Zamalek, 289

Index

Names of Persons

Abadi, Abe, 256;
Adele
(m. Jimmy Sutton), 257;
Charles, 257;
Charles, 257;
Esther, 253-257;
Esther, 257;
Evelyn, (m. Morris
Rahmey), 257;
Frieda ("Fritzi") (m.
Ginsberg), 257;
Lily (née Cattan), 257;
Hakham Matloub (Shaúl), 254;
Michael, 257;
Sandra, 257;
Seymour, 256, 257;
Stephen, 257;
Yaᶜacob, 257
Abbas, Yehuda, 480
Ades, Ishaq, 132;
Susan, 103
Aharoni, Ada, 3
Akiva, Rabbi
ibn-Aknin/ᶜAknin, 23
Alfendri, Hakham Eliezer, 303
Alger, Mons., 132
Alouf, Ḥakham Shimᶜon, 81
Alataras family, 31
Amzalak, Jimmy, 374
Ancona, Abdo, 283;
Mazoul, 283;
Murad, 283-288;
Rachel ("Rae"), 288
Angel family, 30, 322, 327
Angel, Ḥakham, (Buenos Aires);
Rabbi Marc, 449. 495, 496
Antar, Eddie, 104;
Sam, 104
Antebi, Ezra, 201;
Morris, 200, 227-232
Antoki, Fathi, 445
Anzarouth, Aaron-Hillel, 352;
Bernard, 352;
Eva (née Barry), 351, 354;
Ferdinand ("Fred"), 345-354;
Ralph, 352
Anzarut family, 58
Applebaum, David, 163;
Joseph, 163;
Kaden (née Goldman), 163;
Ruth, 163
Arafat, Yassir, 352
Asa, Ḥakham, 214
Ashear, Allen Joseph, 380-388;
Joe, 266;
Mosé, 126;
Ḥakham Mose, 481, 482;
Ṙae (née Shwecky), 381;
Shahadeh, 286
Ashkenazi, Ely, 93, 103, 246, 304;
Ezra, 241;
Ezra 483;
Ezra E, 248;
Ezra S, 248;
Nissim, 268;
Sadqa, 152;
Saul, 93, 103, 248, 250, 304;
Sophie, 240-252;
Zakieh, 282
Assad, Hafez-al, 112, 226, 228
Assin, Alice (née Ancona), 283
Atash, Marco, 214
Attieh family, 31
Attieh, Raffael ibn YaᶜKoob, 207;
Lulu (née Shehbar), 201
Azar, Ḥakham Ḥayeem, 165, 199;
Hymie, 423

Bab il Barabara, 290
Bailey, Morris, 105
Baqqaᶜi, Ḥakham Abraham, 149;
Ḥakham Ezra, 149
Balaas family, 324
Baloutine, 264
Batillas, Ḥakham José, 147
Bawabeh, Aslan, 222;

Ḥakham Mose, 165
Bechar, Nissin, 258
Ḥassan, Beg, 195
Begin, Menachem, 431
Bekhaar family, 169;
Benoliel, Rabbi Chaim, 81
Ben Barkel, Rabbi Zekharia, 21
ben Buyaʿia, Rabbi *Shelomó*, 468
Ben-Zvi, Itzhaq, 471, 475
Benvenisti, Mons. 132
Betesh, David, 439-441
Betsh, Joe, 263
Beyda, Al, 359, 368, 390;
Barbara (née Cayre), 128;
Jack, 128;
Ralph, 359, 368;
Raymond, 359, 360, 390;
Yaʿcob, 258;
Yusef, 258
Biba (singer), 191
Bibi, David, 358;
Ruben, 359
Bigio, Abraham, 243;
Bijou, Sallee, 399, *See* Bigio
Bistreh family, 154
Blanco, Ezra, 258
Bobo, Ezra, 157;
Gloria (née Grazi), 157;
Nathan, 157;
Ralph, 157;
Richard, 157;
Scott, 157
Braha, David, 85;
Joseph, 85;
Millie (née Sarway), 365;
Sam, 365
Brezʾa Raḥmo, 134;
Sami, 133;
Tammo, 133

Cabasso, Isaac, 483
Castro, Fidel, 275, 276
Cattan, Yusef, 136. *See* also Kattan
Catton, "Eddie", 106; Sam, 85, 108
Cayre, Frieda (née Adjmi), 128;
Joe, 85, 128;
Ken, 128;
Lillian (née Mamiyeh), 128;
Selim; Abu Selim, 128;
Stanley, 85, 128;
Trina (née Haddad), 128;
Yadaʿh ("Jack"), 125-129
Chabbot, Dahood, 258;
Marḥabba ("Hello"), 258;
Yusef, 258
Chamoun, Camille, 343
Chammah, Julia (née Ashkenazi), 248
Chasson, Barbara (née Cohen), 400-401;
Gary, 401, 406
Chera, Stanley, 85
Chira, Susan, 103
Chirro-Cohen, Moosa, 179
Churba, Joseph, 102;
Ḥakham Rahameem, 296
Cohen, Bert (Basil), 417;
Basil David, 322-326;
Charlie (Eliahou) 390, 391;
David Eliahou, Basil David, 322-326;
Eli Basil, 414-417;
Elliot, 395;
Rachel ("Rae Ezra"), 396-406;
Regina (née Shamoula), 395;
Susan (née Shamah), 395;
Cohen, Shalom ibn Aharon ibn Obadia Ha-, 499
Collins, Lydia, 498
Cooper, Judith Elias, 499
Crémieux, Adolphe, 330

Dabbaḥ (de Ashkenazi), Isaac, 215, 434-439, 440;
Yishaq, 241
Dana family, 350
Dangour, Abraham, 483
Dayan, Eddie, 286, *See* "Gadʿh il-Missri;
Isadore Nouri, 67;
Rae, 188, 404;
Ḥakham Shaʿya, 129, 130, 471,
Ḥakham Yishaq, 130
Dayan family, 25, 26
Dayeh family, 169
De Picciotto, Signora, 389, *See* also Picciotto
de Tocqueville, Alexis, 65
Dishy, Bob, 103;
Ḥakham, 182
Douek/Duek/Dweck/Dwek, Abraham, 339;
Edward, 209;
Eliahou Moshé, 501
Ezra ("Abu-Faraj"), 135;
Rabbi Isaac, 83, 93, 94, 95;
"Joe", 30, 50, 133, 143, 189, 265, 285, 288;
Ḥakham Mosé, 339;
Ḥakham Mosé Shimʿon, 30, 500;
Raḥel, 50, 135, 143;
Raphael ibn Faraj, 132, 133;
Shaʿya, 325;
Susan, 103;
Ḥakham Yaʿakob, 165, 303
Einie family, 308
Elia, Albert, 142, 350;
Zaki, 142
Eliahou Ha-Nabî (Elijah), 330
Elias, Flower Jacob, 499
Elizabeth I (Queen of England), 470
Elnadaff, Rabbi Raphael, 483

Escava, Aaron. 395;
David, 154, 395;
Eileen (née Cohen), 395;
Felicia, 395;
Gladys, 395;
Isaac, 395;
Michael, 395;
Nathan, 395;
Seymour, 395;
Esses, Abe J., 91;
Abraham, 260, 303;
Asher, 153, 326;
Celia (née Ashkenazi), 248;
Clem, 425;
Diane, 108;
Isaac, 260;
Jacqueline (née Cohen), 399;
Mary, 260;
Rose, 425;
Seleem, 281-283
Ezekiel, Nehemia, 306, 312
Ezra, Abraham ibn, 480

Faḥam, Murad, 36, 473, 475, 476
Farḥi, David, 215;
Ḍenise, 215;
Eduard, 80, 208-215, 483;
Rose, 215;
Sarah, 215
Fallak, Jack, 401;
Marilyn, 401
Fallas, Fred, 393
Farah, 78
Farouk (King of Egypt), 271, 289, 290
Farrah, Yusef, 136
Faur, Rabbi Dr. José, 91, 92
Fishkehli, Ḥakham Sion, 165
Franco, Allegra (née Ashear), 247;
Bonnie, 157;
Irving J., 106;
Jeannie, 399;
Joseph, 157;
Judy, 157;
Louis, 128;
Rena, 157;
Rosalind (née Grazi), 157;
Shirley (née Cayre), 128
Tamar, 157;
Victor, 157

Gabirol, Shelomo ibn, 480
Gaon, 470
"Gadʿh il-Missri" (Egyptian Youth), 286. *See* Dayan, Eddie
Gindi, 15. *See* also Guindi
Gindi, Esther (née Sasson), 173;
José, 483;
Moe, 483;
"Sonny", 85;
Saqqa, Ash'ar, 435
Ginsberg, Friedal (Fritzi) (née Abadi), 102
Goitein, S.D., 2, 4, 22, 23, 31
Goldman, David, 163;
Fortunée (née Kassin), 70;
Hannah, 162;
Isaac, 150, 483;
Leah, 162;
Mazaal, 162;
Nachman, 162;
Renée, 163;
Solomon, 163
Grazi (Garazi), Abraham, 157;
Barbara, 157;
Claudia (née Shalom), 157;
David, 157;
Edward, 157;
Ezra, 281;
Harry, 157;
Jack, 157;
Joseph, 157;
Karen, 157;
Lisa, 157;
Lizzie (née Chabbot), 260;
Marcelle (née Dweck), 157;
Michelle, 157;
Morris, 157;
Paullette (née Beyda), 157;
Paulanna, 157;
Pauline "Bolissa", 149-158;
Rachel, 157;
Raymond, 155;
Richard, 157;
Sally, 157
Selim, 130;
Shirley, 157;
Victor, 157
Guindi, Henri, 204;. *See* also Gindi

Ḥaber, Gabriel, 261;
Rabbi Hillel, 90;
Manny, 85
Ḥaddad, Max A. ("Mac"), 368;
Ḍavid, 368;
Hyman, 368;
Joe, 368
Ḥafif, Frieda (née Ashkenazi), 248;
Joe, 265
Ḥaim, Rabbi Baruch Ben, 80
Ḥakim, Abraham, 249;
Tera, 249
Ḥakkim, Elie, 305
Ḥamway, Al Eliahou, 176;
Leto, 266
Ḥamowy, Al, 124
Ḥamwi-Khabbaz, Ḥakham Ezra, 132
Ḥanna family, 350

Hannono, 183
Ha-Rambam. *See* Maimonides
Ḥarari-Rafful, Hakham Yosef, 81
Harari, Ḥakham Abood, 131;
Ḥakham Abraham, 81;
Ḥakham Rafael, 151;
Ḥakham Sadeq, 212, 468;
Ḥazzan, Abraham, 480;
Ezra, 264;
Rachel (neé Bigio), 238;
Yaᶜcob, 238
Hecht, Rabbi Abraham J. 80, 369, 401
Hedaya, Abe Eliahou, 76;
Eli "Eliahou", 129-137, 258-267;
Danny, 103, 192;
Harry, 187;
Mary (née Namer), 187-192;
Mary (née Chabbot) 259, 260, 261;
Muriel (née Shalóm), 373;
Selim, 264
Henahan, Donald, 479
Herodotus, 121
Herzl, Theodore, 158
Herzog, Chaim, 431
Hidary, Isaac ("Ike"), 55;
Sarah (née Ashkenazi), 248
Hoffstein, Diana (née Grazi), 157;
Jennifer, 157;
Louis, 157;
Martin, 157;
Pauline, 157
Hohvaness, Alan, 479
Horn family, 138
Husney, Abraham, 137
Hwehreen, Yusef, 130, 138

Ibn Ezra, Abraham, 480
Ikehs, Latifeh, 199
Iran, Shah of, 473
Irani, Charles, 406;
Susan, 401, 406
Isserles, Rabbi Moshé, 469, 488

Jabbri, Mme. Shukria, 238
Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, 158
Jemal, Rabbi David, 81
Jemal/ Djmal family

Kahana, Rabbi Abraham, 91
Kairy, Meyer ("Mickey") 483.
See also Cayre
Kalmanowitz, Rabbi Abraham, 81, 221, 272, 375, 376
Karo, Rabbi Yosef, 469, 487
Kassab Family, 169
Kassin, Betty (née Ashear), 381;
Caroline (née Goldner), 381;
Jack, 248;
Jacob, 80, 136,
Joseph, 163;
Joyce (née Ashkenazi), 248;
Mordechai, 381;
Sari, 381;
Saul, 381
Kattan (Sisters), 189, 339
Khatoun, Signora, 489
Khavavi, Leah (née Sasson), 187
Khayatt, Yiṣḥaq il, 154
Kilzi, Ḥakham Yiṣḥaq, 131
Kuwaitti, President, 209

Labaton, Rabbi Ezra, 83, 109;
Mcrdechai, 481
Laniado, Abraham, 299, 301;
Aharon, 296-303;
David, 303;
Ḥakham David, 303;
Eliahou, 299;
Ephraim, 299, 301;
Esther, 299;
Ḥannah, 303;
Niseem, 441-446;
Raḥel, 299;
Reena, 299;
Sarah, 299;
Sheila (née Sutton), 341;
Rabbi Shelomo 29, 299, 300, 471;
Shemuel, 299;
Sipora, 299;
Yaᶜacob, 301;
Yeḥia Pasha, 327;
Yitzhak, 299
Laniado family, 25, 32, 327, 328, 500
Lati, Natan, 326-338
Levi, Hayeem, 68
Levi, Yehuda Ha-, 480
Levy, Menahem, 258;
Meyer, 483;
Mosé, 79;
Rabbi Sion, 314
Lisani, Yishaq al-, 480
Lewis, Bernard, 3
Lieberman, Zevulun S., 82, 489
Lisbona family, 31, 322
Luria, Rabbi Yiṣḥaq, 98

Maimonides, Moses, 23, 98, 469, 470
Maleḥ, Moe, 91;
Leila (née Shᶜayo), 153;
Nissim, 153;
Yacob, 189
Mamiye, Judy. 397
Mann ("Manna"), 350
Marᶜashli, Ḥakham 'Liahou, 131, 132
Maslaton, Ḥakham Mordechai, 331;

Ḥakham Mosé, 331;
Ḥakham Murad, 67, 322;
Ḥakham Sion, 80
Matalon, Ezra and Yehizqel (murdered, 1908), 133
Matut, Moise, 201
Maundrell, Rev. Henry, 28, 29
Mayer, Egon, 7, 94
Menaged, Eliahou, 296, 389
Mendes, Rabbi Doctor, 258
M'gharbaneh, Dr, [Aleppo] 199
Mishaan, Alberto, 148;
Rita (née Shᶜayo), 148
Mishᶜaniyeh, Matilde, 37
Miẓrahi, Carol, 176;
Joyce (née Toussie), 176;
Linda, 176;
"Moe", 176;
Ḥakham Mosé, 110, 132, 473;
Nancy, 176;
Sam, 176;
Susan, 176;
Yosef, 132;
Yvette (née Sasson), 192-198
Mohanna, Alberta, 418, 419;
Joe, 420;
Mike, 419;
Molcho family, 31, 322
Mubarak, Bishop, 343
Muḥammad, 168
Murad, Leila, 228;
Zaki, 228
Musliaḥ, Ḥakham Ezekiel, 500

Nahari, Yeḥiel, 80, 483
Nahem, Joseph, 103;
Samuel, 103
Nakash, Avi, 105;
Joe (Yossi), 105;
Raphael (Raffi), 105
Namer, Joseph, 187;
Robert, 187
Nasi, Madame, 190
Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 272
Nasser, Jack, 85;
Shafiah, 127
Neḥmad, Betto, 437;
Joseph ibn Raḥmo, 147;
Ḥakham Meir, 156, 180, 468;
Raḥmo, 57;
Ruth (née Ashkenazi), 248
Neustadter, Peter S., 80
Nikchari *See* Abu Yomtob Salem
Nigri, Tawfiq, 164

Pardo, Moshé 375
Picciotto (also De Picciotto), 58, 164, 285, 435, 437
Pinto family, 164
Pohuskin, Emma (née Grazi), 157;
Michael, 157;
Randi, 157;
Victor, 157

Raffoul, Mons. 131
Raffoul, *See* also Harari-Raffoul
Rafful, Shaᶜayan, 242;
Rabbi Yosef, 89, 90
Raḥabi, Rabbi David Ezekiel, 32, 497, 498
Raḥmey, Evelyn (née Abadi), 25;
Morris, 257;
children: Charles, Eileen, Jack, and Joyce, 257
Roffe (Pres. Syrian Community in Rio), 21
Romanoff, Leon
Russell, Alexander, 27, 43, 54, 98, 470;
Patrick, 28

Saᶜadia, Deeb, 142
Sabbaan, Albert, 483
"Sackess" (Sachs), 160
Safdeye, Gilly, 404;
Moshé, 102
Safra family, 140, 176
Safra, Edmond, 104, 106, 349;
Edward, 85;
Jacob (Yaᶜcob), 344, 345, 350;
Joseph, 139
Sakal, Violet (née Sasson), 187
Salama, Caesar, 403
Salem, Rabbi Abraham, 68, 154;
Abu Yomtob, 68, 154;
Rabbi David, 92
Helen (née Sarway), 364;
Raffoul, 153;
Selim, 177
Sanua, Victor, 108
Saqá, Ḥakham Isḥaq, 165
Sardal, Raffoul, 201
Sarway, Abe, 365;
Morris, 365;
Nouri, 364, 365;
Rachel (née Salem), 363-365
Sassoon, David Solomon, 349, 500;
Ḥakham Solomon, 499
Sasson, Abraham, 187;
Abraham ibn Mosé ("Adjmi"), 170, 171, 173, 174, 177, 181;
David Abraham, 177-187;
Ezra, 187;
Jack, 368;
Joseph, 340;
Hymie, 359, 368;
Leah, 187;
Victoria, 187;
Violet, 187;

Yusef, 191
Scholem, Gershon, 26
Schumer, Charles E., 114
Sebbo, Yaᶜ cob; 135, Shaheen
Segré family, 285
Selim, Abu, 128
Selim il-Hakkeem. *See* Cayre.
Semaḥ, Shaul, 155
Serles, Rabbi Mitchell, 108
Serour, Joe, 419, 420;
Tawfiq, 68
Serouya, Charlie, 276, 277
Serure, Mal, 483;
Renée, 128;
Ted, 85, 128
Setton, Morris, 79;
Joshua, 79
Shabbetai, Ḥakham Ḥizkiya, 65, 66, 164, 165
Shᶜaib family, 500
Shabbot, Dahood, 198
Shaheen, 134
Shakespeare, William, 29-30
Shalom, Alice (née Chabbot), 259, 293, 377;
Henry, 373, 375;
I. & M., (Isaac & Mosé), 254;
Isaac, 141, 189, 254, 437;
Joseph Isaac, 373-377;
Natalie, (née Sitt), 373;
Niseem, 166;
Robert, 373;
Stephen, 85, 108, 377;
Stephen, 377, 375;
Valerie, 373
Shamah, Clair (née Grazi), 157;
David, 203-208;
Ezra, 164;
Gladys, 425;
Jabra, 198;
Joseph, 425;
Joseph Eliahou, 34, 425;
Linda, 108;
Michael, 157;
Morris A. 108;
Rabbi Moshé, 89, 164;
Stuart, 157;
Susan, 157;
Sydelle (née Ashear), 397, 404;
Victor, 157
Shamosh, Adina, 459;
Amnon, 3, 409, 454-463;
Jack, 359;
Julia, 459;
Shelomo, 456;
Shᶜayo, Ḥakham Ezra, 2;
Muraḏ, 138-148
Shankar, Ravi 479; ᶜ Oudi, 479
Shebar William, 103
Shehebar, Abraham, 280;
Albert, 272;
Aslan, 191;
Gabriel, 267-280;
Giselle, 280;
Ḥakham Isaac (Yiṣḥak), 145-146, 147, 201, 280, 281;
Jacob, 280;
Joseph, 280;
Marcella (née Levy), 280
Shemaᶜaya Angel family. *See* Angel family
Shoskis, Rabbi, 271
Shoueka, Maurice, 109
Shrem, Gabriel Abraham 82, 483;
Eliahou, 357;
Jacob ("Jack"), 303-306
Silvera, Claude, 237;
David, 303;
Edward, 89;
Elie, 232, 233, 237, 284;
Elliot, 237;
Elvira, 233;
Fortunée (née Ancona), 239, 287;
Hezkiel, 237;
Isaaco, 26, 101, 103, 253, 389, 390;
Margo (née Bigio), 232,-239;
Meir, 233;
Mordechai, 233;
Mosé, 132, 281;
Mosé Eleazar, 143;
Nina, 237;
Ralph, 237, 285;
Raphael, 135, 182, 189;
Selim, 143
Sitéhon, Yaᶜacob, 499. *See* also Sutton, Setton
Sitt, Allan, 453;
Eddie, 81;
Ezra, 59, 263, 264, 446, 453;
Irving, 449;
Jack, 81;
Joseph, 81;
Ralph Ezra, 446-453;
Simon, 448
Solarz, Stephen, J. 114, 377
Srour family, 324
Soufeh, Parvis 76
Stambouli, Celia (née Sutton), 341;
Raymond, 341
Stillman, Norman A., 3, 108
Stuyvesant, Pieter, 494
Sultan, Abe, 406-414;
Mrs. Altoun (née Hedaya), 104;
Gita, 108, 397;
Joseph, 260;
Judah, 391, 409
Sutton, Abe S. 85;
Abraham David, 66, 130, 151;
Adele (née Abadi) 25;

Albert D., 85;
Carole (née Ashkenazi), 248;
David Abraham, 130, 131, 283;
David ibn Moshé, 131;
David S., 85;
Edward, 248;
Eliahou, 232-233
Ely, 145;
Isaac, 350, 380;
Emma (née Angel), 151, 285;
Jackie, 380;
Joe Menasche, 243, 245;
Joseph, A.D., 4, 108;
Max ("Maxie"), 377-380;
Mayer (Miro), 85, 341;
Ḥakham Mosé, 131;
Naomi, 189;
Ralph, 378;
Salha Silvera, 98, 151, 152, 285, 286;
Selim Abraham (Sam), 287, 130, 131;
Selma (née Dweck), 104, 338-345
Sutton-Dabbaḥ, Ḥakham, 132;
Saul, 132

Tabboush, Henry, 428, 429;
Ḥakham Mordechai, 177;
Ḥakham Murdoch, 178;
Rafael, 179;
Ḥakham Rafael ("Antebi"), 481;
Regine, 177;
Yvonne, 425-433;
Victor, 428, 429
Ta ʿlab, George, 332
Taweel family, 58
Tawil, Abraham, 483, 484;
Bob, 383;
Frieda (née Chabbot), 260;
Harry A., 483;
Leon, 188;
Max, 483;
Moe, 483;
Mosé, 281;
Mozelle (née Dayan), 404;
Ralph, 383;
Sally (née Ashear), 381;
Shaul, 127;
Shimwehl, 265;
Ḥakham Yosef, 300
Tebele family, 32, 500
Terzi (P.L.O. UN delegate), 431
Timmerman, Jacobo, 148
Tobias, Jack, 277, 278, 279
Toubal, Ezra, 145;
Moise, 147
Toukachensky family, 160
Totaḥ, Mr. 344
Toussie, Candice, 176;
David, 176;
Debby, (née Kaplan), 176;
Elizabeth, 176;
Isaac, 171, 172, 179;
Marco, 171;
Marie (née Sasson), 170, 176, 181;
Laura (née Shear), 176;
Michael, 176;
Nancy (née Hanan), 176;
Ralph, 176;
Robert, 171, 172, 179;
Sam, 176;
Victoria, 176;
"Zizzie" Marie, 176
Toussié-Cohen family, 96
Trollope, Mrs. Anthony, 66
Turjman, Ḥakham Hayeem, 182

Vaknin, Rabbi Meir, 261
Villa, Pancho, 241

Weiner, Nina, 85
Weinisch, Alberta (née Mohanna), 418;
Barbara, 418;
Eileen, 421;
Paulette, 421
Witkes, Michael, 106
Wurf, Sylvia, 114

Ya ʿabes family, 176
Yakkin, Abraham, 435

Za ʿile, General, 209
Zakay, Victor, 313-321
Zerah, Albert, 261

Notes and Dates

Notes and Dates

Notes and Dates

Notes and Dates