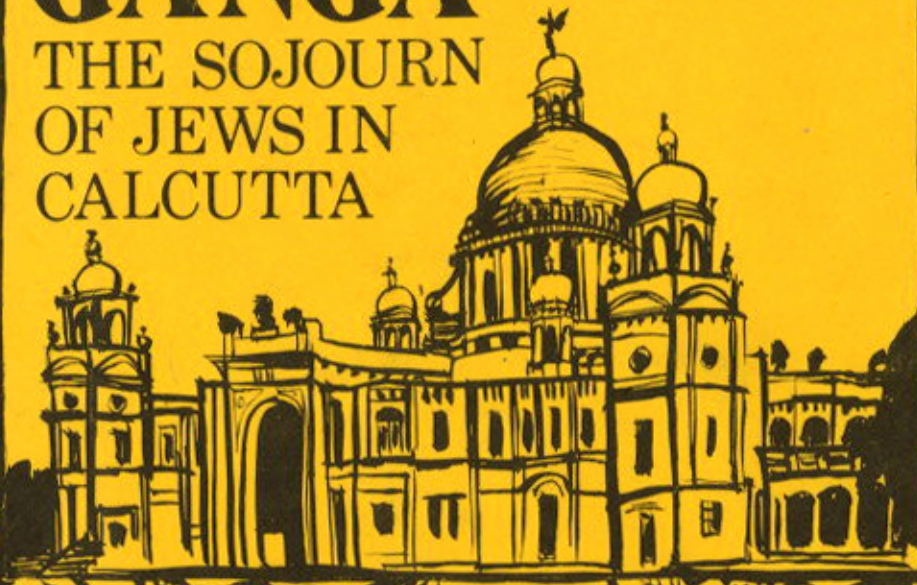


RABBI
EZEKIEL N.
MUSLEAH

# ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA

## THE SOJOURN OF JEWS IN CALCUTTA



On the banks of the River Ganga and elsewhere in India, there dwells a handful of Jewish families, some of them descendants of families who came to India from the Middle East over 2000 years ago. Ezekiel N. Musleah, a rabbi and native of Calcutta, India, describes in detail the life and institutions of these settlers, from the closing years of the eighteenth century to the present time, and their struggle to retain their Hebraic character. Derived from Indian and local Jewish sources, manuscripts of original Jewish settlers and their records and, most important of all, from his own first-hand observations, personalities and events come alive through Rabbi Musleah's work. He discusses unusual educational difficulties and their solutions, religious and social customs and usages, and colorful activities such as arranged marriages, matza-baking and superstitions. This is the first detailed record of a Jewish habitation so far into the Orient and a useful contribution to the overall understanding of Indian Jewry.

Three beautiful synagogues and two small prayer-halls were the hub of interest and observance from which community affairs radiated. Two schools provided both religious and general education for a large Jewish segment, although they encountered keen competition from the local Catholic missionaries for a while. A hospital with kosher facilities catered primarily for Jewish patients at the outset; and all these were built by the philanthropy of local Jewish benefactors without the assistance of agencies overseas.

The economic climate was conducive to business enterprise. Amid acute poverty and illiteracy arose Jewish merchants flourishing in international trade and real estate investment. They were aided by a political mileu noted for the absence of discrimination of race or creed. Despite smiling fortune, however, they never lost sight of their Jewish values. Their religious observances and social customs were patterned basically after Iraqi and Syrian antecedents, with some Indian percolation. Most were tri-lingual, versed in Hindusthani, Arabic and English. Many knew the local vernacular of Bengal, of which Calcutta is the metropolis.

Plainly evident was the community's self-sufficiency in Jewish education. Despite the lack of clergy and professional teachers, instruction was imparted by parents and private lay tutors whose store of knowledge derived from unpretentious educational sources in the "old country." When schools began functioning late in the nineteenth century, the instructors of Hebrew and religious literature were no better trained.

Rapport with all elements of the populace was good. While inter-community mixing was open and cordial, it was not uninhibited. In the nineteenth century intermarriage was largely spurned, while in the twentieth, it had to be staved off by a concerted effort. But, by then the forces of disintegration had begun exerting their irreparable influence.

*Continued on Back Flap –*

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# ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA –

THE SOJOURN OF JEWS IN CALCUTTA

By

RABBI EZEKIEL N. MUSLEAH

THE CHRISTOPHER PUBLISHING HOUSE
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# ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA –

## THE SOJOURN OF JEWS IN CALCUTTA


HIMALAYAS
PAKISTAN
GANGA R.
GOMATI R.
KAPTI R.
LUCKNOW
KANPUR
GORAKHPUR
KALIMPONG
DARJEELING
KURSEONG
GHAZIPUR
PATNA
BHAGALPUR
VARANASI
DINAPUR
MONGHYR
MADHUPUR
CALCUTTA
INDIA
SURAT
BOMBAY
POONA
BAY
OF
BENGAL
ARABIAN
SEA
MADRAS
COCHIN

*To Margaret,*
*to our parents,*
*and to our children,*
*Flora, Rahel and Aliza*

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# INTRODUCTION

Few regions are more picturesque and colorful than India. Its natural beauty, ancient monuments and buildings designed by master craftsmen of bygone days, its philosophy, religions and art testify to one of the oldest and richest civilizations and are of absorbing interest. Like the ancient Israelite Kingdom, it lay in the path of successive expansionist empires, each one of which left a mark on its cultural development. The Aryans, Mauryas, Guptas and Moguls, followed by the Europeans — the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British — all of these ruled portions or the whole of what is today India and Pakistan. The country alternated between periods of splendor and periods of eclipse.

British India was divided into two independent states, India and Pakistan, in 1947. From three centuries as a British possession, India has emerged as the largest democracy in the East within an area that is uncomfortably — and increasingly — aware of the Communist octopus. The republic has stood its ground well enough to make a success of a parliamentary system of government but incursions from neighboring China and growing Communist activity within the country have already imposed severe tests on its democratic system.

The economy in undivided India was a fairly thriving one, though the gaping contrast between palaces and mudbaked huts, and between their respective residents was stark reality. When the British left, the rich were stripped of much of their wealth by a socialist government and commerce has been shackled by a rigorous fiscal policy. Though agriculture has improved and industry increased beyond all recognition, the downward trend in the economic indicators is due largely to the population explosion. The glaring disparity continues but on a lower economic level.

In this land of half a billion persons, with political uncertainty and lessening economic opportunity for entrepreneurs, live three diminishing Jewish communities numbering in their heyday about 30,000. They are concentrated mainly in the western Indian state of Maharashtra (previously Bombay), in the city of Cochin in south-west India, and in the eastern city of Calcutta. The old-

est element are the Bene Israel, who claim to have a two-thousand year history in India. They have become indistinguishable from other Indian peoples in their appearance, language and manner of living. Though many had risen to high office in industry, government and the military, the vast majority were manual workers and lived at a low economic level. They have maintained a Jewish consciousness and an organized community with synagogues and educational institutions and with a pride in their joint heritage as Jews and as Indians.

Some centuries after the Bene Israel settlement, another group of Jews settled in ancient Cranganore and afterward in Cochin. They were joined by Spanish exiles, by German Jews and, later, by Jews from Middle Eastern countries. Their ritual is unique, born of an interaction of varied traditional Jewish practices. The communal pattern was characterized by black, brown and white Jews who had little to do with one another. Most fascinating is the fact that, because of political independence granted to them by a native ruler, Cochin was, for several hundred years, the only sovereign Jewish territory outside the Holy Land in 2000 years!

In more recent years, additions to these older Jewish communities arrived from countries in the Near East, principally from Baghdad, Iraq. Among this wave of immigration were members of the Sassoon, Ezra and Elias families who later became leaders in Indian life as merchants, financiers, industrialists and philanthropists. For the most part, the Mid-Eastern Jews took to trade or became white collar workers; only in the twentieth century did they find their way into the professions. They settled primarily in the cities of Bombay and Calcutta.

A small number of Jews from Europe made their home in India and was reinforced by refugees fleeing from Hitler. They were manufacturers, businessmen and professional persons.

As a corporate group, the Jews of India did not by any means agitate for the end of British rule. Conservative in outlook and generally thriving, they were understandably apprehensive of the uncertainties that must come in the wake of independence. The very circumstances which brought about the withdrawal of foreign dominion and which established independence led to the mass departure of Jews from India. This exodus affected all segments of Jewry, with the result that these communities have been all but liquidated — a matter for regret, considering their long association with India.

Perhaps the most heartening aspect of the Jewish sojourn in

India was the real freedom and equality enjoyed throughout the two millennia (with the exception of the period of the Portuguese inquisition in Cochin in the sixteenth century). The near dissolution of Indian Jewry has therefore been, to a great extent, voluntary. Economic pressures — lowering of the standard of living and diminished business opportunities — sent them away. The unclear political situation spurred the movement somewhat, and the added options of destination in the existence of the State of Israel quickened the pace of emigration. For, in a short two decades, more than half the migrants and the majority of the Bene Israel and Cochin Jews have settled in the Jewish State.

Jews first appeared in Calcutta from Syria toward the end of the eighteenth century when a few thousands of their co-religionists were already living in the Bombay area and in Cochin. At least initially, trade was the primary incentive. Later, political and social unrest in the Middle Eastern regions of their origin, particularly Iraq, forced others to seek refuge on peaceful shores. Fortune smiled on the family of Ezra in the nineteenth century and on the Eliases in the twentieth. Others, too, lived very comfortably; but a goodly number remained in straitened circumstances and depended upon private and communal generosity. For the latter, institutions of welfare were set up. In their new environment, in the midst of the older Eastern world and influenced by the ways of the dominant British, Indian Jews were noted for their aptitude to adopt and adapt. They adopted, in the main, western canons of business and the western scale, though not always style, of living. Britain patterned the country's educational and political processes which contributed, until the start of World War II, to so much stability and well-being of the small middle class. Social habits, however, particularly in the nineteenth century, had strains of the Orient. Jews spoke the local tongue in addition to Arabic; in their leisure they enjoyed Indian music and other forms of entertainment.

While the Calcutta Jews did intermix with the peoples among whom they settled, they hardly intermarried, at least not until well into the twentieth century. They were, by and large, strict observers of the Jewish tradition they brought with them from their Middle Eastern countries of origin. They demonstrated that being Jewish and making a living in an alien land were not incompatible. In fact, an intense dedication to both resulted in a unity that was severed only with the progressive westernization of the present century and post-World War II political developments.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century a centralized Kehilla-type administration served the growing community mainly surrounding the person of a Syrian immigrant, Moses Dwek, son-in-law of the first Jewish settler, Shalome Cohen. His task was by no means enviable. He combined in himself all the offices of a modern elected body and performed also most of the religious functions.

After his death, as might have been expected, some divisiveness was evident. No one person could really take his place since the range of his activity was too wide. In the sphere of religion, leadership thereafter never exceeded a limited degree of acceptance. At all times it was subservient to lay affluence, particularly that of the Ezras, Gubbays, and from the third decade of the twentieth century, the Eliases. Most of the Jewish institutions, however, owed their origin to individual generosity, religious zeal and inter-family competitiveness which resulted in three synagogues, two prayer halls, two schools, a hospital and a few other welfare organizations and funds. At the time when the community, never more than 5000 souls, began disintegrating after World War II, its capital funds were an estimated five million rupees (= one million dollars). Almost all of the moneys are in irrevocable trusts whose income must be utilized only in India for specific purposes earmarked by the donors. Never could they have imagined that the numbers of intended beneficiaries in India would diminish to the point of extinction and the hard-pressed fiscal policy of a government other than British would stand in the way of the assets reaching emigrants in the countries of their new abode.

The need to write the history of my native community suggested itself to me when, as a student at Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, I stumbled upon a copy of David Sassoon's masterpiece, *Ohel Dawid, Descriptive Catalogue of Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts,* in the Sassoon Library. In his introduction he writes: "The Catalogue has more about the history of the Jews in Calcutta. Diaries written by prominent Jews who settled there, and communal records by officials of local synagogues supply us with much information. To the former group belong the diaries of Moses b. Simeon Dwek Hakkohen, . . . the diary of Eleazar b. Aaron Iraki Hakkohen; and the Nawrooz (diary) by Shalom b. Aaron b. Obadiah Hakkohen, a native of Aleppo. To the second group belongs the register of family events by Ezra b. Isaac b. Solomon; the Pinkas of the Neveh Shalom Synagogue in Calcutta; the Register of Marriages by Eleazer b. Aaron Iraki Hakkohen; a similar register by Aaron b. Abigedor b. Azriel; also a similar reg-

ister by Aaron Shalom b. Yahya b. Solomon Gabai; and Register of Births by Ben Sion b. Saul b. Aaron Lanyahdo . . . so full are they of information that they would enable us to write a consecutive history of the Jews of Calcutta from their earliest settlements in that place almost up to the present day (1932)."

I immediately began to interest myself in the subject. I was encouraged by my revered teacher, Prof. Alexander Marx, of blessed memory, Professor of History at the Seminary. The opportunity of furthering my research into the origins and development of Calcutta Jewry came to me only upon my return to Calcutta in 1952, where I served as Rabbi for twelve years. There I found some records in old family libraries. I acknowledge here the considerateness of Sara (Mrs. Aaron) Curlender, who provided me liberally from the libraries of her father and brothers, Aaron and David. The bulk of the information here culled came through the good offices and generosity of Rabbi Solomon Sassoon, of Letchworth, England, and more recently of Jerusalem, Israel, who sent me microfilm copies of all the manuscripts from the Sassoon Library I had requested of him. I am grateful also for his continued interest in this work.

I am indebted to J. M. David, erudite and kindly, with whom I read *Paerah,* the local Arabic-Hebrew newspaper in Calcutta, from cover to cover; to the late J. R. Jacob, initiator and staunch sponsor of the rabbinate in Calcutta; and to Prof. Abraham Halkin, who supervised my thesis toward a doctoral degree at the Seminary.

My brother, Meyer E. Musleah, of Sydney, Australia, read the entire manuscript and offered numerous valuable suggestions. To him I owe my early interest in the Jewish community and in public affairs which perhaps indirectly determined the direction of my life.

To my parents, the late Flora and Isaac Sassoon Musleah, of blessed memory, and to his parents, brother and sisters, I am ever grateful for the seeds of a way of life carefully implanted and devotedly tended. Above all else is my love and appreciation to my dear wife, Margaret, daughter of a well-known rabbinical family, for her boundless understanding and generous assistance in so many ways. To her, to our parents and to our children, Flora, Rahel and Aliza, I fondly dedicate this work.

*Ezekiel N. Musleah*

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
22nd Sivan 5733 (= June 22, 1973).

*Chapter 1*

## THE FIRST JEWISH FAMILY

To relate the story of the inception of Calcutta Jewry is, like early Israelite history, to trace the development of one family. For it was a single Syrian Jew, Shalome Cohen,[1] and his descendants who laid the foundations of the Jewish Community in this erstwhile capital of British India and one of the foremost commercial centers for many decades.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, in December, 1762 (Kislev 5523) he left his native city at the age of twenty-six on June 16, 1789 visiting en route Baghdad, Hillah and Basra (where he tarried six months at the home of a sister), which he left on July 18, 1790 in an English sailing vessel, arriving in Bombay in about six weeks. His goal was Surat, on the western coast of India, where he sojourned till April, 1791. This, his first journey to India, was evidently an exploratory one for he returned to Basra after a perilous voyage lasting five months caused by bad sailing weather, a concomitant of the South West Monsoons in the Arabian Sea.

Although we cannot rule out the possibility, as has been conjectured,[2] that his life was endangered by his Mohammedan co-citizens, he must have been imbued by a love for adventure which was amply sated by his varied experiences. The main reason, however, for leaving his birthplace was to enlarge the scope for his commercial talents.[3]

Obviously impressed by his findings in India, Shalome Cohen in February, 1792 undertook a second journey, lasting seven weeks, to Surat, this time avoiding the Monsoons. His intention to settle permanently in India is gauged from his decision to send for his wife Sathie (or Sadie), daughter of Joseph Dwek of Aleppo. Wary of the long journey fraught with danger and the uncertainty of a pioneer's life in far-off India, his in-laws declined his invitation. "If you pave the way from Surat to Aleppo with jewels," they are reported to have said with picturesque imagery, "we will not send our daughter to you!"

While thus married, yet alone, Shalome Cohen was persuaded

by his friend and partner, a wealthy philanthropist, Jacob b. Semah b. Nissim to marry his sister Najema (or Najamie) who, according to one tradition, would accompany her brother in masculine disguise because of the risks involved to a woman's appearing in public. In fact, however, it is recorded that Jacob Semah, his wife, parents-in-law and sister Najema arrived in Surat from Baghdad on the last day of December, 1792 and the latter was married to Shalome Cohen on January 15, 1793.

Already a wealthy man, the Syrian visitor made three trips to Mesopotamia (Iraq) before finally settling in Calcutta. He was affluent enough to have arrived in Basra from India in September, 1791 with the Shohet, Jacob Sithone, a servant Mordai and a slave, Absalom, probably acquired in India. From the last of such trips, initiated in March, 1795, he returned with his first wife Sathie and two Shohets (ritual slaughterers). In November, 1792 in Surat, he lent a sum of Rs. 15,000/- to his Armenian landlord, Stephen el Goorji (i.e., the Georgian) without interest but was allowed to occupy the house free of rent. Later, on July 9, 1794, he bought the house for Rs. 22,000/-, an indication of his intention to stay permanently in India.

The attractiveness of Calcutta as a center of trade drew Cohen's attention. What kind of place was it at the end of the eighteenth century? The British Crown which, in 1784, took over the Government of India from the East India Company, a semi-official trading society, made it the capital of British India by virtue of its commercial and strategic importance. It afforded access to the high seas by way of the Bay of Bengal and to inland cities by following the Ganges (Ganga) River and its subsidiary waterways. The powerful military citadel, Fort William, was an umbrella of protection to the village of Kalikata (the older name of Calcutta) and two other neighboring villages. The Hindu native of the province of Bengal (of which Calcutta was the metropolis) was one of the most advanced and intellectually active of Indians. Each of the ethnic bodies like Moslems, Jains and Sikhs remained self-contained and there was little or no intermarriage. Living standards, however, were low and housing poor. British endeavors to improve domestic conditions moved slowly and hardly affected most of the natives. But select neighborhoods were prepared to settle westerners, such as the Armenians, who hailed from Armenia on the borders of Turkey and Russia. Traditionally monophysite Christians, they were one of the first migrant communities to enjoy the improved British way of life and the growing scope for trade.

The Jews, led by Shalome Cohen, were soon to follow. He may have heard of the commercial activities of Lyon Prager, an English Jew, who carried on a prolific diamond trade between Bengal and London from 1786 to 1793 on behalf of the British firm of Israel Levin Salomons, and of George Prager, Lyon's brother and successor from 1793.[4] In December, 1797, accompanied by his cook and Shohet, he left Surat for Calcutta, passing through Bombay (where he was guest of one of the earliest Jewish settlers), Cochin and Madras. He arrived in Calcutta on August 1, 1798. At that time the Armenian community already included several well established dealers in real estate and owners of substantial landed property in Calcutta.[5] He hired a house from an Armenian for Rs. 50/- per month but occupied it for a very short period. With a view to bringing over his second wife and their daughters to Calcutta from Surat, he moved to more spacious accommodation in Potato Lane (called by the natives "Aloo Gudam") which he took on a rental of Rs. 72½ per month. The family, consisting of his wife and two little daughters, joined him in October, 1799.

Shalome Cohen, who became the first Arabic-speaking Jewish resident in Calcutta, was a keen businessman. A jeweler by profession, with an enterprising spirit, he was drawn toward trade in diamonds, silk, indigo and Dacca cloth. He exploited his skill in precious stones to the full in a land studded with wealthy maharajas (rulers) and nawabs (noblemen), his most prosperous and eager customers. To assist him in his immense undertaking he employed many Aleppo and Cochin (South West India) Jews who came to reside in Calcutta. Their business ventures took them to, among other places, Madras, Bombay, Dacca (renowned for fine muslin), Murshidabad (famed for exquisite silks) and Benares. The climatic and physical disadvantages of Benares, like some of the other areas in India at the time, were commented upon by George Prager in a letter to his sister, Isaac Levin Salomon's widow, in London in 1796 — "What a disagreeable place in India for Europeans and what we Europeans have to suffer . . . it is a place I would never like to see again; many great merchants are ruined there (Benares)."[6]

His relatives aided him in his activities. While in Surat his younger brother Abraham was his constant commercial envoy to Bombay. In July, 1806, Abraham and his wife joined Shalome in Calcutta. The elder Cohen carried on a rich trade between India and the Near East, dealing in cottons, mirrors, gold leaf, copper, coral, spices, almonds, coffee and indigo. Aaron Solomon Lanyado, his sister's son, who arrived in Calcutta from Basra via Bombay

on August 30, 1802, was despatched regularly to Muscat and Basra, each trip lasting seven months and more. Lanyado fetched his wife and children from Basra in March, 1805.

Cohen maintained his contacts with Bombay and Surat. Before railways were introduced in India in the mid-nineteenth century, the sea route around the Indian peninsula traversing three expanses of water — the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal — was the only mode of transportation between Bombay and Cochin on the one hand and Calcutta on the other. Business trips from the west coast cities were undertaken by that route with a stop at Madras. It took five weeks.[7]

Because of the vast scope of his ventures and also to enlarge his capital outlay, Shalome Cohen was ever prepared to enter into partnerships, at least two of which ended unhappily. His joint business with Joseph Far'un in Surat led the partners to share the accommodation of a house. Gradually their domestic, then their business accounts were separated and Far'un finally lived apart from his associate. They parted company when Far'un left for Tringebar (near Madras), three days prior to Cohen's departure for Calcutta.

Cohen's partnership with Jacob Semah of Bombay was a major blot in his colorful career and ended in a legal wrangle.[8] On the 3rd Tishri 5571 (1st October, 1810), Jacob Semah arrived in Calcutta from Bombay to settle accounts with his business partner, Shalome Cohen, at whose home he stayed for two months. They tried to iron out their differences amicably "during the period of atonement and joy," but by the 3rd of Kislev they acknowledged their failure to effect a settlement unaided. The irritable Jacob Semah walked out of his host's house in a huff, rented a house and lived there by himself. Unpleasantness accompanied every subsequent meeting and the partners were unable, for seven and one half months, to disentangle their knotty problems.

Finally, they agreed on one thing — to submit their dispute to a board of arbitration consisting of four co-religionists experienced in business and acceptable to both. Should they, however, be unable to reach a decision by a simple majority, the matter would then be referred to a non-Jewish businessman whose verdict would be binding.

Documents containing the agreement were drawn up in Hebrew, translated into English, signed by the litigants, and attested by non-Jewish witnesses. They specified that in the event one of the contestants repudiated the verdict of the Board of Arbitrators as well

as that of the single judge, he should pay the other a penalty of a hundred thousand rupees legal tender in Calcutta (approximately $20,000). The terms of arbitration were filed according to the custom of English courts prevailing in Calcutta at the time.

The deliberations of the Board lasted about a month during which the accounts were thoroughly examined. At the end of that period, two of the arbitrators (probably those appointed by Jacob Semah) refused to proceed on grounds of lack of jurisdiction and competency. (This was done perhaps when they discovered that chances for their victory were remote). The other two arbitrators were then forced to hand over the account books to a single judge in accordance with the terms of reference. To facilitate and give effect to them Shalome Cohen had the documents translated from the original Hebrew to Aramaic (the language of the Armenian community in Calcutta); so we presume that the judge was an Armenian businessman.

The inquiry was held in the presence of the litigants, who presented their own cases. The decision was in favor of Shalome Cohen and against Jacob Semah, who was ordered to pay his partner Rs. 60,000, a sum that indicates the extent of their commercial enterprizes. This he refused to do. Shalome Cohen was then forced to repair to the English Courts where he filed suit. The Courts, in an opinion dated 29th Tebeth 5572 (January 14, 1812), upheld the Armenian's verdict and gave Semah the option of paying Cohen or facing imprisonment. After the expiration of the option period without payment being made, a warrant of arrest was served on Semah on January 22, 1812 and he was imprisoned.

Semah tried to appeal but apparently failed in his attempts. At the end of the litigation Semah found that he had spent Rs. 80,000 and Cohen about Rs. 40,000. The accused remained a year in jail.

On emerging from prison, Semah had a warrant of arrest issued for Cohen, then vacationing in Chinsura, a day's journey up the River Hooghly about twenty miles from Calcutta, and previously the center of British trade in Bengal, India,[9] but that legal action failed. Cohen now had creditors to the extent of Rs. 60,000 and, annoyed at the heavy cost of the suit and the non-payment of Semah's debt to him, he instituted fresh proceedings against Semah, who escaped, aided by an illicit payment, to the Dutch colony of Chandernagore. In Dutch law, extradiction was not recognized. While he was thus in exile, some Jewish friends used their best endeavors to bring the two litigants together again but to no avail; this was due more perhaps to the intransigence and bitterness of Semah, as perhaps also his parsimony.

Nothing more is heard of Semah except that he returned to Bombay overland as he would not risk a sea voyage for fear of being detected.

The Jewish community of Calcutta must have been divided and taken sides in the acrimonious dispute. This is evident from an incident, the ethics of which are questionable, described by Moses Dwek, Shalome Cohen's son-in-law. On the day following Jacob Semah's release from prison, Dwek saw an unusual piece of paper in Semah's prayer book. It stirred up his imagination and his desire to know its contents. After the service he lingered on in synagogue after Semah and others had left and opened the closet containing Semah's religious articles (which obviously was not locked). The paper contained a beautifully written poem addressed to Semah, evidently from one of Shalome Cohen's antagonists, reviling Cohen for his part in the suit. Moses Dwek was taken aback but copied it in a hurry and restored it in Semah's prayer book. On his return home, Moses Dwek composed a poem in reply, giving the history of the dispute and, incidentally, of his stay in Calcutta.[10]

Cohen's other deals met with greater success. His congenial disposition won for him many friends among his new compatriots as well as a former non-Jewish inhabitant of Aleppo, Fath Allah Hannah Asfar el-Halabai; the two carried on a business with Dacca, in the province of Bengal before the partition of India, and famous for its silks and muslin. A Jewish associate and later partner, Isaac Sittehone, in 1800 made a trip to Cossimbazar, near Murshidabad, another rich silk-producing town, where he stayed for long periods of time. The luxurious Moghul courts had fostered the manufacture of silks and muslin which had a ready market in Europe, and Cohen's attention was attracted by its rich dividends.

Realizing that his business ventures might make it necessary at any time to transfer to another city, Cohen refrained from buying a house in Calcutta. But he moved to larger premises three times in a little more than two years and in May, 1801 occupied a spacious home on a rent of Rs. 125 per month, 4½ times his initial rent. It was large enough to accommodate Cohen's growing family and provide prolonged lodging for newcomers from the "Old Country."

The influx of Jews was building up into a tiny community which now required a prayer hall. Probably in response to that need, Shalome Cohen was constrained to buy a house in May, 1811 near that of the Armenian, Carapiet, but he lived there a little more than a year. His restless disposition soon made him tour the eastern part

of India in search of a holiday resort and for fresh avenues of trade. During the summer of 1810 he spent about two months in Chinsura, which he and his family liked very much. They moved there in September, 1812. The Calcutta house was retained primarily for continued use as a communal hall of worship, an extravagance directly resulting from Cohen's handsome fortune. Wherever he went he was accompanied by his Shohet and cook, to ensure his observance of the Jewish dietary laws, and by a religious instructor for his children.

Cohen's rising star reached its zenith with his appointment in February, 1816 as court jeweler of the Nawab of Lucknow, Wazir Ghazi el-Din Haidar on a salary of about Rs. 2,000 per month, an enormous emolument equivalent in value perhaps of $10,000. He moved to Lucknow first with two sons Raphael and David, a Shohet, Joseph Hakham Zakhariah, a cook and another servant. His wife joined them in June that year. In three years of his official stay in Lucknow, the members of his family took it in turns to be with him. The rest were in Chinsura. At one stage the Nawab invested him with "The Robe of Honor."[11] It is said that he was granted the unique distinction of riding with the Nawab on his elephant.[12]

The grandeur and fanfare attending the departure of Cohen from Lucknow in April, 1819 is indicative of his wealth and the esteem in which he was held at the court of the Nawab. A regal retinue of thirty Sepahis (soldiers), 25 chokras (oddboys), 7 carriages, 7 palanquins, 60 household servants, 13 changis (sweepers or porters) and 10 personal servants accompanied him.[13] At that time, Moses Dwek and his family were at Cawnpore (Kanpur), but for some undisclosed reason Shalome Cohen did not wish to go there. So he repaired to Chinsura via Fyzabad, a town on the Ganges, "like a fugitive."[14] Moses Dwek attributes this to his father-in-law's fall from favor with "The King of Lucknow."[15] But this is not authenticated by subsequent events, nor is it mentioned in Shalome Cohen's chronicle. Though Cohen spent the rest of his life plying between Chinsura and Calcutta in comparative retirement, his estate was large enough to have been enjoyed by the fourth generation of his descendants — the Dweks.

They dominated the economic life of the community for two generations. Moses Dwek continued the brisk trade in silk with Dacca started by his father-in-law. After the latter's departure to Lucknow, Moses Dwek entered into business partnership with a Moslem merchant, set out for Dacca and stayed there with his wife almost throughout Shalome Cohen's sojourn in Lucknow. Dwek also carried

on, with the help of Aaron Solomon Lanyado, the commercial traffic with Muscat. It is interesting that Shalome Cohen and Moses Dwek were never doing the same business at one and the same time and their diaries do not mention active association in their economic pursuits. Rather than being indicative of mistrust, it points to the extensive scope of their business in those days.

A few members of the Dwek family must have returned to Aleppo, as did Joseph Abraham Dwek in December, 1873.[16]

Shalome Cohen's connections with the nawabs of Oudh, however, did not end with his departure from Lucknow. He may have been in constant contact with them because he records the death on October 20, 1827 of the Nawab; four years later he made another trip to Lucknow, to the native prince's successor, Suleiman Jah Nasr el-Din Haider bin Padi Shahi Awwad. At that time the English Resident honored Cohen by an invitation to breakfast and a Christmas party. In 1828, Cohen was received in audience by the Governor General of India, Lord William Cavandish Bentinck.

The entries in Shalome Cohen's diary show him to have possessed a breadth of interest. He reports on the celebrations at the Calcutta residence of the British Viceroy on the occasion of the Anglo-French peace treaty — December 2, 1814 (Treaty of Paris signed May 30, 1814 at Paris between France on the one hand and Great Britain, Austria, Portugal, Prussia, Russia and Sweden on the other following Napoleon's abdication in April that year).[17] He mentions the passing of King George III who died on January 29, 1820.[18] It would take 5½ months for news to reach Calcutta from Europe. His natural attachment to Middle East affairs, inspired by his Syrian origin, is evident from his mention of the arrival of the Persian Consul in India in April, 1806. His diary gives parallel Hebrew, Mohammedan and English dates with references to Jewish, Islamic and Christian auspicious days. Several mentions of natural phenomena are made, such as lightnings in August, 1822 which caused much havoc involving loss of life and property. It took its toll even among the new Jewish immigrants in Calcutta.

Shalome Cohen must have been remarkably enlightened and cultured. He seems to have been possessed of a gift of witty conversation, which brought him many friendships. It was this talent that made a success of his association with the princes of Northern India. He was familiar with astronomy as may be discerned from his references to the planets and the solar system.

Thus Shalome Cohen was pre-eminently fitted to have placed Calcutta on the map of the Jewish Diaspora. Here, he and his

fellow Jews proved that strength of conviction and determined effort make the practical observance of Judaism a reality, despite initial disadvantages. His pioneering spirit and indomitable courage coupled with a profundity of knowledge, both Jewish and secular, gave him the wherewithal to withstand a dearth of religious and material facilities in the early days. While the Jewish merchants from Europe that preceded him were temporary residents in India, which was merely a stage for their commercial efforts, Cohen can be called eminently the first Jewish settler in Calcutta. His settling resulted in the founding of a Jewish community there.

News of his amassed fortune spread to his native Aleppo and nearby Damascus and other Jewish communities in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Persia and Yemen.[19] A trickle of immigrants from that part of the world began arriving in Calcutta. The lure of business was the main incentive, but it is possible that the harshness of Mohammedan rulers in Iraq was a primary cause.[20] This gives validity to the suggestion mentioned above[21] that Shalome Cohen was constrained to leave Aleppo to safeguard his life.

Being the only Jewish family in northern and eastern India, Shalome Cohen inevitably turned to his birthplace for a life partner for his eldest daughter, Luna. He wrote to his brother-in-law, Simon Dwek Cohen, for the hand of his eldest son Moses. The proposal being accepted with enthusiasm despite the hazards of reaching his wife-to-be, Moses Dwek set out in April, 1806 and was married in January of the next year. The Dweks claim a long unsubstantiated genealogy starting with the Spanish expulsion in 1492 and thence to Aleppo.

It is conjectured that in 1816 there were not more than 50 Jews in Calcutta.[22] Strangely enough a cleavage developed in the infant community forcing it to maintain two places of worship — one of which was at the home of Shalome Cohen.[23] When Cohen left for the north in February, 1816 and his home was no longer available, a house was hired for public worship in a neighborhood called Amratolla. After some time they removed to a one-storied house, later numbered 49 Ezra Street, but originally known as Khan Hajji Masuda.[24] It is here that the life of a tiny community commences.

*Chapter 2*

## COMMUNITY FORMATION

Immigration from Arabia, Persia, Yemen and other countries[1] as well as Aleppo in Syria[2] saw the Jewish population in 1822 reach over 100 souls, including children.[3] With Moses Dwek as honorary minister and mentor, they continued worshipping together in a common prayer hall till the seventh day of Passover 1824 when, as a result of an unpleasant incident, Moses Dwek ceased to attend Khan Hajji Masuda. Though he was Minister of the Synagogue, he chose to be with his close friend, Hakham Eliyahu Musleah who was dangerously ill. Whoever officiated for Moses Dwek was evidently not accustomed to handling a Sefer Torah. In his impatience to turn a page, he tore the parchment at the narrative of the Song of Moses. As Moses Dwek's request went unheeded that the acting Hazan repair it from communal funds or personally, he was forced to move his Torahs and other religious articles to his own home, where he transformed a room into a prayer hall and furnished it with the fittings that were removed from Shalome Cohen's synagogue and stored at his home. The peaceful atmosphere at the Dweks' synagogue contrasted sharply with the bickering and tension prevailing at the other community services. The schism lasted fifteen months. At the end of that period a deputation arrived from Khan Hajji Masuda requesting Moses Dwek to head a united community and giving an undertaking to submit to his undivided authority. After much entreaty he agreed to lend his hand in the formulation of basic rules but refused on oath to be appointed President or Paqueed. Much soul-searching ensued and various names were suggested for the exalted office but none was acceptable to all parties.

Having been absolved of his oath, and only after much persuasion and inducement, Moses Dwek reluctantly consented to accept the post of "Paqueed" for six months only. A document, which may be deemed the first constitution of the Calcutta Jewish Community was drawn up and signed by thirty-six members including

David Joseph Ezra, Ezekiel Eliyahu Musleah, Jonah Jacob Jonah and Samuel Dwek Cohen.

The following is a translation of the original:[4]

On Monday the 15th Elul 5585 since the creation of the world by our calculation, here in the city of Calcutta situated on the River Ganges which flows into the ocean, which corresponds to the English date of 29th August 1825. We, the undersigned, have taken upon ourselves, our future generations and on all those connected with us, a procedure for all times, to appoint an officer and manager of the affairs of the Synagogue existing in this city of Calcutta. He will be empowered to deal with the affairs of the Synagogue as he thinks best, receive and collect money coming to the Synagogue, and pay expenses of the Synagogue as he desires, but he will not be permitted to make other payments spent not for actual need of the Synagogue such as (charity) to the poor and emisary-collectors from other countries and even to poor persons of Calcutta he is not allowed to pay a single penny — this being the burden of the community. Such an officer has no power to force anybody to contribute to such causes except when the collections concern the Synagogue only. We have also given him full permission and adequate powers to rebuke and fine any one who behaves objectionably in the Synagogue, or raises his voice in anger during the time of prayers or the reading of the Sefer, in which case he is empowered to rebuke and turn the offender out of the Synagogue as he thinks proper. He may also take other measures against him, for the officer is permitted to act as he thinks best, and it is incumbent on us to back all his actions for the duration of his appointment, viz. for six months, so that during this period his decision will indisputably stand good with our approval. We have no power to dismiss him from his office; neither can he, after accepting the appointment resign and cast the burden off his shoulders, even if, God forbid, someone has annoyed or villified him. He cannot in anger resign his office, for he possesses sufficient powers to requite the annoyer or villifier in accordance with the English system, as empowered by this document with the approval of any magistrate available in this city of Calcutta. After the completion of the above-mentioned period the authority of the first officer will remain in force until his successor has been chosen and appointed in his stead by the community, or they may extend the period of the first officer so that the "Congregation of God may not be left like sheep without a shepherd."

After the second officer has been chosen, his predecessor is bound

to pass on to him the books, files and accounts, and God forbid, if other payments have been made to the poor or foreign emissaries which do not concern the Synagogue but entered in the accounts of the Synagogue, the second officer is bound to recover the money from his predecessor who is forced to make good the loss out of his open pocket, he having been prohibited at the outset from making such payments out of the funds of the Synagogue.

Whoever the officer may be, he is allowed to select any two men to assist him with their advice, and we are bound to accept them as himself. Even the advisors, after having accepted their appointment to advise and assist the officer, cannot resign their office during the period of the incumbency, and should the officer be compelled to leave Calcutta owing to his business, he is permitted and entitled to choose another officer in his stead to complete the allotted period, and we are bound to accept the latter's authority, actions and decisions as emanating from the first officer.

In the event of the death of the officer taking place before a successor has been elected, the two advisors are bound to choose another officer over them, in order to complete the allotted period of the deceased, so that the power of authority contained in this document may stand valid for all times from one officer to another for all generations and neither we nor our offspring nor those connected with us of the Jewish faith, can at any time or for any reason, annul the powers conferred by this document which we now fully confirm on a solemn oath with good intention. We have invalidated any question or challenge made by any person against this document, by which we, the undersigned, have today severally and jointly agreed to accept, appoint and constitute Moses Dwek Cohen as the first officer over the Synagogue for a period of six months in accordance with the above-mentioned terms.

At the end of this period and when another officer has been elected, the said Moses is bound to hand over to his successor the books, files and accounts and also this very document, after he had written at the back of it the name of the second officer, the date and the period of his appointment. Similarly, when the period of his appointment is completed and the third has been elected, the same procedure is to be adopted by the second officer to the third and the third to the fourth and the fourth to the fifth, and so on for all time.

To this we have clearly written all the conditions mentioned above, and have subscribed our signatures, of our own free will and with full knowledge without the least doubt whatsoever.

We have handed over this document to the said Moses to remain in his possession and in the possession of the officers coming after him as a documentary evidence.

Everything mentioned herein is confirmed.

Benj. Abraham Solomon David.
Salman Eliahoo Ezekiel Gubbay.
Ezekiel Eliahoo Abraham Siman.
Ezekiel Eliahoo Cohen.
Jacob Jonah Isaac.
David Joseph Ezra-Khalaif.
Joseph Hakham Zekhariah.
Reuben Ezra Abraham.
Moshe Abi Shimeon Abi Hoseen.
Ezekiel Dwek Cohen.
Shamaiah.
Joseph Jacob Jonah.
Samuel Dwek Cohen.
Yahya Joseph Arakie Cohen.
Benjamin Eliezer Hakham
Nissim Musleah.
Mordecai Abraham.
Joseph Shimeon Meyer Dwek
Cohen.
Salim Sulaiman.
Ezekiel Eliahoo Musleah.
Ezekiel Reuben Manasseh.
Joseph Ezra Joseph Khalaif.
Aaron Dwek Cohen.
Jonah Jacob Jonah.
Hayim Simon Hayim David.
Moses Ezekiel Rahamim.
Isaac Isaiah.
Abraham Benjamin Solomon
David.
Aaron Hayim Eliahoo Abraham.
Matooq Ezra Joseph Zekhariah.
Solomon Shimeon Dwek Cohen.
Abraham Jacob.
Elazar Aaron Arakie Cohen.
Elazar Mordecai Cohen.
Shimeon Dwek Cohen.
Joseph Dwek Cohen.

The deed, dated August 29, 1825 was registered ten days later, on September 8.

Moses Dwek records the unification of the community with obvious exultation:[5]

"After this we left the prayer hall which was in my house and went to the old Synagogue, and, by the grace of the Almighty, from the day peace was restored (in the community) the Synagogue was placed on a good footing like all other Synagogues, without the least dissenting voice from any one; and we collected a good sum of money (in a short time), that is, from Sabbath Nissabim 5585 to the end of "Tishri" 5586 we gathered three thousand rupees (Government coin) and a little over."

Though Moses Dwek agreed to occupy the office of "Paqueed" for six months only and it was stipulated that at the termination of that period another candidate would be chosen, he was reappointed at the expiry of each term till the 18th day of Elul 5599 (= September 1837) when he was determined to relinquish office. He placed the account books before a meeting of the congre-

gation at which he insisted that, despite their pleasure, he was not prepared to bear the burden of leadership singly. After some deliberation it was resolved that the affairs of the congregation would thenceforth be administered by a triumvirate (one of whose members would be Moses Dwek). The other two names would be drawn by lots from a panel submitted at the meeting. The lot fell upon Ezekiel Elias Musleah and Aaron Mashiah Sabti and the arrangement pleased Dwek. But it did not work for very long for Musleah died on 19th Adar 5599 (= February 1839) and Sabti on 3rd Iyar 5600 (= May 1840). There being no reference to subsequent lots, elections or nominations, we presume that Dwek resumed unaided leadership till his death in 1861. He deftly steered the ship of the community, remaining at the helm throughout his life.

His goal was to have a synagogue, planned and designed for a place of worship. To this end he accumulated large sums of money through individual donations. Seat rents being unknown in that part of the world, he introduced the system of auctioning privileges at religious services, such as opening the Ark, Aliyas, carrying Sefers, reading Zemiroth, etc. This, too, augmented the income of the community. On 5th Heshwan 5586 (= November 1, 1825) a large house, on 8 cottahs and 8 chittaks of land, No. 5 Suktihatta, was purchased for Rs. 16,000,[6] and the sum obtained by mortgaging the building for Rs. 10,000 and paying the balance partly from the funds of the Synagogue and partly from a loan advanced by affluent members. The property was purchased in the names of three of these — Ezekiel Eliahu Musleah, Benjamin Abraham Solomon David and Moses Simon Dwek Cohen so as to facilitate obtaining a mortgage, the responsibility for which devolved upon individuals recognized in business circles. As the purchasers were not ready to occupy it immediately, for three months it was rented to a military captain Amiri Khan at the rate of Rs. 175. Before the building was consecrated Moses Dwek performed, with the consent of the Congregation, the weddings of his son Simon who married Sarah, daughter of Abraham Aaron Cohen on 12th Adar 5586 (= March 21, 1826) and of his daughter Simha to Ezekiel Dwek on 19th Adar 5586 (= March 28, 1826).

"On Friday, the 11th Sivan, 5586 (= 16 June 1826) the whole congregation came to the house which we had purchased out of the Synagogue money, and dedicated it as a place of divine worship up to the present day. May the place be acceptable to the Almighty, and prove a good omen for us and all Israel, Amen."

In the course of the next five years, the mortgage was redeemed and the building became the sole property of the community. Free of all encumbrances, the Synagogue was named Neveh Shalome (The Abode of Peace) on Thursday, 15th Iyar 5591 (April 28, 1826) in thankfulness for the harmony and concord then existing in the community.[7]

". . . we had then paid back all the money we obtained by borrowing and mortgaging the place and also the interest on the same up to the last pie out of the Synagogue's own income; and on receiving back the purchase and mortgage documents, we, the three of us aforementioned, in whose names the said house was purchased and mortgaged, renewed the documents in the name of 'Neveh Shalome Synagogue,' in order that it may never be sold again at any time. May it be the forerunner of heavenly blessings to all of us and all Israel, Amen, be it so."

It is further suggested that the Synagogue was named for the first Jewish settler in Calcutta, Shalome Cohen.[8] The suggestion is unlikely as Cohen was then still alive and it was not customary for community buildings to be named for living people. Besides, Cohen shunned publicity in communal ventures, and when he did make a gift of land to the community to be used as a cemetery, it was done anonymously.

Though Shalome Cohen was eclipsed on the community scene by his son-in-law, Moses Dwek, perhaps because of his pre-occupation in business and in the development of contacts with Indian princes and other authorities, it was just these intimate associations that made it possible for him to bequeath to the Jewish community its burial ground as an anonymous gift. It happened, an unverified story goes, that in an interview with the Nawab of that part of Calcutta, he asked for a plot of land to be utilized as a Jewish Cemetery. The native lord, without hesitation, demarcated about ten bighas of land that makes up the cemetery and gifted it to Shalome Cohen. In accordance with Jewish tradition, however, Cohen declined the offer without at least a token payment for land that was to be a burial site for Jews. He removed a gold ring from his finger and presented it to the Nawab, who accepted it in exchange for the land.

The first Jewish resident in Calcutta lived to the age of seventy-three. He died in Calcutta on 25th Shebat 5596 (= February 13, 1836) and was buried with great honor in the cemetery he had acquired for the community. The following is the inscription on his tomb:

מצבת קבורת השוע האציל הז׳ נשוא פנים הנכבד העניו
כה"ר שלום אהרן עובדיה הכהן נ"ע נלב"ע ליל ש"ק
כ"ה שבט התקצ"ו ליצירה נולד בכסליו התקכ"ג תנצב"ה

In the year following Shalome Cohen's death there were 307 Jews in Calcutta.[9]

After his father-in-law's death, Moses Dwek continued to be held in high esteem by the natives and commanded a unique position in the Calcutta Jewish community. The native Indian, Hindu or Moslem, was ever on friendly terms with the Jew in India. This closeness was manifested particularly convincingly on the part of the intelligentsia, whether in business, medicine or law. Reciprocal cordiality and esteem were the strength of the community. From the very early days of Jewish settlement, this fraternity was well-established and upon it a powerful edifice of mutual respect was built.

Solomon Reinmann, the Galician traveler who settled in Cochin in the mid-nineteenth century, tells this story[10] he had heard from Moses Dwek. It focuses attention on the warm-hearted relationship between Jew and Hindu as well as the reverence for the cow by the natives.

On the eve of a Sabbath, Moses Dwek was sharpening his knife to slaughter a cow in honor of the Sabbath. A rich Brahmin (high caste) Hindu entered his home at the time and was told that Jews insist on the knife being flawlessly sharp to prevent the animal from suffering pain. "Don't commit such a desecration," said the Hindu whose religious sentiments were touched. "Here is 1000 rupees." "Pardon me," retorted Dwek, "be seated and I shall return after I slaughter the cow." The native was determined to prevent the killing and handed over to Dwek five crisp notes of 1000 rupees each. The Jew relented but only till the Hindu, to whom the saving of the animal's life was worth ten times that amount, was under his roof. After he left, Moses Dwek slaughtered the cow and distributed its flesh to the poor. It is not known if the cash was refunded.

Dwek was a forceful though unassuming leader. At times, the lack of response on the part of his fellow congregants would exasperate him as did their ingratitude and inappreciation but adverse experiences did not embitter him. He attributed their opposition to his own inadequacies which deserved divine punishment and trial. He prayed for his antagonists to realize their mistakes and hoped that they would be forgiven and blessed.

Besides being chosen President and Manager of the affairs of the Synagogue, which gave him wide power over his co-religionists, he

was Hazan (Reader) of the Synagogue as was Shalome Cohen before him. He learned the art of Brith Meela (circumcision) in Calcutta where, on arrival, he was grieved at the uninitiated performance of Meela of his oldest son, Simon, born on the fourth anniversary of his father's death and named for him, and the pain and loss of blood caused to the infant. To testify to Moses Dwek's rare capacity and natural inclination in matters of religious services, he undertook to teach himself the art of Meela and mastered it. His first operation was performed a little more than two years later and he expressed satisfaction at its success. Such utter lack of confidence did he have in the functionary at Calcutta, that when a second son, Isaac, was born to him and he was on a business trip to Dacca, he had the family go up to Dacca where he performed the Mitsva himself forty days later. Being blessed with length of days, he performed a total of 323 circumcisions, eighteen of the boys being children of the second generation. He performed Tebilah (ritual immersion) of a certain Abraham from Basra who allegedly was a Jew carried away captive in his early youth. Because of lack of evidence, however, he was subjected to the rituals of a convert.

Moses Dwek had a distinctive Hebrew handwriting and a knowledge of Jewish law, making him eminently fit to write every type of legal document. On principle, however, he refused to participate in any way in the severing of marital bonds, and thus stayed away from divorce proceedings. For all these services to the community he expressed himself humbly and with thanks to the Almighty that he received not even a pittance because God had blessed the work of his hands and made him independent of the community, for he owned and operated a flourishing opium and indigo business.[11]

Not only there did he show that he was imbued by an intense love for Judaism. The ship which brought him from Madras arrived at the mouth of the Hooghly River, 130 miles from Calcutta, on the day before the festival of Sukkot. If he continued his voyage on that ship there would be no chance for him to celebrate the festival with his family in Calcutta. In honor of the festival, therefore, he entrusted his belongings to his accompanying servant, hired a small boat and sailed upstream to arrive eighteen hours before the commencement of the festival. Incidentally, the meeting with his father-in-law to-be was a dramatic one. He did obeisance and kissed him and his uncle kissed and embraced him as a father his son.

His diary[12] is replete with personal and general matters which portray his concern for his fellow Jews and his piety:[13]

"On Friday 25th Sivan 5602 (= June 1842) from 10 A.M. a very

severe storm struck at Calcutta for three hours, less severe the next hour and very much greater intensity till the early evening, damaging ships, boats, houses and trees and taking a toll of lives. The Jewish community lost property but not lives."

"Friday 26th Elul 5602 — 4:30 P.M. in China Bazar, a neighborhood in proximity to the Jewish settlement in Calcutta, about 150 yards from my home and near the Synagogue Neveh Shalome, a large fire broke out in a cigar store that enveloped six neighboring stores. Houses collapsed, twenty people died on the spot and thirty were taken to hospital of whom only eight survived." He dwells at length on the religious significance of the survival of a man who was pulled out unscathed from under the debris after 24 hours and attributes his miraculous escape to his having performed some good deed meriting a fitting reward.

Moses Dwek's personal life was darkened by a tragedy involving his son-in-law Ezekiel Dwek.[14] On a Friday afternoon on May 12, 1826 (= 5 Iyar 5686) at about 4 o'clock, three Jews, Ezekiel Dwek, Simon Moses Dwek and Joseph Jacob Jonah went to the shore of the River Hooghly, on whose bank sprawls the city of Calcutta and which is a tributary of the great Indian River Ganges or Ganga, for their customary dip in honor of the approaching Sabbath. This body of water was an artery for the plying of small boats called "dinghis" that flourishes in the business of carrying merchandise up-and-down-stream. Some were larger coasters that steamed around the Indian Peninsula between Bombay and Calcutta.

The ritual completed, Ezekiel Dwek, feeling like a more extended refreshment on a long summer afternoon, proposed a race to a given boat about 45 feet away. His companions, not similarly inclined, were finally persuaded to join in the splash. Ten feet away from their goal, Ezekiel Dwek complained of total cramps and an inability to proceed. Joseph Jacob Jonah hurried back fearfully to dry land. Simon Dwek had gone ahead and caught hold of one of the boats. Seeing Ezekiel Dwek in distress he rushed to his aid but, being unfamiliar with any life-saving technique, he failed in his attempt to have the helpless victim go forward and hold on to one of the boat's cables. Out of breath, tired and anxious for his own safety, Simon returned to the boat with the intention of throwing out a cable. He could not, however, find any. It would have probably been in vain, because evidently the drowning man had lost control of his limbs. Joseph Jacob Jonah beckoned to the seamen in the other boats for help but they turned a deaf ear. The sufferer was fast drowning — only his hair and finger tips were visible five

minutes after he was stricken. At that stage a boat full of Moslem traders from the Indian west coast of Malabar approached. By the time they were a few feet away from him he was completely submerged and apparently dead, his terror-stricken and separated companions looking on helplessly.

Public officials (perhaps the coast guards) who were "bystanders" throughout the tragic episode then stepped in and took particulars of the victim and his family connections and filed the testimony of witnesses.

News of the drowning spread quickly in the city. Several members of the Jewish community arrived at the scene and heard the almost unbelievable story of the stunned companions. Relatives tried to get the aid of divers and lifesavers to no avail because night had set in. It was 8 P.M. Disconsolate and heavy-hearted, the dispairing crowd dispersed.

Ten days later Ezekiel Dwek's fellow bathers handed their testimony formally before a Jewish tribunal consisting of Joseph Ezra (Joseph Khaleif), Ezekiel Reuben Manasseh, Ezekiel Elias Musleah, Abraham Benjamin Solomon David and Isaac Isaiah Sittehone.

The court recorded also the following blood-curdling evidence of Saleh Ezekiel Zerubabel and Aaron Elias Abraham. This pair of witnesses reported that on the Wednesday following the alleged drowning of Ezekiel Dwek, an Indian domestic servant of Jacob Jonah (Isaac), Dal Jan, wife of Gareeb Ulla, a resident of Hooghly district, (six or seven hours "up" stream from Calcutta by sailing boat in a favorable wind) was distressed. While sailing to Calcutta, she said, she saw the body of Ezekiel Dwek floating on the surface of the water at a place called Palta Ghat, a distance of 2½ hours run from Calcutta. She had come to know him well when he would live with his father at the home of her master Jacob Jonah. She was reported to be wailing as she came off the boat: "Woe to Ezekiel Dwek!" On being questioned as to the reason for her cry, she related her pathetic story and added, "The relatives should be informed so they can arrange for burial while his body is still intact. Even a black and white check shirt (called in Hindusthani "Charkhana") was observed on his back. He had borrowed it from Joseph Simon Dwek and a pair to it was produced for verification. They had been bought at a place called Alfi and were not available in Calcutta or its environs.

The witnesses and their respective testimonies were examined by another group of seven constituting a court, viz. Ezekiel Reuben Manasseh, David Hakham Aaron Gubbay, Isaac Isaiah Sittehone,

Shaul Halevi, Abigedor Azriel, Ezekiel Elias Musleah and Joshua Isaac Halevi. The witnesses and testimonies were declared unimpeachable.

The matter then was submitted to Hakham Moshe Hayyim Abdulla, Chief Rabbi of Baghdad, for his decision on the fate of Ezekiel Dwek's wife. Would she be considered an Agunah (a woman, the death of whose husband lacks a witness, and who, legally, cannot re-marry) or a widow? The responsum dealt with the crucial question of whether the testimony of Dal Jan could be accepted on the principle of Mesiha Le-Phi Tumah (incidental statement) and answered it in the affirmative. There may have been one possible doubt. The non-Jewess did not specifically and clearly mention in her opening statement that she saw Ezekiel Dwek dead but elaborated only when questioned about the cause of her grief. The law, however, takes this sequence into consideration as follows: The testimony of a non-Jew who volunteers evidence incidentally, though subsequently further questioned for the sake of elucidation, may be accepted in the matter of pronouncing a lost husband dead, and the wife of the deceased may re-marry.

Moses Dwek's daughter Simha, Ezekiel Dwek's widow, was in fact married a second time on 11th June 1829 (= 10 Iyar 5689).[15] Her husband was Jacob Mordecai Yeshua.

To accommodate a rapidly expanding congregation, Moses Dwek's efforts towards the construction of a synagogue building were furthered by the acquisition of the second and third properties containing two houses on eight cottahs of land.

The following are translations of two extracts from the diary of Moses Dwek:

"On Tuesday, the 26th Tebeth 5601 (January 19, 1841) we purchased out of Neveh Shalome Synagogue money another house on the west side of the Synagogue and quite close to it with only a wall between, for the sum of Rs. 9,500.00 (Government money). But as the owner of the said house had, before selling it to us, let it to an Armenian gentleman for a period of six years, and this gentleman was unwilling to leave the house, we were obliged to pay him Rs. 500.00 as compensation for cancelling his agreement and leaving it. So the said house cost Rs. 10,000.00 which we paid in full then and there out of the Synagogue money which we had in our hands, as we said above. And on Thursday, the 6th of Shebat of the same year, we received the deed of sale which was drawn in my name as the purchaser. I therefore wrote at the back of the last document that I purchased this house out of the money of

Neveh Shalome Synagogue, for the Synagogue itself, and that neither I nor any one belonging to me has any right or claim upon the said house, and signed my name in the presence of witnesses. We let the said house to an Israelite for Rs. 40.00 a month.

"On Tuesday 30th Shebat 5603 (31st January 1843) we purchased the third house for Neveh Shalome Synagogue, which is a very big property, on the south of the synagogue and running from east to west alongside the former two properties, for the sum of Rs. 19,250.00. We had Rs. 7,000.00 in hand and borrowed Rs. 12,250.00 on interest without mortgage, but on joint pro-note of four wealthy gentlemen for the said amount. But we took the conveyance from the vendor in the name of the said four gentlemen and we shall pay them gradually. We kept the title deeds in trust in the hand of Mr. Ezekiel Judah (Jacob Solomon). The four gentlemen giving the joint pro-note for the above amount are Messrs. Ezekiel Judah (Jacob Solomon), David Aaron Gubbay, David Joseph Ezra and Moses Moses Ezekiel. When we pay back the sum borrowed with interest the said four gentlemen will have to reconvey the property to Neveh Shalome Synagogue. It should be noted that the sites of the said three premises form a large area all together being between two streets, one on the south and the other on the north, whereon by the help of God, when He so ordains, a synagogue will be built on the three sites and then there will be a gate to it from the said two streets, one on the south and the other on the north, as God grant and help by His infinite mercy. So may it be Amen."[16]

A plan for the demolition of these buildings and a blue-print of the new synagogue edifice with a courtyard and garden were prepared, notwithstanding the existence of Bethel Synagogue built in 1856. Execution of the scheme was abandoned at the death of Moses Dwek, 4th Tammuz 5621 (12th June, 1861). The following is the inscription on his tomb (EF163).[17]

פה מצבת איש חמודות מדובר בו נכבדות ממלכת כהנים
זקן ונשוא פנים שומר אמונים ישיש בן שמונים הסיד
ועניו יראת ה׳ על פניו הכם נבון וישר במעשהו מאושר
המ׳ משה שמעון דוויך הכהן נ"ע נלב"ע יום ג׳ ונטמן
יום ד׳ ד׳ תמוז שנת התרכ"א ליצירה תנצב"ה

Moses Dwek was thus the real founder of the Jewish community and like all initiators of new projects his love for it was unbounded. With relentless energy he guided the destinies of the growing community so that the Biblical words: "At his word did they encamp and at his word did they journey" can aptly be applied.[18] At the

end, he had accomplished much. There was evidence, internally, of the makings of soundness, and externally, of general recognition. An association of about 1000 Jews was functioning, at least theoretically, under a statute. Two prayer halls and a cemetery were a reality. Carefully-laid plans for more elaborate organization awaited execution. Relations with other Jewish communities and institutions were on-going. Neighboring ethnic groups were well-disposed. In short, the founding families had consolidated into a community.

*Chapter 3*

## REVEREND MERCHANTS

The key to the survival and prosperity of Jewry in Calcutta was a balance of apparently opposing interests — the commercial and the religious, the knowledge of the Torah and material aspirations. Jews in India settled there primarily to do business, but they were ever conscious of their responsibilities as preservers of their heritage. They believed that they were Jews not only because they were born Jews but because they took a pride in carrying on the great heritage of the Torah and all that it involved, despite the handicaps of being surrounded by a veritable spiritual wilderness from the Jewish point of view. The environment was thickly overlaid with paganism which could only impede roots being struck in new directions. Recourse could be had only from the innate religious stamina the immigrants brought with them. And it held up well. When we look into the lives of these men we find that they owe their success to a sort of artistic unity between their inner thoughts and outward acts, forming a harmonious whole. There was no inconsistency between their way of life and their means of living.

The presence of these reverend gentlemen made the office of rabbi superfluous. Visiting rabbinical emissaries could never understand the phenomenon. One of them, Jacob Sapir, in 1852, had this to say: "They have not even the semblance of the office of 'Hakham' (the designation of rabbi in Sephardi communities) . . . But where can they get a true rabbi and conscientious teacher? . . . They cannot bring a rabbi from Baghdad for they require one who will have an all-round education, who will know the local languages so as to be able to communicate with the princes and the government officials, and who will be able to direct an educational program according to the techniques of the modern age. Indeed, a rabbi of this city must be a synthesis of (the cultures of) Asia and Europe, that is, his mind from (the Talmud of) Babylon and his body (or secular education) from Europe. And such a multi-qualified rabbi has not yet arisen in their midst."[1]

Though there was no ordained rabbi in Calcutta in the nineteenth

century, and it took a full century to produce one, that Jewish outpost at the gates of the Far East was blessed with an unending stream of personalities who unofficially, — but by public acclaim, — assumed its spiritual direction. How truly applicable to them is the rabbinic comment on Ecclesiastes 1:5, "The sun rises and the sun goes down, — before the sun of one righteous man sets God causes the sun of another righteous man to rise. On the day that Rabbi Akiba died Rabbi Judah (the Prince) was born."[2]

These were men who played a vital part in the development of Indian Jewry as religious leaders, communal workers and commercial experts. To mention a few: Aaron Kindil, an ancestor of a Hazan at Bombay, and Aaron Solomon Lanyado, forbear of a Hazan of Bethel Synagogue, Calcutta, and constant traveler between the Middle East and India. In frequent consultation with Moses Dwek in halachic matters and signatories of religio-legal documents were Faraj Hyeem Ezra Meir, Reuben Shooker Isaac and Ezekiel Ezra (Khaleif),[3] and Moses Moses Hakham Ezekiel who signed the last document in March, 1855, went to China and died there in February, 1858. Hakham Eliyahu, son of Hakham Ezekiel, son of Hakham Saleh, son of Joseph Musleah of Baghdad was an honored individual. His grandfather, Hakham Saleh Musleah and uncle Nissim were the spiritual leaders of the Baghdad Academy and poets of repute in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[4] Several of their liturgical hymns are still preserved.[5] Hakham Eliyahu Musleah died in Calcutta in 1824. His son, Ezekiel, one of the most wealthy members of the Jewish community,[6] was expert in the indigo trade and his services were utilized by the East India Company.[7] The present writer is in direct descent from Hakham Saleh Musleah in the eighth generation.[8]

Another immigrant from Baghdad to make his mark on the community was Ezekiel Judah, son-in-law of the famed Hakham Moses Hyeem, Ab Beth Din of Baghdad 1785-1837.[9] Having a Talmudic background and training in his native country, he was foremost in advancing matters of religion in the land of his domicile. He was God-fearing and pious, but his talents were not limited to the spiritual field. He was one of the most honored and wealthy residents of Calcutta,[10] excelling as an indigo merchant and a dealer of silk and Dacca cloth.[11] He was recognized as one of the leading religious authorities.[12]

His large-heartedness, well-known even in far-off Baghdad, was reflected in several acts of charity. Wealth, he felt, was entrusted to him to better the lot of mankind and more particularly, his Jew-

ish brethren. He succoured the poor and the needy and upheld the Torah and its students.

His most distinctive and lasting contribution was the part he played in a joint venture with David Joseph Ezra to build the second synagogue in Calcutta. This building, at first also called Neveh Shalome, later came to be known as Bethel in the following circumstances:

The site, in a quarter of the city known as Lembootola, about 200 yards from the Neveh Shalome Synagogue, belonged to a Jew, Immanuel Belilios. The structure standing on it was taken on lease by the community in the spring of 1856 for a place of prayer. The cost of the entire project, including the installation of religious appurtenances, must have been borne singly by Ezekiel Judah, for Eleazar Arakie refers to the prayer hall as that "which Ezekiel Judah made."[13] The first congregational prayer was held there on June 4 that year (= 1st Sivan 5616).[14]

In about two months the scheme was reviewed. Arrangements were made for the *purchase* of the property by the community, an indication of preference for a new synagogue building. But the revised plan called for more elaborate financing involving David Joseph Ezra, now in a joint venture with Ezekiel Judah. The old structure was to be demolished and an entirely new building put up. Work on the demolition commenced on August 14.

Moses Dwek, recognized as leader, laid the foundation stone on September 9, and wrote in his diary:[15] "Today at 12 o'clock noon we laid the foundation of the new synagogue building and I engraved in china marble in square (Hebrew) characters: This Synagogue, Neveh Shalome, started being built on Tuesday 9th Elul 5616. May it augur good luck in a blessed and auspicious hour, Amen. The said stone we placed at the site of the Hekhal (Ark) and built on it in the name of God in Lembootola quarter, Pollock Street."[16]

The significance of the retention of Neveh Shalome as the name for the new synagogue should not go unheeded. It pointed to the community's, that is, Moses Dwek's, intention to replace the old synagogue building, then dilapidated and not quite fit for use as a house of worship, by the new edifice.[17] But the conservative won the day, at least for the time being. They continued to worship in the older house, while others moved into the new sanctuary which retained the name of Neveh Shalome at least until the death of Moses Dwek in 1861. When the Jewish traveler, Shelomo Reinmann, visited Calcutta before Dwek's death, he found two syna-

gogues in existence — one called Slah-il-Atikah (the Old Synagogue) and the other Neveh Sha-anan (obviously a mistake for Neveh Shalome) or Slah Jedidah (the New Synagogue).[18] Apparently, the name was changed to Bethel after the community persisted, and Dwek had died, in retaining both synagogues. The first available evidence of the name Bethel for the newer synagogue came in 1874. Referring to "the house bought by public subscription for a school," *Mebasser,* the Hebrew-Arabic newspaper, reported its location to be near "the new synagogue — Bethel."[19] But the appellation Bethel was not universally or uniformly used as late as August, 1874. It was referred to also as Slah-il-Kebiri (large synagogue) in contrast with the smaller Neveh Shalome.[20]

According to the commemorative tablet put up at the entrance of the Bethel Synagogue, the whole scheme jointly cost Ezekiel Judah and David Joseph Ezra a sum of Rs. 50,000.00. (Another source puts the cost as high as Rs.60,000.00, shared equally by the benefactors.)[21] However, the popular belief[22] appears to have accorded Judah with a considerably larger share in the undertaking.

Ezekiel Judah had arrived in Calcutta in June, 1838 from Baghdad, where he was married twice; his second wife was Khatoon, daughter of Hakham Aaron Saleh Gubbay, the marriage having taken place in November, 1820 when she was 10! She bore him a son, Aaron, at the age of 13. Aaron subsequently was drowned in Baghdad together with an older step-brother's wife as they crossed a bridge. Khatoon, accompanied by three children, Nissim, Farha and Rahma, joined her husband in Calcutta in January, 1840.[23]

Ezekiel Judah died in Calcutta on 30th Nisan 5620 (April 22, 1860) before reaching his sixtieth year, and was survived by his wife[24] and three sons in Calcutta.[25] His eldest son, Reuben, by his first wife was one of the leaders of Baghdad Jewry while yet another son, Solomon, conducted a Yeshiva in Jerusalem at which ten scholars constantly studied Torah and recited prayers.[26]

For a year after his demise his sons invited scholars from the Holy Land, Syria and Baghdad as well as from the poor of the city to study Torah day and night at the residence of the deceased. These labors were well rewarded. Every Sabbath, friends and other members of the community would gather at their home and study Nebeeim, Ketubim, Mishna and Musar (this study is called "Mishmara") at the end of which the eldest son in Calcutta, Sassoon, in his own right a scholar, would deliver a sermon on the Torah portion of the week. On the first anniversary, Rabbi Jacob Sapir,

a traveler from Jerusalem, preached, after which they recited Psalms and Mishna and partook of a sumptuous meal.[27]

The other partner in financing the Bethel project, David Joseph Ezra, founded in Calcutta what was to become the most outstanding family in the city, almost as prominent as the Sassoons of Bombay. The first member of the family to set foot on Indian soil was Joseph Ezra, one of the signatories of the 1825 statute, who arrived in Calcutta on February 22, 1821[28] with two of his sons, David and Nissim. The family is also known as Khaleif, after an ancestor Ezra Khaleif or Bahar, meaning sea, indicating that they were the first or one of the first to cross the Persian Gulf into India.[29]

After setting up business connections in India, Joseph returned to Baghdad but he must have lived in India till at least May, 1826 when he signed a religious document in Calcutta.[30] Having had a taste, however, of the comparative freedom in India under the British and finding the Moslem rule in their native country intolerable, the sons settled in Calcutta. David proved to be the more enterprising of the brothers in commerce and later in real estate. His business interests included the export of indigo and silk to the Near East and of opium on a large scale to Hongkong.[31] He was appointed agent for Arab ships arriving at Calcutta and for Arab merchants of Muscat and Zanzibar, importing dates and other produce and in exchange exporting rice, sugar and other foodstuffs[32] from India. Purely conjectural is the estimate valuing Ezra's wealth at 50 million francs.[33] In recognition of his contribution to the development of trade, and in token of his vast ownership of real estate, two streets in the heart of the Jewish quarter were named for him — David Joseph Lane and Ezra Street in which almost every property belonged to him.

Next to the Ezras in prominence was the Gubbay family. David Hakham Aaron Gubbay came from Baghdad but his children settled in Hongkong and Shanghai. His nephew Elias S. Gubbay, however, became a leading Jewish merchant in Calcutta, who also invested his wealth in real estate whose value appreciated over the years.[34]

Immigration into India was quickened by persecutions in the twin cities of Baghdad and Basra at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Spurred by the cruel treatment of the Wali of Baghdad, Daud Pasha,[35] Sason, the father of the founder of the House of Sassoon in India, fled from Baghdad and settled in Bushire where he died. His son, David, continued his journey to Bombay and flourished.[36]

A similar fate befell the Nasi of Basra, Isaac Solomon (Benjamin), who escaped from his native city on May 8, 1836 with his wife Hannah, the daughter of Ezekiel Khadoori, and took up permanent residence in Calcutta about two months later.[37] Considering his love for learning, benevolence as well as his status in Basra, where his father and grandfather before him bore the same title, it is no wonder that he is extolled by the printer Eleazar Arakie for the valuable assistance and support rendered him in publishing his edition of Hayyim Benveniste's Pesah Me-ubbin, Calcutta, 1841. He was aware of the Russian pogroms of the 1880s,[38] and composed a prayer for the occasion which he sent to Queen Victoria.[39] He could trace his genealogy 250 years back. He was a good orator and possessed a retentive memory. Noted for his piety and hospitality, he espoused the noblest of causes. In business he lost his initial fortune of Rs. 40,000 which he could never regain. Nevertheless, he lived comfortably but never departed his high sense of justice and ethics which was reflected in his will. He enjoined his children Ezra, Ezekiel (Rangoon resident), Solomon and an unmarried daughter to live in the fear of God and lead religious and charitable lives. His bequests included a month's wages for each of his domestic servants.

Born on 28th Heshwan 5569 (= November 18, 1808), he was in his seventy-eighth year when he passed away on 24th Sivan 5646 (= 27th June 1886). He was so afraid of being buried alive that a few days before his death he gave instructions that his body was to lie untouched for 24 hours after expiry, rather unusual for a community that started funeral rites as early as two or three hours after death. His wishes were respected and the funeral took place only the next day, attended by almost the entire community. A funeral oration was delivered at Bethel Synagogue, the place where he worshipped.[40]

Such then were the founders of the more prominent families of the community. In most cases their fortunes kept pace with the growth of the city in this prosperous corner of a thriving Empire. But at the same time they never lost sight of their Jewish values and were ever on guard to foster for themselves and for the community as a whole the practice of the religion that was so dear to their hearts.

*Chapter 4*

## ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

In the first part of this chapter, we shall trace the economic pursuits of the Calcutta community mainly in the nineteenth century and see the effects on their mode of living; in the latter portion, we shall concentrate on the same issues in the present century, bringing this aspect of the story as close as possible to the present day.

### *The Nineteenth Century*

At all times, Jews of the Indian province of Bengal were entirely urban. The metropolis, Calcutta, together with the cities of Bombay and Poona on the west coast, absorbed the greatest proportion of immigration from Iraq, Yemen and Iran. As a trading center, its position was enhanced by its geographic pre-eminence at which rail, river and, more recently, air traffic converged. It is the only outlet to the sea for the rich valley of the River Ganga (Ganges) with its mineral and industrial resources.

Calcutta has three climatic periods — hot and dry, hot and wet and cool and dry. The long summer starts at the beginning of March, becoming progressively hotter and drier until mid-June. Brief relief is afforded in the evenings by a southerly breeze and occasional thundersqualls, bringing rain and dropping temperatures that can at times soar to 117°. The monsoons then break and continue for the next three and one half months, averaging twelve inches per month, with increasing humidity. The mean temperature at this time is between 82° and 87°. In October and November, nights are cool but precipitation almost nil. Calcutta's winters are pleasantly cold, temperatures dropping to 45°-55° with little rainfall.

The lungs of Calcutta are its maidahn (park) extending over 1200 acres and consisting of sports fields for football (soccer), hockey and cricket; an outdoor stadium and a race course; and a memorial to Queen Victoria, which is considered the finest building in the city. Facing the maidahn, for a length of about two miles stretches

Chowringhee, once a row of palatial buildings but later the locale of hotels, shops, offices and museums.

The Jewish neighborhood in the nineteenth century, including the synagogues and schools, was only about a half a mile from the river banks. In that century the total population never exceeded one million people, while in the first half of the present century it had increased 1½ times. With the fast moving pace of industrialization the economy of the city received a great boost; in addition, migrations in population resulting from the partition of India produced a steady increase so that by 1961 numbers had grown to 3,000,000. However, pressing problems in housing and automobile traffic were thus created.

Diverse languages were spoken. About two-thirds of the population were Bengalis, almost the entire remainder being Hindi-speaking people of the North. The British, whose numbers have dwindled considerably since independence, formed the largest group of Europeans.

In modern times, Calcutta has air links with almost every important city in the world. Its port, extending for over thirty miles, is one of the busiest. Vessels of 16,000 tons drawing thirty-eight feet and more go eighty miles up the River Hooghly to Calcutta, the limit for ocean-going liners. The passage is dangerous because of strong tides and bores and consequent changes in bed level but it is kept safe by the skill and vigilance of the most trying, though talented, pilot services in the world.

Calcutta had two universities. The University of Calcutta was inaugurated in 1857 on the style of the University of London; and the University of Jadavpur came into being in 1955 in the southern suburb of the city.

The early Jewish settlers from Aleppo, Baghdad and Basra were attracted to Calcutta for its strategic geographic and commercial position. Besides the silks and muslins of Dacca and Murshidabad, which were in demand in Europe in the nineteenth century, the saltpeter of Bihar was vital for Britain in the manufacture of gunpowder during the wars with France. Against the background of today's import to India of millions of tons of rice, it is difficult to imagine that India once *exported* part of her staple crop. Sesame oil, jute and cotton goods, sugar, spices and lac also were sent overseas through the port of Calcutta.[1]

Besides these products the early settlers were engaged in two main types of business. The first was the export of opium to the East, mostly China, which found a ready and abundant trade. The

drug is obtained from the immature fruits of the opium poppy by slightly incising the fruits and collecting and partially or completely drying the exuded juice. The juice is white and liquid at first but coagulates and turns brown on exposure to air. For an agricultural product it has high value in proportion to bulk and weight, and offers no considerable problems of storage and transport.

Opium eating was practised in the Orient as a household remedy to relieve pain in gastric and respiratory ailments. It was also taken as a tranquilizer. Some took it for pleasure in smoking and chewing. It was declared a vice in China in the mid-seventeenth century. Organized use of the poppy and coca leaf for purposes of commerce developed after 1700. Turkey, Iran and India were chief producers. Its importation into China by foreign traders led to war in 1839-42 between Britain and China and again in 1857. After that date, cultivation was permitted in China while imports from India continued.

The opium trade was dominated by Jews. The Indian farmer sold all his produce to the British Government of India which auctioned it to the highest bidder, to the value of five or six million rupees annually. Then it was exported privately to Penang, Hongkong, Shanghai and Singapore mainly in Chinese boats. Even the shipping of opium was almost entirely in Jewish hands. In January, 1888, for example, 4546 chests were exported, 2870 being through Jewish merchants — David Sassoon 1220 chests, Elia Shalome Gubbay 1445 chests, Elia David Joseph Ezra & Co. 580 chests, Meyer Brothers 475 chests and Saleh Manasseh 150 chests.

There were two qualities of opium, Patna and Benares, named for two Indian cities. When Jews wanted to depress the market they boycotted the auction and picked up the product when prices were lower. The Marwaris, migrants from western India, were their only competitors. Prices fluctuated so rapidly that overnight one might become very wealthy or be reduced to poverty. For the most part success did not depend on skill or wisdom but on mere chance. By and large, fate seemed to have favored the Jews. So lucrative was the business that Arthur Sassoon accumulated a fortune of four million rupees in eight years when he resided in Hongkong, one of the receiving ends of the trade. Greater impetus was gained as distances seemed shorter when the steamship replaced sailing boats.[2]

In the early twentieth century the trade was banned. But even before then, the Sassoons of Bombay switched over to the textile trade[3] and the Calcutta Jews became well-established in the booming real estate business.

The second means of livelihood with rich returns was the export of indigo to countries far and near. "Indigo is one of the most valuable dyestuffs which comes from Indian markets. Bengal is the home province of the plant Idigofera Sumatrana which is reared from seed sown at the end of March or beginning of April. By the middle of June the plant has attained the height of three to five feet. The indigo is contained in the leaf of the plant in the form of a colorless glucoside. This substance is soluble in water and by the joint action of an enzyme contained in the leaf and atmospheric oxygen, it yields indigotine, the coloring matter of indigo. It is on these facts that the manufacturing of indigo from the plant is based. When seeped in water the color varies from a bright orange to an olive green."[4]

Some of their other enterprises were in silk, woollen and cotton products made in factories and exported to various countries. They dealt also in precious stones.

Trade between Baghdad and India in the mid-nineteenth century was almost entirely in Jewish control, though there were some Arabians, Persians and Europeans to contend with. Many Jews became very wealthy and occupied comfortable and spacious homes, employing several native men- and maid-servants and cooks. Their opulence drew the attention of the government and native non-Jewish residents by whom they were held in high esteem.[5]

About the same time, a Jewish traveler reported, "Apart from the very rich like David Joseph Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay, Simon Raphael Hyeem Isaac and his sons, Ezekiel Eliyahu Musleah and others, some were moderately rich and lived comfortable and honorable lives. Even those who worked for their living were independent because Calcutta provided many opportunities for business. Even the very poor do not starve, for they are maintained from the income of synagogue property acquired by Moses Dwek when he was responsible for communal funds."[6]

The editor of the above travelogue, himself a visitor in Calcutta a few years afterwards, corroborated the evidence of that author: "In general, the Jews of Calcutta are respectable and straightforward people, making an honorable living. Some, however, maintain themselves in a despicable and lowly manner hardly worth the name. Even in Bombay there is a street housing many Baghdad Jews, and vain fellows who inhabit it are only superficially observant of Judaism. For observance to them is a licence to do whatever their light hearts dictate."[7]

With the start of the second quarter of the nineteenth century,

Jews began turning their gaze further eastward for commercial prospects. They shuttled between Calcutta on the one hand and Rangoon, Burma, Singapore, Malaya, and the Chinese cities of Shanghai, Penang and Hongkong. Travel being very slow, a business trip to the Far East took between six and eight months. For example, a trip to Singapore undertaken by Moses Moses Hakham Ezekiel extended in 1842 from January 20 until August 15.[8] Eminently successful in business in Singapore was the family of Meyer under the name Meyer Bros., — three brothers, Reuben who died aged 42 in Calcutta in 1885,[9] Manasseh and Elias.[10]

Another Calcutta family which made good in Singapore was that of Joseph Joshua Elias, who traded under the name of Joshua Bros. Having settled in Calcutta from Sham in 1837 he prospered in the opium business which he began in Singapore twenty years later. In 1867 he returned to Sham where he retired. A turn of the wheel of fortune came in 1872, when he was informed that the Singapore business had failed and his assets in his native city were confiscated for payment to his creditors. In his old age he lived a precarious existence as he found it difficult to retrieve his fortune. When fortune smiled, he raised Rs. 10,000 on two occasions to give poor brides in marriage. There is no knowing when he returned to Calcutta, where he lived alone. His wife and three children, Elias, Rahma and Rahel continued on in Sham. He died in 1887.[11]

Saleh Manasseh Saleh who emigrated from Baghdad in 1862 and died in Calcutta in 1894,[12] married Esther, daughter of Abraham Aaron Cohen; he also flourished in the opium business in Singapore and returned to Calcutta in 1885. He was understanding, well-read and uninterfering.[13]

Owners of a beautiful park in Howrah, a suburb of Calcutta, the Belilios family, led by Raphael Belilios, made Hongkong their home in 1861.[14] Immanuel, his son visited Calcutta a few times and was royally received by the Jewish community, the last time in 1887. He entertained his co-religionists at his suburban residence and distributed more than Rs. 1,000.00 to the needy on the eve of his departure.[15] His mother Salha died in Hongkong in March, 1894. By that time her sons had dispersed throughout the world; Aaron was in London and Isaac in Calcutta; only Immanuel was still in Hongkong.[16] She had three daughters, Grace, wife of Aaron Shalome Gubbay, Sarah and Dinah.

Closer home, Burma was the center for Abraham Aaron Cohen, one of the earliest settlers in Calcutta.[17] He inaugurated a business in September, 1874 at Moulmein, Burma, with a capital of Rs.

40,000.00[18] and was noted for his philanthropy. He died in Calcutta in January, 1887[19] and was survived by six sons and six daughters, four children and his wife having predeceased him. The firm of Cohen Bros., Rangoon, was owned by his children. His eldest surviving son, Jacob Meir, was the leader of Rangoon Jewry for several years.[20] When in India the elder Cohen's wife and family spent the summer in Darjeeling where they bought a house called "Ogden." He himself would travel back and forth.[21] He died in Calcutta in January, 1887. A Sefer Torah was dedicated in his name at the Bethel Synagogue on Hanukka Sabbath 1888. Rabbi David Nathaniel Rofeh, from Tiberias, gave a Darush (discourse) at 4 o'clock in the morning prior to services.[22]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when trade with the west became faster and freer, local Jews followed David Sassoon & Co. in 1887 in setting up commission agencies in London: Sillman Ezekiel in general stores and Y. Yaari, originally with David Sassoon in London, struck out on their own.[23] Abraham Joseph Hyeem sold shoes imported from London.[24]

Elias Joseph Musleah who lived at 17 Pollock Street, at least from 1871–1873, owned an import agency for upward of 15 years till 1880. He did business with London, Paris and Marseilles in a variety of goods, primarily wines, perfumes and toys, for which he found a ready market in Rangoon, Dinapore, Bombay and of course, Calcutta. Not very fluent in the English language, he hired an Englishman to aid him in his correspondence with the West, while with his clients in the Orient, the medium of correspondence was Arabic which he wrote himself.[25]

European Jews made a bid at opening trade channels with fellow Jews in India. The following advertisement appeared in *Paerah*, the Judeo-Arabic journal, in 1879:[26]

"The undersigned offers himself as Agent and Commercial Informer for Austria-Hungary, Germany, Switzerland. Write in English, French or Hebrew . . . Address Moses Williams, University of Vienna, Austria."

While his commercial range spanned Europe and Asia, the plain of the River Ganges afforded the Jew a fertile approach. Trade with key cities on the river became a common preoccupation and the strategic position of each of these places made them attractive objectives. Railways were introduced in India in 1853, but it took between two and three decades to connect the main cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Much of the internal trade, therefore, was done through the waterways, the greatest expanse of which was

occupied by the River Ganges and its tributaries. Jewish merchants traded initially in opium, then extended their interests to other local indigenous products.

Though many tried their hand at each trading center, a single Jewish family often attained outstanding success at each one and by association assumed the designation of the place. Mordecai Abraham Cohen was connected with Bhagalpur, Samuel Dwek with Dinapur, Raphael Moses (Ashkenazi) with Ghazipur and Ezekiel Saleh Ezekiel Moses with Gorakhpur.

As fortune smiled they left Calcutta and established themselves in their respective towns. Not only in trade did they prosper but also in booming values of real estate. They paid annual or biennial visits to Calcutta on business or for personal reasons such as marriages or births. Frequently even these were not sufficient reasons for traveling to Calcutta and the religious functionary would be brought from the metropolis. Family cemeteries are found in each of these places.[27] Gradually they became popular holiday resorts. On one occasion as many as 250 people saw the vacationists off at Howrah, Calcutta's railway terminus.[28] Some of these holiday seekers and others died at the resorts and were buried at those private cemeteries.

Bhagalpur in Bihar State, India, is presently on the Sahebgunj loop line of the Eastern Railway. Its principal product is colored and artistic fabrics made by local weavers from tussore and eri silk. Mordecai Abraham Cohen who settled there, had three sons — Abraham, Elias and David Sassoon, and three daughters, Shahie, Farha and Sophie.

Dinapur was one of the main centers of the opium industry. A news report published in the local Jewish newspaper, *Maggid Mesharim*, in February, 1894 mentioned that excessive rain benefitted the opium crop at Dinapur.[29] Samuel Dwek's son, Moses, carried on his father's business pursuits. He would live there as early as 1842 when his son Aaron was born. The circumcision was performed in Dinapur by Moses Dwek on November 28, 1842, when the child was over five months old.[30]

Travel to these stations was not free from peril. A warning was issued by a Jewish resident of Dinapur to fellow travelers to be careful en route from the railway station to the town — a distance of one and a half hours. Rest rooms had been constructed but thefts were rampant.[31]

About 45 miles east of Benares (Varanasi, since Indian Independence) in the State of Uttar Pradesh, is Ghazipur on the left bank

of the Ganges. The ancient town of Gadhipur adopted the name Ghazipur, derived from the title of Moslem rulers at that time. Besides being the administrative and business center for opium, it is noted for perfume distilling. Calcutta Jews used an abundance of rose water, a distilled product of Ghazipur.[32] Flour and oil milling also occupied the business community.

Raphael Moses, who married Reemah, daughter of Jacob Nissim Isaiah, in 5614 (= 1854),[33] had three sons — Joseph Hyeem, Moses Ezra and Jacob; Moses Ezra married Serah, daughter of Hyeem Barook Benjamin in Calcutta on September 24, 1894. As mentioned, it was common practice for residents of outlying towns to choose their brides from Calcutta. In such cases, the wedding took place in the capital city. However, when the bride was from Dinapur, her groom would go there for the wedding. In 1838 Sarah, daughter of Hyeem Eliyahoo Dwek was married in Dinapur to Ezekiel Daniel of Calcutta.[34]

Another town in Uttar Pradesh is Gorakhpur, 150 miles north of Benares on the left bank of the Rapti, a tributary of the River Gogra. The city grew up around the Hindu Gorakhnath temple, about 1400 C.E. and was given importance in the reigns of the Moghuls, Akbar and Auranzeb and ceded to the East India Company in 1801. It was connected by railway in 1885 and now is the headquarters of the North East Railway. Because of its proximity to the Himalaya mountains, summer heat is reduced. Its main industries are textile manufacture, paper making and tobacco.

Ezekiel Saleh Moses' son, Elias Faraj, was born in Calcutta in 1894. The elder Moses retired from Gorakhpur a few years before his death in Calcutta in 1928.

Near Bhagalpur, about seventy-seven miles east-southeast of Patna on the right bank loop of the Ganges is the town of Monghyr. It was a strategic center under Moslem rulers as early as the ninth century. The Jewish family whose surname was derived from this town thrived on business there. In the paper, *Maggid Mesharim*, the founder of this family is referred to as Shalome Joseph "Monghyr" as well as by his subsequent anglicized name "Mingail."[35]

As we mentioned previously, there were two grades of opium — one grown in Benares and the other in Patna. Monghyr was one of the centers for Patna opium. It is, however, more famed for the manufacture of swords and firearms in which Jews did not deal.

Occasionally Jews extended their trade to the towns of Faizabad on the right bank of he Gogra river in the Gangetic plain, and Kanpur. Founded in 1730 by the Nawabs of Oudh, Faizabad was

replaced by Lucknow, eighty miles further west, as their capital. Forty-three miles south west of Lucknow in the state of Uttar Pradesh is the city of Cawnpore (Kanpur, after Indian Independence) famed for its leather goods. It was the frontier outpost of Oudh and Bengal and came under the aegis of the East India Co. in 1801. It figured in a siege of the British during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, during which many Europeans lost their lives.

While trade and commerce occupied the attention of many in the nineteenth century, a goodly number were white collar workers holding jobs in governmental agencies and commercial concerns. At this time and well into the next century, training for government jobs was favored by Indians throughout the country. Only one percent of the applicants secured these highly competitive jobs, the standard of living being so low and job seekers so numerous, that an advertisement for a clerk on Rs. 15.00 or Rs. 20.00 per month would evoke a spate of applications, many of them from graduates.[36]

The firms of E. D. Sassoon and David Sassoon employed several local Jews whose emoluments were not considerable. They occupied the middle stratum between the affluent businessmen and the poverty-stricken folk who depended for their livelihood upon the pittance doled out to them from communal and individual sources.

A few in the so-called middle economic bracket were owners of small stores and retailers. Some old religious articles and books,[37] black and white raisins for wine and food, [38] cheese,[39] rose water from Ghazipur,[40] beans (bakkalli) from Dinapur,[41] pomegranates,[42] matsa and wine for Pesah from Baghdad, Shiraz and Abushire,[43] dates for the manufacture of Halek (date juice, used as Haroseth).[44]

Small workshops were also existent. Benjamin Jacob Mordecai Joshua indulged in gold and silver electroplating. On the occasion of Pesah 1888, the community was asked to patronize him.[45]

Professional doctors, lawyers and engineers were almost unknown. A medical man from Baghdad, Judah Aga David Halevi, announced the setting up of a practice in Calcutta in July, 1893.[46] He was recommended by Ezekiel Isaac Nawi whom he cured, after every other medication failed.[47]

Salha, wife of Jacob Arakie, trained in midwifery and nursing, was the first Jewish woman so qualified.[48] Non-Jewish midwives charged Rs. 50.00 per delivery.[49]

The Jew in the nineteenth century was thus a typical example of economic individualism. He had no interest in professional careers but was a small independent merchant, importer and exporter, ever

on the look out for new avenues of endeavor. The appearance of Hebrew-Arabic papers published locally spurred and sustained interest. They printed fiscal and shipping information and reports of local and foreign market conditions. For instance, in 1873, *Mebasser,* the pioneer in local Jewish journalism, ran, on its first page of the third issue, shipping news, bank rates and bullion prices. (Gold was selling for Rs. 16.00 and 5 annas a tola = 23 carats).[50] This policy was continued by its successors, *Paerah* and *Maggid Mesharim,* as it was evidently well-received. Data on arrivals and departures of shipping also occupied pride of place on the front page.

Business made some of the early settlers in Calcutta very wealthy; and they knew the best means of investment too. They were attracted to, and displayed an uncanny interest in real estate. It has been said that when David Joseph Ezra died in 1882, he was one of the leading property owners in Calcutta. His descendants added to his extensive stakes in land holdings. They owned some of the most imposing edifices in the city. In September, 1873 he bought four houses belonging to an estate that had to be divided among the owner's sons. They were: 30 Chowringhee costing Rs. 105,000.00; 11, 12 and 13 Sudder Street for Rs. 170,000.00. Their combined rents yielded Rs. 580.00 per month.[51] The Chowringhee property was still in the Ezra Estate when it was liquidated after almost ninety years at a price about fifteen times its cost. Another substantial building was Ezra Terrace bought in November, 1881 for Rs. 263,000.00.[52] He possessed also the palatial Esplanade Mansion and Ezra Mansion.

This interest is indicative of not only a deep Jewish insight into investments of potential value, but perhaps also to a confidence that Calcutta's Jewish settlement was going to be more durable than it proved to be. While the Armenians were similarly inclined, the European businessman was less enthusiastic; his land holdings were low or practically nil.[53] There was a clear lack of European interest in the land market. European companies owned buildings for their employees but private western ownership was conspicuous by its absence. They were sojourners in India and almost without exception expected to retire in their native countries.

David Joseph Ezra's nephew too was an established real estate owner. In 1874, Nissim Nissim Joseph Ezra took his bill collector to court for misappropriating rent he had collected.[54]

The immovable property market was competitive even for agents. Ezra Isaac Solomon (Benjamin) announced the inception of his

agency business under the name of Messrs. H. Solomon & Co., 24 Pollock Street, by offering more reasonable rates than Hindu agents.[55]

Rents of houses occupied by Jews were higher than those paid by the general community because of the Jewish practice of offering a higher rent for apartments they fancied, occupied even by fellow Jews. This, in 1878, led to the ejection of Jews paying a low rental in favor of the occupancy of co-religionists offering a higher rental. Jewish communal leaders appealed for the cessation of the unfair practice.[56]

Up to approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, Jews made their opulence evident also by keeping slaves,[57] native Indians, both male and female. After years in slavery, they were manumitted and opted in favor of the religion of their erstwhile masters. The first document of manumission is dated 2nd Shebat 5587 (January 30, 1827) when Moses Hyeem son of Yahya Taazi (anglicized Tassie) freed his slave Abdullah. Freed slaves were nicknamed Mayshuhrar which later became a family name. Occasionally, a master may have had male and female slaves who married each other on receiving their freedom. Thus, Abraham and Lulu, slaves of David Joseph Ezra became man and wife according to Jewish law on the day after their release 12th Tishri 5598 (= October 11, 1837).

Manumitted slaves at times married born Jews such as Gazala, slave of Yahya Solomon Gubbay, married Elias, son of Abraham, 23rd Tebeth 5600 (= December 30, 1839). They were presumably divorced within a year and she married thereafter Jonah Nissim Jonah on 8th Tishri 5601 (= October 5, 1840). Also on record are cases of freed slaves marrying the children of slaves who were freed a generation earlier. Thus, Elia Mayshuhrar married Hannah, daughter of Antobia Mayshuhrar, 13th Kislev 5607 (= December 2, 1846). Or, the second generation of manumitted slaves "intermarrying," such as Awad, son of Joseph Mayshuhrar, married Sarah, daughter of Antobia Mayshuhrar, 4th Sivan 5611 (= June 4, 1851).

Conversions to Judaism were almost as common as manumissions. On 29th Adar II 5608 (= April 3, 1848) Salim Mayshuhrar married Miriam, a convert. Sons born of female slaves, while in the service of their masters (yelid bayit), were circumcised according to Jewish law. So, the son of Gazala, slave of Moses Dwek, born in Nisan 5573 (= April 1813) in Chinsura, was named Nisan. Native lads in the employ of Jewish masters were circumcised at age six to ten irrespective of their parentage. A case is recorded

of the circumcision of Abraham, yelid bayit of Elikoo, who was in turn yelid bayit of David Taphaha; his mother and father's mother were non-Jewish.

Other slave owners included Jacob Nissim Isaiah, Isaac Ezra Levi, Sillman Elias Cohen, Ezekiel Hyeem Saleh Sassoon Levi, Raphael Immanuel Belilios and Ezra Ezekiel Elias Musleah. No manumissions are recorded subsequent to 1859. Presumably, the practice of retaining slaves slowly died out thereafter as the British Government discouraged it.

Several families owned property at vacation spots. We have seen how Shalome Cohen's family lived at Chandernagore and Chinsura, a few miles up the Hooghly from Calcutta.[58] Ezekiel Judah owned property at Cossipore, near Calcutta (1852), Abraham Benjamin Solomon David (1843)[59] and the Belilios family at Howrah, a suburb of Calcutta. Some would vacation at Barrackpore, about twenty-five miles from Calcutta.[60]

One hundred and eighty-two miles from Calcutta, in the State of Bihar, is a little town of Madhupur, about 800 feet above sea-level. Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, Calcutta Jews, rich and poor, enjoyed its salubrious climate every winter. Retired Europeans and Eurasians, especially erstwhile railway employees, made home in its quiet retreat. Till the achievement of Indian independence in 1947 it afforded an inexpensive vacation, extended or curtailed, for those who wanted an easy escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Schools were closed for the year-end vacation; children joined adults in a carefree atmosphere. For a month or two, Madhupur blossomed in liveliness and gaiety. At one time, daily and Sabbath services would be held; even a Sefer Torah was transported there. A ravine within walking distance of the main center of the town elicited great pleasure as a picnic spot. A few well-to-do Jews were inclined to buy moderately priced property there and could afford to have it vacant almost through the entire year.

The well-to-do escaped the oppressive, summer heat of Calcutta by vacationing in the lower regions of the Himalaya Mountains. The most popular resort was Darjeeling, about 6000 feet above sea-level. Breathtaking landscape and gorgeous scenery were natural incentives. The snow-clad Kanchenjunga (28,146 ft.) is visible on a clear day and from Tiger Hill, a neighboring hill, Mt. Everest (29,000 ft.) can just be seen. In 1888 it took twenty-four hours by train to get there from Calcutta in two stages: to Siliguri, an important city in the Himalayan foothills by broad guage rail-

way, and thence by the light "Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway," inaugurated in 1881, that took about eight hours to go up the range.[61] After Indian independence, however, and the partition of India, when the route to Siliguri was cut by Pakistan territory and a detour was made across a river, it took a much longer time to reach the foothills. Plane service between Calcutta and Siliguri then answered a pressing need. Later, the total travel time was reduced somewhat.

The very wet monsoons are sandwiched by two periods of moderately cool and dry weather, ideal for the vacationer, in April-May and October. Winters are too cold for all but the indigenous population. Most residents descend to the plains in the cold weather.

During the season, about forty Jews — men, women and children — lived there toward the end of the nineteenth century. Three Jewish families owned houses. Joseph Elia Ezra's "Koolinton" to the east of the town was a palace with extensive and well-laid-out grounds, second in grandeur only to the "Shrubbery," the official summer abode of the Governor of Bengal. Elia Shalome Gubbay owned "Banstead" in the center of the city near the station and market. The interior accommodation was vast but in 1888 Gubbay was enlarging and improving the surrounding grounds. The "Ogden" in the west belonging to Aaron Shalome Abraham Cohen was a smaller, two-storied house with a small garden.

A regular visitor was Howard S. Howard and his family who occupied the property "Vernon Lodge" of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar in the center of town. There were so many other Jewish visitors that for the first time a service with a Minyan was held when the minister of Maghen David Synagogue, E. M. D. Cohen, vacationed there in October, 1888.[62] Jews frequently were guests at Government House and the Governor was invited to their homes. Joseph Elia Ezra particularly would throw elaborate functions almost every week.

Twenty-five miles east of Darjeeling by road is Kalimpong, a town on the main trade route between Indian and Tibet through Sikkim. A smaller town 4500 feet up is Kurseong.

A popular hill station, Mussoorie, stands about 6000 ft. above sea level in another Himalayan range in the Uttar Pradesh State outstanding for its mountain scenery. In each of these hill towns, private schools catered to children of European employees of the British government and commercial concerns headquartered in Calcutta. Some local Jews and others with greater Western orientation, took advantage of these educational offerings patterned after British

schools. The classes were held from March through November.

From time to time the Jewish community of Calcutta patronized the northern Indian city of Lahore, now in Pakistan, on the west bank of the Ravi River. It is famous for its Shalimar Gardens laid out in 1641 by Shah Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal.

While India offered several locales for relaxation and entertainment, Singapore and a few Chinese cities were favorite protracted vacation spots for the affluent families. For instance, those of Sassoon Ezekiel Judah and Saleh Ezra Jacob spent almost a year in 1862 journeying to and from Penang.[63] The wife of Nissim Joseph Ezra gave birth in Singapore to their son Elia. The family returned to Calcutta November 10, 1845 and the son was circumcised soon after at the age of almost nine months.[64] Ezra must have been in Singapore all that while. Pleasure trips to western countries were rarer in the early days. Menahem Moses went to Aden in November, 1856, Reuben Ezra Abraham to Hebron in March, 1846, Sassoon Ezekiel Judah and Reuben Ezekiel Elias to Switzerland in November, 1852,[65] and some undoubtedly visited in London. Others made their homes permanently outside Calcutta and would visit that city occasionally. Aaron Moses Gubbay, a relative of Elia D. J. Ezra, lived in Paris. Being at the same time a son-in-law of Sir Albert Sassoon, Bombay, he probably looked after the business connections of the Ezras and Sassoons in Europe.[66] Still others, like Joseph Elia Ezra, retired in London, never to return.

### *The Twentieth Century*

The *Eastern Hebrew,* a Jewish English-language journal, wrote in 1941: "Calcutta is the one city that draws men and women from every province of India. They come not only to carry on a trade but also to make their home. . . . Its popularity is in no small measure due to the organized life of the city. Its sports activities are controlled. . . . Its trade and business covers a wide field and caters for every community. Its transportation facility is efficient and enables people to enjoy cheap travel. . . . The efficiency of the traffic police has played no small part in the orderliness that is at once apparent in so cosmopolitan a city. . . . These may be some of the reasons why in the course of the last decade the population of Calcutta had doubled . . . to two million."[67]

This was the urban setting in the twentieth century in which the Jewish community thrived. Occupations became more diversified, more people taking to professions, and greater industrialization in-

creased employment and sent the star of at least one Jewish family, that of Benjamin Nissim Elias, to its zenith.

The census figures for Jewish breadwinners and their dependents in 1941 are respectively 1305 and 1306, an average of one dependent to every breadwinner. The reason given for this unusually favorable proportion is that a large number of women were gainfully employed as clerks and stenographers, as well as an influx of 781 immigrants, mostly unmarried (probably from the Middle East), between 1931–41, who found jobs.[68]

This explanation applies only to a section of the community, albeit a large one. The underprivileged element that lived in poverty and squalor on the dole of the Jewish community has been largely overlooked. Here over-sized families were typical, the average being perhaps four or five children. The heads of these families were usually unemployed and their members often on the verge of starvation. Only with the increase of western culture and conventions did the size of families begin to shrink. There is no gainsaying, however, that women played a greater role in the scheme of gainful employment in Calcutta than in Bombay or Cochin, because clerical and stenographers' jobs were more readily available. In 1947, for example, out of 1325 Jewish women in the Jewish community, 355 or 25 percent were active in the economic and professional life.[69]

In fact a large number of Jews in Calcutta subsisted on charity. There was a field of endeavor in which these could have found employment — domestic service. The low wages for this work, however, together with the social prejudice against menial work, made such a proposition unthinkable.

An integral part of the general economic picture in India was the hiring of domestic help. After slavery was no longer in vogue as a means of easing the housewife's chores in the sixties of the nineteenth century, servants on a wage performed the same functions. Essentially, a cook prepared meals, a maid or "boy" or bearer served the meals, dusted, ran errands and did the odd jobs. A member of an untouchable Hindu caste usually did the porter's work. Cleaners called dhobies, using suburban streams, offered home delivery service at least once a week and frequently, more often. All of these servants attached to a single household would cost, in the mid-twentieth century, the equivalent of a mere thirty dollars per month at the rate of exchange of seven rupees to a dollar. (At the same rate an average white collar worker earned about one hundred dollars. Considering the standard of living, however,

a rupee could *buy* the equivalent of something like fifty cents or twenty pence.) Thus, the average Jewish family in the city could invariably afford to hire at least two servants. In well-to-do families a special maid, or "ayah," looked after the children and additional help attended to household duties. Work schedules differed little from those that had once prevailed under slavery: usually six in the morning to nine at night, seven days a week every week of the year, with perhaps a few hours off each week and on native religious festivals. Early Jewish settlers took their servants with them on business trips and even later, domestics accompanied their masters on vacation where they continued their full work schedule.

What then did the housewives do? Few household chores as they are understood in the West; it was their province to see that the servants toed the line. Inevitably, considering the conditions of employment, domestics tended toward indolence and dishonesty. Ladies of leisure thus spent a fair amount of time and even more nervous energy keeping them from these sins.[70] With the passage of time, the most important of these servants — the cooks — demanded the "privilege" of purchasing the food and groceries for the household; considering the bargaining tactics normal in the East and varying prices, they could, in this way, increase their overall monthly takings — without imposing too much strain on their employers. In due course — but not till the last two or three decades — servants have demanded somewhat improved wages and conditions; and their employers were shocked to learn that they might even form unions.

Small Jewish tradesmen were available in fair numbers. They operated stores such as confectioners, grocers, furnishers, opticians or functioned as manufacturers' representatives, that is, trade brokers. There was evidence of white collar workers from poverty-stricken families who began life on the bottom rung of the ladder and by dint of perseverence worked their way to the top. Isaac Ezekiel Mordecai and Joseph Ezekiel Jacob are admirable cases in point. Mordecai started life as a peddler of simple wares and latterly owned a going concern of canned preserves and other businesses. Jacob joined Remington Rand as an office boy and retired as a director of the company.

Jews were also active in the stock market. In the days of expanding economy under British domination, except during the depression of 1929–30, there was much Jewish trading in stocks and shares. Some were just investors that witnessed increasing capital gains. A few were brokers and still fewer were members of the

Calcutta Stock Exchange like Aaron Obadiah Cohen, one of its founders, his son Obadiah and David A. Silliman. One report had it that a boom in prices made the Jewish festivals in the fall of 1888 doubly gay. The price of opium soared simultaneously.[71]

The Ezras, as previously mentioned, were real estate kings in Calcutta. The Gubbays, Judahs and later the Cohen brothers, Immanuel and David, were owners of distinction, possessing whole streets in select neighborhoods. Properties purchased at nominal prices, with the passage of years fetched several times their original values at resale. They had great faith in the scope of the real estate business and were never shy to invest in land. During the war years, when prices slackened, many picked up handsome properties at low cost. The post-war period was characterized by a boom in the business and a wild harvest was reaped. B. N. Elias & Co., the most recent arrival on the real estate scene, profited from one of the biggest land booms in this period.

The Cohen brothers were prominent in the Jewish and general communities through the first half of the twentieth century. They and a third brother Isaac presided over magistrates' courts. David was the more sagacious and sharp-witted of them. For about forty years he was a municipal councillor sponsored by the European Association, Chamber of Commerce & Trades' Association. Recognized as leader of the Jewish community and as the liaison between it and the government, he was decorated with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1941. He served an elected term on the Bengal Legislative Council from 1921 to 1923 and thereafter became a nominated member of the same Council. His brother Immanuel and he held sway over most of the Jewish institutions in Calcutta.[72]

As technology improved locally, British and native money was channeled to industry which started slowly after World War I and gained momentum following the depression. E. D. Sassoon's industrial chain had headquarters in Bombay with offices in Calcutta providing jobs for several families. The branch closed down in 1941.[73]

While the sun of the Sassoons was waning, that of Benjamin Nissim Elias was rising. From very modest beginnings, he built up a complex of industrial and commercial concerns commanding a respected place in the business life of India. At the time of his death he was one of the more wealthy men in India, with major manufacturing interests in tobacco, jute and bone and agency interests in engineering companies and electrical goods. To achieve

this must have taken enormous drive and energy and a tremendous flair for business; much more, indeed, than one would suspect on meeting this unassuming, retiring man. If he was told that the public would like to hear his success story, he would shake his head whimsically. In his eye one could glimpse the gleam of the visionary. He was never prepared to rest on his laurels — always looking for something new. He never forgot, however, that he once lived a hand-to-mouth existence, and gave generously to the poor and the needy. A favorite charity was the endowment of impoverished brides.

In his commercial endeavors he was aided in particular by his loyal son-in-law, Jacob Reuben Jacob, endowed with business acumen and organizational ability. When his own sons, Nissim and Jack, were old enough to join the business they became invaluable in its expansion, the former in management generally and the latter in guiding financial policy. All three were recognized as leaders in commerce and industry. Another son-in-law, Ralph Arakie, represented the firm in London. B. N. Elias himself became a member of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, membership having been continued by his family after his demise.[74] His grandsons, Ben, Stafford and Julian Elias, and Ronald and Bernard Jacob, continued the direction of the business in the post-World War II period. Ronald Jacob, to whom intellectual pursuits made business concerns less attractive, lived in London, England.

Elias' companies took the place of Sassoons' in absorbing Jewish labor and executive talents. The two concerns were totally different. Sassoon concentrated on exporting some of India's staple products; Elias stressed indigenous industrial pursuits.

With the passage of the twentieth century, the professions became popular. The first woman ever to practice law in the High Court of Calcutta was a Mrs. Rachel Ashkenazi. She learned the Bengali language to represent absent Purdanashin women, that is, Moslem ladies who wear a veil, and whose customary religious modesty preclude them from appearing publicly in court. One of the most prominent members of the Calcutta Bar was Ellis R. Meyer. Called to the Bar in England, he established a reputation by his judicious application of the law and lucid court presentations.

Teachers were never well-paid. Some, chiefly women, were nevertheless attracted to teaching for personal satisfaction. About a half a dozen took to the medical profession, some like Isaac H. Meyer and Maurice Shellim, becoming Fellows of the Royal College

of Surgeons & Physicians. Women doctors, too, were conspicuous. Some women were qualified nurses.[75]

Engineering held the professional interest of a few young men, as did accountancy.

Few Jews of Mid-East origin were attracted to the army. The Bene Israel of western India excelled in that sphere.[76] Yet, in each world war, the community lost one of its sons. In World War I, David Ezra, son of Ezekiel & Ramah Ezra, captain in the Royal Garrison Artillery, was killed in action in France. In the second World War, Sonny Solomon, Flying Officer (navigator) in the Royal Air Force was killed in air operations over France.[77]

One of the few who joined the Indian army under the British was Joseph Mingail because he was "deeply stirred by reports of Nazi tyranny against the Jews." He was wounded in the Western Desert campaign in 1944.[78]

Jews were enrolled in a semi-military group called the Volunteer Rifles beginning in the late 1880's. Joseph Elia Ezra was captain of the group[79] which trained in the courtyard of the Maghen David Synagogue.[80] Weekly drills concentrated upon keeping members in shape and on shooting practice.[81]

Jews of another Indian province, Punjab, were refused admission to the Corps. The rules and regulations obviously excluded everyone but British-born residents. The *Daily News* of Calcutta in that connection commented that the bye-laws of the Calcutta branch were altered to enable Jews to become members.[82]

Generally, then, the Jews of Calcutta were well integrated into the economic life of India. In spite of the relative size of the community, they offered keen competition, participated in almost every aspect of business and professional activity with a profit motive and maintained a "European" standard of living that was considerably higher than the average Indian level. Small wonder that they were disappointed at the fall in that standard in the wake of Indian independence and looked elsewhere for the expression of their economic dynamism.

*Chapter 5*

## THE SOCIAL SETTING

*Nineteenth Century Bridal Importations:*

In the middle of the nineteenth century (about 1850), the traveler Israel Benjamin found a Jewish community of 1500 *families* who were "happy, comfortable and secure and many of whom have become affluent and very successful in business." He mentions by name Ezekiel Judah, Joseph Ezra, Ezekiel Ezra Kalufi (error for Khleif), Reuben Isaac Zakoor (probably Shooker) and David Shushan (perhaps Sassoon — but there was no David Sasoon of note in Calcutta).[1]

More accurate is the estimate of Jacob Sapir, the envoy from Jerusalem in 1860. In that year, he declared, there were 200 Jewish families besides one hundred indigent people and visitors in Calcutta, or between 600-1000 souls.[2] The former figure is quoted in the local Jewish paper *Mebasser,* 1877.[3] It is surprising that in its fifty years or more existence in Calcutta, the population did not increase more rapidly. A possible explanation is proferred by Jacob Sapir. Although in India itself women were not held in high regard by their husbands, Jews who settled there did not fit into that pattern. "Jewish ladies, though few, were honored and dear. Since the settlers came from far-off countries they left their wives and families behind. Also, because of the excessive heat, men born elsewhere found the climate unbearable, how much more the ladies, with weaker constitutions and accustomed to luxury and delicate living, contract illnesses and die young. They do not have too many children."[4] The Jews from Mesopotamia in Calcutta, moreover, were particular about getting their sons married to young girls not above the age of seventeen; at the same time they were finicky about pure lineage, good looks and talents. They, therefore, had a limited local choice. Many of their brides came from places as distant as Baghdad, Syria and Palestine.[5]

The following story[6] is a case in point:

In 1820, Abraham Salim Mori, whose name indicates Yemenite origin, was despatched to Mecca, his native city, to fetch a damsel each for his brother Moosa and one Jonah Jacob Jonah who, it

was agreed, would have the choice of brides, probably because he paid the larger share of the broker's expenses. A party of four returned to Calcutta — Badra, the daughter of a Kohen, Jeena, the daughter of Yahya Khamri, the agent Abraham and his aged father who had long looked forward to witness his son's wedding.

Young Jonah cast his preference for Badra. His parents, however, like many others, were prejudiced against their son marrying the daughter of a Kohen and they found it hard to turn his heart away from her. To the marriage of Moses Dwek's daughter Kadoon in Chinsura in February, 1820 many Calcutta Jewish residents were invited, among them the Jacob Jonah family and the two brides-to-be. Jonah's parents solicited the aid of Moses Dwek to dissuade their son from marrying Badra. They finally won their point and Jeena was married to Jonah on 2nd Nisan 5580 (= March 17, 1820) in Calcutta.[7] Apparently the marriage was not blessed. There is evidence that Jonah was married a second time, this time to his cousin Kamayrah, daughter of David Jonah Jacob on 7th Shebath 5593 (= Sunday January 27, 1833).[8] This is confirmed by Kamayra's tombstone inscription.[9]

What happened to Badra? Her hand was sought in marriage by several others in Calcutta, including her escort Abraham Salim Mori but "either she did not approve of them or she did approve but Heaven did not help." Subsequently, she was escorted to Cochin by Aaron Mashiah (Sabti) who owned property there.[10] There, rumor had it that she was previously betrothed in Calcutta, thus marring the prospects of marriage. The local Jewish community thereupon addressed a letter to Calcutta seeking clarification of her marital status. On July 6, 1825, Calcutta unequivocally confirmed she was never before betrothed, Moses Dwek adding the facts relating to the incidents that occurred during his daughter's wedding celebrations in Chinsura.[11]

Much of the correspondence on religious law in the first half of the nineteenth century between Calcutta and Cochin, Bombay, Iraq and Persia, therefore, centered around what may be termed "personal law," i.e., situations affecting the marital status of immigrants from those communities.[12]

Communication with Shiraz, Persia, exemplifies such correspondence. Jews who settled early in Shiraz enjoyed religious liberty till the beginning of the eighteenth century when they suffered persecution under the early kings of the Afghan dynasty. In the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela estimated the Jewish population at 10,000. Israel Benjamin in 1850 found a community of

500 persons and nine synagogues, whose chief rabbi was Mulla Israel. He claims that the population had been 3000 Jews in 1830 but that it had been drastically reduced by persecution. Apostasy was widespread and the "converts" practised Judaism in secret. Even the Rabbi, Mulla Israel, was asked to pay a heavy fine or embrace Islam. He ostensibly agreed to change his religion but asked for time to study Islam. Upon the expiration of this period he refused to accept the new faith and was tortured in prison. Fortunately, as a result of the civil war then in progress, he escaped and fled to Baghdad.[13]

Against this background we may appreciate better the letters that passed between the Jewish community of Calcutta and the rabbis of Shiraz. Written in Calcutta on Sunday 10th Sivan 5608 (= June 11, 1848) the first was addressed to Mulla Raphael; Isaac Mulla Rahim Dayan; Mulla Israel Abd-il-Aziz; Mulla Israel ben Hakham Elias; Shem Tob Mulla Aaron.

Regarding Agababa b. Pinhas Gareh, a Jew from Shiraz living in Calcutta with a wife and son, Moses, who was himself then old enough for marriage, a rumor was circulating that the boy was born out of wedlock, of a relationship involving his father and a married woman. The father was said to have embraced Islam in Shiraz, married an apostate woman, Bibi Jan, by whom were born three sons, Moses, Joseph and Sillman. After several years he fled to Basra with his son Moses, leaving his wife and two other sons in Shiraz. Besides Bibi Jan, he married another apostate Jewess who died. Subsequently he took for wife another Bibi Jan with whom he was living in Calcutta. He returned to Judaism in Basra but left for Bombay and thence settled in Calcutta. His three brothers were then in Shiraz.

Prospective marriage negotiations with a Jewess in Calcutta were suspended pending clarification of the young man's status. The Shiraz elders, by a letter dated 28th Sivan 5608 (= June 29, 1848) confirmed that Agababa was an apostate and changed his religion because he wished to marry the daughter of an apostate, Bibi Jan. They had three sons one of whom was Moses, named for his grandfather.

Mulla Raphael was not among the signatories, and added were Mulla Simon b. Mulla Samuel; Mulla Samuel b. Khwaja Israel; and Mulla Samuel b. Khwaja Isaac. The authorities in Shiraz confirmed the boy's eligibility to marry a Jewess. He was in fact married in Calcutta to Khatoon, daughter of Elia Benjamin on 4th Kislev 5610 (= November 19, 1849). Soon thereafter his parents' marriage was regularized when a Ketuba was re-written for them in Calcutta in

place of the one written in Shiraz and misplaced due, probably, to the unsettled conditions in their former place of residence.[14]

Some male emigrants from Baghdad who came to Calcutta left their wives behind, presumably promising to send for them when they were settled. A few did not. The Baghdad rabbinate apparently was prepared to intervene, as in the case of Yeshua Jacob (Abraham Makhmul) who was given one of three options. If he wanted his wife back he should return to Baghdad or send her fare for her to join him in Calcutta. If he did not want her, he should send her a bill of divorce. He must have chosen the latter alternative as he was married in Calcutta on 6th Tishri 5611 (= September 12, 1850) to Gala, another daughter of Elia Benjamin.[15]

The Jewish communities of the Far East like Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century were not organized well and did not offer the religious facilities obtainable in Calcutta. They looked to Calcutta for guidance. For instance, Sofers (scribes) were difficult to come by. And so, for the marriage of Joseph, son of Joshua Elias and Rahma, daughter of Saleh Hakham Aaron Gubbay, the Ketuba was written in Calcutta and sent to Singapore.[16] The writing of another Ketuba drawn up in Moulmein, Burma, was executed in Calcutta.[17]

A Jewish settlement must have been in existence in Madras in the mid-nineteenth century. A Ketuba written there on Tuesday 11th Shebath 5611 (= January 14, 1851) was filed in the Neveh Shalome Synagogue register. The couple was Benjamin Jacob Shuhami and Hannah daughter of Saeed Awad. A few Singapore and Rangoon marriages were likewise registered.[18]

Stray cases of intermarriage were evident. Ezra, son of Abraham Arab was so called because he defected to Islam in Calcutta and married a Mohammedan woman although he had previously been married to a Jewess. On his death several years later, the local Beth Din accepted the testimony of one Abdulla, a Moslem, and declared the Jewish wife of the deceased free to re-marry — July, 1852.[19]

*Communal facilities:*

The Jews of Calcutta were not heterogeneous as were their counterparts in Bombay, where Bene Israel and Baghdad Jews lived in large enough numbers to resist being welded into a single unit with closer bonds. Almost all of the Jews in eastern India in the early twentieth century spoke Arabic and they, or the generation immediately preceding, hailed from Middle Eastern countries. Social and economic barriers of course tend to separate individuals in a com-

munity but, whether rich or poor, everyone had a common background and therefore could mix without impediment.

In the nineteenth century the synagogue was the dominantly cohesive force. Though local Jewry was never conspicuous for its sense of community organization, it gravitated around the synagogue and religious ceremonies. In the absence of a center for meeting, the house of worship served as the locale for social exchange: public meetings took place there and domestic occurrences were announced there; even personal animosities were exhibited there. There was hardly ever a roof organization to control and direct the affairs of the community. But in course of time they did develop other machinery to facilitate the religious observance of its members. Not all of it was efficient, nor was it free from competition and strife. To trace these attempts at direction and control is to become more familiar with some of the leading figures and to understand the motivation behind their actions.

The overriding consideration with the community was religious observance and its perpetuation. A plea was issued once for Jews to refrain from buying bread from a Jewish baker whose location opposite a *trefa* (non-kosher) butcher shop made mixing a possibility.[20] Jews in Calcutta in the main were not beef eaters, not out of deference for the Hindu proclivities favoring the cow but because of an inherent distaste for red meat. They did relish mutton when they could get it. The absence of a central coordinating institution resulted in irregular supply. Sporadic attempts to set up butcher shops with an element of communal control broke down partly from the inexperience of the amateur butcher and partly from the insufficient size of the demand.

In 1892, Isaac Jacob Abraham Berakhel complains he makes a mere fifty rupees a month from Shehitah, whereas a centralized Shehitah structure in Baghdad nets about 20,000 rupees a year.[21] He failed to acknowledge that Baghdad had a Jewish population of 100,000 and Calcutta about 2000![22] High prices turned away the poor while even the quality of the cuts left much to be desired.[23]

A major cause of irregular meat supply was the inavailability of qualified Shohets. "There are more Shohets than animals and birds for the slaughter," exclaimed Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena in 1891.[24] Conceivably, people practised Shehitah who did not possess Semikhah (certification). It was once suggested in 1878 that all Shohets show their knives to Hakham Hamoi, a learned visitor from Jerusalem.[25] Hakham Abraham Elias Isaac Solomon, probably a new-comer from Baghdad, knowledgeable in Shehitah, not without

justification made ingracious remarks about the Shohets in Calcutta as a result of which he was ostracized. Feeling uneasy and dejected, he craved pardon publicly in Bethel Synagogue on the first day of Sukkot 1877. He was subsequently tested and given Semikha by a local Shohet, Aaron Shalome Gubbay (who himself had received authority from the master, Eleazar Arakie) and was authorized to join the "guild" of Shohets which included at that time Ezra Barook Hakham Reuben.[26]

Some disjointed and haphazard communal supervision was evident. An announcement, for example, appeared in 1874 that the Shohet of Calcutta, Hakham Eliyahu Hakham Jacob Bar Nal had left for Baghdad and Nathan Joseph Dwek, Hazan of Neveh Shalome, was recognized Shohet for animals and Joseph Simon Awad Cohen for birds.[27] At the same time, new applicants were invited to indicate their qualifications. After Nathan Dwek's death in 1877, Isaac Berakhel of Jerusalem, living in Calcutta since 1863, was appointed on the basis of strong recommendations from Jerusalem rabbis and locally prominent people.[28] An aspersion at the Shehitah of Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena himself, the doyen of religious functionaries, was silenced in 1892 by a fine testimonial from Raphael Kalamaro, grandson of Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Raphael Panigel.[29] Community meetings were held from time to time to discuss the state of Shehitah.[30] As a result of one such meeting, a Shehitah board was set up in 1926, comprising Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, Michael M. Wolfe, E. H. [Hilali] Solomon, Sassoon J. Cohen and Joe E. Gubbay. They raised a sum of 10,000 rupees as capital for the purchase of sheep and goats and a butcher shop was opened at 27 Weston Street.[31] The scheme did not long survive the death of Rev. Cohen in January, 1927.

Matsa manufacture was another semi-centralized activity. It is fair to assume that before 1825, each family prepared its own Matsa. In that year, in a community of 200 persons, far removed from other centers of Jewry, (even the nearest Indian Jewish settlement of Bombay was twelve hundred miles away), some semblance of communal interest was first visible. The leadership was not yet ready to sponsor any arrangement for Matsa making. By unofficial assent, however, one Simon Awad Cohen assumed charge of baking for Pesah, conceivably in the vicinity of the hired communal prayer hall at Khan Hajji Masuda. The small profit went entirely to the contractor. Some persons may have availed themselves of this facility while others continued to bake on a family basis, but private baking was gradually discontinued.

His son, Elias, Gabai of Bethel, continued in his father's footsteps and managed to bring the ovens into the grounds of his synagogue. The conditions under which he labored were more complex. He had to reckon with an influx of poverty-stricken immigrants who had to be provided gratis with Matsa, called "Hillook." His profits, meager in any case, were deeply cut into; nor was he subsidized. There seems, however, to have been gain enough from the sale of Matsa to the well-to-do to compensate for free supplies to the indigent.

About 1865, for an undisclosed reason, the rooms housing the ovens were demolished and the ovens dismantled. Elias Awad Cohen was constrained to hire rooms contiguous to his house for the business of Matsa-making and warned the community that it would not be feasable to continue distributing free Matsa to the poor. He thereafter received a subsidy of between forty and one hundred rupees annually during the next decade.

In 1875 the business became competitive. Joshua Simon, Gabai of Neveh Shalome, announced that the one hundred rupees yielding four hundred pounds of Matsa was not sufficient for the poor and should be augmented by 50%. He was prepared to enter into Matsa-making on the basis of his own proposals.[32]

This incited Cohen to make a counter offer, important because it formed a pattern for "Hillook" in later times. If his ovens were returned to the synagogue courtyard, he proposed, he would contribute three hundred rupees to the needy in cash or kind, the latter in the form of Matsa, wine and vegetables for the festival. In addition, he would grant concessions to those who wished to pay at least a part of the price of their Matsa.[33]

The brewing animosity and unhealthy competitiveness between the Gabais of the synagogues burst into the open in Bethel Synagogue on Saturday, April 1, 1876, a week before Pesah. The next day a meeting of some of the elders, of whom Aaron Shalome Gubbay and Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay are mentioned, was held to examine the causes of the unrest. In addition to private donations they awarded on behalf of each of the synagogues, Neveh Shalome and Bethel, a commitment to Joshua Simon, a subsidy of fifty rupees for rations to the indigent of Matsa, rice, potatoes and onions. Simon, in order to make his merchandise more attractive, imported small quantities of Matsa and Shemura from Baghdad, prepared under the supervision of Hakham Abdulla Somekh, Shemura from Abushire and wine from Shiraz.[34]

Nothing further is heard about the activities of Cohen, though he died in 1888. He seemed to have lost the battle to Joshua Simon

who continued the pattern proposed by Cohen, trying to balance payments to the poor from contributions of individuals and community subventions. But despite these, he was "in the red" and had to "borrow" from the official Neveh Shalome shop rent account. His situation was not to be envied, for that year, 1876, the poor actually threatened violence if their allotment was reduced.[35]

Splinter groups occasionally arose, like the one in 1884 under the supervision of Yehiel b. Adon,[36] a visiting Jerusalem rabbi. By the last decade of the nineteenth century an idealistic group was created that pledged all profits to the Talmud Torah School. They styled themselves "Hebrath Oseh Matsa Be-Kashruth" (Kasher Matsa Makers). They were prepared to manufacture Matsa for export too, as they announced: "We wish to inform the Jewish communities of India, China and Burma that from Rosh Hodesh Shebath 5652 (= January 30, 1892) we will manufacture Matsa at the Talmud Torah premises, 41 Chattawalla Lane, supervised by Solomon Abid Twena." Signed, Moses Aboodie Amber.[37] Joshua Simon simultaneously continued his semi-communal contract until his death in 1898, and then his son Simon Hye carried it on.

Simon Hye, as an employee of Maghen David Synagogue, came under the surveillance of its Board, whose members in the first few years of the twentieth century found themselves supervising the Matsa production, though the machinery belonged, and profits accrued, to its Gabai.[38] As the community numbered about 2500 souls and the quality of Matsa had deteriorated,[39] it was felt that a more representative and centralized body should take charge. At a meeting of the community held at Maghen David Synagogue in 1912, the three synagogues, Neveh Shalome, Bethel and Maghen David, agreed to form a non-profit Matsa Board comprised of two representatives of each of the synagogues.[40] Neveh Shalome remained the locale for Matsa-making and Simon Hye its manager.

The self-perpetuating Board was drawn into the inter-synagogue controversy[41] which terminated its representative composition and removed the site to the more neutral Bethel courtyard. Maghen David retained a major responsibility for the administration.[42] Gradually, the composition of the Board became less dependent on synagogue affiliation and the organization more stable.

A major impetus to financial stability was a donation of 27,700 rupees by Sir David Ezra in 1937 from the Jewish Charitable Fund.[43] In 1911, the Fund was set up in a futile attempt to coordinate private charities. Twenty years later Sir David realized he was the sole surviving trustee of a fund that was totally inoperative. His

peers were dead and no monies distributed for years. He therefore had to make the arbitrary decision to hand the balance over to the Matsa Board, whose "boss" was David Jacob Cohen, already up to his neck in the administration of other Jewish institutions and civic affairs. In 1955 the assets of the Board added up to almost 100,000 rupees of which, like most other communal funds, only the annual interest was expendable. Everything else remained the same — the Board, the site, the poor, the Hillook, the casual donations in a non-profit organization. Here was a typical case of insufficient communal control and the decisive influence of a handful of wealthy people whose unquestioned authority, not always efficient, made for apathy among the rest .[44]

The process of Matsa-making was interesting to watch; it was not the most hygienic. About two months before Pesah, a group of native women sift the wheat. A single worker supervises the grinding by machine. The day after Purim the baking starts. About twenty workers, male and female, Jew and non-Jew, poor and never in the cleanest of clothing, are the operators. Women squat on the floor, boards on lap, relentlessly chatting as they roll out the dough. Men knead and bake. Ovens roar and large baskets are hauled away with a striking aroma of freshly baked Matsa. Nearby, a pair of large scales weigh the product for the never-too-contented buyers. Here and there, an occasional flourish of frayed tempers drown out the constant din which is reduced only by the hustle at the sight of a wealthy customer.

Machine-made Matsa was financially prohibitive. Shanghai was the only Jewish community in the East with that facility but the equipment was bombed out during the Sino-Japanese war.[45] In the early days of Jewish settlement, Shemura was made and sold on the eve of Pesah with wheat properly supervised from the stage of growth in the fields. Latterly, the only distinctive feature was its shape and taste.

Another religious facility available to the community was the Mikvah. Built in the grounds of, and alongside, Bethel Synagogue, it was poorly equipped and little looked after since its inception. No one was really in charge. The non-Jewish *male* caretaker, in the employ of the synagogue and living on the premises, possessed the key to enter. Most women, even if they desired to fulfill a religious precept, were precluded from doing so by insanitary conditions, where absolute privacy was not insured.[46] Hot water was not to be had. Only the robust could use it in all seasons. Men did occasionally, especially on the eve of Kippur. It was not until the visit to Calcutta of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon of Letchworth,

England, following the death of his aunt, Lady Rachel Ezra in 1952, that reasonable comfort was generously provided at his sole cost. By that time, the community was already disintegrating by emigration.

Wine for religious use was prepared under the aegis of Bethel Synagogue. Private manufacture was unlawful, so the synagogue had to be licensed. Every bottle bore the label "Sacred Wine, Bethel Synagogue." Illicit sale to persons other than Jewish was an attractive proposition especially since Christians favored Jewish wine for sacramental purposes.

In the nineteenth century most of the cultural edification was derived from the synagogue. Occasional biblical expositions by learned residents or visitors, until the arrival of Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena in the mid-eighties, were a considerable part of what local Jews could expect in the way of adult education. Hakham Shelomo preached on a regular basis every Saturday afternoon for about two decades until his death in 1913. From 1875 until 1901 the Hebrew-Arabic journals were another source of enlightenment. Every week they supplied local, national and international news. Editorials were thought-provoking. Articles dwelt upon biblical, talmudic and zoharistic themes. A discussion on the translation of parts of the Zohar, the Idra Zuta, by a resident of Poona, India, Abraham Sillman Ezekiel, occasioned an unusually animated controversy involving the rabbis of the Holy Land as well as local religious authorities and laymen.[47]

Talks under the auspices of the Theosophical Society held in the 1880's were attended by about fifty Jewish intellectuals, headed by Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah, at which Moses Abeasis, a cultured immigrant from Tunis, supported traditional Judaism.[48]

A lack of a social center was offset by dramatic programs in private homes. One was a pantomime "The Sleeping Beauty" organized in 1888 by the children of Elias Abraham Cohen, Howard S. Howard and Sassoon David Hakham Aaron Gubbay.[49]

Especially during the winter season, the only cool period of the year, wealthy residents entertained at garden and theatrical parties. At the termination of festivals, Isru Hāg, groups of Jews went from garden to garden, from the elaborate home of Ezra to that of Gubbay, from the fairyland of Raphael Isaac Joseph to the garden palace of Belilios where two large banners bearing the traditional festive greeting, Tizkoo Le-Shanim Rabboth, welcomed visitors. Five hundred Jews were present in 1886 when, under illuminated trees, there was music, liquor and food in plenty. Festivities closed with an Indian play.[50]

A farewell party in the same venue a few months later, given to Isaac R. Belilios and his wife on a visit to Calcutta after making his home in Hongkong for twenty-six years previously, displayed the same extravagance. It was a function brought up by subscription of the rich to honor the owner of the house who was no longer living there permanently. After three hours of liquor and dancing, they sat down to a fifteen course dinner over a two-hour period. The party broke up at three o'clock in the morning following post-dinner toasts and another prolonged round of Indian and Western music and dancing.[51] It could hardly be imagined that a stone's throw from this scene native families did not have enough to eat and in the Jewish neighborhood, co-religionists subsisted on dole. Yet it must be remembered that this party was not exceptional in a land of such contrasts.

The farewell for Belilios was the fourth reception of the week. Saturday night an elaborate dinner party was held at the home of Elia Shalome Gubbay. On Sunday morning, Joseph Elia Ezra sponsored a river party on the Hooghly River from 6:30 a.m. until 1:30 in the afternoon. On Tuesday night, following a dinner at Ezra's home, the invitees were treated to the theater.[52]

The Jewish community enjoyed Hindusthani and Bengali music and drama. In November, 1888, with the collaboration of Abraham Joseph Abraham, the Star Theater prepared a special program for the Jewish community, staging the Bengali Opera ADARSA SATI (The Model of Chastity) followed by the oriental pantomime "Belick Bazar." It was the first night of Hanukka, with sixty Jews in attendance. The management prepared an introductory song to greet the Jewish community.[53] Later, the Theater announced another dramatic program "under the patronage of the elite of the Jewish community of Calcutta."[54] A program in English was also staged.[55]

The Calcutta zoo was a favorite spot for the middle and poorer strata of Jewish society. Ten Jews became patrons. Elia D. J. Ezra, the leader of the community, contributed an enclosure for large animals and a bandstand where a military band played. Elia Shalome Gubbay made possible a shelter for birds.[56]

Across the Hooghly is an extensive botanical garden, so-called because of the large variety of tropical vegetation and horticulture. A banian tree sprawls over several acres — the largest of its kind in the world. With the zoo, this garden, reached by a boat ride of about an hour, was popular for picnics — especially on Isru Hāg.

Not many people were interested in sporting events. A Jewish

cricket club was formed in 1873 under the guidance of Aaron N. E. Judah.[57] Much later football (soccer) became more popular and a Jewish Athletic Club, in which Nat Zachariah took a leading part, came into being. Like so many other sports clubs, the team was granted a field for practice. Some sports events, particularly of the local Jewish school, were held there.

A social club, however, took a long time to organize. There was an urgent need for a center that catered to a cultural, social and recreational programming for Jewish adults. To answer that need, a few community-minded people, among whom were Rahma M. Luddy, Ezra M. Musleah, Kate and Violet Mashiah, organized the Judean Club in 1929. Centrally located and well furbished, its early programs and social events were meticulously organized. It soon became the favorite venue for a meeting, a social afternoon, a dance, a lecture or a game of cards. However, it was never too easy to draw people in large numbers and the club, except for periods of success, did not receive the support it deserved. Its membership dwindled with departures and deaths, and ultimately it was patronized almost exclusively by people who spent their time in games of chance.

The first and only Indian Jew to conduct Britain's famous orchestra, The Philharmonic, was Calcutta-born Bernard V. Jacob. Graduated at Oxford, he became conductor of the then newly-formed Ben Uri Orchestra in London. The *Times* commented: "His enterprise in selecting music that we rarely hear and his spirited direction of it must be commended." His repertoire included works by Israeli composers. On his return to Calcutta, he wielded the baton for the city's orchestras.[58]

*In the general community:*

Despite the ruling of the London Beth Din obtained in the mid-nineteenth century prohibiting a Jew from becoming a freemason, thirty-five years later a Jew, Nissim N. Adas, was appointed Master of the "Lodge of St. Andrew in the East," the first-ever designation of a Jew to so high a masonic office.[59] Others followed. Of the more noteworthy were Ezra Arakie, Sam Rassaby, Shuly Sadka, Elias J. Samuel, Ezra M. Musleah, David Hye David, and brothers Ellis and Bertie Meyer.

We have shown how, in the early days of Jewish settlement in India, a rapport existed between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. This affinity continued through the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. There is a record of a Chinese tenant of Elia Shalome Gubbay donating thirty rupees to Bethel Synagogue for distributing to the Jewish poor on escaping unhurt when a part of his terrace collapsed.[60]

The Armenians too were good friends. They were neighbors in the early nineteenth century, their church being a stone's throw from the Maghen David and Neveh Shalome Synagogues. One Owen Arathoon inserted an advertisement in the Jewish journal *Mebasser* in 1873, when he embarked on the editorship of his own newspaper.[61]

Hindus, Moslems and Jews possessed common sensitivities in diet. All of them held pig's flesh in abhorrence. Thus, in 1886 when oil was being adulterated with the fat of the swine, cows, sheep and dogs, all three communities were up in arms. It will be recalled that the immediate cause of the Indian Mutiny against the British in 1857 was a suspicion among the native sepoys (militiamen) that the cartridges, a part of which they had to bite off before using, were smeared with animal fat and that their British masters wanted to convert them.[62] Pressed by the Jews of his constituency, Babu Kahana, a Hindu commissioner of that ward, mentioned the matter at a meeting of the Legislative Council on July 29, 1886. The Government promised to investigate. Further memorials, signed by 10,000 people of whom many were Jews, were presented to the Governor of Bengal. Calcutta's City Council and later the Bengal Legislative Assembly adopted a law, operative only in Calcutta, requiring sellers of oil to be certified, and violators were assigned stiff penalties. Though the adulteration practices spread all over India, no national deterrent steps were taken to counteract the malpractice. The Jews of Calcutta, however, were delighted that the law recognized their legitimate religious proclivities.[63]

There was no discrimination against Jews. They were admitted to the Calcutta University (some were eminent graduates), commercial houses, and most select British clubs and hospitals. There was one possible exception. The Dufferin Hospital, created by subscriptions of the general Indian community as the personal project of the wife of the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, was reported ironically to discriminate against Europeans (and the Jewish community was classified as such though most individual Jews identified with the local indigenous community). One of the leading Calcutta dailies carried a report in 1888 that a Jew was denied admission. When the hospital superintendent explained that the person was a European Jewess, the matter was dropped, as it was evident that local Jews were treated with equality. Incidentally, it appears that Elia Shalome

Gubbay had personally donated 10,000 rupees to the hospital.[64]

Intermarriage in the nineteenth century was negligible. The indigenous population professing other faiths were staunchly religious. Hindus and Moslems wished to remain loyal to their faiths and Jewish consciousness was deep. The non-Jew was as determined about maintaining his faith as was the Jew.

About 1846, when the book *Hizzuk Emunah* was printed in Calcutta at the same time as it was printed in the Holy Land, the Christian missionary movement started probing for roots in India. They did find a fertile prospective field where ignorance and poverty were prevalent. Both Jew and non-Jew, however, were put on their guard. Some did fall by the wayside but their numbers were relatively infinitesmal. The registers of the Old Mission Church (formerly Hebrew Mission) of Calcutta record eleven Jewish conversions into that Church from its inception in 1858 to 1900 and twenty more until 1945.[65] In the corresponding periods, the Jewish population of Calcutta averaged 1500 to 4500.

The missionary activity was directed largely at the younger adults and children. Rev. C. J. Buffan of the Baptist Church in Bombay estimated that in all of India in 1945 there were twenty to twenty-five families of Bene Israel origin and five Baghdadi families converted to various Protestant denominations.[66] The Catholic missions were not then too active. Since Calcutta had but a handful of Bene Israels, it can be assumed that the Church met with little success with the Jews of Baghdad origin in that city.

The Church did make persistent efforts in this regard. A letter appearing in the leading Calcutta daily, *The Statesman,* October 16, 1945, observed: ". . . Another task to which the Old Mission Church and its persons were earlier directed was to the conversion of the large community of Jews living in and around the Parish. In 1876, the Rev. Welland acquired the premises of Kennedy's School as a high school for Jewish boys. This proved a valuable asset to the Church in its work of conversion until 1916 when the buildings were utilized for the Hebrew Mission School. . . ."[67]

The inference of success implicit in this claim is misleading. It is true that a Jewish school was not in existence in 1876 and that many impoverished Jewish parents availed themselves of the facility of the Mission school. But the Jewish community was awakened out of its lethargy and opened a school a few years later.[68] Not much irreparable harm took place in this comparatively short space of time and almost all those who were influenced by the Church were retrieved. The missionaries soon extended boarding

facilities to their school. In the absence of a Jewish boarding school many Jewish parents did send their boys to the Christian institution. But again this handicap did not gain too many converts for the Church.

There are at least two specific reports of interest in the nineteenth century concerning head-on confrontations between the Jewish community and the Christian authorities. In 1875, an Ashkenazi Jew died in a Calcutta hospital. A Protestant priest who got to the body first had it buried in a Christian cemetery. A report was relayed to the Ashkenazi community of Calcutta, which promptly demanded the body exhumed. On their request being denied, they got relief through processes of law in the form of an order for re-interment in the Jewish cemetery. When Joshua Simon, Gabai of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, went to execute the court order, he met with silent opposition — the grave could not be found. With the help of the official cemetery register, however, it was located. Before opening the casket the Jewish official stipulated that he would accept the body only were it proved the deceased was Jewish. Upon proper identification the body was retrieved.[69]

The second noteworthy incident about the same time was a direct outgrowth of impoverished conditions among Calcutta Jews. A Jewish girl, aged ten, was sent to a Christian boarding school in the North Indian province of Punjab, 1500 miles from Calcutta. The Church made a binding arrangement with her parents that she would not be withdrawn for five years. If, however, they did remove her before the expiry of that time, all her expenses would have to be paid prior to her release. It so happened the parents did request her return before five years and the Church insisted on compliance with the terms of agreement. The father, with the assistance of a kind-hearted Hindu lawyer, filed suit. A lower court upheld him, but the Punjab High Court returned the case to the lower court with instructions to "consider the interest of the girl in the light of her likely future position." Accordingly, the court issued a contrary verdict. The girl would have either to return to school or be in the custody of a responsible member of the Jewish community of Calcutta as her guardian.

Joseph Hyeem Joshua Somekh undertook to bring her up with his own daughters.[70] An appeal for funds was launched in Calcutta to save the girl. A year elapsed and Somekh, in the meantime, probably changed his mind. However, Aaron Joshua, Gabai of Bethel Synagogue, traveled to Punjab and got back the girl on behalf of the Jewish community.[71]

An extraordinary case occurred in 1925. A girl, admitted into a Christian leper asylum at the age of ten as a Jewess, was claimed to be a Christian on her death, many years later. After protracted negotiations, the Church agreed to release her body to the Jews for burial, provided the last Catholic rites were administered at their cemetery. This condition being resolutely rejected, the body was given up unconditionally.[72]

The Jewish hearth was a religious citadel until the early years of the twentieth century. With the spread of education for both sexes and the increased availability of jobs in the 1920s and 30s, numbers of girls took employment as clerks and secretary-stenographers. This made non-Jewish contacts easier and more general and built up an independence among young persons who, on occasion, rejected the religious sensitivity of their parents and the traditions of their people. Thus, the middle years of this century saw the community shocked from time to time when a young woman decided to "marry out" — and less frequently when a young Jew chose a gentile bride, who was more often than not ready to be converted.[73]

The presence in India of British servicemen during World War I and both British and American in World War II made Western attitudes more widespread within this somewhat isolated community. Some Jewish girls married Jewish servicemen. Although numerous intermarriages also took place, nothing was done to stem the rising tide. Lay leaders in at least one case encouraged the mixed marriage by gracing the wedding with their presence.

All this while, the Christian Hebrew Mission functioned with, at best, negligible success. It published pro-Christian and proselytizing articles under fictitious Jewish names, e.g., Mr. Aaron, without first name or address.[74] As late as 1942, an apostate, A. S. Shamash, formerly an Arabic-speaking Jew, was posted in Calcutta to influence his former co-religionists whose language he knew. In an article in the Old Church Parish magazine in Calcutta he made believe that the Jewish community was fertile soil for missionary activity. Results could be achieved, he maintained, through the medium of a Mission-conducted school for Jews who were not too satisfied with their own educational system. He recalled the time in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when a temporarily successful attempt was made through a similar medium. But his plan never materialized.[75]

The attempt to assimilate Western living and thinking undoubtedly took its toll, in recent times, on the strictly orthodox traditions

that had been characteristic of this community, essentially Eastern in its origins. The process of grafting to it modes of living and thinking from the West was successful. The British Indian environment and an education on English lines for the last two or three generations must necessarily have left their imprint. And the image was a good one. Yet the price was paid in a whitling away of what their fathers had considered most precious — the strict code of religious belief and observance — though the price was not as great as that paid by some other Jewish communities. For this, rootedness in tradition must take credit. Despite a host of forces to which the "emancipated" must be subject, despite poor formal religious education and leadership, the upbringing in the Jewish home and the attachment to the synagogue, however unintelligent and haphazard as it was, stayed the hand of ruthless distraction from the Jewish faith and community.

*Dress and Language:*

A Midrash[76] accounts for the continuance of the Israelites of old as a people apart in Egypt. It relates that the external traits they retained were their names and their language. The Jews of India who hailed mainly from Arabic-speaking countries spoke the Arabic language in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, and wrote it in the Hebrew script then vogue among the Sephardim. The diaries of the early settlers in Calcutta, for example, authenticate this fact. The local Jewish newspapers also used Arabic in "Rashi" script. Influenced by India's indigenous language, however, they gradually developed a dialect which bore the distinct stamp of Hindustani, the colloquial language of India — and the result was a peculiar admixture of both, employed increasingly in the Hebrew-Arabic papers of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many knew the Bengali tongue spoken by natives of the Indian province of Bengal. As mentioned earlier, a special performance of a play for the Jewish community at the Star Theater in 1892 was in two languages, Hindustani and Bengali.[77]

With the emphasis on western culture becoming more pronounced, especially after the turn of the twentieth century, English became more widespread. It was adopted as the medium of instruction in the Jewish school established in 1881, but its common and effective use was a slow and painful process, for parents spoke Arabic and Hindustani and children were more fluent in these media. In the early days, the Inspector of European Schools attributed the

low standard of English to the children speaking Hindustani to each other. The period between the World Wars saw Western influences intensifying steadily and English for the most part displaced Arabic and Hindustani as the mother-tongue. Parallel to this process was a gradual weakening of the fabric of traditionalism.

A similar pattern was evident in dress. India was always rich in garment variety. The "fashion" among nineteenth century Jews was the Arab garb. Men wore Sedaria (a short buttoned vest), Dagla (a long top coat), Zebun (a long inner garment) and Fez as head gear. The more informal wear consisted of a loose shirt and pyjamas which were, however, considered improper in synagogue.[78] Invitees to the first prize awarding ceremony of the Girls' and Infants' School in 1882, at the hall of Joseph Ezekiel Judah, at which Sir Richard Garth, Chief Justice of Bengal, presided, were requested to dress in Zebun, Dagla, Jubba (overall) and Fez.[79] Women wore a loose dress, a jacket and shawl. Some wore a "chadder" — a sheet that covered every part of the body except the face.[80] The advent of the twentieth century witnessed western style dress in increasing numbers. As one's language became anglicized, his dress did too. A significant impetus for change came about as a result of large-scale white collar and secretarial employment in European firms.

*Names:*

Very few Jews who came to India from Arabic centers in the Middle East possessed surnames. Some of these were: Matsliah (transliterated Musleah), Dwek, Sultoon, Sadka, Matook. Most first names were biblical; some were talmudic. These names were common: the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon; the twelve tribes — Reuben, Simon, Judah, Benjamin, Asher, Manasseh, Ephraim; other biblical names such as Samuel, Nathan, Elijah (anglicized Elias), Ezekiel, Ezra, Joshua and Daniel also were widespread, the latter four being the names of Ezekiel, the Prophet, Ezra, the Scribe, Joshua, the High Priest and Daniel, whose tombs are in Iraq.

The form Isaac *son of* Abraham was not used. Simply Isaac Abraham. Sometimes names of three, four or five generations were clustered and the man called Pinhas Elazar Aaron Ha-Cohen,[81] instead of Pinhas son of Elazar son of Aaron Ha-Cohen or Saleh Elia Ezekiel Joseph Ezra instead of Saleh son of Elia son of Ezekiel son of Joseph son of Ezra.[82]

Children were named for their grandparents, great-grandparents or near relatives: for example, Moses son of Elias son of Moses son of Elias Dwek Cohen. For the most part, no religious scruples prevented naming for living relatives. In fact it was considered good fortune for a grandfather to be present for the naming of his grandson and almost exclusively he was the Sandek (Arabic — Sindak). If, however, the grandfather were dead, the child usually received an additional name, like Benjamin *Hye* or Moses *Hyeem* to differentiate between the living Benjamin or Moses and the dead. Other second names include Faraj (Arabic — redemption, that is, a prayer that the child will bring redemption to the family) or the Hebrew, Rahamim (mercy) or Barook (Hebrew – blessed). Occasionally, the two names combined prominent figures Meir and Ezra (for Rabbi Meir Baal Haness and Ezra the Scribe) or Meir and David. The combination of a substantive with the first name was not uncommon, like Isaac Sassoon (Heb. Sason = joy), Ezekiel Nissim (Heb. Nissim= miracles). All the second names could form independent names too. In a later period after World War I, additional English names were attached to the Hebrew as is commonly done in the West. Thus, the son of Ernest J. Solomon was named Jacob Meir Vivian[83] and was called Vivian.

Anglicized versions of Hebrew and Arabic names were in vogue even in the late nineteenth century when the biblical and talmudic names found in English translations of these books were adopted. Later, social climbing demanded anglicized forms of Hebrew and Arabic names. Thus, Rahamim became Raymond, Hyeem-Hyam, Faraj-Ferris, Meir-Meyer; at a later stage, Abraham became Adrian, Manasseh became Maurice, Moses as a surname became Morris, Elias became Esmond. Since most immigrant families had no surnames and western influence required surnames, fathers' names were adopted. Thus, Isaac son of Meir became Isaac Meyer (Meyer being the surname).

Many bore Arabic names such as Abd-il-Nabi (servant of the prophet Ezekiel), Agababa (Persian title).

Arabic-speaking Jews were very fond of nicknaming. Meir Benayahu, in his introduction to *Massa Babel,* lists the various ways nicknames came about. The following were applicable to local Jewry:

1. From the name of the founder or leading member of a family, like Beth Hakham Shimon (family of Hakham Shimon).[85]

2. From the communal position of the founder. For example, Shamash, Gabai, Il-kátib (scribe), Ma-állim (teacher).

3. From his profession. For example, Darzee (tailor).

4. From his external appearance or bodily defect. For example, Aswad (black), Abyad (fair), Katan (small built), Tweel (tall), Abu-Shwarab (moustache), Il-A'mi (blind).

5. From his favorite food or his occupation. For example, Beth Hámid (acid food), Beth Jiji (most of the Baghdad Jews preferred chicken to mutton or beef). A family that reared chicken was called Beth Jiji (family of the chicken).

6. Patronymics or place names. For example, Kurdi, from Kurdisthan; Ajmi, Persian; Halbi, from Aleppo, Syria; Hallawi, from Hillah in Iraq.

Although these place names referred to the places from where the families came to Baghdad when they emigrated to India and other Far Eastern cities, they retained their original names. For example, a family might have come originally from Kirkuk in Northern Iraq; when they settled in India, they were still known as "Kirkukli," from Kirkuk.

7. From the name of his children. For example, Abu-Reuben, father of Reuben. It was a slight to address a man by his first name.[86] Most frequently a prefix (i) Abu (ii) Im (iii) Ibn (iv) Binth were added to a name of children in (i) and (ii) and parents in (iii) and (iv). If Reuben's eldest son is Simon, Reuben becomes known simultaneously with the birth of his eldest son as Abu-Shimon, father of Simon, and this name stays with him throughout his life. In the case of a childless man, the cognomen of the person for whom he is named, usually a grandfather or close relative, is adopted. If that man was Moses, he becomes Abu-Moses.

8. From the names of illustrious women in the family. For example, Toba. Jacob David Toba.[87]

9. From his occupation in the holy places like the tombs of the pious of old. For example, Abd-il-Azair, supervisor at the tomb of Ezra the scribe called Azair.

*Chapter 6*

## FOUR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

We have already pointed out[1] that right through the nineteenth and half of the twentieth centuries the Calcutta community had no rabbi, no paid official whose duty it was to foster its religious life and direct its cultural development. Yet, leaders there were, acknowledged in varied degrees by public acceptance of their learning, men of stature, at times fearless and outspoken. We have noticed this characteristic among the early settlers. This chapter will review the contribution of some of the more outstanding leaders in the second half of the last century, and the first quarter of the present one.

In about 1850 the European Jewish traveler, Israel Benjamin, visited Calcutta and was favorably impressed with religious life. He wrote: "The customs and habits (of the Calcutta Jews) are the same as those of their brethren in Baghdad. Almost all of them are wise and intellectual but they have no special rabbi. One of the honored rich residents, Ezekiel Judah, whose knowledge of the Talmud and other studies is wide, is their leader in spiritual matters."[2]

On the other hand, from Solomon Reinmann, who visited the city about 1860, we have: "The Calcutta community has a Shohet trained in Baghdad, and Hazans from Aleppo (Syria) but they do not possess a rabbi or Hakham and not one of them is knowledgeable in even one paragraph of the Shulhan Arukh."[3]

The latter seems to have been an erroneous evaluation. At the time of Reinmann's visit there were people like Moses Dwek, Aaron Abigedor and Eleazar Arakie and many others recognized for their knowledge of rabbinic law and literature. Others, Simon Raphael Hyeem Isaac and Elias Joseph Musleah among them, were not as learned but sufficiently well-informed in Jewish sources to give an authoritative opinion. Reinmann stands refuted even by Wolfe Schur, the editor and commentator of his book but a few years afterward; he had this to say: "As I know it, many are found now in Calcutta who know and learn the Shulhan Arukh and there are some who understand a little of the Talmud."

Reinmann further observed,[4] inaccurately again, that the Jews of Calcutta were not zealous for religious practices like the Jews of other places. We must assume that, as in other communities both then and since, dissenters and non-conformists were part of the warp and woof of the texture of the Indian community. The vast majority, however, were scrupulously and earnestly observant. J. H. Lord, the Christian missionary representative in 1885 found the Baghdad Jews in India observant and meticulous about their traditional customs and the moral code.[5]

Though many of the foreign visitors like the Shaliahs (rabbinical emissaries) and others were highly esteemed, some were self-styled Hakhams who made Calcutta their home permanently or for the time being. Jacob Sapir observed many of them during his visit.[6] In an ironic portrayal of some of these "Hakhams," a *Paerah* correspondent[7] who evidently disapproved of the whole emissary movement but tolerated the genuine Shaliah, lashed out particularly at the deceivers who could produce certificates of questionable validity as Hakhams. They should be called, he suggested, Hakhamim Abu Amama, Hakhams by virtue of their turbans, which were larger than usual. These, he alleged, did not put on even a "Fez" (small hat worn in Moslem countries) in their native cities. When they reached Suez on their way to India, they used a small cloth covering for their heads. At Aden, further East, they tied a scarf; the closer they got to India the larger the turban, till at the place of destination it became quite unwieldy!

The conduct of these impostors left much to be desired. If they were refused, they reviled and abused and heaped insults. They traded on the names of the rich in the cities they had visited previously, and the latter did not bother to refute them, possibly being quite satisfied with stories of donations attributed to them. And so the hoax went on.

Reinmann saw through this band of deceivers. "They (the Calcutta Jews) called every foreign visitor 'Hakham' whereas many of the latter know only to read the Torah according to the grammar and traditional chant."[8]

Gradually even this elementary standard could not be satisfied. The synagogues, therefore, ruled that foreign visitors not be permitted to read their portion of the Sabbath morning lectionary. In fact, so as not to embarrass them, the rule was extended to everyone, even recognized local readers whose familiarity with the traditional chant was well-known.

As the third generation of Indian-born Jews began to emerge

after the passing of Moses Dwek and Eleazar Arakie, the Kehillah or central communal system began to loosen. The observance and study of religion required strengthening. To keep that generation faithful to Judaism, as well as unified, someone had to be chosen, even informally, to lead them. It was felt, however incoherently, that the fragmentation of religious organization into congregational units such as Bethel and Neveh Shalome, where "each did as was right in his eyes" was sapping the vitality of religious life. No leader arose with a powerful enough personality and sufficient learning whose authority would be unchallenged.

One man stood out from the mid-'60s till the mid-'70s as a religious leader commanding the respect of most people. We refer to Aaron Hakham Abigedor Azriel, "physician, Hazan, Shohet, Tokeah (one who blows the Shofar) and Maykaddesh (marriage performer)"[9] whose "ministry" was cut short when he died at the age of forty-five on March 8, 1874. His father married in Calcutta in December 1825[10] and he was born there June 24, 1828. Hakham Abigedor was a deeply learned person and provided his son with a well-balanced rabbinic education. His youth, though, was a serious obstacle to his inheriting the mantle of leadership; but there could be no doubt about the depth of his learning.

The Safed emissary, Hyeem Jacob Cohen, testified on his visit to Calcutta in 1874: "This man (Aaron Abigedor) whom I met in 1866 (then only thirty-eight) was distinguished in Calcutta. And now I inquire after him but he is not, for God took him away three months ago, in his prime, leaving little orphans whom he did not have the opportunity to raise. Those who knew him are sorrowful and broken-hearted."[11] Further evidence of his outstanding credentials is a reference at the time of his fatal illness. Two religious irregularities had been committed in the community, prompting the editor of *Mebasser* to exclaim in December, 1873, "Had Aaron Hakham Abigedor been active, may the Lord grant him complete recovery, these things would not have happened."[12]

The infraction of the law had reference to a Jewish woman who became a mother out of wedlock by relations with a native Hindu of Bengal. The matter was kept a tight-lipped secret until the circumcision was performed by Saul Moses Lanyado, Hazan of Bethel synagogue. Though the child must be considered Jewish according to the Law, the editor of *Mebasser,* Moses Mayohas, recommended that in cases where a woman repudiates her faith, her son should be circumcised without the complete benediction and she is not to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. Unless these

penal norms were adopted, laxity could very well increase.[13]

There were other signs of growing disorder in Jewish life. A couple betrothed in Bombay were not permitted to be married because intimation was received that the man had a wife and children in Baghdad. Before word could be relayed to Calcutta, the couple journeyed there and had the marriage performed by a layman, Ezra Isaac Solomon, the son of the Nasi of Basra, although marriage ceremonies were usually performed by ministers of the synagogues. Ezra signed as a witness but the second witness apparently could not sign his name; and erroneously he substituted Jacob for his actual name, Simon.[14]

At about the same time (August, 1874) some began belittling the ritual of circumcision. In defence of the Law, a *Mebasser* correspondent[15] related the story [16] of a non-Jewish physician whose new-born son developed a genital disease on the sixth day after birth. The infant was cured after being circumcised by a Mohel.

Intermarriage was virtually limited to Jewish women and non-Jewish suitors. In several instances, if the non-Jew retained his own faith, the children were brought up as Jews. A rather fortunate case was reported in 1877 of a boy aged seventeen of just such parentage who volunteered to the Covenant of Abraham and read the Torah the following week with great feeling.[17] Occasionally, the intermarriage was carried out without having to worry about any sanction that the community might impose. On one occasion, when an intermarried woman and her illegitimate daughter actually arrived in synagogue as guests, the voice of protest was raised and the demand made that no such incident should be permitted to occur in the future.[18]

No wonder then that Abigedor's strong hand was missed. The poor performance of religious leaders and inadequate religious knowledge of many adults were decried in 1874 by a Western Jew who saw reason for concern. Asher Isaiah b. Moses Halevi,[19] seized on the fact that several vain attempts had been made to set up a school as a handle to criticize nonchalance in religious matters generally.

He commended the school scheme but preferred adult education. About religious leadership he said, "These are men of no standing as religious authorities who nevertheless make decisions in religious matters and are lenient where they should be stringent. Neither are they knowledgeable in the laws of marriage and divorce even to the extent of a basic understanding. There is no one to pass opinions as Beth Din Hedyototh (laymen's court). The Torah

is almost forgotten in this city." He went on to ridicule the local observance of Kashrut, Niddah and Mikvah and justified his interference in the internal affairs of the community: "Where there is profanation of the name of God one should not respect persons, for it has been said, 'Where there is no man, try to be a man.' "[20]

Despite this criticism, it must be said in fairness that what Calcutta suffered from was indifference rather than ignorance. Jews of Singapore credited the Calcutta community with competence to write bills of divorce and they traveled many hundreds of miles from Malaya in order to have them written in Calcutta. Thus did Rahamim Nissim Rahamim in December, 1874.[21]

A further indication of communal sufficiency in rabbinics was an advertisement for the sale of "Gemaras (Talmud), books on Midrash, Musar (ethics) and Jewish law" from Hillel Joseph Abraham of Bombay.[22] The same man announced the proposed publication in Livorno of standard rabbinic commentaries on the Bible in Arabic spoken in Baghdad and India, provided fifty subscribers at Rs.30.00 each were available in India. Nineteen subscribers were obtained from Calcutta.[23] The scheme was commended by Solomon Bekhor Hussein, Baghdad publisher.[24]

To return to Abigedor, he maintained a register[25] of religious documents written from February, 1861 (a few months before the passing of Moses Dwek) and September, 1873. They list 136 marriages he performed in Calcutta, Gorakhpur and Sahebgunj in India as well as Rangoon, Hongkong and Singapore. There is evidence of male and female proselytes and a letter dated 1865 addressed to the rabbinate of Saddah in Yemen about a divorce. Also recorded is a list of 116 circumisions from March, 1859 to August, 1873.

Though his death dealt a serve blow to religious life in Calcutta, all was not lost, for Providence had prepared a respected and scholarly successor to sustain it. He was Hakham Moses Mordecai Mayohas, who came out as an emissary from Jerusalem in 1871, aged twenty-four, and settled in Calcutta on marrying Rachel, the daughter of Moses Elias Dwek Cohen. He eked out a meager livelihood, dealing in Hebrew books and religious articles which he sold at a store at 4 Bentinck Street in a district called Kasi Tola, on the southern extremity of the Jewish neighborhood.[26]

His religious literary output was considerable. A frequent correspondent to local Hebrew-Arabic newspapers, *Mebasser*, which he pioneered as the first Hebrew-Arabic newspaper in Calcutta,

and *Paerah* of which he was part, then full, owner till January, 1881, he stirred up communal interest in numerous worthy endeavors.[27] His labors on behalf of a school, synagogues, cemetery, Cochin Jews and the local poor have been recorded in other chapters. On one occasion he collected, with the help of the brothers, Samuel and Aaron Arakie, a sum of Rs. 2,500.00 which was distributed to impoverished families by Aaron Arakie, Moses Abeasis and Joseph Simon Awad Cohen.[28]

The part he played at the inception of the inter-synagogue strife was unfortunate but later he made amends for it. His backing of the cause of the Neveh Shalome faction appears to have been the result — at least partly — of personal annoyance: he was certainly hurt about the removal from Maghen David Synagogue of a portion of his "Menorah"[29] and also protested against the speed at which Saul Moses Lanyado conducted services at Bethel. At about this stage (1888) he tried his hand at still another periodical, *Tsedek.* In it he upheld the justice of Neveh Shalome cause and upbraided the "high-handed and unjust" Maghen David party. He embarked on this project without weighing the need for an additional journal for the small community which obviously found it hard to maintain even one. *Tsedek* produced only three issues,[30] but the attempt indicated Mayohas' indignation and impatience with the status quo and his craving for a vehicle of expression for his fertile mind.

His support for Neveh Shalome, however, did not last long. He left for his native Palestine in 1890, took the opportunity to confer with the rabbinate there, and, at its instance, reversed his stand. He then lived in England three years. Upon his return he issued a twenty-seven-column plea in Arabic for the abandonment of the synagogue controversy in a pamphlet, *Moreh Be-Isba*, published in July, 1894.

He authored several poems with religious content, such as the one prepared for the Hebrew New Year 5639 (= 1878).[31] In form it resembles the Azharoth of Shabuoth by Solomon Gabirol, read by Sephardim.

His labors for the Indian Jewish communities were assiduously undertaken and he was ever conscious of the sacred task that brought him to India. For the Holy Land he always retained a great love that inspired a timeless faith in him and he was convinced that brighter days were in store for that land of old and for the Jews there.

After fifteen years in Calcutta, he yearned to visit the country of

his birth. He set out late in 1885, and was in London at the time of the death in February, 1886 of Elia D. J. Ezra whom he regarded highly. His eulogy, written in England, is a masterpiece of literary finesse and homiletic genius.[32] He spent Passover that year in the beloved surroundings of Jerusalem and the warmth of his family. "It was a dream, as if I owned the whole world . . . a complete joy of the heart. It is not because there is wealth or palaces or material well-being. On the contrary, on every side desolution and damage, poverty and suffering everywhere."

With him on his return to India was the Shaliah, Hakham Shalome Arakie [Cohen], who conducted successful appeals in Aden and Bombay before arriving in Calcutta in July-August, 1886. A letter from the Rishon Le-Sion (Sephardi Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land) to the Jewish communities of India, Burma and China was published in *Paerah*.[33] It solicited funds particularly for the colony of five hundred new immigrants from Yemen who expected to be ejected from their homes in the cold winter months unless they paid arrears of rents. In an unprecedented move, Mayohas invoked the help of the general public. The response was encouraging. A total of Rs.3,218.00 was realized, Rs.150.00 of which was from non-Jewish sources — Robert Turbull, Secretary of the Legislative Council and W. Hielgers & Co.[34]

After the death of Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, who had served as resident representative for institutions in Palestine for forty years, Mayohas was appointed Gabai in April, 1887.[35] A formal appointment letter was signed by Meir Raphael Panigel, Sephardi Chief Rabbi,[36] which meant that he was recognized as the local representative for Palestine in Calcutta. In an official or unofficial capacity, he ever protected the interests and facilitated the work of visiting emissaries. In one unusual incident, when a group of frivolous people had embarrassed an old Shaliah, Mayohas did not rest till he extracted an apology from them in the presence of Elia D. J. Ezra.[37]

He watched the happenings in the Holy Land with great interest through his reading of the Jerusalem newspaper *Habatseleth*. Typical of his quick response to news reports concerned the Baghdad-born rabbi of Hebron, Eliyahu b. Sillman Mani, brother-in-law and pupil of the famed Hakham Abdullah Somekh. He was given to asceticism and led a life of solitude and great piety. In 1856, he emigrated to Palestine in the wake of a movement that prompted many Baghdad Jews to settle in the Holy Land, which he reached after a journey full of adventure. In the course of time, he was appointed spiritual head of the city of Hebron.[38]

It is difficult to imagine how, of all people, Mani could be the subject of intrigue and slander. He was accused of fraudulent handling of large amounts of funds he was alleged to have received from the Diaspora for the institutions in the Land. The saintly rabbi was finally vindicated, but not before he was subjected to ignominious treatment at the hands of his antagonists. The entire Jewish world was outraged. At the height of the indignities in 1879 and at the instance of Moses Mayohas, a letter, signed by the leaders Elia D. J. Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay and Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, appeared in *Paerah* decrying the contemptible treatment of Mani and threatening to cut off financial aid of local Jewry for Hebron until the attacks ceased and the rabbi was restored to his honorable position.[39]

Dogged by almost continuous ill-health, Mayohas' second stay in England for three years was possibly for medical treatment but, except for the publication of *Moreh Be-Isba,* he was comparatively inactive on his return. He died at the age of 52 on 12th Tebeth 5660 (= December 14, 1899).[40]

A close partner with Mayohas in cultural and religious matters was Moses de Jacob Abeasis. Born and educated in Tunis,[41] North Africa, he lived in Malta for a while, from where he arrived in Calcutta toward the end of 1876.[42] He was enterprising enough to have started his own business which was fairly successful. An accomplished scholar and intellectual, he became involved in decisions in Jewish law.[43]

Abeasis brought his wide learning to bear as he participated in a discussion under the auspices of the Theosophical Society at which the speaker was Abraham Sillman Ezekiel of Poona, the translator of the mystical *Idra Zuta* into Arabic. He later sent a letter to *Paerah* challenging Ezekiel's expressed ideas.[44]

His activity in Jewish educational spheres is described later.[45] We mention here that he was one of five on the committee to investigate the impact of the government ruling classifying Jews of India as non-European in educational matters.[46] He was a capable administrator, having been appointed to run several institutions such as the Anglo-Jewish Association, The Jewish Boys' and Girls' School, and was treasurer of the Jewish Board of Administration. On behalf of the Holy Land his support was unflagging. After Mayohas left for London a second time and subsequently withdrew from public life, Abeasis was appointed Gabai of the Arba Aratsoth of the Holy Land. He appealed in July, 1893 for several institutions

there — Aboth Ha-Olam, Rahel Immenu, Ezekiel Ha-Nabi, Bikkur Holim and Lehem Lar'ebim.[47] He solicited funds in company of Shaliahs[48] on their visits to Calcutta and received donations for the Holy Land from Rangoon, Singapore, Hongkong and Shanghai.[49] Hakham Ben Zion Kuenka reaffirmed him Gabai in 1889, a few months before Mayohas died. He himself passed away on the first day of Passover 1908 at the age of nearly seventy.[50]

In 1881, the absence of an official rabbi in Calcutta became poignantly felt as an orphan minor girl was forcibly betrothed. An appeal to Baghdad to intervene brought a firm rejoinder from Solomon Bekhor Hussein, the famous bookseller and publisher. He decried the absence of a rabbi and a proper Beth Din. He was of the opinion that Calcutta was backward not for the absence of large-heartedness but because of lethargy.[51]

Abigedor's country of origin is not known; Mayohas hailed from Jerusalem and Abeasis from Tunis and Malta. The greatest preacher and most beloved of all who made Calcutta their home was Hakham Solomon Abid Twena.[52] A native of Baghdad, he lived there at least twenty-four years before he arrived in India, a distinguished student of a Yeshiva. About the year 1880, he was sent to India at the request of one Ezekiel Joshua of Bombay, maternal grandfather of Lady Rachel Ezra, who required the services of a Dayan and a Shohet. As a student he had made a name for himself as one of the most promising young men in the academy. The famous Hakham Yosef Hayyim, spiritual leader of the Baghdad Jewish community from 1859 to 1909 was the last of the great rabbis of that famed center of Jewish learning. He was quoted, in response to a query from India on religious observance, as saying that it was not necessary for the Jewish community of India to address their questions to him as they had someone in their midst, namely, Hakham Shelomo, who was as competent and well-versed as he was, if not more so, in the intricacies of the Law.

He was first heard of in Calcutta in January, 1883 in connection with the dedication of a Sefer Torah in Bethel Synagogue.[53] He soon became the accepted preacher, and mourners were consoled by his comforting eulogies, such as the one delivered on the completion of eleven months after the death of David Joseph Ezra[54] and the "short" and "full" month of Emma, wife of Abraham Aaron Cohen. His sermons were delivered in Arabic. He used to address the community in the newly constructed Maghen David Synagogue

before he started his own prayer hall at his residence.[55]

His home was situated in the poorest section of the Jewish quarter. His spiritual qualities stood out in bold relief against his humble demeanor. He earned his living by selling religious articles imported from Baghdad and Palestine,[56] from the ritual slaughter of animals and birds, and from the teaching of Hebrew to the children of well-to-do families. In addition, he ran a printing press — chiefly to publish his own prolific writings, some of which still remain in manuscript.

Scholarship is not hereditary; Torah must be acquired and cannot be handed down from father to son. Of Hakham Shelomo's seven sons and four daughters, only two took after their father. Both of them passed away without having the rest of their father's works published. These precious manuscripts, gradually being worm-eaten and thrown away in the Calcutta Genizah, are lost forever, for the Genizah comprises a well of water for distintegration of religious writings and articles.

He received endorsement of his rabbinic authorization to slaughter animals from Hakham David Nihmash of Jerusalem. He sharpened his knife, the recommendation stated, with great proficiency. A process normally taking about three hours took him ten minutes. "He who cast aspersions on his (Hakham Shelomo's) authorization would be as one who was casting aspersions on Moshe Rabbenu," was the unprecedented final remark of Hakham Nihmash in that testimonial.[57]

He supported staunchly the Baghdad and Jerusalem rabbinates. In the controversy over the translation of the Idra into Arabic which had been banned by Jerusalem, he chided the translator for criticizing the rabbis of the Holy Land.[58] For this he was taken to task by the "enlightened" who advocated the translations.[59] He was termed a "Kolel" (emissary of the Holy Land) by Meir Franco, himself a Jerusalem Shaliah in 1887.[60]

Because he decried the indifference of the community elders towards the poor, he fell into disfavor with them. However, the fact that two hundred persons in acute distress petitioned the local Commissioner of Police for relief in 1891 appears to have been an unflattering reflection on the Calcutta community. Hakham Shelomo himself drew their attention to one such person who appears to have attempted to take his own life in desperation. Mozelle Ezra, widow of Elia D. J. Ezra, was singled out for praise but she could not, he said, handle all the problems of the local poor. So overwhelmed was he at one stage by the tide of opposition that he offered a prayer pleading for deliverance from his adversaries.[61]

His many printing and educational activities are described below.[62]

His mother and brother Abraham, who became Hazan of Bethel Synagogue, arrived in Calcutta from Baghdad before Rosh Hashana 1894.[63] Several stories are woven around Hakham Shelomo's life and death. It appears that his mother's children would succumb soon after birth; but, when Hakham Shelomo was due to be born, the story goes, an old man appeared to his mother, almost in Biblical style, and in his blessing announced the birth to her of a son who was to be illustrious. At first the old man's prediction appeared to have been mistaken for the child was born dumb and remained so for seven years. When he did begin to talk he was sent to a Yeshiva where he soon surpassed and outclassed his fellow-students.

The blowing of the Shofar is considered by some to be a mystical feat of the highest order. Only a selected few, it is held, are familiar with its implications, and if the blower's concentration is defective Satan obstructs him and he finds he cannot produce the required sounds. Hakham Shelomo, another story goes, was once placed in this position. With his superior knowledge of the mystical skill he overpowered Satan, who retaliated in defeat by drenching him from head to foot.

At the age of fifty when he lay very ill and doctors had given up hope, the community, unable to bear the thought of losing its teacher and preacher, offered supplications on his behalf and one Hakham Eliyahoo prayed publicly that seven years of his own span of life be vouchsafed to Hakham Shelomo. Recovery did follow and Hakham Shelomo lived exactly seven years longer. He attributed his miraculous recovery to the aid of the patriarch Abraham who, he stated, remained with him throughout his illness. He passed away suddenly in Calcutta at the age of fifty-seven.

The following is the translation of the words that appear on his tombstone:

> "Let our eyes flow with streams of tears for this beauty that is decaying in the dust, a teacher of the congregation of God. Woe, a righteous man has perished from the earth. Let our souls weep in secret places for his glory, for we are bereft of our father, our teacher and the crown of heads, Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena. The memory of the righteous is for a blessing. Died Friday night 24th Elul 5673 (=September 26, 1913) about fifty seven years of age. May his soul be bound in the bond of eternal life."[64]

Kol Nidre evening. A tall well-built figure in a flowing gown, with a long hoary beard, ascends the Tebah (pulpit) of the Maghen David Synagogue. His face, radiant with gold-rimmed glasses, glittered. Soon the packed place of worship resounds with age-old traditional melodies of the most solemn of days. For members of the congregation, old and young, the accomplished rendition of this gifted master is a soul-stirring experience.

This towering personality was the local Elijah — Elias, son of Moses Dwek Cohen — mentor of Calcutta Jewry for over half a century, lovingly referred to by his initials "E.M.D."[65] The high standard for the conduct of services, which he set, he expected his juniors to emulate. His reading of the Torah was immaculate and his enunciation and correct intonation especially on sabbaths, festivals and high holy days had an elevating and awe-inspiring effect. He was so zealously devoted to the Synagogue that even in failing health he gave of his heart and soul to the service of God.

He started his ministry in Calcutta when he was called upon to officiate as junior minister of the old Neveh Shalome Synagogue in place of his father, on Rosh Hodesh Heshwan 5634 (= October 21, 1873). He was confirmed in that post on the premature retirement of his father, who held it since 5622 (= 1861-2), on Rosh Hodesh Tebeth 5634 (= December 20, 1873) when he was ten days short of twenty-one years of age. About three years later, on the death of Rev. Nathaniel Hai Joseph Semah Dwek, on 26th Shebat 5637 ( = February 9, 1877), he succeeded to the senior ministership of that synagogue.

Thus, he became the third member of the Dwek family to serve as minister of the Neveh Shalome and Maghen David Synagogues, over a period of one hundred years. His maternal grandfather, also known as Moses Dwek, was not only the first president of the Jewish community of Calcutta, but also honorary rabbi as well as minister, Mohel and Maykaddesh (marriage performer) from 1825 until his demise on 4th Tammuz 5621 ( = June 12, 1861).[66]

On his becoming senior minister, Rev. E.M.D. Cohen was invited ex-officio to join the Board of Manhigim (managers) of the Synagogue. From that time he became the dynamic power behind the Board's activities and the guiding star of the Synagogue. Some of his efforts are outlined in the chapter dealing with the history of the Maghen David Synagogue,[67] because it is not possible to separate a description of the Synagogue from an account of the chief architect of its development. It remains to be said that through new sources of income, including offerings and the sale

of privileges, he increased the revenue of the Synagogue six-fold. By the institution of Yehidim (special subscribers) and their Kippur night offerings, which were accepted as seat rents, he procured representation of the Synagogue on the Council of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in London, with a view to raise the status of the Congregation. These payments to the Synagogue seemed to have been an indication of membership, normally unknown in India, and a prerequisite for affiliation with the London Board.

Born in Calcutta on Tuesday 10th Tebeth 5613 (= December 21, 1852), he was the eldest of eight brothers and four sisters. He married Gracia, daughter of Yom Tob Isaac Dwek on 2nd Shebat 5630 (= December 6, 1869), when he had just completed his seventeenth birthday. They brought up a large family of five sons and four daughters. His love and devotion to his helpmate for fifty-seven years knew no bounds. Such was the bond between them that when he had to undergo an operation, he refused the anesthetic and instead, requested the doctor to let him hold his wife's hand; as the pain increased, he merely tightened his grasp.

In his zeal for the work that was so close to his heart, he was rather impatient with the stolid conservatism of many members of the community who would not adopt some of his more progressive ideas. Endowed with a personality that dominated those of his colleagues and fellow-workers, and with unique powers of persuasion, he often won the day. On the other hand, he was known to be modest and humble. After Rosh Hashana services in 1926, which proved to be his last, he approached one of his good friends, Meyer Ezra Musleah,[68] a man who was only a year or two older than his eldest son, with genuine satisfaction, exclaiming: "Whenever I see you I rejoice because you are my guide."

However, the Maghen David Synagogue constituted only one of his varied communal interests. He helped to found the Jewish Girls' School, established on January 18, 1881, and was its Honorary Assistant Secretary from 1882, its Honorary Secretary from 1887 and its Honorary Treasurer as well from 1913 till his death.

Whenever an opportunity to perform a Mitsva presented itself, our minister was ready to carry it out. The religious duty of hospitality was adhered to when the needs of Jewish soldiers during World War I were pressing. With a small nucleus of about eleven soldiers of the 9th Middlesex Regiment in Passover 1915 — which included his youngest son Joseph — Rev. Cohen made arrangements for about seventy Jewish boys from twenty-four units throughout India to spend the High Holy days that year in the traditional manner by writing to the Battalion, Brigade and Divi-

sional Commanding officers for information regarding their Jewish membership. The military authorities would communicate with him inter alia, on matters of religious import referring to Jewish soldiers, such as the sick and wounded, and burial in case of death. In July, 1917 Rev. Cohen wrote to the Adjutant General in India suggesting the appointment of a Jewish chaplain in India. The proposal was turned down on the ground of the relatively small number of Jewish soldiers in India.

At the same time Rev. Cohen's widespread efforts in this humanitarian cause came to the attention of Major Michael Adler, the Chief Minister to the Jewish Forces in the British Army, who thanked him for his services in promoting the welfare of his co-religionists in a land foreign to them. As senior minister of Maghen David Synagogue he received a letter from Major Schonfield, the Officer in Command of the administration of the Jewish War Services Committee in London, constituted by War Office authority. It suggested that a similar committee be formed in Calcutta with branches all over India to work in cooperation with the London Committee which looked after the spiritual and material interests of all Jews serving in His Majesty's Forces at home and abroad. Forms of Return, supplying data of Jewish personnel, were to be furnished to the London office of the Committee.

This was a gigantic task and Rev. Cohen knew that he could not shoulder such responsibility single-handed. He asked the Additional Deputy Secretary to the Government of India for the services of two Jewish soldiers, Gunner Epstane and Private Middlebrook, the former being an ordained rabbi, and of Lt. Herbert Loewe of the Army Clothing Factory at Alipore to assist him as the Supervising Officer.

In a speech delivered at a meeting of the Jewish community held at 3 Kyd Street on February 6, 1918, Rev. Cohen outlined the functions of the local Committee. Centers were formed in Bombay, Bangalore, Rawalpindi, Ambala and Aranpoora in Rajputana to obviate the difficulty of troops traveling to Calcutta to avail themselves of the facilities provided. Arrangements were made for visiting each center for the supply of Kosher food during Passover. The cooperation of the Calcutta Jewish community, whose members had already been very helpful, was sought to facilitate the housing of servicemen during the festivals. Rev. Cohen became the president of the Committee. The number of Jewish troops catered for rose to 250, while through another scheme 250 Jewish prisoners of war at Sumurpur were provided for by the community.

Recognition also came in the wider sphere of civic affairs. Rev. Cohen was elected councilor of the City Municipality from Ward 12 in 1897 by an overwhelming majority of hundreds of votes over the combined strength of his opponents, and he rose to be President of his District No. 2 Committee for about ten years. During his long term of office he served on almost all the standing Special Committees of the Municipality where he was known as the "Grand Old Man," and letters would reach him thus addressed. He was respected by all for his independence, impartiality and tenacity of purpose. He gained the esteem and affection of his colleagues as well as the rate-payers whom he represented. He lost his seat, which he held for twenty-one years, at the elections in March, 1918, as he was unable to devote enough time to electioneering, having been preoccupied with preparations for the inauguration of the Jewish War Services Committee.

The Government of India saw in him the spokesman and de facto representative of the Jewish community. In matters concerning legislation in which Jewish interests may have been affected, his opinion was sought by the Government. On several occasions he was invited to represent the community at public meetings and state functions. He was one of the six Jewish delegates received by the Vicerory, Lord Dufferin, in 1887, to present the address felicitating Queen Victoria, Empress of India, on the occasion of the Jubilee of Her Majesty's accession. Having been introduced to Lord Lytton in the early 1870's, he was perhaps the oldest member of the "European" community on the Viceregal list. He was also one of the party which welcomed the Prince of Wales (afterward King Edward VIII and Duke of Windsor) and King George V to Calcutta.

Court cases between one Jew and another as well as between Jew and non-Jew, were referred to him for arbitration and his awards were invariably accepted by the litigants.

On his tour of Europe he visited England, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and Germany, and in the Middle East, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. He kept a detailed diary of his travels.[69] He saw Jewish colonies in the Holy Land and formed a very favorable impression of the settlements there. Having been imbued by the Zionist ideal, he prayed for the restoration of the Jewish State whose borders, he hoped, would be co-extensive with the dominions of David and Solomon. This would be a precursor, he believed, of the Messianic era.

The golden jubilee of Rev. Cohen's ministry 30th Kislev (Rosh Hodesh) 5684 (= December 8, 1923) was an occasion of great

rejoicing. The congregation was honoring a man whom it loved and was grateful to, one who had striven for their welfare for half a century. The Board of Management of the Synagogue presented him with an address containing an account of his significant contributions not only to the Synagogue but also to the Jewish and general communities. In token of their gratitude and in recognition of his varied selfless services, he was presented with a gold repeater watch and curb chain with compass and charm. In honor of the auspicious celebration the congregation intoned the Hebrew hymn (Melekh Hamay-fo-ar) especially emphasizing the name Elijah (Elias) occurring in the second stanza.

There had to come a time, however, when that beloved figure would no longer ascend the steps of the Maghen David Tebah on Kol Nidre evening, when his sweet chanting and melodious voice would be stilled. Suffering from complicated ailments, he conducted services on Rosh Hashana 5687 — 1926 by sheer force of will-power. He did not appear in the Synagogue on Kippur, though privately he went through the prayers faithfully from cover to cover, understandably with a pang of sadness. Inevitably life's journey seemed to be drawing to a close. On Friday night, 12th Shebat 5687 (= January 14, 1927), the grand old man of Calcutta Jewry breathed his last.

An eye-witness account of his funeral was written by David Solomon Sassoon for the *London Jewish Chronicle;* "The funeral was timed for Saturday evening eight o'clock, but long before the appointed hour, the whole Jewish community was assembled at the house of mourning. All endeavoured to show their last mark of respect. The funeral started at nine o'clock. The whole community followed the bier, which was carried by the members of the congregation all the way from the house to the cemetery. Six torches were carried on either side of the bier along the route. The coffin was taken to the Jewish Girls' School where the pupils were assembled. Thence they proceeded to the Maghen David Synagogue and the bier was carried around the building and afterwards placed in the Synagogue where Rabbi Judah Abbn, from Jerusalem, delivered a short funeral oration. From this place of his life-long activities he was removed to his last resting place, in the cemetery at Soorah (a suburb of Calcutta). We returned about two o'clock in the morning from this most impressive funeral."[70]

We may echo with David Sassoon: "He well deserved the love and respect of the great funeral crowd. Their love and respect will not stop at the grave of the teacher and friend, but will live in the institutions and works which he created."[71]

*Chapter 7*

## GROPING FOR COORDINATION

The Calcutta community is an interesting study of the reaction of people with an Eastern background, exposed over three to four generations to a western education, and absorbing a milieu influenced by British culture and tradition. Significant here is mainly the development of the idea of community organization. A number of attempts were made but until about 1940 *all* of them had broken down, sooner rather than later. There were of course personal issues: longstanding feuds and individual jealousies, as well as the determination to maintain the separateness of each communal "empire." A further and possibly deeper explanation lies in the fact that most of the community's institutions were well endowed — both financially and with their own boards of managers originally set up by the donor founders; such committees held office for life and were thus self-perpetuating. At the same time, for the very reason of their financial independence, the ordinary members of the community were hardly ever called upon to bear any part of the burden of running — be it a synagogue or a cemetery. Hence, too, the rank and file would hardly ever, by means of any democratic procedure, affect any of the policies of the various boards; and accordingly, losing interest, they were prepared to leave things in the hands of their Eastern-style "Manhigim" or leaders, usually the more wealthy members. Let us follow a few of the attempts to hammer together some form of communal organization.

It is understandable that these efforts should revolve around the conduct of affairs by the synagogues. As the last quarter of the nineteenth century approached, two synagogues continued to serve a rapidly expanding community of about a thousand souls, mostly of Baghdad extraction. The older place of worship, Neveh Shalome, was unattractive and precarious, its furnishings inelegant, its congregation desirous of a more esthetic setting. Since the death of Moses Dwek in 1861, no official account had been rendered until October, 1874, when figures for fourteen years were printed in *Mebasser,* the new Hebrew-Arabic newspaper.[1] Thenceforth, an-

nual statements of accounts appeared in *Mebasser* and succeeding newspapers, *Paerah* and *Maggid Mesharim.*

To save a dilapidated building, major repairs and alterations resulting in increased accommodation were executed in September, 1881. An added room substituting for the stairs, which were removed to another part of the building, provided space for better seating. In 1875, a wooden balustrade had already been erected for the ladies gallery at the cost of approximately Rs. 300.00.[2] An anonymous donor contributed Rs. 1200.00 towards these repairs. Improvements to appurtenances were also carried out thanks to Mozelle, the wife of Elia D. J. Ezra, who financed the purchase of thirty manually manipulated ceiling fans (called pankas) at the cost of Rs. 340.00 and to smaller donors who helped to install gas lights imported from London and to bridge the deficit in the cost of regular maintenance.[3]

Prior to the repairs and despite them, migration to Bethel persisted. Judging from the augmented proceeds from the sale of privileges there, and a corresponding diminution in Neveh Shalome, an increasing number found an environment more conducive to prayer at this more recently built synagogue, already in existence about twenty years and itself in need of some restoration and expanded accommodation. Repairs here were made possible by public subscription amounting to Rs. 620.00 and executed in 1876.[4]

The real estate parcels pieced together steadily and patiently by Moses Dwek a generation previously and envisaged by him as a site for a beautiful, spacious synagogue, now housed a workshop and storage rooms from which the community was deriving income applied to relieving some of the distress of the indigent. Sometime prior to the end of 1875, the buildings were demolished and in their place sprang up a marketplace designated "Canning Chowk" (= market)[5] evidently for more income than the workshop fetched. A notice in *Mebasser*[6] urged the Jewish community to patronize the lessees so that their financial position would improve and thus enable them to increase rents payable to the community.

Control of communal finances was wielded by a salaried warden of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue. The office was almost identical with the ancient designation of "Archisynagogus" who "maintained order, distributed honors, invited guest preachers and when necessary, cared for the building. . . . He was held in high esteem. To belong to the family of an Archisynagogus was a matter of great pride." In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Joshua Simon, honest though naive and unbusinesslike, was the incumbent.

Authorization of day to day expenses was not determined by a democratic procedure, for there was no constitutional possibility of franchise, but by a small group of wealthy, influential people who became the warden's consultants. Affluence, therefore, counted heavily in influencing communal action. Wherever members of the Ezra, Gubbay, Judah and other families endowed synagogues, schools and social welfare bodies — their will was the dominant one. By about 1900, over a period of eighty years, they had set up two synagogues and a cemetery, financed the assemblage in the sanctuaries of about sixty Torahs, about 150 beautifully textured parochets (curtains), each costing approximately twenty pounds sterling, and valuable silver appurtances. Individually, they were innately philanthropic.[7]

And they were heaven-sent. The problem of poverty was becoming more pressing as a result of stepped-up immigration from Arabic-speaking areas of the Near East. Moses Mayohas said this about the impoverished: "Homeless immigrants in straitened circumstances come to seek shelter in the shade of the esteemed and philanthropic of our community."[8] Demands to alleviate their distress became imperative. Mayohas estimated that in 1877 the expenditure of two synagogues and public philanthropy exceeded two thousand pounds sterling annually.[9] But it lacked organization.

It was really pressure from the indigent that brought matters to a head in the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century. They had no guidance or advisor, no medical attention and no organized education. There was growing awareness that the tide of community affairs had reached a very low ebb, and the application of urgent remedies became necessary.[10]

The initiative was taken by Moses Mayohas and Aaron Joshua Gubbay, a successful local businessman. They convened a much publicized meeting held on December 27, 1876, which was surprisingly well attended, and eloquently presented the case for immediate action.

Gubbay prefaced an able speech by referring to the unanimity among the elders about seeing something tangible done to restore order and inject a sense of organization in the administration of the funds of community. He spoke at length about his proposals and recommended the reopening of negotiations for a community school. He recalled with much gratification the purchase of a building for a school about two and one half years previously but regretted that instead of housing a school it had been converted into a residence for Rev. Saul M. Lanyado, the minister of Bethel Synagogue, in lieu of his salary. He hoped that the building would be

restored to the purpose for which it was acquired. The community, Gubbay continued, had resources yielding a monthly sum of Rs. 400.00 which could be divided equally between the proposed school and the maintenance of the poor. This would have to be supplemented by individual subscriptions. To carry out his proposals a committee should be formed.

In the course of a wise and judicious address, Aaron Raphael Gubbay proposed the names of those who, he thought, should serve on the committee: Elia David Joseph Ezra, President; Elia Shalome Gubbay, Vice President; Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah, Secretary; Nissim Nissim Joseph Ezra, Treasurer; Aaron Shalome Gubbay, Counsel. Members: Moses d' J. Abeasis, Aaron R. Belilios, Aaron A. Cohen, Howard S. Howard, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac, Joseph E. Judah, Elias Meyer, Raphael Sassoon. Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, who always took a warm interest, declined a place on the committee because he was otherwise preoccupied.

The institution was named "Hebrath Honen Dallim" — "Society for Aid to the Poor." The committee wasted no time in putting into effect the mandate of the general meeting. Four days later, on December 31st, it was discussing ways and means to provide solutions to the maze of financial problems.

A debt of Rs. 700.00, Rs. 300.00 of which represented arrears in taxes, was to be paid from a sum of Rs. 2000.00 in Government securities lying with Elia D. J. Ezra and till then unaccounted for. The poor who had not been paid their monthly subventions for seven months were to receive at least half of what was due to them forthwith. To make room for a school, Rev. Lanyado was to give vacant possession of his residence in three months, whereupon his salary of Rs. 45.00 a month would be resumed. On the recommendation of Elia D. J. Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay, however, the notice was suspended till the community had definite plans for a school (which never did materialize).

The most intricate question was the undoing of an eleven-year lease between one Faizulla and Joshua Simon, on behalf of the community, involving the occupancy of the terrace of 109 Canning Street, which belonged to the community.[11] The lease allowed Faizulla to build a structure on the roof, agreed to share equally in construction costs and expenses of periodic repairs, freed him from all taxes, and required him to pay a rental of only Rs. 42.00 a month. As a matter of fact, he was sub-letting the premises for Rs. 100.00 only. Faizulla demanded Rs. 5800.00 to vacate. The amount was financed by a bank loan for Rs. 4000.00 and the bal-

ance was raised by public subscription.[12] Till the debt was redeemed from community funds, the opening of school was to be postponed.

There were varied attitudes about the measure of Joshua Simon's responsibility for the blunder. Some felt that, though they could not detect any deliberate fraud in the warden's administration, he was nevertheless to be charged with carelessness and irresponsibility for which he should be penalized by being stripped of the free accommodation provided by the community on a month's notice. Others were of the opinion that the community was as much culpable and attributed the lapse to its apathy in the administration of its own property. Again, on the recommendation of the soft-hearted Elia Ezra, Joshua Simon was permitted to retain his premises for three months, rent-free. Presumably, thereafter he would have to pay a rent for his accommodation.

The community did not have to wait too long to liquidate its loan. The following anecdote reported by Moses Mayohas illustrates how the needs of the community were often met.[13] As was his daily wont, he was at the home of David Joseph Ezra at 7 a.m. one day in August, 1877, eight months after the general meeting. (The daily visits of the Hakham were meant to keep old Ezra abreast with the happenings in the community.) The host was reported to have said, "Last night as I lay on my bed, I could not sleep. I was thinking about the Rs. 4000.00 the community owed . . . when will the amount be paid . . . here is Rs. 1000.00 . . . go to other charitable people and collect the balance."

Again with the help of Aaron Joshua Gubbay, Rs. 2500.00 was collected.[34] It could not have taken much longer for the balance of the loan to be repaid. By that time, however, the ardor for a school had abated and an opportunity was lost for at least a few years.

In fact, the Honen Dallim institution itself faded away without achieving any of its aims.[15] After six months the poor were still not paid the promised portion of what was due them, the amount said to be in safe keeping with the Ezras, was not forthcoming and the debts were not redeemed. When Mayohas finally did write in *Mebasser* in June, 1877 he complained bitterly. "When the spirit of man is wrapped in anxiety and the stress of the times, . . . and trouble and sorrow incessantly toss within me," he was not in a mood to write about communal affairs. For five years since his arrival in Calcutta he had been "burdened with hardship, ever fretting for my means of living to the extent that I have lost my desire to succeed in business, God help me." Besides, he had written so often and exhaustively about the school, there seemed to be nothing

more to write. He described his patient unproductive wait: "In the midst of my personal affliction, while sitting in my house or lying on my couch I am overcome by sleeplessness, thinking of how the matter will be resolved. . . . The spur has worn and each one has retired to his corner." But he was still confident that the elders would not let the poor down.

The brave soul tried another avenue based on individuals rather than on a community effort. Despite local opposition, and in co-operation once again with Aaron Joshua Gubbay, he formed another institution called "Oseh Haised" — Doers of Kind Deeds — aimed at "providing healing balm to the broken-hearted and the crushed in spirit." Rs. 52.00 a month was assured him not only from Calcutta but from co-religionists throughout India; he hoped that that was only a beginning. Elia D. J. Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay and Aaron N. E. Judah were among the contributors. This body came to be associated with the burial of paupers primarily and later became the Hebra Kadisha (burial society) of Calcutta.[16]

Two other organizations, simultaneously, were concerned with welfare. Hebrat Bikkur Holim — Society for Visiting the Sick — and Hebrat Gomel Hasadim — Society for Doing Acts of Kindness — probably inaugurated in 1878, and worked satisfactorily for a couple of years; but, by September, 1881, they existed only in name. Their exact objects are unknown, though the editor of *Paerah* mentioned their passiveness with regret.[17] In fact, early in 1884 they ceased to function altogether.

Two years later Mayohas lamented the absence of a central body to look after the affairs of the community, "though the Government is beginning to give it more recognition in recent years." The institutions, he wrote, were too individualistic, each one forging its own program, though out of step with sister organizations. The management of neither of the two synagogues had properly constituted Manhigim (boards of management), else they might have taken the initiative to bring the community together, as was done in Western cities where every aspect of communal life was under the auspices of the synagogue. Appealing for seat rentals to augment funds, he mentioned that a small congregation like Bene Jeshurun in New York derived nine hundred dollars from that source.[18] It was the only occasion when such a proposal was made to the community. The concept of a personal contribution to community funds never found any support and was never adopted in any form. Conceivably for an Eastern group, used to having facilities provided, there appeared to be no need for any sort of community tax.

One of the rare occasions when the two older synagogues co-ordinated their efforts was in 1880, when the two committees decided to maintain registers of births and deaths. (Registration of such events was not compulsory in British India.) In addition, Calcutta has the extraordinary distinction of possessing, thanks to the solicitude of Mohels, an unbroken record of male births from the earliest days. [19]

Bombay already had a central organization. Its working was examined by Joseph Elia Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay and Howard S. Howard on their visit to that city in September, 1884, while returning from their holiday in Europe, and these local leaders were determined to try it out in Calcutta.

The newly built Maghen David Synagogue provided an impetus, in December, 1884, to bring the community in convention under the chairmanship of Elia D. J. Ezra. The urgent need primarily was the coordination of all charitable efforts. Rules, also, it was thought, should guide community government.

Three decisions were taken:

1. A central committee, which may be characterized as an Ezra-Gubbay amalgam, had Elia Ezra, President, Elia Gubbay, Vice President, and their respective sons, Joseph and Maurice, Treasurers. Moses Abeasis and Rahamim Moosa Cohen were appointed Secretaries.

2. Weekly meetings of the community were to be held in Bethel or Maghen David to discuss happenings and consider needs.

3. Most interesting because it reveals economic evaluation of the most affluent; it was a self-imposed scale for prospective contributors to the central charitable fund to benefit the local poor and itinerant rabbis. All calls for communal charity were to be filled percentage-wise in the following way: Elia D. J. Ezra 40; Elia S. Gubbay 20; Howard S. Howard, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Meyer Brothers, 5; Joseph Jacob Judah Ezekiel, Samuel and Aaron Arakie, 3; Simon Raphael Isaac, Moses Abeasis, Raphael Elias Sassoon, David Moses Mordecai, 2; Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Saleh David Joseph Ezra, Saleh Elia Ezekiel Joseph Ezra, Simon Hyeem Dwek, Aaron Abraham Cohen, Aaron Raphael Belilios, Elias Hyeem Hilali, 1; and a further twenty-five persons at a half percent.[20] The organization was named Hebrath Ozer Dallim — or the Jewish Charitable Society, in May, 1885 and a "prospectus," a body of rules, was published.[21]

Weekly meetings, it appears, did take place for a while. One such weekly meeting took an unusual decision to discourage the poverty-stricken from making trips from other Jewish centers to Calcutta for financial succor.[22]

A year later an incident induced the realization that the aims of the Society were not broad enough to function in all matters affecting the community. It involved a Jew in straitened circumstances who, in the course of making an honest living, was arrested and convicted of a fraudulent sale. He was released from a three-month jail sentence, twenty days of which he served, after the High Court reversed the magistrate's verdict. And this was possible only upon Aaron Raphael Belilios, a Jewish magistrate, took up cudgels on behalf of his convicted co-religionist.

The matter stirred up the sensitivities of E. M. D. Cohen, who editorialized in his *Paerah* a plea for enlarging the scope of the Ozer Dallim Society. Imprisonment for the poor man could have been avoided, he argued, had there been communal facilities such as a committee of Jewish lawyers to safeguard his rights. He recommended as a central body a managing or advisory committee of the community which would function through sub-committees attending to the care of the poor, visiting the sick, religious questions and many others.[23]

The wheels were grinding slowly. Several months later the name of the Jewish Charitable Society was changed to the Jewish Board of Administration and in Hebrew from Hebrat Ozer Dallim to Vaad Kollelut Kahal Kadosh Calcutta. Cohen was proud to second the resolution proposed by Aaron Ezra Arakie and supported by Sassoon Benjamin Elia, and Joseph Elia Ezra became President, Moses Abeasis, Treasurer and E.M.D. Cohen, Secretary. The rules were to be revised.[24]

However, the Board was never accepted wholeheartedly by many who felt it was a mere cover for the unbridled sway of Joseph Elia Ezra and his associates over the affairs of the entire community. Several voices of dissatisfaction were raised at its despotism on the one hand and its complacency on the other.[25] The Board, nevertheless, worked unpretentiously as the spokesman for the comunity to improve the lot of the poor and alleviate social distress. It was the Board that sent felicitations to Queen Victoria through the Viceroy of India on her jubilee celebration in 1888. The response, too, was addressed to it.[26]

To cite the instance of divorce and marriage: It was only too easy to institute and complete divorce proceedings. A team of dis-

reputable practitioners made a livelihood from them. Not uncommonly was regret expressed by the parties to a divorce and occasionally only a day elapsed before re-marriage. The Board then ruled that the divorce proceedings should be staggered and red-taped. A divorce had to be applied for and the couple appear before the Board. Further, to prevent clandestine marriages for gain, only Hazans were permitted to officiate at weddings. There were, however, some who defied these regulations, and no sanctions could be applied against them.

Some action had to be taken to make the Board of Administration more officially acceptable. A meeting of the community on January 20, 1889, at which eighty people were present, confirmed the official position of the Board to act on behalf of the community and invested it with "authority" to safeguard the rights of and ensure justice to every member of the community, and to speak for it on religious and social matters. It was understood that this action would not detract from the independence and "sovereignty" of each existing communal institution. A committee was appointed to revise the rules of the Jewish Charitable Society. It was proposed further to make membership dues, instead of percentage-wise as previously, a straight subscription, so as to involve the poor man's payments too. Furthermore, membership of the Board was to be by election, and not as hitherto by nominations of donors to community projects. This move was meant to democratize the basis of the communal organization.[27]

But the revised rules never materialized. Almost from its inception the Board ran into what was perhaps the most turbulent storm in the history of Calcutta's Jews. It was the time of the unfortunate controversy between Neveh Shalome and Maghen David synagogues[28] when concern for the community as a whole was at its lowest. Of more decisive moment was the coincidence of Joseph Ezra, the President of the Board of Administration, being also president of one of the litigant synagogues. The Board thus lost its effectiveness as a neutral body and became suspect of taking the side of the imperious Maghen David party. Thus, when Maghen David referred the dispute to the Board, and the Neveh Shalome party was asked to present its case, it was like summoning the defendant to testify at a tribunal set up by the prosecution. They did nevertheless appear but with a skeptical, defiant attitude. A resolution favoring Maghen David was passed; Neveh Shalome was told to shut down.

In response, Aaron N. E. Judah, President of Neveh Shalome,

resigned his membership on the Board and called a meeting of the "community" at Neveh Shalome on July 6, 1890. One hundred people attended and reaffirmed their intention of continuing services at Neveh Shalome. Joseph Ezra resigned from the Board in anger and withdrew from all communal activity. Later, he retired in England where he died. The Board carried on a "lame duck" existence for about four more years, and is not heard of after 1894.[29]

About the turn of the century, the inter-synagogue feud notwithstanding, a slipshod attempt was made to set up a central charitable fund to provide relief to "deserving and respectable Jews . . . and the widows and children of respectable Jews who have come down in the world . . . and are reluctant to seek assistance . . . and also to pay the marriage expenses of poor . . . Jewish maidens of Calcutta. . . ." (To avoid misunderstanding it should be stated that the word "respectable" implies "formerly in comfortable circumstances; not given to 'begging' or soliciting aid for oneself.") With a sum of over Rs. 16,000.00 on July 4, 1910, a committee of subscribers was formed, some of whom paid over Rs. 500.00 each, to administer the fund. Nissim I. Sassoon, E. M. D. Cohen, Ezekiel A. Gubbay, Moise A. Sassoon and Samuel E. Arakie (secretary) were the first committee members. Later, Alfred N. Sassoon replaced his father, and two others, Solomon J. Solomon and Benjamin Meyer, were added. A sort of executive board called "trustees" were appointed in the persons of David Elia Ezra (later, Sir David), Rahamim M. Cohen and Alfred N. Sassoon. A deed of trust, incorporating the purposes and rules of administration, was drawn up in July, 1911, when the fund was augmented by almost a thousand rupees and named "The Jewish Charitable Fund." As an incentive to larger donations, a "memorial record book" was to be kept in each of the synagogues so as to bless donors on Kippur and memorialize them after death. Nothing is known about the manner and amounts of disbursements except that the Fund was a project of the higher echelons of the community. A quarter of a century later, it had accumulated an additional ten thousand rupees but its administrative machinery was inoperative as all but one of its managing committee and trustees had died. Sir David Ezra, the sole surviving trustee, then unilaterally turned over the funds in October, 1937 to the Matsa Board to help in its non-profit operations.

In effect, then, the Jews in Calcutta lived virtually without a central organization except for the efforts of Moses Dwek in the first half of the last century. Community government was patterned after an oligarchy; wealth and influence were gateways to service

on a committee. Persons of moderate means, therefore, could not aspire to leadership because they were not within the select circle financially and, hence, were ineligible. The result was the disease of "perennial parnassim" or paternalism passively accepted by rank and file. Only latterly was an attempt made to force the issue and break into the self-perpetuating boards of management. For the most part, however, there was only silent disgust and unexpressed boredom leading to cynicism and indifference.

Moreover, the first four decades of the twentieth century proved to be inauspicious for the community and the world. The synagogues' controversy paralysed virtually all development, while the two world wars and the intervening economic depression probably held men's minds and kept attention away from the orderly and constructive development of community affairs. In addition, the firm personal administration of two strong individuals, E. M. D. Cohen and D. J. Cohen, by their immense capacities, lulled the community into so profound a coma that the communal body lost consciousness of the inner damage to its vital organs. It had to be brought back to life gradually.

The signal for reform was sounded by Robin Ezra Gubbay in 1941, when he founded the Jewish Democratic Organization of Calcutta and became its lone executive. A man of moderate means, he hoped to cause a stir by denoting the undemocratic character of the existing situation. Managers of the institutions, he alleged, were self-perpetuating and intentionally uncommunicative about communal finances, and their administration was far from efficient.

Gubbay's revelations, however, failed to shake the lethargy of the common man who, it is true, grumbled and murmured but could not come up with any feasible alternative. He did not gain confidence perhaps because he was endeavoring to challenge well-established communal procedures and the wealthy office-holders. Some gave Gubbay token lip support, others became paying members of his "democratic" organization and his projects in support of feeding and clothing the poverty-stricken girls of the Jeshurun Free School. But it took a much more concerted community-wide effort, built around a more substantial individual or group, to bring the institutions together even in a semblance of "confederation."

Meanwhile, more people became thoughtful and communally-minded. In 1944, the *Eastern Hebrew's* editor, David Hye Shalome Arakie, suggested the setting up of a Communal Relations Department to strengthen Jewish life in Calcutta. One of the main responsibilities of the Department was to be a sort of clearing-house

for information about the aims, problems and activities of each institutional unit. The *Eastern Hebrew* was offered as a forum. "A large and varied field of activity in which the Community Relations Department must busy itself is that of creative Jewish expression. It cannot be said that Jewish life in Calcutta is spiritually barren. . . . Nevertheless, there is need for an inspirational warmth to invigorate it. . . ."[30]

He later made more specific recommendations. As a first step there had to be a federation of synagogues and a Beth Din. At its head, a rabbi would speak with authority on Jewish matters and be a pivotal point around whom the whole organization would revolve.[31] He also made a plea for centralized charity with a nucleus of 300 subscribers at three rupees each.[32]

The stage was now set for negotiations to get under way for the formation of the Jewish Association of Calcutta, the last community-wide body, whose existence almost coincided with the disintegration of the community and is the subject of our final chapter.

*Chapter 8*

## ELIA DAVID JOSEPH EZRA — 1830–1886
## ELIA SHALOME GUBBAY — 1829–1898

Since people are largely a product of environment, they live in a society and are dominated by its prevailing spirit and values. But here and there are rare people who, by some innate alchemy, succeed in creating a climate of varying the general environment. Very often these persons are of such modesty that they are not aware of the power they possess or the impact they exert on people and community. It is by such persons, says a beautiful Jewish legend, that the world is sustained.

Calcutta possessed a few such individuals. It is appropriate to delineate two from the leading families of Ezra and Gubbay, who fashioned or influenced the creation of many communal institutions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They certainly nourished every facet of the community's life but, in the process, made a democratically administered central body almost superfluous and impossible to achieve.

A casual passer-by in Ezra Street in the 1870's would have noticed on either side of a large gate at No. 57, two men of noble mien in the Arabic garb of nineteenth century Baghdad Jews resident in India. Be the pedestrian a Jew or non-Jew, his salute was cordially acknowledged by the hoary as well as the younger occupant of the gateway. Conversation affecting the community, a trade communication or a random chat was an equally hearty experience.

This couple was none other than David Joseph Ezra and his son, Elia. They were constant companions and shared a deep and mutual love and respect. Though Elia was invited to England by his father-in-law, Sir Albert Sassoon, and despite his ardent desire to visit the Holy Land, he gave up these projects in order that he might not leave his father even for a short while. For that reason, except for trips of limited duration to Bombay and Poona and to other cities in India, he hardly traveled at all.

David's father, Joseph, immigrated to India in 1815 with him and his brother Nissim. Of the brothers, David, a boy of only seventeen, was the more enterprising. Joseph returned to Baghdad, but David utilized his small capital so shrewdly that at his death he was accounted the most affluent of his co-religionists and one of the wealthiest citizens of India. His substance was invested in large tracts of landed property whose value appreciated by leaps and bounds with the passage of the years.

Elia was born in Calcutta on 4th Adar 5590 (= February 20, 1830) and married Rahma, daughter of David Hakham Aaron Gubbay on 19th Sivan 5607 (= May 31, 1847). She died in Calcutta on 27th Tishri 5624 (= October 10, 1863).[1] He married a second time in Bombay, Mozelle, daughter of Sir Albert Sassoon, on 10th Elul 5630 (= September 6, 1870). He could not have attended school for many years, as he was admitted the first time when he was over twelve years old (July 5, 1842)[2] and was married at seventeen and a half.

The family business included a rich and growing trade in opium with the Far East, indigo and silk with the Middle East and other imports from Muscat and Zanzibar. So adept were they in the line that when Sir Ashley Eden, Governor of Bengal, formed a committee of eleven to safeguard the opium business against those who would like to see it wrecked, Elia D. J. Ezra was nominated on it together, incidentally, with the Armenian pioneer and fellow trader, Gaulstun. Elia outlined ways and means for the improvement and preservation of the trade, among which he mentioned greater attention to the healthy growth of the crop, a stricter vigilance in packing the product and restricted duration of storage to prevent loss in weight.[3] Opium-carrying ships to China would, at times, load 12 percent of their space earmarked for this commodity with Ezra's chests;[4] a higher proportion of the trade was undoubtedly frequent.

Elia Ezra was prominent in civic affairs. He was an Honorary Magistrate at the City Civil Court situated at Fort William[5] and Sheriff of Calcutta in 1879.[6] He once signed a notice appearing in the Judeo-Arabic paper *Paerah* intimating the opening date of the Criminal sessions.[7] Incidentally, other Jewish members of the bench as honorary magistrate were Elia Shalome Gubbay, Aaron Raphael Belilios, Howard Sayeed Howard and Rahamim Moosa Cohen.[8] With E. S. Gubbay he served also in the Bengal Legislative Assembly.[9]

A picturesque and colorful tradition of British times in India was

the annual receptions, called Levee, held in honor of Viceroys of India at their winter headquarters at Belvedere, Calcutta, the present locale of the National Library. Among the invitees were the Governor and Deputy Governor of Bengal, High Court Judges, Government officials and prominent citizens. Elia Ezra was one of the veterans on that list, having been invited to the Levee of Lord Lytton in 1879.[10]

Again, in the company of E. S. Gubbay, he presented an address of welcome to Lord Dufferin on behalf of the citizens of Calcutta.[11] The Jewish community had other opportunities to show its loyalty to the British Government and the Royal family. When an attempt was made on the life of Queen Victoria on March 2, 1882, services were held in each of its two synagogues, Neveh Shalome and Bethel; at the latter, Elia Ezra recited a thanksgiving prayer.[12] On the same occasion he represented the mercantile community of Calcutta when he presented an address of congratulations to the Queen on her providential escape from the assassin, through the Viceroy at Belvedere.[13]

When Victoria's son, the Duke of Connaught, together with the Duchess, paid a visit to Calcutta in December, 1883, Elia was one of the five Jews on a committee of twelve to welcome them and later he attended a party in their honor. To mark the occasion, the Ezra's home, transferred to the more elegant Chowringhee Road after the death of David Joseph Ezra in March, 1882, was decorated with rows of flags and illuminated with little star-like gas lamps. The Connaughts honored them by changing their route to the racecourse so that their carriage would pass the residence of the leader of Calcutta Jewry.[14]

His public spirit was displayed frequently. He served first on the general committee and later on the executive or working committee under the chairmanship of the Governor of Bengal, Mr. Morgan, to collect funds to relieve the famine in Ireland in 1880, and himself donated Rs. 1000.00 to the appeal. He donated Rs. 500.00 towards the building of Ladies' Hospital, later named for Lady Dufferin, wife of the Viceroy.[15] The hospital cost 600,000 rupees.

For the zoological gardens at Alipore, at the cost of Rs. 12,000.00, he had an enclosure of 60′ x 60′ built for the giraffes and other large animals, which was called "Ezra House," and donated many animals, including a pair of gazelles and birds of various species, many of them imported.[16] A bandstand costing Rs. 13,000.00 was also built at the zoo;[17] Rs. 4000.00 was spent on the installation, by the side of his home, of watering troughs for horses.

By the Jewish community he was held in princely esteem. During his father's lifetime he was recognized as the leader and spokesman of his co-religionists by being appointed, together with Elia Shalome Gubbay, trustee of the properties of Neveh Shalome and Bethel Synagogues.[18]

Elected President of the first Jewish School in Calcutta in April, 1881, he took an active part in its maintenance and administration till he resolved to start a new school for eighty indigent children in November, 1882 in memory of his father. Not only would the students receive free education, both religious and secular, but also a daily lunch and, occasionally, clothing.[19] His monthly expense for this endeavor was Rs. 600.00.

A further mark of recognition is indicated by his appointment as President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Calcutta Branch, in February, 1883. Its main function was to collect funds which it remitted to London for alleviating the suffering of Jews, especially at that time, of Russia. When a procedure was laid down for charitable appeals in Calcutta, as we pointed out,[20] Elia Ezra was allotted to contribute 40 percent of the total sum collected, an interesting reminder of his wealth and standing in the community.

His unusual generosity revealed itself in a grand undertaking — the building of a synagogue, also in memory of his father and named for him, Maghen David. This beautiful and elegant structure was estimated to cost 200,000 rupees, but an extra 100,000 rupees was spent before the building was completed. At first he wished to build it on Chitpore Road, but some congregants requested that he utilize the communal grounds adjoining Neveh Shalome Synagogue. Furnished with seats to accommodate 300 men on the main floor and about 300 ladies in the balcony, it has much unused space that could seat a further 400 persons. Its nineteenth century Victorian architecture, its stately fifty-foot high ceiling, its imposing granite pillars and floral adornments, its multi-colored window panes — all these add up to make this synagogue the largest and most outstanding house of Jewish worship in the East. How much more striking would it have been had Elia Ezra been able to carry out his expressed intention of converting into gold the railings of cast iron for the Tebah at a further cost of Rs. 50,000.00,[21] and to ornament and decorate the interior of the synagogue.[22] He committed himself to improve and expand Bethel[23] but gave up that plan after the Maghen David cost more than originally envisaged. Bethel's renovation was later carried out at the expense of Elia Gubbay.

Congregants were inconvenienced by music and noise on Neila evening by the Hindu Durga Puja immersion processions terminating at the river's edge not far from the new Maghen David Synagogue. So great was Elia Ezra's influence in civic affairs that, on his application, the Commissioner of Police banned the playing of music one hundred yards on each side of the Synagogue, i.e., Portuguese Church Street to China Bazar Street.[24]

He intended to create a trust fund of Rs. 50,000.00 in lieu of the net income of the communal property demolished to make room for the Maghen David. Until it was created, however, he undertook to pay in cash the amounts lost in rents aggregating Rs. 229.00 a month. He did not live long enough to fulfill his commitment of establishing a trust fund; his descendants, however, had continued to honor the pledge of a cash donation of Rs. 229.00 a month.[25]

As was the custom among Baghdad Jews, a Sefer Torah dedicated to the memory of David Joseph Ezra was donated to the Bethel Synagogue in January, 1883 and a Parochet and another Sefer Torah to the Neveh Shalome Synagogue a month later. The scroll of leather was imported from Baghdad and the outer wooden case overlaid with golden floral work was prepared in China. The latter were transferred to the Maghen David Synagogue at its dedication ceremony in 1884. A similarly ornate Sefer Haftarah with Chinese outer work and the scroll written in Baghdad is also his gift to the Synagogue.[26]

Elia Ezra's philanthropy knew no bounds. It is said that his wife's annual quota of charity amounted to Rs. 50,000.00,[27] apart from his own liberal contributions to the needy — of even non-Jewish communities. Not contented with a synagogue, he desired to present a hospital to the Jewish community extending from numbers 34 to 36 Ezra Street, at that time occupied by Jacob Sultoon, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay and Saleh Ezekiel Joseph Ezra. He intended not only to equip the hospital in the most lavish manner but to create an endowment fund to look after its recurring maintenance.[28] Unfortunately it was not given to him to fulfill this desire, but his widow, Mozelle Ezra, did so. In July, 1887, a year and a half after his demise, the Ezra Hospital was established in the heart of the medical neighborhood. Though it was to be available to members of all communities, special provision was made that any Jewish person needing hospitalization should have prior right of treatment.[29]

Rumor had it that Elia intended to build a synagogue in Hongkong, costing 100,000 rupees, in memory of his father. This would

have been appropriate as there was no synagogue in that city. But, according to a *Paerah* Shanghai correspondent, there was no assurance of a Minyan. He made a plea for a synagogue building in Shanghai, whose community had approached, in vain, several likely benefactors. There was even a possibility, according to this source, of a Hazan from England being hired.[30]

In Jerusalem, he established, in conjunction with his wife, Mozelle, a Yeshiba, Mazal Tsomeyah whose annual outgoings were 120 pounds.[31] After Elia's death, a local correspondent of *Paerah* recommended the institution of a Beth Hamidrash in Calcutta to be named "Midrash Eliyahoo,"[32] but it never came about.

Elia Ezra was instrumental in the community's celebration of the centennial of Sir Moses Montefiore in October, 1884, the only special service held in Maghen David Synagogue during his lifetime. A congratulatory telegram costing over one hundred rupees was sent to Sir Moses on that occasion.[33]

Both through travelers and the circulation of the *Paerah*, Elia Ezra was known in Europe. He once received a letter from a Jew born in Odessa, Russia and settled in Palestine, requesting help for the Jews in Palestine. Ironically, the writer complained about discrimination against Ashkenazim in Palestine. The Yearbook "Ha-Asiph" of 1886, published by Nahum Sokolov, carried an obituary notice of the leader of Calcutta Jewry.[34] After describing the virtues of the deceased it made mention of what appears to have been his last request — to have yet another Yeshiba established for him in Jerusalem.

We have thus far dealt with Elia Ezra's official, civic and Jewish spheres of interest. Let us now discuss Elia the man, in his private life.

Probably the most outstanding quality of Elia Ezra was humility. Far from him was the splendor and arrogance commonly associated with wealth and social position. Thus, on being greeted by anyone, no matter who, he was wont to lift both hands in response. Disliking pomp and show, he was the first to enter the Synagogue so that people would not have to rise up for him. If he was in the neighborhood of the synagogue he walked there, and if he came from a distance, he did not permit his horse-drawn carriage to enter the driveway to avoid being made much of. His unassuming characteristics belied his vast personal fortune. Extremely friendly, he attracted to him both the old and the young who sought his advice. His father's tomb of marble cost him a lavish Rs. 5000.00 but he instructed his eldest son Joseph to have his own made like that of any ordinary person.

Being deeply religious, he was in the habit of reciting the daily prayers and rose early to chant the hymns prior to the commencement of services in synagogue. He was loud in the responses during services. His strict observance of the sabbath and festivals was reflected even in his official duties. It was customary for the Sheriff of Calcutta or his deputy to sit with the judge at the High Court sessions. When Elia Ezra held the office of sheriff, and the deputy sheriff was out of town, Ezra mentioned in court that he would not be able to attend on Saturday, this being the Jewish sabbath. Not only was he exempted from attending but the judge postponed the case in deference to his wishes. This points, by the way, to the freedom of religion Jews and other minorities enjoyed in British India.[35]

He did not allow even his business deals to interfere with his meticulous adherence to the laws of the auspicious days. Fluctuations in the price of opium contained in telegrams reaching his office meant thousands of rupees in profit or loss. Accordingly, intimations that arrived on the holy days were handled by his non-Jewish brokers who would enjoy the transacted benefits. Once the broker reported an unusually large profit in consequence of a deal completed on Shabuot; the accretion was spurned at by the principal who handed it over to his agent.

During his final illness doctors advised a diet that included beef. However, as there was no Kosher beef available in Calcutta, he instructed his eldest son not to allow Trefah to touch his mouth though his condition was critical.

He confronted his illness philosophically. Quoting the verse, "It is the Lord; whatever is good in His eyes He will do," he prayed that his death might serve as his redemption from purgatory.

The first notice of the serious illness appeared about two weeks before his demise. On his last visit to Poona he contracted an illness said to be pleurisy, which progressively worsened and became so critical that it was thought advisable to have Pidyone Nefesh and distribution of alms to the poor on Friday, January 15, 1886. An improvement was discernable for a few days. Talmud Torah boys read Psalms and prayed in synagogue. The following Wednesday he developed pneumonia and four doctors were in attendance around the clock; frequent inquiries were made by Jews and non-Jews alike, who anxiously read the bulletins issued twice daily. On Thursday evening before the open Ark, and to the accompaniment of prayers, his name was changed. A night-long vigil was held in the synagogue by about one hundred people, amongst whom

were Hakhams reading Mishna and Zohar and schoolboys reciting Psalms and supplications to the point of exhaustion. Women and children sat on the floor weeping loudly. Christian clergymen visiting the synagogue were visibly touched at the moving sight. In Bombay, also, prayers for his recovery were offered.

The community was relieved the next morning to read an encouraging bulletin. The patient had rallied and their prayers seemed to have been answered. That evening he awoke from sleep and asked his son Joseph if he saw anything extraordinary on his face. "Don't be afraid," he said, "I am well." He then turned to his wife and pointed to the place where she would find the cover for the bier. When given water he remarked that he was drinking "living waters." The satisfaction of the community was, however, short-lived. His condition worsened on Saturday night and steadily deteriorated. In the last minutes the words "Ya Allah" and "Hashem Ehad" were clearly audible. He passed away peacefully in the presence of his wife and children on Wednesday morning 28th Shebat 5646 (= February 3, 1886) at 5:30, the day after his fifty-sixth birthday, according to the Hebrew calendar.[36]

Before the funeral procession left his residence in Chowringhee, Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena, then a recent arrival from Baghdad, delivered the eulogy. With honor befitting a prince the bier was carried to the Maghen David Synagogue, recently erected by him in memory of his father and which, unfortunately, he attended only during the High Holydays of 1884. The Ark and Tebah were draped in black. On both sides of the house of worship were lined the boys of the deceased's school, Tehilla Le-Dawid, and the congregation included the sick and aged. A second eulogy was now delivered, but so intense and so sincere was the display of grief and lamentation that the speaker was obliged to refrain from continuing. Typical was the following poignant remark of a poor widow: "Would that my son died and Elia remained alive" — a reference to the unfailing succor she had received from him.

Many shops and business houses owned by Jews and non-Jews alike were closed that day to allow their assistants to attend the funeral and a number of high Government officials and other leading citizens were among the mourners. When the cemetery was reached, he was interred in silence beside the grave of his father.

Besides his wife, Mozelle, a brother and two sisters, he left eleven children — four from a former wife and seven from his widow.

News of his death was carried by all leading English dailies in Calcutta and Bombay, such as the *Englishman, Statesman* and

*Indian Advocate,* which eulogized Calcutta's most prominent Jew. The *Englishman,* India's leading daily, compared him with Sir Moses Montefiore; he would have been more famous, it said, had he been active in politics. The *Daily News* called him a "great and unusual benefactor." Apart, perhaps, from the District Charitable Society (a committee appointed for the charitable causes of the poor and needy of all races and religions), no one knew the extent of his philanthropy.[37] The *Statesman,* Calcutta, stated that his death created a great void. His reputation became proverbial and he had become one of Calcutta's leading citizens. The Jewish community, it continued, had lost a respected and noble leader and an invaluable and true friend.[38]

During the first seven days of mourning twenty scholars studied Torah at his home where prayers were conducted twice a day in the presence of large congregations of mourners, and schoolboys read Kinahs (dirges). Throughout the year eleven people studied and prayed at the Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta. In the tradition of Iraqi Jews, a table laden with fruits was set for the poor on the seventh day and the boys of the Talmud Torah were given a wide-ranging meal. In keeping with the non-denominational benevolence of the deceased, Rs. 1000.00 was donated to the Committee of the Christian Charitable Society and Rs. 500.00 to a non-Jewish Free School of Calcutta. As was customary, prayers were recited at the home of the deceased also on the twenty-second and the thirtieth days after death, the "short" and "full" month respectively. At the former occasion Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena read out a unique sermon, every word of which began with the letter "mem"! The sermons eulogizing Elia Ezra were published in Livorno (Leghorn, Italy) under the title of Midrash Eliyahoo.[39] A Kinah written in similar style with the initial "mem" by Asher Isaiah Halevi,[40] an Austrian Jew and a tanner by profession, who made his home in Darjeeling, in the Himalayas, is preserved in *Paerah.*[41]

The letters and telegrams received by the family before and after his death could fill a volume. They came from far and wide, including several places in the Middle East — Basra, Baghdad and Tiberias and Safed — and Europe.

News of the passing of Elia Ezra was met with great mourning in Jerusalem, by the Jewish community in general, and in particular by poor widows and rabbis. In the Yeshiba Mazal Tsomeyah, Rabbis Raphael Meir Panigel and Jacob Saul Eliashar delivered eulogies. *Habatselet* No. 24 reported the matter and the following issue devoted two pages to an obituary notice. The *Jewish Chronicle,*

London, dated 12th March, 1886 published a report of the demise.

On the first eve of Rosh Hodesh after his death (Adar I) the whole community of Safed recited the Tikkun Kareth (for people who die before age seventy, from the volume Mishmeret Ha-Hodesh) to the accompaniment of weeping and lamentation. A custom common to Baghdad Jews but introduced for the first time in Safed, the Hashkaba (memorial prayer) before the reading of the Torah, was chanted by the Hazans of the six synagogues whose choking voices were drowned by loud weeping among the congregations. Seven rabbis read the Zohar and a Minyan of Hakhams were sent to Meron to study Zohar, Talmud and the Codes and to light a memorial oil wick. Rabbi Shalome Sisu of Safed prepared a dirge which was sent to Calcutta together with a report of the mourning procedure followed in his city.[42]

A particularly touching encomium was sent by the Kolelet Ha-Sephardim, Jerusalem, inscribed on a marble tablet. Written in four stanzas to the acrostic of his name, it particularly commemorates the building of Maghen David Synagogue. In deference to the objections raised on the ground of being a dirge, it was erected in an inconspicuous spot on the inner wall over the entrance to the synagogue and because of the projecting balcony it does not strike the eye easily.

A Sefer Torah to match the one dedicated to the memory of David Joseph Ezra was consecrated at the Maghen David Synagogue on the first anniversary of Elia's death. The scroll was prepared and written in Baghdad in a lucid large hand and the outer wooden cover overlaid with silver and gold floral patterns together with the pointer (Mahwi) and ornamental bells (Rimmonim) were the artistic and expert handiwork of Chinese craftsmen.[43] Moses Mayohas delivered the eulogy at the end of the 11th month (Sant il-Naks) and Hakham Jacob Samone at the "full" year.[44] The boys of the Tehilla Le-Dawid School participated in readings for the repose of his soul every year thereafter.[45]

At the suggestion of Moses Abeasis, two marble tablets on either side of the entrance to the Maghen David Synagogue ornately bordered and inscribed in Hebrew and English commemorate his life and work. The sum of Rs. 800.00 which it cost was four times the anticipated target figure raised by public subscription, no one being permitted to pay more than a half a rupee. A photograph of the tablets erected January 6, 1888 was reproduced in *Paerah*.[46] This memorial was a lasting acknowledgement to a man of rare beneficence. How fitting that each member of the community should

share in the tribute and how sad that the benefactor of the community should die at the age of only fifty-six! Had he lived longer, he would undoubtedly have added further to the gifts already made to the community.

Elia Ezra and his wife, Mozelle, were so extraordinarily prominent that anyone who shared the leadership of the community with them had to take second place. Very unusually philanthropic and civic minded himself, Elia Shalome Gubbay could point to a record of public service whose brightness was dimmed only by contrast with a still brighter light. But he held his own. He was respected for his discernment that came with intelligent and practical application of kindliness and insight.

The Jewish community owed to him the consolidation of two of its institutions and the extension of a third — the Kehillath Yeshurun or Jewish Girls' School, Bethel Synagogue and the cemetery. He was the mainstay of the School. When Ezra opted out of its management for the purpose of running a free Talmud Torah for boys at his sole expense, it became considerably weaker and was left in the lap of its Vice-President, Elia Gubbay, who continued, as President, to carry it and strengthen it till his death.[47] Commencement exercises were held annually at his home.[48] An example of his concern and generosity: He once donated twelve sets of the Talmud he had brought out from London.[49]

Bethel had been in existence almost thirty years when Elia Ezra dedicated in 1884 the magnificent and imposing house of worship built and gifted to the community in memory of his father. Elia Gubbay continued to attend the older synagogue and, being concerned about its state of disrepair, he extended and renovated it in 1885–1886[50] and again in 1894 at a total cost to himself of 100,000.00 rupees. The length of the synagogue was increased by one-third and the Ark room widened to receive a growing number of Torahs. The ceiling was raised and the bulky columns streamlined (in recent years painted white with light blue-grey, flower-inspired capitals). For the ladies, he provided a more spacious, recessed balcony, with lace-like railing.[51] Modest stained glass windows atop high side panels, and delicate ceiling fixtures, completed the interior with sheer delight — the whole being airy and lighted. A feeling of spaciousness belied the modest size of the rectangular sanctuary.

The facade, however, in pale yellow stucco, was left unpretentious, yet with Italian and Byzantine influences in evidence. It was im-

possible to get a good view of the building because of the narrow forecourt, and if one went out to the street, the view was blocked by an outer wall. But as one ascended the fifteen steps of the synagogue, on either side, in Hebrew and in English, were inscriptions in marble, setting out Elia Gubbay's beautification program for Bethel Synagogue.

He was instrumental, also, in adding 14,400 square feet of land on the south west of the original grounds of the cemetery for an expanding Jewish community.[52]

Together with Herman Kish, Assistant Secretary of the Bengal Government, he was Vice-President of the local branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1883.[53]

Jewish institutions in Baghdad were likewise beneficiaries of his generosity. To the tomb of Ezekiel the Prophet he presented a beautifully embroidered cover used for the first time on Shabuoth 1883 and he donated Rs. 300.00 for repairs to the Prophet's synagogue.[54] He provided also for additional accommodation for visitors to the Prophet's tomb. In response to an appeal in 1883 by Solomon Bekhor Hussein, the noted printer and publisher, he ordered his agent in Baghdad to supply Tephillin to those who could not afford to repair their worn out ones. Hussein estimated a thousand people were in such economic straits.[55] In 1891 Gubbay made a contribution of Rs. 350.00 to alleviate poverty and starvation among 4000 Baghdad residents.[56] The Jewish community of Aden also had an occasion to be grateful to Elia Gubbay, Elia Ezra and Rahamim M. Cohen.[57]

Gubbay's influence was certainly felt in Calcutta's civic affairs. He was an honorary magistrate from February 1877,[58] a position bestowed by the British Government as a mark of acknowledgement and a social privilege. He presided over police cases at Fort William, the arsenal and military headquarters of the old city of Calcutta. The crowning achievement of his public service came with his appointment to membership of the Legislative Assembly of Bengal at the same time as Elia Ezra in 1884.[59] Also, with Elia Ezra he served on a committee to administer relief of a famine that raged in 1881. He made a personal donation of Rs. 1000.00.[60]

He participated with citizens of all races and creeds in committees formed to organize functions on special occasions. The earliest known appointment was made in July, 1875 when a meeting in the Town Hall considered a program of welcome for the Prince of Wales (son of Queen Victoria and later King Edward VII). It was an exhibition at the Maidahn or Park, a display of fireworks, and an

itinerary which made special mention of the Jewish neighborhood. Gubbay was included in a smaller executive committee to work out details and donated one hundred rupees to a special fund.[61] The Prince arrived in Bombay, and Gubbay made a trip there in November for an introduction to His Royal Highness in advance of his Calcutta visit. Elias David Sassoon, the famed industrialist and philanthropist, was also present.[62] Gubbay's house and gardens were beautifully illuminated December 28th-31st in honor of the Prince's visit.[63]

When Victoria was invested in 1876 with the added designation of "Empress of India," the government held a Durbar or exhibition in Calcutta January 1, 1877 to felicitate the Queen. Gubbay was authorized to recommend a select number of Jews to attend.[64]

Among other auspicious occasions, he helped plan the welcome for the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, (the Duke was one of Victoria's children)[65] the celebration of Victoria's Jubilee,[66] the farewell for Sir Rivers Thompson, Governor of Bengal,[67] and the reception for Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, in April, 1888.[68] He was a regular guest at official British governmental functions starting with the Levee of Lord Lytton in December, 1879,[69] and was often a guest of princely Indian families.

Elia Gubbay was ever responsive to local appeals. When Lady Dufferin, the wife of the Viceroy, launched a campaign to raise funds for a woman's hospital, Gubbay donated Rs. 250.00 initially and then Rs. 10,000.00[70] He assisted in improving and expanding the zoo by underwriting for Rs. 8000.00 the fencing off of an enclosure for tender animals like the deer and, at the urging of Elia Ezra, he financed Gubbay House, a building to accommodate birds and reptiles.[71]

Gubbay encouraged the young men of the Volunteer Corps, a semi-military organization, by donating a prize of Rs. 150.00 annually. It was presented by the Viceroy, Lord Ripon in 1882.[72] The exact reason for the award, however, is not clear.

Elia Gubbay was astute in business. With his older brother Aaron[73] he maintained contacts with Bombay and became agents for the firm of E. D. Sassoon in Calcutta. They extended commercial ventures with the Near and Far East with growing, and later sole, emphasis on opium and it would appear that fortune favored them. Aaron spent three years in Hongkong and the rest of his life in Calcutta. Elia went to Singapore in November, 1854 and returned in July, 1856[74] and, except for a visit to Europe in April-May, 1884 and a short vacation in Singapore in February, 1895, lived

in India.[75] Like the Ezras, the Gubbays invested in real estate and reaped a full harvest. Manasseh or Maurice, Elia's only son, was taken as a partner in 1888 shortly before the death of his brother Aaron.[76] Maurice was the President of Bethel Synagogue for many years, though he lived for the most part in England.

Thus, whether in his own business affairs, in civic matters concerning the general community and most beloved of him in the work of the Jewish community, Elia Gubbay,[77] by dint of his contribution both in time and money, reached all the heights open to a citizen of British Imperial India in its heyday at the end of the last century.

*Chapter 9*

## MAGHEN DAVID SYNAGOGUE

At the time that Elia D. J. Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay were active, the Jewish community of Calcutta was a growing body for whom the old Neveh Shalome Synagogue and the comparatively small Bethel Synagogue built in 1856 were not sufficient.[1] The building of a new and larger synagogue was considered desirable to serve a two-fold purpose — to provide a more spacious and more conducive place for worship than the old Neveh Shalome building, which was in fact no more than a place of residence converted into a prayer hall after it was purchased in 1825. Moreover, it would fulfill a wish of Elia D. J. Ezra to honor the memory of his late father who had enjoined his son to build a synagogue.[2]

Plans for a new synagogue building were drawn up in 1857, a year after Bethel started functioning and during the lifetime of Moses Dwek[3] but, for some unexplicable reason, were not executed, despite occasional agitations and an offer for help from Sir Albert Sassoon of Bombay on one of his visits to Calcutta.[4]

In October, 1882, shortly before proposals for Maghen David were announced, a scheme to demolish the old Neveh Shalome building and erect a larger and more elegant synagogue building at Elia Ezra's sole cost was publicized. The details resemble the plan of Maghen David as it was ultimately built, except that the older place of worship was not demolished. To this there might have been objections by the more conservative. Ezra, therefore, looked elsewhere to bring his intentions to fruition. He decided to build on a plot of land on Chitpore Road, in a neighborhood called Chatri Khana (umbrella manufacturing vicinity) both a synagogue and a hospital and offered a little over one hundred thousand rupees to acquire it. But the congregation of Neveh Shalome proposed that he build the synagogue on communal property as it was the intention of the community to do ultimately. The old synagogue building was therefore allowed to continue its precarious existence.[5]

In response to their wishes and to concretize his own plans, a

portion of the old Neveh Shalome building and two plots of Neveh Shalome land adjoining the building occupied by shops and jute and tobacco presses were dismantled in October, 1882.[6] The net income of these shops and presses amounting to Rs. 229.00 per month at that time, were being utilized for charity.[7] Ezra promised to invest about Rs. 90,000.00 of his own in trust to fetch an equivalent income for distribution to the poor. He intended enlarging the corpus but his early death soon after the synagogue was constructed, ended his efforts in this direction. Since his heirs did not take any further steps in the matter, the Trust still yields the same net income as it did initially. As is to be expected, the effectiveness of the Trust has been largely undermined as a result of inflation, which in turn has been offset by a dwindling number of beneficiaries.

Ezra bought an adjacent plot of land on which stood a house, and the older premises was demolished to make room for the larger synagogue he planned to build. The land on which the synagogue stood measured two bighas, two cottahs, seven chittacks.[8] Built by the well-known British firm of Mackintosh Burn & Co., it was designed by their architect, Osmond, in Italian Renaissance style. Together with the annexes and appurtenances it cost about three hundred thousand rupees. Maghen David is almost certainly the largest synagogue in the East. It is noteworthy for its architectural qualities and visitors from far and wide are struck by its ornate elegance. A red brick building interspersed with thick grey facades, it was modeled after the old Telegraph Office and other official structures of the day. It measures externally 140 feet in length and 82 feet in breadth. The first floor (ground level) was four feet higher than the courtyard level, itself a foot above the street level.

From the outside, the pattern of stained-glass windows on the north and south sides gives the building a three-story appearance. The first or lowest row consists of seven windows each in the north and south, one on each side of the stairs leading to the women's gallery and six on each side of the Hekhal or compartments for men's seats, while each of the two Hekhals on the extreme end of the synagogue in the west has an additional window. The second row consists of twelve windows, one beside each of the compartments for the ladies' seats. The third row of thirty-six windows gives the effect of an additional story but, in fact, overlooks the main hall whose ceiling is fifty-two feet high.

On the west, the exterior is semi-circular, with an arch rising to the height of the second row of windows.

On the east, a portico of the same height is open on three sides.

The fourth side, originally of seven marble steps eight feet broad, led to the main entrance flanked by two large mahogany doors. (Two steps were later covered over by masonry work when the level of the courtyard was raised).

Above the entrance is a mosaic arch with intricate ornamentation inscribed with three biblical verses.[9] In the center is the design of a Maghen David bearing the name of the synagogue in the inner hexagon.

The main hall, in the middle of which is the Tebah (pulpit), measures ninety-two feet in length and thirty-three feet in breadth. On the north and south are white-walled wings (which were to be painted blue but in fact never were) separated from the hall by eighteen Mirzapur stone pillars, to seat men on the first floor and women on the second. Each wing, fifty-two feet long, fifteen feet wide and sixteen feet high is partitioned into Hekhals or compartments by back-to-back benches. One row of seats in each compartment back-face the Ark. Brought from London are the stone pediments of the pillars; their lower bands and embellished floral caps look alike but on scrutiny minute differences might be observed. Joining each of the tops of the pillars is a floral ornamented arch rounding off each ladies' compartment. Appropriate biblical verses which adorn the arches were chosen and designed by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen in 1917. It was he who also made an appeal for funds to make possible the beautiful bracket lights between the arches.

Besides seats for ladies on the upper level of the two wings, there is a third section on the east to accommodate them. The multicolored glass windows above this gallery were made originally of ordinary English glass which would not keep out the morning sun. A huge screen still hanging above would be rolled over the window but, at the same time, would deprive the synagogue of much natural light. Rev. Cohen introduced frosted glass which not only did away with the necessity of the screen, but also ensured that the sunlight would not be kept out.

On the western end of the hall is a semi-circular platform projecting from the second pillar north and south, reached by four marble steps on each side. The floor of the platform is made of Castillian tiles especially created by Manton Hollands & Co., London. Here the Kohens bless the congregation and weddings and circumcisions are performed.

Beyond the platform two steps higher is the approach to the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light) and Hekhal Hakkodesh (Ark). The domed

ceiling there probably represents the sky on a starry night, perhaps reminiscent of the vision of Abraham. Set in the "sky" are three windows, upon two of which are inscribed Judaism's eternal truths, "The Lord is our God, the Lord is One," and, "Thou shalt love thy fellowman as thyself." The middle window contains an amorphous impression of a cloud radiating rays of splendor and presumably representing the Shekhina. This mystic figure, according to a view expressed by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, was conducive to and inspired meditation during prayer.

The Hekhal Hakkodesh (Ark) is a semi-circular room with, at one time, as many as about eighty Torahs in wooden cases overlaid with silver and gold or covered with velvet. Castillian marble with a different design adorns the floor.

The floor of the hall, wings and the Tebah are of marble, patterned with black and white two-foot squares edged with broad lines. The check squares of the Tebah are one foot each with a star in the center. The marble for all the steps in the synagogue was imported from London.

The handsomely painted bronze balustrade of the Tebah, the galleries and the front platform as well as the iron fencing, gate and lamp above the gate were acquired from London. Rev. Cohen felt that the Tebah was too closed in (he used the word "Kuffuss," Arabic for "box") and impeded the effective carrying of the reader's voice. Accordingly, he had a blueprint of a revised Tebah prepared, but he was preoccupied with so many pressing matters that he never fulfilled the plan.

The synagogue could accommodate about three hundred women and four hundred men, each compartment on the wings seating twenty men (besides the seats in the back of the synagogue under the eastern gallery) and fifteen ladies in two rows of chairs besides those in the gallery.

Synagogue architecture never possessed stylistic definiteness but was inevitably influenced by local social and intellectual forces. In the case of Maghen David the structural pattern resulted from the impact of a Christian architect on the plans. Obviously unaware of patterns of synagogues in Britain and of the fact that steeples were a symbol only of Christian houses of worship, he topped Maghen David with an imposing 142 foot steeple that misled many a western Jewish visitor to whom a steeple was the stylistic peculiarity of a church. That the native Jewish community did not object may be attributed, not to the fact that they were unaware of the characteristic Christian influence, but rather to their not having

suffered in any way at the hands of the Church; they probably thought the steeple was a harmless adjunct to the synagogue. In fact, the architect inadvertently complied with the Talmudic prescription to have Jewish houses of worship tower above all other houses in town!

The clock, in the fourth level of the steeple, sixty feet above the ground was imported from London and was the largest of all the clocks on public places at that time. With dials on four sides and chiming hours, half hours and quarters, it has six bells (five small and one large) and could be lit up to make the time visible from a distance. It was acquired from a firm that supplied clocks to all the large churches and parliamentary buildings in England and the European continent. Six levels lead to the top of the tower. One of the levels opens onto the roof of the ladies' gallery where once every twenty-eight years or so congregants have ascended on the first Wednesday in Nisan to recite the benediction over the sun. April 8, 1981 is one of the dates in the future.

A severe earthquake was felt in Calcutta in July, 1885 within a year of the dedication of the synagogue. During the tremors of three minutes duration, the city suffered much damage. It seems the steeple of the synagogue was noticed to be swaying but no damage ensued. The clock kept on working.[10]

Before the installation of electricity in 1902, gas facilities were used for lighting, while in the middle of the large hall over the Tebah was an elaborate chandelier that burnt olive oil. The latter gave way in 1918 to a cut-glass thirty-light electrolier which originally adorned the Grand Opera House in Calcutta and was presented to the synagogue by its minister, Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. Two other chandeliers were placed on each side of it after his death in 1927. The gas lamp frames were electrified in 1921 by Jonah R. J. Jacob after lying unused for five years.

The picturesque decoration over the entrance to the holy room was a series of Jewish religious symbols. Of the most conspicuous were two replicas of the seven-branched Menorah, from which the entire work was called "Menorah." Designed by Moses Mayohas, embellished by Ezra Aaron Gareh and executed by John Boseck & Co., jewelers, it cost Rs. 10,000.00, contained 3500 tolas of silver, with portions overlaid with gold and covered with velvet. The seven-foot by six-foot ornamentation was first viewed in September, 1885 at Boseck's store, 7 Wellesley Place.[11] English language newspapers carried a report on it under the caption "Gate of Heaven" from an embossed inscription of Genesis 28:17 "He (Jacob) was afraid and

said, How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the House of God and this is the *gate of heaven.*" Photographs in two sizes sold for five and two and one half rupees.

Publicity drew thousands to view it, among them city officials and court judges. Some suggested sending it to a museum in London. The new Maghen David's congregation, however, wanted it to be installed in their synagogue over the entrance to the Ark since it was there that the words of Jacob applied appropriately and there the minister recited them when the Torah was returned to the Ark. Half of the price was collected in a little more than six months and the rest pledged in varying sums. A list of donors with the amounts they contributed was to be published in *Paerah* and inscribed on a silver plaque placed below the "Menorah."[12]

The goal was slow to reach and Elia D. J. Ezra's death dampened spirits. But soon after his father's death, Joseph Ezra reportedly gifted the "Menorah" to the synagogue and had it installed on the eve of Rosh Hashana 1886.[13] What happened to the subscription is not clear.

The name of God figures prominently in effulgent splendor below the crown symbolizing His absolute sovereignty and the words of Exodus 33:15: "This is my name forever and this is My memorial unto all generations." The Name appears as part of three verses: Psalm 16:8, "I have set *the Lord* always before me," Psalm 113:3, "From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, praised is the name of *the Lord*" and Psalm 16:8, *"Lord,* I love the habitation of Thy House, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth."

Below it stands in bold relief the two tablets of the Ten Commandments with the first letters of the inscription. Further down, there are: a rod representing the Ark of Covenant and a painting of the Kotel Ma-arabi (Western Wall) decorated with evergreens. On the sides, there are two columns, at the top of which are represented figurative adornments of the Pillar of Fire on the right and the Pillar of Cloud on the left. The Tablets of Commandments are flanked by picturesque menorahs, the branches and stems on the left containing the mystical rhymed prayer of forty-two words (Ahnna Be-ko-ah) whose author is the Tana, Nehunya ben Hakanah (first century) and those on the right, Psalm 67. Also to be seen is a diagram of the mystical ten spheres, the multi-colored stones of the Urim and Thumim, the Table of Show Bread, the Altar of Incense and several names of the angelic host. Mystical words border the top and the bottom of the Shema as well as Genesis 28:17. The two branched candelabra from which the name "Me-

norah" was given the entire work of art, are shown with seven branches, each in the temple tradition. The designer and artist, though Jewish, disregarded the Talmudic tradition of preserving the superiority of the central sanctuary in Jerusalem by modifying synagogal replicas into five, six or eight branches.

Three memorial oil glasses are lit perpetually in memory of Elia David Joseph Ezra, his wife, Mozelle, and Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. Memorial plaques are also erected in their memory at the entrance to the synagogue.[15]

According to municipal plans announced at the time, the synagogue would ultimately be an island bounded by Canning Street on the south, Jackson Ghat Street on the north and a new road called "Synagogue Street" on the east. A garden and a walkway planned by the City would separate a Catholic cathedral 160 feet away and the synagogue, which was itself to be surrounded on three sides by a fenced garden. But developments within the Jewish community, that is, the death of Elia D. J. Ezra and the resurgence of Neveh Shalome, leading to inter-synagogue strife, put these early plans beyond attainment.

After the death of Elia Ezra, a Mikvah was built on the west side of the synagogue at the cost of Rs. 8000.00 and borne by his son, Joseph. The fountain and pool were divided into four sections, each connected to a self-contained dressing room. The outer pattern resembled that of the synagogue.[16]

The Rangoon synagogue "Masmiah Yeshuah" rebuilt in 1887 was fashioned after Calcutta's Maghen David.[17]

The foundation stone of the building was laid on 15th Shebath 5643 (= 23rd January 1883).[18] On the previous Friday, an open invitation was extended to the community.[19] At noon, over three hundred of the poorer members of the community partook of a sumptuous lunch and also received gifts of cash.

The service was called for 4 p.m. in a shamiana, a large tent-like enclosure covered with non-waterproof material. Men sat on three sides, north, east and west and ladies on the south. In the center was a Tebah (raised platform) with lit candles made from pure honey.

They were to start with Minha (afternoon service) but under threat of rain, the honored guest from Jerusalem, Hakham Asher Abraham Halevi, began his sermon. Midway, a heavy downpour prevented him from proceeding, whereupon Elia Ezra and his brother, Saleh, read a Kaddish. E.M.D. Cohen, the minister, and Elia stood at the site earmarked for the stone and the philanthropist offered a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the opportunity to

fulfill the verses: "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8), and "I (God) have been to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they are come" (Ezekiel 11:16).[20]

In unrelenting rain he placed the following in a bottle: a sheet of paper written in Hebrew[21] which was planned to be read aloud but was not because of the rain, a silver plate with an inscription in Hebrew,[22] a silver rupee and a copy of *Paerah* Vol. 5, No. 31 carrying the announcement of the ceremonies. He then placed the bottle and the stone in position and read Psalms 121, 128 and 130. Rev. Cohen recited the memorial prayer for David Joseph Ezra and a prayer for the well-being of his generous son, Elia.[23] Following the benediction for the congregation, the proceedings moved to the Neveh Shalome Synagogue alongside for Minha. When the rain ceased, the congregation returned to the enclosure where the sermon was resumed. The Kaddish recited once again, the Hakham chanted the memorial prayer; Arbith (evening service) terminated an eventful day.

The synagogue building took twenty months to build. When the new synagogue was about to be completed, Neveh Shalome showed signs of collapsing. It was found necessary to demolish one of the three Hekhals and repair the others so the congregation might continue worshipping there till they could move to the new synagogue.[24]

On September 5, 1884 the religious articles were removed from Neveh Shalome to Maghen David and on September 11th the new synagogue was formally dedicated in the presence of a large congregation. Almost the entire Neveh Shalome congregation moved to Maghen David where seats were allocated to each member. The few that did not began to attend Bethel. Family Torahs were taken to Maghen David by relatives and the old Neveh Shalome building was closed and ceased to be used as a synagogue. The Gabai (warden) and all the employees of the old synagogue began to work for Maghen David. In effect, the congregation removed from one premises to another and the congregation of Neveh Shalome became almost wholly the congregation of Maghen David.

Some objection was raised at the change of name from Neveh Shalome to Maghen David perhaps because of a sentimental attachment to the old name and also opposition to the new synagogue being so obviously linked in name with a single family. An overwhelming majority, however, welcomed the change.

The last special service held in the old Neveh Shalome was one

of praise and thanksgiving after the success of British forces against the rebellion of Arabi Pasha in the Anglo-Egyptian campaign lasting seven months. On Thursday, 1st day of Sukkoth 5643 (= September 28, 1882) after the reading of the Torah, Psalm 44 was recited followed by a special prayer prepared by Dr. Nathan Adler, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire[25] and concluded with Psalm 100 and the prayer for the Royal Family. The last formal accounts of Neveh Shalome were presented by Joshua Simon (Gabai) in September, 1884.[26]

Maghen David was to have been dedicated on Rosh Hodesh Elul 5644 (= Thursday, August 21, 1884) but the ceremonies were postponed three weeks. [27] The following advertisement appeared on September 5: "The synagogue will be officially opened on Thursday 21st Elul 5644 (= September 11, 1884) to which the whole Jewish community is invited to attend. E.M.D. Cohen will allot permanent seats in the synagogue the following Sunday, Monday and Tuesday from 7 to 9 o'clock in the morning. We expect members of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue and others who wish to be regular members of Maghen David to avail of this opportunity and have their seats allocated."[28]

An impressive ceremony marked the dedication.[29] To the tuneful melody of the hymn MERIM LAYROSHI, the Torah Scrolls were reverently carried out of the old Neveh Shalome Synagogue, the hymn's refrain being strikingly appropriate. "I beseech Thee, My Redeemer, build my Temple, Thy lofty abode and majestic splendor, and my supreme joy." On reaching the entrance to Maghen David, the leader proclaimed with a voice resounding with emotion, "Open to us the gates of righteousness, we will enter into them, we will give thanks unto the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter into it," and in response the doors of the synagogue were ceremoniously opened from inside. Ascending the seven stone steps leading to the synagogue, the Hazan blazoned to the accompaniment of congregational undertones, "How goodly are the tents, Jacob, thy dwelling places O Israel. O Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth." The specially arranged choir and those present then sang, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord, we bless you out of the house of the Lord. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Give thanks unto Him and bless His name. O come, let us bow down and bend the knee, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing. O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever."

The Scrolls were taken in circuit seven times round the Tebah with psalms and prayers and hymns as is customary on Simhat Torah. They were then returned to the Ark to the chanting of the latter part of Yigdal, "God gave His people a Torah of Truth." Standing in front of the Ark, Dinah, the daughter of Elia David Ezra, handed a silver key, which she carried on a velvet cushion, to her mother, Mozelle Ezra, who proceeded to open the doors of the Ark. Enclosed in a small case, this key adorns the front of the synagogue.[30]

Before the Scrolls were conveyed into the Ark, to the accompanient of hymns fitting the dedication theme, Elia Ezra pronounced the "Shayhayhayanu." Also, he recited the dedicatory prayer in which he expressed his gratitude to God for material bounties he was blessed with, for his gracious wife and loyal children and for having planted in his heart the desire to build a sanctuary in the name of his late father for the benefit of the community. Fittingly, therefore, the synagogue was called "Maghen David." This part of the ceremony was concluded by the Hashkaba (memorial prayer) for the repose of the soul of David Joseph Ezra.

In the midst of the Minha Service, a sermon was delivered by the honored guest from Jerusalem, Hakham Samuel Mayohas. The Hazan offered a supplication based on King Solomon's prayer of dedication, invoking blessings upon the donor and his family. This was followed by a prayer for the welfare of Queen Victoria and the Royal Family. Between two sets of hymns, a member of the Board of Manhigim, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac, publicly thanked Elia David Ezra for his noble and generous contribution to the service of the Jewish community of Calcutta. An invocation for his welfare and that of his family preceded a blessing for the whole congregation. The Minha service was concluded with the addition of Psalm 122: "I rejoiced when they said unto me, 'Let us go to the House of the Lord,' " and the Adon Olam. Before the commencement of Arbith, Psalm 150 was sung to a new melody.

The only special service held with Elia D.J. Ezra attending and through his initiative was on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Sir Moses Montefiore on October 26, 1884. Following the afternoon service, Elia read a prayer composed by Moses Mayohas.[31] Fully lit, the synagogue rang out with warm-hearted singing in which the children of the local Jewish schools participated. A congratulatory telegram read in the presence of the congregation was sent to Sir Moses in Ramsgate: "The Calcutta Sephardic Jewish Community assembled for thanksgiving prayer convey their hearty congratulations on the completion of your

hundredth year and earnestly pray that your valuable life may be prolonged for many years."[32] Less than a year later, at Sir Moses' death, *Paerah* carried a long obituary notice.[33] The following week, on August 6, 1885, a commemorative service was highlighted by an eulogy by Hakham Shalome Sisu, Shaliah of Safed.[34]

The new synagogue was soon honored by the visit of the highest British dignitary in the land — Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of India. Without prior notice he arrived in the synagogue on the first day of Passover 1888. With him was his A.D.C., Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace and the Mayor of Calcutta, Henry Harrison. The same day, the Viceroy visited also a neighboring Catholic church and a Moslem mosque.[35] The congregation did not have to wait too long for a visit from a member of the Royal Family. When Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, toward the end of 1890, was on an official visit to India. Rev. Cohen received him at the synagogue and pronounced the priestly blessing over him.

The synagogue authorities were careful to note the outstanding events during the reigns of the British monarchs and in the lives of members of the Royal Family. On Sunday, June 20, 1897 (= 20th Sivan 5657) the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, a service of prayer and thanksgiving was held in accordance with a request of the Chief Rabbinate of the British Empire and an order of the service circulated by it. It was an afternoon service incorporating Psalm 21: 1-8, Minha, Psalm 61, a sermon, a prayer with the Ark open and another for the Royal Family, concluding with Psalm 72 and the national anthem in Hebrew.

At the occasion of the coronation of Edward VII, a special thanksgiving service was conducted on Saturday afternoon 6th Ab 5662 (= August 9, 1902) in conjunction with Bethel Synagogue. The congregation being seated, the choir entered, followed by the members of the Boards of Manhigim and Hazans of both synagogues who proclaimed "Blessed are you who come in the name of the Lord." The first three verses of Psalm 136 were sung in unison. After the choir, consisting of school boys, sang the Adon Olam, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay blessed them.

Minha was started by Rev. Elias Rahamin Joshua Levi, and Rev. Cohen took out the Torah from the Ark and accompanied it to the Tebah to the singing of "Simhu Na." Rev. Cohen read the first portion of the Torah, Rev. Levi the second, and Rev. Saul Moses Lanyado, the Hazan of Bethel Synagogue, the third. While the Torah was still on the Tebah, Psalm 21 was recited, a sermon

delivered, and a specially prepared prayer in honor of the new king invoked. The choir sang the national anthem in Hebrew and Rev. Lanyado blessed those who made contributions in commemoration of the coronation. Following the chanting of two hymns the Torah was returned to the Ark while the congregation sang the hymn Hallelujah. The service ended with Psalm 150 as it is sung on Rosh Hashana, Ein Kaylohaynu and Yigdal. The three Hazans shared in conducting the service.

A similar service was held in celebration of the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary on Thursday, June 22, 1911, as well as on the occasion of their Silver Jubilee on Saturday, May 11, 1935. During the latter service, Immanuel J. Cohen, the then Honorary Secretary, addressed the congregation. Rejoicing turned into grief at the passing of George V when a service was held to mark the day of his burial on Tuesday, January 28, 1936.

May 12, 1937, the coronation day of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, was observed by a service at which a sermon was read, based on the verse, "The King shall have joy in Thy strength O Lord; and in Thy salvation how greatly shall we rejoice." (Psalm 21:1).

As loyal subjects of Britain, the congregation held several intercession services for the welfare of Allied armies in both World Wars. One such service was held on Saturday, January 2, 1915. At the beginning of the second World War in 1939, at the instance of the Chief Rabbinate of London, a prayer of supplication was offered every Sabbath and Festival. On Sunday, September 8, 1940, the first anniversary of the outbreak of hostilities, a special service entitled "The Voice of Weeping" was tearfully organized for the success of the Allied armies. The services included supplicatory prayers, a memorial for those who fell in battle, and Psalm 20. Almost the same service was held on March 23, 1941, with the addition of the recitation of the "Shema" once, "Baruch Shem" thrice and "The Lord He is God" seven times. The service terminated with the blowing of the Shofar.

On three successive anniversaries of the outbreak of war and in order to support Britain's fight for freedom, services were organized on Sunday, September 7, 1941, Sunday, September 6, 1942 and September 12, 1942. On the latter occasion a New Year message entitled "The Sun of Righteousness" was read out. At that time a memorial prayer was recited for the repose of the soul of David Solomon Sassoon who died on August 10, 1942.

Calcutta Jewry lost one of its young members in each World

War. David Ezra, Captain, Royal Garrison Artillery and grandson of the founder of Maghen David Synagogue, in World War I and Sonny Solomon, Flying Officer (Navigator), Royal Air Force, in the Second. Appropriate plaques at the entrance to the synagogue commemorate them. When the war was over in 1945, a service of praise and thanksgiving was conducted by the American and British Jewish chaplains. Noteworthy was a prayer for the victims of mass murders and a Kaddish for all victims of war and massacre.

Rev. E.M.D. Cohen was assisted ably in the readership of the synagogue by Rev. E.M. Levi, a re-enactment of the Levi assisting the Cohen in the Temple of old. They were followed by an Israelite in the person of Albert F. Morris who, apparently for reasons of economy, officiated singly. He succeeded to junior readership on the death of E.M.D. Cohen and became sole minister on the passing of E.M. Levi in 1929. Possessing a melodious and resonant voice, he was ideally suited for the position he held for twenty years. His forceful and inspiring rendition of the Hebrew prayers lent dignity to his conduct of the services. On High Holydays he enjoyed the voluntary aid of Meyer Ezra Musleah and afterward, of his son, Isaac Sassoon Musleah. Starting as a novice, and with the help of the latter, Rev. Morris mastered the liturgical melodies with great facility. He had a keen sense for musical intonation.

Like Rev. Cohen in World War I, Rev. Morris worked hard to see to it that the British and American Jewish soldiers in World War II were comfortable during their stay in Calcutta. He co-operated spiritedly with Jewish chaplains, especially Rabbi David J. Seligson, to organize services and provide hosts during festivals. His own home was ever open joyfully to receive boys who spent an entertaining hour in the glowing warmth of his family, and his hospitality is witnessed by a host of letters of thanks he subsequently received from relatives of the soldiers. He died at a comparatively young age in August, 1946.[36]

The Jewish community of Calcutta adopted a constitution in 1825, the year that the first House of Worship was purchased. The mortgage was redeemed on April 28, 1831 (= 15th Iyar 5591). On Saturday, May 2, 1931 (= 15th Iyar 5691) a centennial service was held during the Shahrith when Psalm 30 and 122 were included. A tablet was duly erected at the entrance to the synagogue to commemorate the observance of the centenary.

The Golden Jubilee of the dedication of the synagogue was celebrated by a service on 18th Kislev 5695 (= November 25, 1934). Following the Minha service seven Torahs were brought out

and three circuits made around the Tebah, the first with the recitation of Psalm 30, the second with Psalm 24 and the third with 100. A memorial prayer for the David Joseph Ezra and his son Elia formed a significant part of the service and the Torahs were taken back to the Ark with the chanting of Psalm 29. An address was given before the Rabbis' Kaddish was recited.

A similar service was held for the celebration of the 75th anniversary on February 7, 1960 when a handsomely designed brochure entitled "Tehilla Le-Dawid" was published. Compiled by the present writer, as Rabbi of the community, it incorporated a brief history of the synagogue (a shorter version of this chapter) and a biography of E.M.D. Cohen. During his twelve years as spiritual leader in Calcutta, he organized varied services on occasions connected with the Commonwealth of Israel — Independence Day (Yom Ha-Atsmaut), and memorials for Presidents Weizmann and Ben Zvi. The final service before his departure for the U.S.A. in 1964 was a memorial for the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The final constitution and rules governing the affairs of the synagogue may be traced through two earlier stages: the first, a draft drawn up by E.M.D. Cohen shortly before Maghen David was dedicated. This was rather far-reaching and was meant to comprehend not only the new synagogue but Bethel as well (on the assumption that Neveh Shalome would not continue in existence). The second, the body of rules actually adopted for the new synagogue in 1885 but apparently lost[37] and a third, the one that has remained in force ever since it was adopted on 1st Kislev 5654 (= November 10, 1893) and signed by the Manhigim on 2nd Adar 5654 (= April 1, 1894).[38] Some provisions of the original may be pieced together from an interesting letter in *Paerah.*[39]

The rules in their varied forms reflect the social composition and attitudes prevailing in the community at the time.

First: Was there any effort in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to coordinate the affairs of the community as a whole? There was such a proposal, in the first draft of E.M.D. Cohen referred to above, and it was at least partially implemented.[40] This aimed to create a position for Elia D. J. Ezra as the president or guiding light of the whole community. It envisaged a return to the Kehillah set up that had worked quite successfully in the days of Moses Dwek, Cohen's maternal grandfather. Since Dwek's death in 1861, however, there was a series of futile attempts which failed,[41] as the institutions were moving rapidly towards individualism and away from a centralized administration and coordination.

Second: How was the new synagogue, the gift of the Ezras, to be managed? The answer is clear: by the Ezra family and its nominees — in a sort of oligarchical manner. The first Board was appointed by Elia D.J. Ezra and consisted of himself, Joseph, his son, H.S. Howard, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac and Rahamim Moosa Cohen. When Joseph Elia Ezra became President his brother Ezekiel also joined the Board. In the next ten years, prior to the adoption of the second set of rules, David Hye Solomon [Abraham] and Aaron Ezra Arakie were added, while the two co-opted in 1894 were Nissim Isaac Sassoon and Aaron Ezekiel Joshua. The *Paerah* correspondent referred to above objected to the criterion for the choice of Manhigim. They were drawn from the wealthier strata of the Jewish community while those of more moderate means were not represented. Besides, the protest continued, E.M.D. Cohen, an able administrator, despite his salaried office of minister, should have had a seat on the Board.

The first chairman was, of course, Elia himself. After his death in 1886, that position was occupied by his elder son, Joseph, who was in turn succeeded by his half-brother Sir David. In the absence of an Ezra descendant in Calcutta on the death of the latter in 1947, his wife, Lady Rachel Ezra became President till her demise in 1952. The office thereupon passed, for the first time, into the hands of a non-Ezra, Aaron Curlender, who, unfortunately, held it for six months only. He was succeeded by Nissim Benjamin Elias. Joseph Curlender assumed the office in 1965. Thus, throughout its existence the Board has perpetuated itself and vacancies continue to be filled by its own appointments.

(Incidentally, other special privileges enjoyed by the Ezras pertained to their Sepher Torahs; thus the Sepher Kol Nidre must be one donated by the family.)

An interesting feature was that of rotating Manhigim or Board members, a common practice in European communities. In Vilna, for example, each member of the executive board held for a month the office of warden or parnas and supervised the daily working of the community. He was known as "Parnas Hahodesh," Warden of the month.[42] In Maghen David, Calcutta, the name of the "Manhig Hahodesh" was displayed in a prominent place on the board used for announcement of the hours of services and liturgical information so people knew who was in a position of authority. How did this work in actual practice? Within living memory, that is, for the last half century or more, this custom has been merely a form. Any controversial matter that arose was decided by the

Honorary Secretary, if present, (particularly during the long tenure of Immanuel J. Cohen) and otherwise, after consultation among the members of the Board who happened to be on the spot.

Third: How was the right to seats to be determined? E.M.D. Cohen's original proposals provided that the synagogue membership was to be divided between paying and non-paying members, the former having many privileges over the others. Seat rents would be set at Rs.5.00, Rs.3.00 and Re.1.00 a month. Such a special member who, through reverse of fortune, was unable to pay the minimum of Rs.12.00 a year, would continue to enjoy the privileges he had hitherto. The paying members would form a special assembly from among whom were to be elected annually a president, not under twenty-six years of age, a treasurer and a secretary (both to be over twenty-one years of age), an assistant secretary and seven other managers to form a Board.

Considering there had been quarrels over possession of seats in Neveh Shalome, Cohen suggested allocation by the Board of a place to each special member, whose anniversaries (Yartseits) would be recognized in precedence to those of ordinary members for the purpose of being called to the Torah. Ordinary members would occupy seats not allocated to the privileged few. However, the adopted rules failed to accept the ideas of seat-rents, special assemblies or annual elections. Seats were merely distributed to all members prior to the opening ceremony, though an allocated seat could be lost by an absence of more than three years. Should the member return, the Gabai, an official responsible for the day to day running of the synagogue, must re-allot a seat, which need not necessarily be the one occupied previously. The future apportionment of seats for both men and women was to be at the discretion of one or two Manhigim and the Gabai, and no objection was to be raised to the place indicated. Our *Paerah* correspondent criticized the last provision, as it appeared that the privilege of allocating seats were being taken away from the minister, E.M.D. Cohen, and placed in other hands. Actually, neither of the last-mentioned found their place in the revised rule of a decade later; either the correspondent had voiced a popular protest or, what is more likely, they were simply not relevant any longer, occupancy of seats having become well-established and universally acknowledged.

Fourth: What was the attitude of the more wealthy to the less fortunate members of the community? This was always somewhat paternalistic and at times bordering on the arrogant. An indica-

tion of this may be witnessed in some of the above-mentioned provisions. A further stricture in the original code prohibited the attendance of services in dirty, torn or improper clothing. Obviously aimed at the poor, the correspondent attacked it as discriminatory. A poor man, he said, who possessed only two suits would be excluded from public worship if the one he gave to the laundry was delayed. Interestingly this, too, was omitted from the revised code.

Two more rules came in for criticism at the hands of our *Paerah* champion. The first was quoted as saying that when a Meela was performed in the synagogue the congregation should not crowd around the "Chair of Elijah" but stand each at his seat. Similarly, no one should assemble in front of the Tebah as the Sepher Torah was being brought from the Ark. These clauses, however, were so completely different from established custom, they did not find a place in the second set of rules.

A section prohibiting anyone except the Hazan from sitting on the Tebah was found fault with on the grounds that a Shaliah had to be given an honorable place. In Bethel he sat on the Tebah. In the old Neveh Shalome because the Tebah was so very small, he was given a seat beside Simon Raphael Hyeem Isaac, considered a special distinction as he was a venerable old man. On the first Sabbath after dedication, the writer continued, a Shaliah (probably Hakham Samuel Mayohas) of Jerusalem had not been accorded the honor of a special place.

So much for the rules laid down from above and their stringent critic. Both he and the makers of the by-laws have long since departed from the scene. Maghen David Synagogue, however, has served for the best part of a century, what was at first a growing community. Many are those who will never forget the Holy Days in the synagogue, filled to overflowing, and though, today the synagogue is more often deserted than not and woefully empty with the exodus of a very large part of the community, the benefit and service to his community fulfilled the best intentions of Elia D.J. Ezra.



Maghen David with a steeple – a rare mark of a synagogue.



Maghen David Synagogue – from Ladies' gallery.



Maghen David Synagogue showing Tebah (reader's desk) and seating compartments.



Maghen David Synagogue showing thirty-six Torahs displayed for the Festival of Simhath Torah.



The Tebah showing Rabbi and Reader chanting hymns between portions of the reading of the Law on Simhath Torah.



Bride and groom, depicting the unusual custom of being covered with the Tallith (prayer shawl), blessed by Rabbi Musleah. The inscription on the canopy ceiling marks the gift of Mozelle Elia Ezra in 1884.



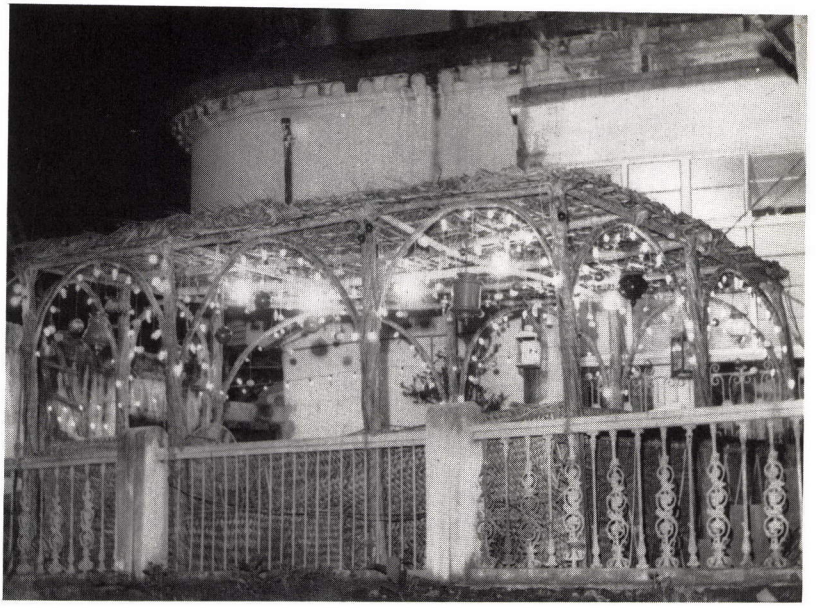

Bethel Synagogue facade.



Bethel Synagogue - interior.



Meyer E. Musleah, among the first Halutzim from Calcutta in 1945, addressing a subsequent convention of Indian Jews in Israel. On the right is the President of Israel at that time, Izhak Ben-Zvi. Two Bene Israel women are dressed in Sari.



An illuminated and decorated bamboo booth, covered with palm leaves, used on the Festival of Sukkoth or Tabernacles.



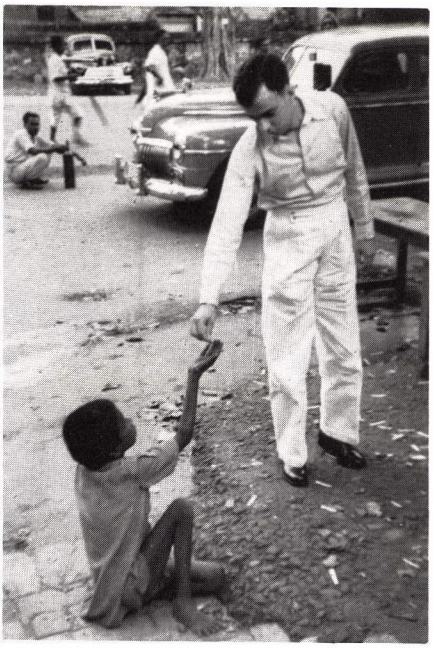
Hanukka Menorah on the sixth evening of the festival. The oranges are placed as decoration. The author's daughters, Aliza (top), Flora (right), Rahel (bottom) and a friend.



A Bar Mitsva boy being helped to put on Tephillin (Phylacteries) for the first time. The ceremony is performed at home, witnessed by family and friends.



A Bar Mitsva boy in typical Arabic dress of the early twentieth century.



Emaciated and diseased, the ubiquitous beggar receiving alms.



Meyer Ezra Musleah (in Arabic garb) with son Elias Hyeem, in a village market at Madhupur.



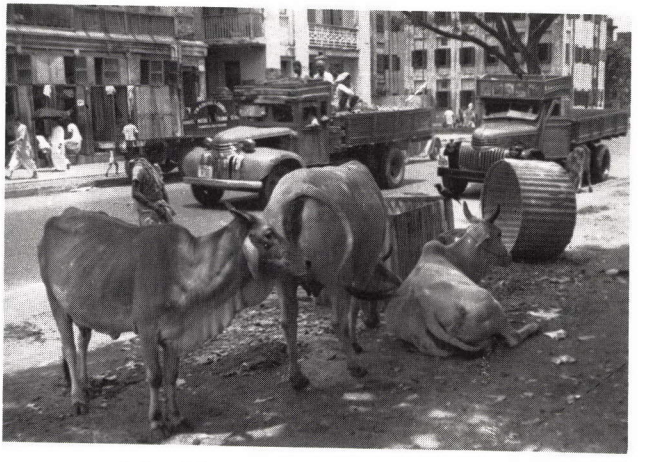
Early morning ablution in the holy Hooghly River, a tributary of the Ganga.



A haircut in the middle of a railroad track by the edge of the Hooghly River.



A wayside tea-shop, where amenities fit the meager demands of satisfied clientele.



'Sacred' cows grazing at a refuse dump.



On the other side of the street from this colony of refugees from East Bengal (later Western Pakistan, now Bangla Desh) is Raj Bhavan, official residence of the Governor of West Bengal.




Sidewalk sleepers—nowhere else to lay their heads.



Human and animal labor vie. Behind the cart is a horse-drawn carriage.



Demonstrating for higher wages in a prestigious section of the city.



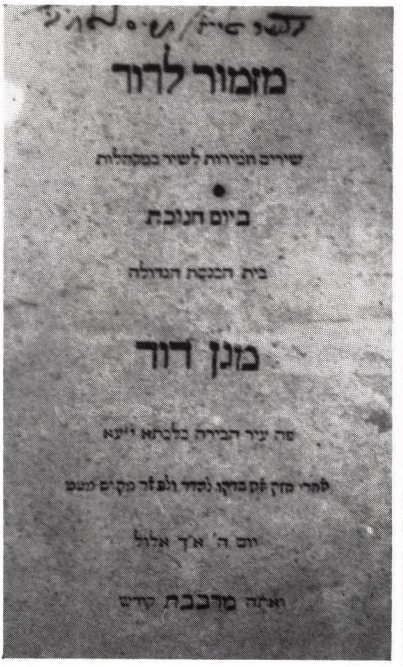




The first lithographed Calcutta publication—the biblical Song of Songs, 1841, with Aramaic interpretation and its Arabic translation.



An illuminated Ketubah (marriage document), 1920.

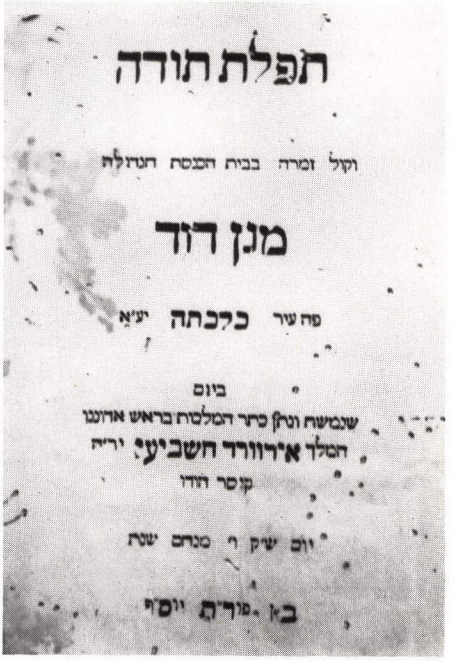

מזמור לדוד

שירים ותשבחות לשיר בקהלות

ביום חנוכת

בית הכנסת הגדולה

מגן דוד


תפלת תודה

וקול זמרה בבית הכנסת הגדולה

מגן דוד

פה עיר כלכתה יע"א

ביום

שבשמחת ועטין כתר המלכות בראש אחינו

המלך אדוורד חשביעי יריח

קוסר הודו

יום שיק י מנחם שנת


סדר העבודה

ביום חג היובל

של בית הכנסת

מגן דוד

בעיר כלכתה יע"א

הבי אליה דוד יצק עורא נ"ע

עד ושמת אבני

הבי דוד יצק עזרא נ"ע

ונתנך ביום כ"א לחדש אייר שנת התרכ"ד

יום א' חי כסלו תרצ"ה יס"ק

סי' יבנה עבדך דוד ימות נתן ושנך

ORDER OF SERVICE

On the occasion of the

Jubilee Celebration

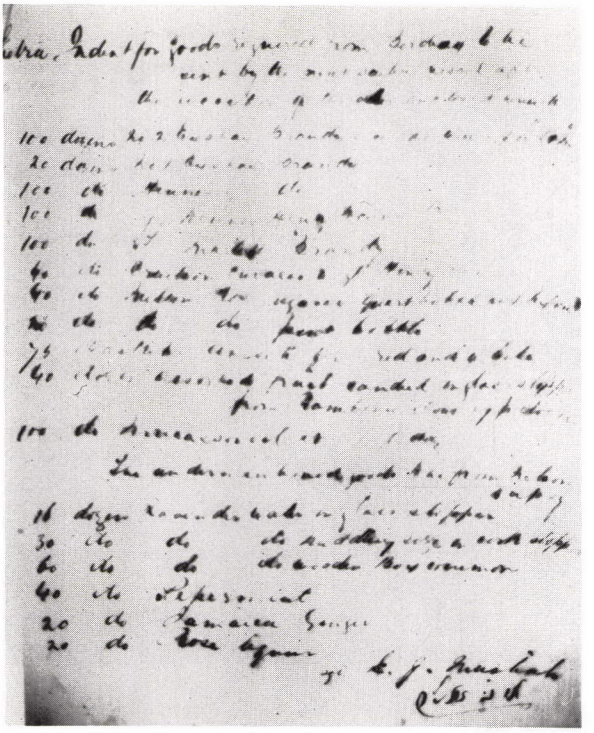
of the Dedication of the

SYNAGOGUE "MAGHEN DAWID"

CALCUTTA.

Sunday { 18 Kislew, 5695, / 25 November, 1934.

Maghen David Synagogue – Special Services *top* dedication, 1884 (left), coronation of Edward VII, 1902 (right), *bottom* jubilee, 1934.



A page from the letter file of Elias Joseph Musleah, 1872 in English and Hebrew, indenting for liquors, perfume, peppermint and ginger.



The annual Mohurrum. The canopied bier of Hussein, grandson of Mohamed, killed in civil war (680), carried in procession, as Shi'ite Moslems beat their breasts and chant dirges.

*Chapter 10*

## INTER-SYNAGOGUE STRIFE 1884–1917

Until 1884, the Jewish community of Calcutta worshipped in two synagogues — the older, Neveh Shalome, bought in 1825 and the newer, Bethel, built in 1856. The Neveh Shalome Synagogue contained two halls, running east and west, another hall on the east, running north and south, was used by ladies; there was also a third hall on the south side which was demolished in 1884 because of disrepair.[1] This accommodation had become deficient for an ever growing congregation and the ventilation and lighting were poor. Under the circumstances, Elia D. J. Ezra erected the Maghen David Synagogue adjoining the old Neveh Shalome building and on land belonging to the community.[2] On the part of the community it was undertaken to tear down the old Neveh Shalome structure after the new one was built.[3]

Thus it was that Calcutta came to possess the largest and most ornate synagogue in South East Asia. The community was prepared to honor the part of the agreement it was committed to but for the following consideration. The building was known to be included in a municipal scheme of widening an adjoining street. It was therefore wise to wait for the civic authorities to demolish it and thereby receive compensation rather than tear it down at the expense of the community. Being an astute businessman himself, Elia Ezra did not press the community to abide by its commitment. The building was actually used for a time to store wheat for Matsa. At the time (May, 1885), Bethel Synagogue was undergoing extensive repairs, which necessitated the temporary removal of the worshippers to Neveh Shalome for eight months. When they left, the lower rooms were used again for storage of wheat but the upper floor was closed. Ezra died a year and a half after the Maghen David was dedicated. Meanwhile, Neveh Shalome remained unused and neglected.

In the spring of 1888, two years after Elia Ezra's death, a certain Rahma Jacob Aaron, whose father was the wealthy Ezekiel Elias Musleah, one of the signatories of the first constitution of the com-

munity in 1825 and one of the three original trustees of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue, wrote to the committee of Maghen David Synagogue for permission to re-open the Neveh Shalome Synagogue. Verbal negotiations were evidently[4] under way, but the Maghen David Board was procrastinating before making a decision, the effects of which it felt would have unfortunate repercussions. It is evident also[5] that there was slight unrest in the community over the closure of an old and venerated synagogue, though an overwhelming majority favored the continuation of the situation created since the erection of Maghen David.

Rahma Aaron wanted the synagogue repaired, refitted and furnished with gas connections, mattings, benches and punkhas (hand-manipulated fans) estimated at Rs. 600.00. Not only was she prepared to donate the cost of the Parochets (curtains over the Ark) but also to bear all these items of expenditure should it be beyond the means of the community.

The place should serve, in her opinion, a definite need. A Yeshiba was required by those who had come from Baghdad and other religious centers in the Middle East. No Hazan need be appointed, as the man in charge of the Yeshiba could conduct prayers occasionally for a small remuneration, though the services of a Shamash would obviously be needed.

Rahma Aaron backed up her contention with sentiment. She claimed that since the synagogue had been used by five generations of Jews in Calcutta, it had attained a special sanctity (an obvious exaggeration since the building had belonged to the community for a little over sixty years). Any apprehension about the state of disrepair representing a danger to life was discounted on the ground that "the world may go to ruin but the houses of God will not." Besides, the matter was pressing and urgent, she claimed, as she and others had learned from dreams and various mystical experiences, a sign that the departed spirits were on her side.

The Committee finally tendered its reply and agreed to her making use of the Neveh Shalome building on the following four conditions:

1. Neveh Shalome should not be opened as a synagogue, that is, a fixed place of worship, for the congregation. Rather, it should be used only as a Yeshiba; but those who studied there might worship in the premises during the day time only.
2. The Board of Management of the Maghen David Synagogue would not be involved in the expenses of the Yeshiba but would superintend it generally.

3. The Board of Management of Maghen David Synagogue would not be responsible for any repairs, which must be undertaken by the applicant.

4. Should such repairs and plans for administering the Yeshiba be agreed upon, the Maghen David Board must give their prior approval.

The implications of these prerequisites were that, without being directly responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the Yeshiba, the broad policy was to be laid down by the Maghen David Board and it expected regular reports of the running of the new venture. There appears to have been a further provisio that the place was to be used for prayer on weekdays only.[6]

It would seem that the Board erred in granting sanction for even a limited utilization of the old building. Composed of people essentially in the business world, the committee failed to examine the issue from all angles and to take into account the dissatisfaction, discontent and emotionalism of a small, though effervescing segment of the community who were obviously disturbed at the continued inactivity in the old house of worship. It succumbed to pressure, made itself vulnerable to the whims of a very small minority and opened the door to strife and divisiveness.

For the prospective "students" at the Yeshiba it was clearly a victory and they exploited it to the full. With the aid of Rahma Aaron, a pious woman and an easy prey in the hands of a misguided few,[7] they had the formal opening on Shabuoth night with Tikkoon (study of Torah). At the end of the vigil, the morning service was held, when three Torahs belonging to Rahma Aaron and which she intended to donate to synagogues in the Holy Land, were used. Two other scrolls were obtained from elsewhere. Having served their own ends they ignored the old lady who might very well have lodged her protest over the wrongful use of her good offices.[8] The group included Hakham Moses Mayohas and Simantob Obadiah Hakkohen (Hazan). Many were taken unawares. A few decided to worship in Neveh Shalome out of sentiment when they heard religious services were being held there; some went there out of curiosity. During the service, privileges were auctioned not only for that day but for the next, the second day of Shabuoth, as well as the whole month of Sivan. Services were also held on the second day of the Festival and a little later a collection of Rs. 600.00 was made for the purchase of another two Torahs — making seven in all. (That is the number required for Kol Nidre night.) Everyone gave willingly, again because of the sentiment associated with the old synagogue.

Joseph Ezra, eldest son of the late Elia Ezra, was on holiday in Darjeeling at the time. On his return a month later, he called a meeting of the Board of Administration,[9] a coordinating body with representatives of all the Jewish institutions in Calcutta, and some of those who worshipped in Neveh Shalome were also summoned to the meeting. The Board was determined to nip the trouble in the bud and to prevent the dispute from spreading.[10] The plea of the latter was that the poorer members of the community could not afford to compete with the rich who attended Maghen David and Bethel and thus were deprived of "privileges" or honors that had become the monopoly of the well-to-do. The consensus at the meeting was that Neveh Shalome should be closed forthwith.[11] But it was already too late. Support for the renewed use of Neveh Shalome was gaining momentum and it could not at that point be stopped. The Neveh Shalome party promised, however, to prevent discord from spreading. Meanwhile services continued on a regular basis but nothing untoward happened.[12] Thus ended the first phase of the dispute.

There were no overt incidents during the next two years of an uncomfortable truce, but undercurrents of discord continued. A "cold war" ensued between the Maghen David Board and its supporters on the one hand and the Neveh Shalome "sentimentalists" on the other, and it threatened to cut deep into the ranks of the growing community.

To arrest this divisive process, Moses Abeasis took it upon himself, during the summer of 1890, to lay the case before the Rabbis in the Holy Land. The judgment of Rabbi Jacob Saul Eliashar, Ab Beth Din, Jerusalem, in concurrence with Rabbi Raphael Isaac Israel, Chief Judge, and Rabbi Raphael Meir Panigal, Chief Rabbi, supported the contention of the Board of Maghen David. Their response was based on three considerations:

1. There was no unlawfulness in dismantling an old synagogue.
2. Though Rahma Jacob Aaron might have acted in good faith and had an interest in the Neveh Shalome by virtue of the active part played by her father or husband in its founding and maintenance, at the time of the building of Maghen David it was already under the administration of the community which stipulated that it should be closed in favor of Maghen David. In the circumstances, she might be deemed to have forfeited her right to any further say in the affairs of the older synagogue.

3. After the Torahs had been removed — an act symbolic of the departure of the congregation — and after a new synagogue had been built to replace the old one, the Neveh Shalome Synagogue (and the bricks whereof it was built) did not have any further sanctity. It was therefore lawful to exchange the old for the new. "Exchange or sale of a synagogue is permitted, as the sanctity of the building so exchanged or sold is transferred to the building for which it was exchanged or to the purchase money, and the old building becomes devoid of sanctity and can be used for lay purposes."

The rabbinic decree ended with a plea to the worshippers of Neveh Shalome to desist from holding services there, to Rahma Jacob Aaron to remove her Torahs from Neveh Shalome and to the community generally to refrain from strife, dissension and causeless hatred.

It recommended specifically that the building be used as a Talmud Torah, to which the Maghen David committee was agreeable. This proposal would not only restore peace, which was the supreme objective but would ensure instruction in Torah: "Go thy way by the footsteps of the flock and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tent" — applied by the Rabbis to the study of the Torah by children.

On June 29, 1890 a meeting of the Jewish Board of Administration decided to publicize the contents of the Rabbis' letter by issuing pamphlets and distributing them throughout the community, publishing the letter in the Judeo-Arabic paper *Maggid Mesharim* and writing to the owners of the Torahs being used in Neveh Shalome to have them removed. An appeal for concord and harmony was incorporated with a request for compliance with the Rabbis' directives.

There was mixed reaction to this circular, though quite a few thought an amicable settlement should be reached. In the third week of July that year, a letter was addressed to Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, Senior Minister of Maghen David, by one Abraham Elias Khadair, suggesting arbitration between Joseph Elia Ezra and Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah, who seemed to be the leader of the Neveh Shalome party. The basis of a compromise, he thought, could well be a further contribution of Rs. 161.00 to be made by Joseph Ezra in addition to Rs. 229.00 he was paying monthly in lieu of the communal income lost by the building of Maghen David.[13]

Since there was no clause in the proposed compromise regarding possible alternative uses of Neveh Shalome, it can be gathered that there was understandable acrimony and jealousy in some quarters because of the prominence of the Ezras in the life of the commu-

nity, a pre-eminence brought into focus and magnified by the grandeur of Maghen David. If more money could be extorted from the Ezras, at least part of the purpose of the agitators would have been attained and the Neveh Shalome party would save face in the adverse situation brought about by the Jerusalem communication. The Ezras, however, were not in the mood to be coerced or persuaded. The extent of their charity, official and private, far exceeded what they felt was their obligation. They could, of course, have accepted the additional commitment but it was not the time, nor was the communal atmosphere conducive to bargaining.

Having thus failed to reach an acceptable formula for a settlement and recognizing the need to redeem itself from an awkward predicament, the Neveh Shalome party officially revealed its negative response to the Board of Administration's notice. Using the services of Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena,[14] a brilliant preacher, teacher and author, recently arrived from Baghdad, they forwarded a letter to Jerusalem stating the Neveh Shalome side of the case and implying that the judgment publicized earlier was biased and took into consideration only the opposing point of view.

Before outlining the salient points of the Neveh Shalome contentions, it is worth noting that the Jerusalem Rabbinate, realizing the existence of deep-seated symptoms in this controversy, sent to Calcutta an emissary Hakham Joseph Mayohas, who had been a rabbinic visitor to Calcutta and Bombay in the summer of 1880. A brother of Moses Mayohas, a regular worshipper at Neveh Shalome, he was to attempt to iron out differences personally. Though the envoy met with humiliating experiences and his peace mission ended in partial failure, he succeeded in convincing most of the congregants of Neveh Shalome to desist from attending that synagogue. Whereas about thirty people would worship there when the synagogue was first reopened, barely a Minyan could now be found; and ironically, Maghen David's resources had to be depended upon to complete Neveh Shalome's quorum! The Rabbis also wrote a special letter to Moses Mayohas explaining that his attendance at Neveh Shalome was contributing to the increased friction and urged that it be discontinued. Moses Mayohas thereupon left for London, where he stayed three years. On his way, however, he visited Jerusalem and personally explained the issues involved to the Rabbinate there.

The case of the Neveh Shalome party was based on the following:

1. Elia Ezra built Maghen David on land belonging to Neveh Shalome but failed to replace the monthly community

income, lost thereby, claimed to be Rs. 750.00, by a suitable trust yielding an identical amount. His children continued to pay Rs. 229.00, which was considered inadequate. "As a sign and a witness" of the unfinished business between the synagogues "concerning the money of the poor," the Neveh Shalome has been reopened to serve as a permanent reminder and a weight on the consciences of the Ezras and the community.

2. Elia Ezra was alleged, on sentimental grounds, to have refrained from demolishing Neveh Shalome though he would have been within his rights to have done so, in keeping with his prior condition with the community. Despite the dilapidated condition of the building and despite the fact that it was actually blocking light and air from Maghen David, he had only had the unsafe portions demolished and had built a wall in order to widen the grounds of Maghen David Synagogue. He is further said to have acquiesced to the use of Neveh Shalome while he and his children and friends worshipped in Maghen David.

3. The Neveh Shalome was never completely closed for prayer. Only the lower floor was used as a store room for Matsa.

4. The congregants of Bethel used Neveh Shalome as a house of prayer for about a year when their synagogue was being extended and repaired in 1885. A place once consecrated cannot be used for common purposes.

5. An attempt was made by Moses Mayohas and E. M. D. Cohen after Maghen David was built to have Neveh Shalome demolished but strong opposition from the community, bordering on violence, made them abandon the scheme. Elia Ezra was said to have supported the opposing side.

6. The fact that Ezra had refrained from pulling down Neveh Shalome so that it might be done by the Municipality, and his rebuilding of the wall when a part of the old building had been demolished indicated that Ezra had not intended its demolition.

7. The poor who worshipped in Neveh Shalome did so because they could secure privileges at reasonable prices much below the level of prices at Maghen David and Bethel.

8. Insufficient accommodation, especially during festivals and High Holydays, forced some persons to Neveh Shalome.

The petition was signed by Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah and seven others who claimed oral delegation of authority from the

majority of the community. For corroboration the Beth Din was referred to Hakham Shalome Shikuri who had been present on the night of the reopening of Neveh Shalome.

The Rabbinate's response to this petition dated August 24, 1890 is not available, but it evidently was unfavorable to the Neveh Shalome party. The Maghen David contenders, however, sent another plea to Jerusalem to coincide with the Neveh Shalome letter and received a reply dated September 25, 1890 in which the Neveh Shalome advocates were squarely condemned. Here follows a synopsis of the rabbinic fiat signed by Jacob Saul Eliashar, Ab Beth Din, Joseph Raphael Uzziel and Raphael Meir Panigel, Chief Rabbi, Jerusalem.

After castigating the author of the letter (said to be Hakham Shelomo Twena) who should have known better for all his learning, and thanking Moses Mayohas for his personal report and enlightened attitude, the Rabbis claimed to be in a better position to judge the issues involved.

1. Of the signatories of the Neveh Shalome plaint, only one was a regular worshipper at Neveh Shalome; others belonged to Maghen David and Bethel. This revealed their motivation — a spirit of contention directed against Joseph Elia Ezra.
2. The majority of the signatories had not been in Calcutta at the time Maghen David was built. Hence they were disqualified as witnesses.
3. Maghen David was built in response to a need for a newer and better synagogue that grew more acute with the passage of the years. The community would have built one from its own resources had they been available. On the day Maghen David was dedicated everyone joyfully accepted it and were gratified at the munificence of Elia Ezra. Had the synagogue been built from communal funds the poor would have been deprived even of the Rs. 229.00. In other words, now the community could have its cake and eat it as well!
4. Rs. 229.00 represented a faithful evaluation of the rent hitherto received and the pledge was being honored.
5. The people who worshipped in Neveh Shalome on the opening night of Shabuoth were mistaken and ignorant of the legal aspect of the case. Some of these, like Moses Mayohas, regretted their action.
6. The proponents of the continued maintenance of Neveh Shalome Synagogue were told that it was not right to use Neveh Shalome as a regular place of worship. Further, the

Rabbinate retracted its recommendation to use it as a school, since it had become aware of the fact that Joseph Elia Ezra was maintaining a Talmud Torah for indigent boys at his sole cost. It was suggested that the guidance of the Board of Administration be followed in the matter of what to do with the old building. In order, however, to obviate the cause of contention, it should be demolished.

7. It should be proposed to Joseph Elia Ezra to create a trust fund yielding Rs. 229.00 per month to be applied to charity.

The decision concluded by advising the author of the Neveh Shalome letter to ask forgiveness of Elia Ezra by visiting his tomb, and of Rabbi Joseph Mayohas whom he had offended.

An independent, undated judgment of still another rabbi of the Holy Land, Rabbi Justice Borla, and corroborated by Nissim Barookh, is not being detailed since their conclusions are almost identical with the others we have set forth at length.

The considered opinions of the Rabbinate had little or no effect upon the litigants. Services continued in the Neveh Shalome Synagogue and altercations occurred occasionally. There is evidence that the community continued to be divided in 1893 when Moses Mayohas returned from London. In a document entitled "Moreh Be-Isbah" dated June 26, 1894, he traced the background of the division in the community, concluding with a plea for peace directed at Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena who was held responsible for supporting the Neveh Shalome dissenters and ignoring the injunction of the Rabbis.

This attempt at a settlement may be deemed to have brought to a close the second or "rabbinical" stage of the dispute.

The next group of events, lasting about seven years, may be referred to as the "Arakie" phase because it brings into focus a new, active leader of the Neveh Shalome party — Ezra Aaron Arakie, a young man of about twenty-seven, more militant than his predecessors and with a legal frame of mind. The Neveh Shalome Synagogue was represented up unto this point by a group of worshippers who assumed leadership by virtue of their wealth or prominence in the community at large or by the intensity of their opposition to the Ezras. In or about September, 1902, Ezra Arakie ceased to attend Maghen David Synagogue, presumably after differences arose with

its management. He joined Neveh Shalome and became its Honorary Secretary in January, 1903.[15]

While Arakie's appearance at the helm gave the party a new lease on life, it augured ill for the trend of events thus far confined within the Jewish community and Jewish courts. The issues turned from sentiment to rights and the contenders from businessmen to lawyers.

The first signs that the dispute was meandering into larger public notice and to the secular courts of the land became apparent when a solicitor's notice was served in May, 1903 by the Neveh Shalome group on Samuel Ezra Arakie, Honorary Secretary of Maghen David Synagogue and, ironically, uncle of the younger Arakie. Their blood relationship was exploited by the latter to the full as will be gathered from the enfolding story.

The material facts, as set forth in the letter, emphasized Neveh Shalome's right of ownership to the land on which Maghen David was built and, of course, to the property and site of Neveh Shalome Synagogue. Both sites had been purchased, it was stated, out of communal funds over a period of about fifty years in four stages, the conveyance on each occasion being in the names of successive trustees for the Neveh Shalome Synagogue. The last trustee was David Joseph Ezra who died in 1882, grandfather of Joseph Ezra, President of the Board of Manhigim from 1886 to 1916. The payment of Rs. 229.00 per month by Elia Ezra was a tacit acknowledgment of a "debt" he owed the community. In effect, it was claimed that since Neveh Shalome was the first synagogue in Calcutta, it became heir to the property acquired in the name of the community and the Maghen David Board had encroached on the rights of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue.

The fact that during the lifetime of Elia Ezra it was contemplated to utilize the old synagogue building as a Yeshiba, was by no means inconsistent with, nor did it operate as an abandonment of, its original function as a synagogue. Much less could such a project, even though it had been carried out, operate to divest the community of its property, of its rights and interests in the premises, or to vest it in any other institution.

The Maghen David Board claimed, however, that with the erection of the newer synagogue and the complete closure of the old one, the community had moved to Maghen David which, ipso facto, acquired the ownership of the immovable assets of the Neveh Shalome. It is clear, therefore, that the problems arose from the adoption of a new name by Maghen David in unique circumstances

and also of the contiguity of the two buildings. It is doubtful if this latest trend involving ownership would have appeared had the name Neveh Shalome been retained or if the new synagogue would have been built in another neighborhood.

In consonance with its plea of rightful ownership the Neveh Shalome Board demanded, inter alia, access to and inspection of the title deeds relating to the old synagogue's properties, appointment of new trustees in succession to David Joseph Ezra, recognition of the Neveh Shalome Board by the lessees of the leased portions of the Neveh Shalome building and particulars of all leases and tenancies granted by the Board of the Maghen David, as well as an account of the payment of Rs. 229.00 by the Ezras and the application thereof.

The titled deeds being in the possession of Joseph Ezra, the Maghen David party held the trump card. It claimed also that there was an automatic transfer of administrative and legal authority from Neveh Shalome to Maghen David, or rather the two institutions were one and the same. Be this as it may, the Maghen David Board refused to concede or relinquish its rights born of the unbroken historical *continuity* while the Neveh Shalome Board never ceased pressing its cause of historical *originality*. The discord continued to simmer with spasmodic precipitation.

One such "fall out" took place in 1907–08. The Neveh Shalome building consisted of a prayer hall on the first floor (above the ground); below it were rooms used for storage of Matsa-making implements and to house the subordinate staff of both synagogues. In September, 1907, Ezra Arakie wrote to the Maghen David Board to vacate the lower floor in order that the Neveh Shalome might repair the entire building, such decision being a mandate from a general meeting of members of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue. The Honorary Secretary of Maghen David, Samuel E. Arakie, replying the same day without consulting his Board and obviously under pressure from his nephew, Ezra Arakie, stated that he could not make a unilateral decision but, since the matter was urgent, he was prepared to vacate the room in question upon a written undertaking that it would be restored upon conclusion of the repairs. During the next month the proposal was not drawn to the attention of the Maghen David Board. Instead, at the end of it, Ezra Arakie agreed in writing to restore the two rooms in question but added a proviso — an exchange of the rooms then occupied by the Maghen David for others in another part of the building on the ground that extensive alterations and modifications affecting the Ark room and the staircase were envisaged.

A more prudent decision than had been suggested by Samuel Arakie emerged from a meeting of the Maghen David Board, which did not meet till January, 1908. Counsel's opinion was to be sought and repairs, if undertaken at all, were to be under the supervision of Maghen David Synagogue. Legal advice recommended circumspection, and no written reply was issued by Maghen David Board, obviously apprehensive of the legal effects of allowing Neveh Shalome to execute the repairs and unwilling to commit itself formally. They were apparently not prepared to spend any money to repair the top floor, which was being used as a prayer hall against their will. A verbal arrangement between the two parties for the exchange of the rooms seems to have been agreed upon,[16] but such agreement was never given effect to. Finally, the repairs of the portion occupied by it were undertaken by Maghen David.

A thaw in the contentiousness, now two decades old, came as a result of two moves made by the Maghen David group. In January, 1910, a public meeting sponsored by them was held and attended by Ezra Arakie and I. J. Cohen representing Neveh Shalome, for the purpose of appointing seven new trustees for the properties of Neveh Shalome. Ezra Arakie proposed the appointment of six trustees, two from each of the three synagogues. It was not known, however, if the original deed of trust gave Joseph Ezra, as grandson of the last trustee, the power to appoint new trustees. But there were no further developments in this direction. The fact that the disputants came together justified hopes of an amicable settlement.

A further proposal emanating from the Maghen David side in July, 1910 was the sale of the estate of Neveh Shalome to the Ezras on the understanding that the proceeds would be applied to building of another synagogue to be called Neveh Shalome in the central part of the city where Jews were moving, and to donate the balance to the Jewish Charitable Fund for the benefit of the local Jewish poor in lieu of the Rs. 229.00 per month paid by the Ezras. It is interesting that, though members of the Neveh Shalome committee were at variance concerning this proposal, Ezra Arakie and J. S. Duke favored its acceptance provided a satisfactory price was determined by the community. E. S. Levy, the President and A. S. Abraham were opposed and a Mr. Raymond non-committal.

An alternative, and to them a more judicious suggestion, was adopted by members of the Neveh Shalome committee, that the synagogue be pulled down and rebuilt on the same site with available funds and further donations, especially from Mrs. Seemah

Ezekiel, a keen and affluent supporter of the Neveh Shalome party. With the adoption of this proposal for unilateral action, the seeds of a complete rift from Maghen David were being sown.

Three days after this meeting a final attempt was made to retrieve a deteriorating state of affairs — an announcement of a general meeting of the community on the neutral grounds of Bethel Synagogue on July 17, 1910 to discuss the future of Neveh Shalome Synagogue.

Seventy people were present, notably, three members of Neveh Shalome committee, Ezra Arakie, J. S. Duke, and A. S. Abraham; conspicuous by his absence was E. S. Levy, the President. Worthy of mention also is a directive from the Chair that the speakers might use English or Arabic so as not to embarrass or hinder from participating in the discussion those whose knowledge of spoken English was poor.

E. M. D. Cohen, a prime mover of the conference and Senior Minister of Maghen David Synagogue, was voted to the Chair. He specified three possible steps the meeting might take: build Neveh Shalome on its original site, or in another neighborhood or turn it into a Talmud Torah. Speaking for himself in Arabic so that all present could understand, he stressed the necessity of the existence of a synagogue in the southern part of the city near Chowringhee. We might gauge his prescience when we consider that about three and a half decades later a prayer hall was instituted there in answer to the needs of those who had moved to that section of the city and did not wish to ride to synagogue on Sabbath.

As this meeting was an historic one and had enduring effects on the Jewish community of Calcutta, we describe the proceedings more elaborately.

I. J. Cohen moved that the Neveh Shalome Synagogue be rebuilt on its existing site and not elsewhere. A. S. Abraham, true to the stand he took at the Neveh Shalome Board meeting, seconded the motion supported by Siman-Tob Obadiah Cohen and Benjamin Jacob Elias. Meyer Ezra Musleah, a traditionalist for whom the retention of Neveh Shalome on its original site meant reliving the past which was a part of him, spoke in favor of the motion.

Mordecai A. Arakie proposed the building of a Talmud Torah on the site of Neveh Shalome since Maghen David and Bethel were sufficient to accommodate the Jewish community. Abraham Joseph seconded the proposal.

J. S. Duke, a member of Neveh Shalome Board, wishing to safeguard its rights, moved an amendment to Mordecai Arakie's mo-

tion. The building of the school should be subject to the appointment of trustees to the estate of Neveh Shalome Synagogue. Ezra Arakie who had taken charge of the Talmud Torah institution and was looking for permanent buildings, therefore supported the amendment, but the Chair ruled the amendment out of order. We may conjecture that E. M. D. Cohen's ruling was a reflection of the opposition of Joseph Ezra to the appointment of trustees. Ezra had made England his home but was obviously in touch with the trend and terms of the settlement if there was to be one.

The meeting was honored by the active participation of Prof. W. W. Haffkine, the famous scientist. He stated that there were two considerations in everyone's mind — one concerning the immediate future and the other geared to the longer term. The former included the question of the payments to the poor by the Ezras and of personal animosities between the members of the two synagogues. The latter was the building of a permanent synagogue on its original site, which was unreasonable and could be a permanent cause of rivalry and friction. Moving an amendment to I. J. Cohen's motion concerning re-building the synagogue on its original site, he proposed that one of three options be adopted:

1. The present building be repaired.
2. A small prayer house, a Beth Hamidrash, be preserved as an adjunct to the Maghen David Synagogue.
3. A new synagogue be rebuilt on the same site approximating in size to Maghen David Synagogue — he was personally opposed to this alternative.

The motion seemed too involved and was probably not understood by most people present so it was not seconded and allowed to drop.

Mordecai Arakie's proposal was not favored when put to the vote. I. J. Cohen's motion, however, received overwhelming support and was adopted.

Viewed objectively, the decision erred in its short-sightedness. E. M. D. Cohen's proposal to erect a synagogue in the southern part of the city surprisingly was not even discussed as, presumably, it was beyond the members to envisage the value of having a synagogue in another vicinity. It saw too far into the future; those present were obviously prisoners of the past. Only events over the next thirty years vindicated the stand he took. Had his recommendation been implemented the community would have been saved extended and costly litigation and would have had a synagogue instead of only a prayer hall in an area that later developed swiftly.

The meeting lapsed further in its failure to appoint a community

agency to implement the decision to rebuild the synagogue. In the absence of any firm mandate, the Neveh Shalome committee took the onus of reconstruction upon itself and set about to raise funds. A philanthropist of no mean standing was found in Mrs. Seemah Ezekiel who agreed to donate a third of the total costs not exceeding Rs. 15,000.00, besides the Rs. 3000.00 already contributed, *provided* that the Sepher Torah dedicated to the memory of her father-in-law, Judah Ezekiel, would serve as Sepher Kol Nidre in consideration of a further annual donation of Rs. 150.00 during the lifetimes of herself and her daughter, and that the balance of the money be raised from the community. The stage was thus set for unilateral action by the Neveh Shalome Board, not only taking the administration of Neveh Shalome out of the hands of the Maghen David Board but also removing it from the competence of the community as such. The new synagogue, costing Rs. 40,000.00, was ready by the end of 1911 and was dedicated in February the following year. Thus we arrive at another turning point in the dispute between the synagogues which we might call "the new synagogue phase" — the most bitter and far-reaching of all.

The Board of Maghen David must have reconciled itself to the fact that it was futile to contest any longer the title to the Neveh Shalome property. After the reconstruction of the new synagogue building it did not raise any objection to services being held on the top floor. Tacit consent by some members of Maghen David Synagogue present at the general meeting of the community of July 17, 1910 was given as a result of the landslide vote. E. M. D. Cohen, Minister of Maghen David, who presided, had to acquiesce to overwhelming public opinion.

This phase of the dispute, however, centers around the ownership of the rooms (called godowns) used for storage purposes.[17] In the old building there were eight godowns in all, three of which were occupied by the subordinate staff of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue before Maghen David was built and since continued to be used by the Maghen David sub-staff. One was used by the Burial Society (Oseh Haised) to store funeral requisites, one as an office for that body's superintendent, two by the Matsa Board for the storage of wheat and Matsa, and one for storing wine, oil and candles. So long as the old building was standing the godowns were in the sole possession of the Maghen David Board.

The new synagogue building was constructed on two levels, probably in deference to the wishes of the Board of Maghen David that

claimed an oral agreement with the Neveh Shalome Board. According to this, the upper floor was to be a synagogue under the aegis of the latter and the lower level with one large room replacing the earlier eight, was to be administered by the Maghen David. This contention was later denied by the Neveh Shalome but corroborated by the contractor, who declared that he had built all the entrances except one — that of the large, single godown on the side of Maghen David so as to be easily accessible from its grounds. Obviously the Board of Neveh Shalome acquiesced to the building of those entrances in that manner and the Maghen David Board was considered to have had undisputed possession. Neveh Shalome was even allowed to encroach upon the courtyard of Maghen David Synagogue in order to have a wider building.[18]

Be that as it may, the reader will question the discretion and propriety of maintaining the two levels in the new building which perpetuated instead of obviated the divergences and sources of dissension. Again, because of faulty planning and an unwillingness to deviate from the groove of customary and established practice, the two parties found themselves on opposite sides in a secular court of justice where the wrangle was exposed and decided after dragging on for over three years.

To facilitate the production of Matsa for the community, it was considered advisable to set up a committee representing all three synagogues, rather than entrust its administration to any one of these synagogues. At a general meeting of the Jewish community held on January 14, 1912, it was resolved to constitute such a Board and delegated two persons from each synagogue Board to make up its membership thus — Samuel E. Arakie and Hilali E. Solomon from Maghen David, B. Meyer and David A. David from Bethel and E. S. Levy and Ezra A. Arakie from Neveh Shalome Synagogue. The new large godown was partitioned on the western side to the extent of one third of the total cubic capacity and utilized by the Matsa Board. Samuel E. Arakie's appointment as Honorary Secretary of the Matsa Board had disastrous consequences upon future events, not because of doubts about his personal integrity, which was in fact undeniable, but because of his family relationship with the more assertive Ezra Arakie, Honorary Secretary of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, alluded to above. Despite the agreement that gave Maghen David the right of ownership of the rooms on the lower story, the Neveh Shalome Board demanded rent from the newly-constituted Matsa Board for the use and occupancy of that godown. From correspondence between Samuel and Ezra Arakie during January and February, 1912 it might

be deduced that pressure was brought to bear by the nephew on the uncle to consent to this arrangement. Over the objections of Maghen David's representatives, the Matsa Board paid rents to Neveh Shalome for ten months in advance for 1912.

Soon after, Samuel E. Arakie resigned and was replaced as Secretary of the Maghen David Synagogue by I. J. Cohen, an ex-member of Neveh Shalome Synagogue and who later served as Honorary Magistrate in the Calcutta Small Causes Court. (Samuel Arakie resigned also as Secretary of the Matsa Board and he was succeeded there by Hilali E. Solomon). More and more legally minded people were joining the fray and the stage was being set for a public showdown. The Maghen David Board now reopened the controversial issue of the ownership of the land and demanded rent from the Matsa Board. Placed in an awkward position, the Matsa Board extracted an indemnity from the Neveh Shalome Board that, in the event of its being obliged, as a result of legal action, to pay the rents to Maghen David, the amounts would be refunded by Neveh Shalome.

The Matsa Board remained in occupation for twenty-two months till December 4, 1913. When vacant possession was given to Neveh Shalome Synagogue for about a year and a half, the rents had actually been paid to that synagogue. Acting on legal advice, the Maghen David party, seeing the open godown on December 6, took possession by putting in some of its furniture. This action was taken by its non-Jewish substaff on the Sabbath! Police proceedings ensued, but Neveh Shalome's application for obtaining possession was dismissed. The western godown had two locks — one belonging to each of the opposing parties, while the eastern godown had one lock of which the contending parties had duplicate keys.

The final scene of this unseemly sequence of events was staged in the High Court of Judicature at Fort William, the highest court in the province of Bengal. Displeased with the decree of the lower court, the Neveh Shalome party advanced its contentions at the High Court in April, 1914 and pleaded for exclusive possession of the godowns under Section 9 of the Specific Relief Act. The plaintiffs, however, were lukewarm about following up their suit, which dragged on for two years.

The Maghen David party was becoming impatient. In April, 1916 it filed suit chiefly for declaration of title to the eastern and western godowns of the reconstructed Neveh Shalome Synagogue and for an injunction restraining the Neveh Shalome party from interfering with their peaceful possession of them. The plaint was modified later to include claim to a godown in the south east corner of the

Neveh Shalome building. The suit was heard in August, 1916. Several witnesses on both sides were examined, the chief of whom was Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. His deposition amounted to about seventy-five typewritten pages and may well have turned the tide in favor of his synagogue. Being the great-grandson of the original Jewish settler in Calcutta, Shalome Cohen, and the grandson of Moses Simon Dwek Cohen, the first president of the newly-constituted community in 1825, he possessed their diaries from which he culled many facts of the early days. E. M. D. Cohen had dominated the Calcutta Jewish scene for forty years before giving evidence and, therefore, had much first-hand information relating to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. From his newspaper *Paerah* he extracted many articles about the happenings in the 1880's. His revealing earnestness, forthright attitude and imposing personality were likely to impress any presiding judge favorably.

And so it proved. For several reasons judgment took a year to deliver. First, several attempts at reconciliation were made by independent persons of the Jewish community, the opposing lawyers and even the judges, but without success. Yet the terms of an amicable settlement were actually announced in court on December 7, 1916 and the judge himself dictated the terms which were presumably accepted by both parties. However, the Neveh Shalome party later retracted on the ground that the congregation they represented did not approve of the settlement; it is interesting to examine the conditions of the attempted arrangement.

The ground on which the respective synagogues stood was to be the property of the respective synagogues, held in trust by their Boards of Management.

Trustees were to be appointed for each of the two Trusts. Joseph E. D. J. Ezra having died in 1916, his half brother David was to be trustee for the Maghen David trust. The title of the land on the west and east sides of the latter synagogue, vested in the Ezras privately, was to be conveyed in favor of the Maghen David Synagogue. The Neveh Shalome trustee was to be announced on two successive Saturdays.

In addition to the property plot of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, a further sum of Rs. 25,000.00 was to be paid by the Ezras as a voluntary donation to the Neveh Shalome Trust Fund and utilized for the Neveh Shalome congregation. Rs. 229.00 was to continue being distributed by the Maghen David Board.

Each side would enjoy exclusive use and possession of its own land and buildings without interference from the other side.

Undertakings regarding proper provision of light and air would be given by both sides. Restrictions of passage and of the building of a wall on the south east of Neveh Shalome were outlined.

The projected settlement never came about. Because of other conciliatory moves and the judge's ill-health, judgment was not delivered till May 16, 1917; this was in favor of Maghen David Synagogue. The congregation of that synagogue was recognized as a continuation of the old Neveh Shalome and the Board of Maghen David had therefore the same beneficial proprietory rights as its predecessor had over Neveh Shalome. A fluctuating body of persons is not incapable of owning property. Proprietory right was not lost by Maghen David by the possession of the Matsa Board or by the fact that for some time a number of people, and later a congregation, held services on the top floor of the reconstructed building.

The most significant remark made by the presiding judge reflected his opinion on the attitude of the Neveh Shalome party. "I do not think the Court can be called upon to decide as to whether the new congregation have any right to be called the 'Neveh Shalome.' All I can say it has not justified its name 'The Abode of Peace!' "

The land of the eastern and western godowns was considered Trust property, that the "cestui que" trusts were the present congregation of Maghen David, which was the old congregation of Neveh Shalome and that the congregation was entitled to its possession. The keys were directed to be made over to the Maghen David Board which was to have peaceful occupation.

Thus ended a sad and unbecoming chapter involving a reputable community and two houses of worship. The dispute had dragged on for about three decades and had split the community. Yet it might have been settled on more than one occasion, as indicated above; far-sighted and imaginative solutions were rejected out of hand — sometimes without discussion. With the longer perspective given by the passage of time, and the calm judgment that comes long after passions have cooled we may conclude that far more than any principles, the clash was the result of personal rivalries and a pettiness that has not been characteristic only of the Calcutta community.

The latter stages of the court action received much publicity and unfavorable comment in the general press. The Jewish community remained divided for many years; the congregation of Neveh Shalome was never large and in the later years of Ezra Arakie's life he had to depend for a Minyan on the compulsory attendance of the boys

of the Elias Meyer Free School. The psychological impact of the unfavorable decision on Ezra Arakie made him more determined to preserve his independence of Maghen David and sent him more into isolation. *His* version of the case was summarized in an inscription put up at the entrance to the Neveh Shalome Synagogue. It is obviously partisan and particularly omitted the 1917 Judgment. Arakie preferred to describe the conclusion of the disputes as a settlement which, in fact, came later, perhaps in 1918 as claimed by him. Though the lawsuit ended in a decision in favor of Maghen David, David E. D. J. Ezra (later Sir David Ezra), who succeeded his brother Joseph as President of that synagogue, showed great magnanimity by consenting to give the title of the newly-constructed Neveh Shalome building and the land on which it stood to the Board of Neveh Shalome, it being agreed as well that the property of Maghen David was to be vested in Sir David under a declaration of trust with power to appoint other trustees. In addition, the trust property of Neveh Shalome consisted of a contribution of Rs. 25,000.00 for the use of the congregation of Neveh Shalome made by Sir David. Rs. 229.00 continued being distributed to the poor every month. Thus, the main provisions of the December, 1916 recommendations of the High Court emerged as the final resolution of the strife. They could not now be implemented, however, without the graciousness of Sir David Ezra.

Here follows the inscription:

> This tablet is erected by the members of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue to perpetuate the following facts:
>
> On the site of this building and its adjoining land to the south stood the former building of the original and only synagogue in Calcutta which was acquired in the joint names of Ezekiel Musleah, Benjamin Abraham[19] and Moses Dwek Cohen in 1825 and shortly after consecrated and named The Neveh Shalome Synagogue.
>
> In 1840 land to the west of the synagogue building was acquired from the synagogue funds by its members in the name of Moses Dwek Cohen as Trustee.
>
> In 1844 further land to the south of the synagogue building was purchased out of the synagogue funds in the names of the late Ezekiel Judah Moses Moses,[20] David Aaron Gubbay and David Ezra as Trustees.
>
> In 1872–73 a further plot to the west of the last acquired land was purchased by David Ezra, the sole surviving Trustee and his son Elias Ezra in their own names out of the sale pro-

ceeds of a portion of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue land acquired by the Corporation for the widening of Canning Street.

In 1882 Elias Ezra undertook to rebuild the Neveh Shalome Synagogue at his own expense. In September, 1884 the new building which is erected on the Neveh Shalome Synagogue land to the south was opened and consecrated under the name of Maghen David Synagogue. This change of name met with strong disapproval on the part of many of the Congregation who declined to recognize such synagogue as the successor of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue and such dissentients continued to worship in the original synagogue.

In June, 1910 the old building which was very dilapidated was dismantled. On 16th May, 1911 the foundation stone of this building was laid by the late Mrs. Seemah Joseph Jacob Judah Ezekiel who generously contributed the sum of Rs. 20,000.00 towards its costs. A further sum of Rs. 10,000.00 was kindly given by the late Lady Rachel Jacob Sassoon and the sum of Rs. 2,500.00 by Mr. Elias Meyer, the Hony. President of the synagogue. The remainder of the expenses for the internal fittings of the Synagogue and amounting to Rs. 7,500.00 was contributed out of the Synagogue funds. The present building was completed and consecrated on Sunday 4th March, 1912.

Disputes between this synagogue and Maghen David Synagogue culminated in legal proceedings in the High Court which were subsequently settled and the terms of such settlement were recorded in the High Court, Calcutta, on the 18th June, 1918 under which the Maghen David Synagogue recognised the title of this synagogue to its buildings and land. Towards the costs of litigation amounting to Rs. 27,000.00 Miss Rebecca Muzzletob Ezekiel paid Rs. 18,000.00 and the synagogue funds contributed the balance. Miss R. M. Ezekiel kindly contributed a further sum of Rs. 5,000.00 for improvements of the synagogue.

Friday 1 Kislev 5681
Corresponding with
12 November 1920.

Ezra Aaron Arakie
President
Neveh Shalome Synagogue.

## *Chapter 11*

## MAGHEN ABOTH AND SHAARE RASONE SYNAGOGUES

In the midst of the inter-synagogue conflict between Neveh Shalome and Maghen David, of which Bethel was a silent observer, a room in a private residence became the venue for religious services. "Such gatherings often developed into permanent institutions and private congregational worship . . . effectively supplemented that offered by the synagogue."[1]

Jews have frequently preferred small neighborhood houses of worship to large central synagogues. For this there were many motivating factors. It may have been to ensure the leadership of someone who could not be or was not active in an established house of worship. Such situations occurred in the early Hassidic movement in Europe when each leader boasted of a synagogue of his own.

At the same time, it may have started to cater for a particular social group that was not at ease in the larger synagogues, or to provide congregants with the facility of worshipping in a neighborhood hall because of the distance from the synagogue; or, dissatisfaction with the prevailing administration may have provided the impetus.

One or more of these reasons may have accounted for the origin of services held at the home of Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena at 10 Lower Chitpur Road, south of the Jewish quarter. But it is difficult to come to any definite conclusion. When he arrived in Calcutta he worshipped at Maghen David; with the reopening of the old Neveh Shalome, however, he began attending there. Maghen David might have had reservations about the length of his sermons; they might have requested him to shorten or condense them. The strictures imposed by the Jerusalem rabbinate in the inter-synagogue conflict might have influenced him to dissociate himself from the Neveh Shalome party. Finding both synagogues unsuited to his needs and feeling that Bethel might present the same problems as Maghen David, he chose private congregational worship.

A dynamic personality who wanted the affairs of the synagogue run his own way with a liberty to express himself as he liked, he started conducting daily and Sabbath services in his own home in

1893. Being a popular preacher, and friendly to all who sought his advice, he attracted a congregation of people from all walks of life, young and old. The poorer class, conscious of a general shabbiness of attire and unable to pay for privileges auctioned at high prices at the large synagogues, formed the vast majority. At the outset, gas lamps were used on the premises and it was not until electricity was installed by the benevolence of the worshippers, and the old excess furniture from the Neveh Shalome Synagogue introduced, that the congregants prayed in comparative comfort. The generosity of friends was responsible also for improvements in the structure of the building which housed the prayer hall. Seeing that there were three other synagogues in the city at the time, the creation of an additional venue for public prayer may be regarded as an indication that freedom of religious expression could not be stifled. The preacher yielded to his flair for discourse; the congregants were stimulated by his inspiring messages.

Those who heard his discourses recalled his resonant, clear-throated voice that facilitated forceful delivery. He was endowed with talents of lucid, vivid and penetrating presentation of his subject-matter. Every Sabbath before the afternoon service he would select a portion of the Talmud and comment on and interpret it with originality unequalled in that part of the world. For adult Calcutta Jews it was the only source of religious education available. His oration lasted for about two hours, but not at the expense of boredom to his listeners. On the contrary, for them it was an enlightening experience that could be stopped only by the arrival of the time of prayer. Religious observances were beautified and made more meaningful by his masterly interpretation and fluent expounding of the law. He was known never to have prepared any of his addresses but would just speak to his audience with simple and natural confidence.

His initial attempt was so successful he continued using his home as a prayer hall even after he moved to 25 Blackburn Lane in the middle of the poorer Jewish quarter, about a half a mile from his previous residence.

He enjoyed a substantial measure of public backing. Gifts of Torahs were made by individuals and by the two synagogues, Bethel and Maghen David, against which no animosity lingered. One source [2] claims that Hakham Shelmo received three Torahs from a disbanded Ashkenazi congregation, but this fact is not substantiated, nor is there any proof of the existence of such a place of worship.

Names of individual leaders were associated with the houses of prayer they inaugurated. This one was known popularly as "Hak-

ham Shelomo's House." During his lifetime it was well looked after and attended; and a Gabai was appointed in the person of Abraham Shalome Joseph Hyeem Einy.[3] Voluntary donations from benefactors and wealthy visitors were its mainstay. Privileges were auctioned, but at nominal prices, a fraction of that prevailing at other synagogues. Funds were even raised for the Holy Land on Purim and the eve of Kippur.

After the founder's death in 1913, the synagogue was formally named "Maghen Aboth" and two of his elder sons, Moses Hyeem and Joseph David, shared in the conduct of services and administration. Poverty continued to plague his family which did not now enjoy the same degree of support. Only two years later they fell into arrears of rent. It was through the efforts of Sillman Yehuda, well-known for his acts of kindness and charity, that they were helped to liquidate the debts. The institution was thereby given a new lease on life.[4]

Twenty years later, back rents had again accumulated, this time to the tune of Rs. 4,000.00 extending over a period of several years. Another benefactor came forward to wipe off this debt, Sassoon Judah (also known as Dick Hannah, at one time of Singapore), great grandson of Ezekiel Judah, co-founder of Bethel Synagogue. In addition, he undertook to bear the entire expense of repairs and renovations.[5]

It is reasonable to assume that the prayer hall was given an official designation as protection against ejectment suits brought against the Twena family. An adjoining building was occupied by a mosque whose worshippers would only be too glad to get rid of a place of Jewish worship next door. A private house holding services could be removed if the building were officially acquired for the mosque; with religious status, however, the synagogue had just as much right to be there as had the mosque, rent arrears notwithstanding.

The next crisis was reached in 1940 when the owner, a Moslem lady, brought suit for recovery of five years' rent. The mosque also wanted to extend its property. On this occasion it was Isaac Ezekiel Mordecai who came forward to save the synagogue. An affable, soft-spoken individual, with deep religious feelings, he went the rounds on a personal door-to-door campaign, trying to persuade the more affluent to give towards the cause; he was assisted in no mean measure by Robin Gubbay and Rahma Moses, on the teaching staff of the Jewish Girls' School. They first obtained the support and patronage of the leading members of the Jewish community, Sir David and Lady Ezra.[6] As a result of a general meeting of the Jewish community in

February, 1941, a fund-raising committee was appointed with Lady Ezra as President, Saleh J. Nawe, Secretary, Ralph Arakie, Treasurer and I.E. Mordecai, Sassoon J. Cohen, Abdullah Sion Lelah, Meyer Ezekiel, and Moses Linyado, members. Their stubborn efforts netted a little over Rs. 16,000.00, Rs. 10,000.00 short of the amount demanded by the owner for an outright sale.

When all was nearly lost, Benjamin Nissim Elias, industrialist and philanthropist, came to the rescue by pledging to pay the balance, whatever it be, to effect the purchase, provided that the institution, when repaired and renovated, be named for his uncle, Jacob Benjamin Elias, and that two of his nominees would be included on the Board. He paid the entire sum amounting to Rs. 26,500.00. With the idea of an institution dedicated to rabbinic study, its name emerged as "Maghen Aboth Yeshibath Jacob Benjamin Elia." It was intended also to set up a home for the aged, but neither the Yeshiba nor the Home materialized. The synagogue, however, was redeemed and the sum subscribed by the Jewish community formed the nucleus of a trust fund for the synagogue. A firm guideline adopted by the committee was that members of the Twena family would be allowed residence in a part of the premises as heretofore.

The interim committee held office till August, 1945 when another general meeting appointed a permanent committee of five members — Ezra N. B. Musleah, Isaac E. Mordecai, Saleh J. Nawe, Abraham Ezekiel and Aaron Morris. Jacob B. Elias and Isaac S. Musleah were Elias family nominees. Jacob B. Elias was later elected President; Ezra N. B. Musleah, Honorary Secretary and Isaac S. Musleah, Honorary Treasurer. The institution was put on a democratic footing by the adoption the same year of a constitution.

The committee had little to do above opposing the intransigence of the Twenas, who could scarcely be reconciled to communal administration of the affairs of a place over which they were once in full control. At the time of the adoption of the constitution only four of a large family of the founder were residing at the premises — the wife of Hakham Shelomo (who died the following year), his son, Jacob Sassoon (died 1954) and two daughters, Lily and Mozelle.

The synagogue was saved in time to answer the religious needs of Burmese Jewish refugees who were dislodged from their homes when Burma was occupied by the Japanese in 1942. In fact, after the death of the founder's sons, Joseph David that year and Moses Hyeem the next, the ministership passed on to the Hazan of the Rangoon synagogue, Gabriel Solomon, who happened to be Hakham Shelomo's brother-in-law.

Emigration took its toll on the synagogue. When Gabriel left for the United States a few years later, Menasseh Abada Abraham was appointed. But he also left for Israel after serving about ten years. Meantime, attendance became so sparse, a Minyan was difficult to come by; and by 1964 the synagogue was functioning only irregularly.

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The old Jewish quarter, in the western part of the city, bounded by Old China Bazar Street, Sukeas Lane, Lower Chitpore Road, Canning Street, and in which were located three synagogues, gradually lost its attraction for an increasing number of the community.[7] After World War I trickles of Jews were moving toward the center of the city and further south, a more comfortable area, with better homes. By the end of the third decade of the present century, a sizable portion of the Jewish community resided there—a row of houses leading from Old Court House to Canning Street, hitherto called the Howrah Bridge Extension and later named Brabourne Road for a Governor of Bengal. Soon thereafter no Jew would be living in the neighborhood of the synagogues, which had become a business center.

Not many people living in the thirties recalled the historic meeting on July 17, 1910, presided over by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, to consider the future of the old Neveh Shalome Synagogue.[8] Rev. Cohen's was the lone voice that recommended that the synagogue be rebuilt in a southern neighborhood where Jews tended to relocate. But the more conservative won the day and the synagogue was rebuilt on its original site. Now with an increasing concentration in the new locale, the need for a house of worship was felt keenly. Many had to ride to synagogue in the older neighborhood despite their religious scruples and sensitivities against the use of the automobile on holy days. No philanthropist was eager or willing to make substantial contributions to defray the cost of a new synagogue. Perhaps three synagogues and a prayer hall were considered adequate to serve the then numerically steady community. A feeling expressed at this time in jest reflected the sober opinion of many people. "If only each brick and pillar of Maghen David Synagogue could be dismantled and re-assembled in the southern section of the city!" said Hilali Solomon. Maghen David had become superfluous in that location but it was too majestic to be deserted. A southern venue was needed but lacked a wealthy sponsor.

Hilali's father, Elias Hyeem, a leading member of the community

and particularly pious, who would attend Maghen David Synagogue twice daily, suffered a stroke in 1928 and was confined to his home in Park Street. That Rosh Hashanah and Kippur as well as the following year prayers were conducted there by Alroy Judah Leveroy for the benefit of his partially paralyzed father-in-law. Friends made up the Minyan.

About the same time people living in the southern neighborhood suffered bereavements — Ernest Solomon and Sunny Ezra. For them it was a trying experience to travel about two miles to synagogue twice a day. Then in August, 1930, Leveroy lost his mother and the precedent of the High Holyday services of 1928–29 was tried on a daily basis at 44 Park Street, initially only in the morning and later in the evening as well. Two rooms were converted into a prayer hall and five Torahs gotten from Maghen David Synagogue were installed in an Ark.

Soon thereafter Joseph E. Gubbay, a flourishing merchant, ceased attending Maghen David Synagogue following a feud with its administrative officers. He now gave his active support and put his full weight behind the prayer hall on Park Street which hitherto he had been unwilling to do. Rivalry has often been the cause of communal cleavage; here, however, Gubbay's severing connections with Maghen David Synagogue produced a substantial supporter for a pressing need of a growing section of the community. He enlisted the support of a business associate, David Ezekiel, who became Gubbay's spokesman. Gubbay was ready and willing to buy the property which housed the prayer hall. He had plans to erect a building which would contain not only a place for public prayer but an institution for the aged and needy. Rs. 5,000.00 was paid as earnest money but the transaction fell through because of a defective title. Gubbay and Ezekiel agreed, however, to share the expenses of the prayer hall, till then borne exclusively by Leveroy.

The synagogue was growing in popularity. Its attendance increased and on Sabbath morning about thirty-five people, perhaps more than in Maghen David Synagogue, would worship there. It was time to broaden its base.

At a meeting held on April 3, 1933 and attended by regular worshippers for the most part, a committee was elected consisting of Elias Hyeem Hilali (Solomon), President, Robin E. Gubbay, Vice President, Jacob Jonah, Honorary Treasurer and Alroy Judah Leveroy, Honorary Secretary and Ralph Arakie, David Ezekiel, Joseph E. Gubbay, Members.

That day the treasurer was put in funds to the extent of the fol-

lowing donations: David Ezekiel Rs. 250.00, Joseph E. Gubbay Rs. 100.00, Ralph Arakie Rs. 50.00 and A. J. Shellim Rs. 100.00.

It was soon to become apparent that the synagogue needed to have firmer foundations to ensure its chances of survival. Two committee members withdrew, Ralph Arakie resigned on his departure for England, and on his return from Europe in March, 1934, David Ezekiel "for some inexplicable reason" was no longer interested.

A crisis was reached in the middle of 1934. The regular income was about a quarter of the expenditure. Small spasmodic donations were insufficient to balance the cost of maintenance. There was evidently also a sparseness in daily attendance and consequently a need to employ men to complete the Minyan. More serious was the notice served by the owners demanding vacant possession.

At a committee meeting called to consider the future, all were unanimous that the synagogue should continue, Robin E. Gubbay recommending its functioning only on Sabbaths and Festivals. Joseph E. Gubbay, having greater personal stakes in the decision, generously undertook the cost of maintenance and agreed to house the synagogue free of rent in two vacant rooms in one of his properties on Sudder Street, the heart of the new Jewish quarter, provided that, should the property be sold, the synagogue would vacate the premises. Ironically, years after Gubbay's death and in spite of several demands of his son Ezra who had settled in America, that the synagogue be vacated so as to facilitate the sale of the property, the institution keeps asking for extensions of time and the owner kindheartedly agrees. Thus, 6A Sudder Street has been the address of the synagogue since 1934.

Further reductions in committee members took place in the next few years. In April, 1935, Jonah resigned and soon after, Robin E. Gubbay severed his connections with the synagogue. Elias Nahoum officiated as Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer when Leveroy went to Europe in 1936 on leave of absence.

In the middle of 1939 a fall in revenue resulted in an inability to pay the Hazan's salary of Rs. 45.00 per month. The Hazan, David Girji Raymond, happened to be a tenant of Gubbay's, living in an apartment below the synagogue suite. He claimed that his salary was earmarked for his rent which he could no longer pay, not having received his salary from the synagogue. Gubbay thus, for many years, was in effect advancing the Hazan's salary.

As recompense for these many services to the synagogue, Gubbay reserved certain privileges normally auctioned in other synagogues. When he attended Maghen David Synagogue he paid up

to Rs. 1,000.00 for the Maftir of the first day of Rosh Hashana equivalent to two years rent for the suite of Shaare Rasone.

About the end of 1948, the Hazan, David Girji Raymond, expressed a desire to immigrate to Israel. Early in the following year, Abraham Joshua Silas was appointed. Educated at the local Talmud Torah, he was familiar with customs and traditions and soon rendered the Torah and the rest of the liturgy with almost flawless intonation and style. For a while, Sam Rassaby, master Hebrew grammarian, was a keen adviser. With the interest and under the guidance of Leveroy, Silas soon became a capable Hazan. In March, 1963, and due to changing circumstances in India, he was obliged to join his family in London.

The salient features of the constitution adopted in 1952 were: Management of the synagogue was vested in a self-elected, self-perpetuating Board of five members of the synagogue, three of whom were President, Secretary and Treasurer. Alroy Judah Leveroy, the founder, was declared President for life, and Moses Linyado, Secretary. Overwhelming powers were vested in the President.

> "If meetings are adjourned four times in succession for want of a quorum the Board as then constituted shall stand dissolved and the former President will proceed to *'elect'* (italics mine) from the congregation at least a new Honorary Secretary and a new Honorary Treasurer with himself as President."

Arbitrary control characterized the rules of governing Board-congregant relationships. "Seats other than those allotted to a congregant can be changed by the authorities without assigning any reason whatsoever. Anyone acting in contravention to the rules is liable to be turned out and no longer admitted and without voicing his objection.

> "The liturgy and ritual shall be as practised by the orthodox Sephardic communities. Any change, whenever deemed desirable, must and shall conform with the service in important Sephardic communities."

These regulations notwithstanding, the Shaare Rasone was the first and only synagogue to install an electric Ner Tamid (Eternal Light). Unaccustomed to this innovation, the congregants raised a furor over an apparent breach in the hoary tradition which limited the light to an oil wick. The electric light was, in fact, instituted on the authority of a Jewish chaplain stationed in Calcutta.

*Chapter 12*

## RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

Most of the customs, ceremonies and religious practices of the Arabic-speaking Jews of India followed the Baghdad rite, which can claim to be one of the oldest in Jewry. Outside the Holy Land, the most ancient Jewish settlement was that of the Jews of Iraq. The greatest part of this community (till 1950, when they were transported to Israel en masse), were the descendants of those Jews who, after the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C.E., were led into exile. Most of their descendants remained in Babylonia, although a minor portion of them returned to Jerusalem in response to the liberal edict of King Cyrus of Persia. The prophet Jeremiah's exhortation was followed: "Build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them, take wives and beget sons and daughters . . . multiply there and be not diminished. . . ." And the Babylonian community prospered.

Before the air-lift to Israel was effected, 120,000 Jews lived in Iraq. Of the total population they formed about two and one-half percent and in Baghdad, the capital city, as much as twenty-four percent. Besides the great antiquity that bound these Jews to their native land, they had become an integral part of the Iraqi nation. They excelled in commerce and politics and were a vital element in a thriving economy. In their daily habits, social customs and language they were no different from the Moslem citizens. Arabic was the mother tongue of both communities.[1]

Occasional outbreaks against Jews, however, did take place in the cities of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. The removal of the well-known Sassoons to Bombay from Baghdad early in the nineteenth century was due to extortion of money from Jews by the Turkish Pasha or overlord. The same fate befell the Nasi or civil head of Basra Jewry, Isaac Solomon [Benjamin] who fled his native city and settled in Calcutta in 1836.[2]

### I. *Affinity to Centers of Origin*

While the earliest Jewish settlement in Calcutta in the first two

decades of the nineteenth century comprised mostly Syrian Jews in search of trade, the original Arabic-speaking Jewish settlers of Bombay were from Baghdad and Yemen. Not until the second quarter of that century did a sizable immigration from Iraq flow in, as a result primarily of the impact of persecution by Daud Pasha, Wali or overseer of Baghdad.[3] The main centers of Arabic-speaking Jews in the Indian sub-continent were Bombay and Poona on the west coast and Calcutta in the east. Before World War II they numbered about 10,000. Some of these moved farther eastward: to Rangoon, Burma; Hongkong, a British crown colony off the coast of Southern China; Shanghai, China; and Singapore, in what was then Malaya.

Apart from responsa dealt with in a later chapter,[4] the "mother" country was kept in contact with her outlying "colonies" in the Orient, primarily to assist financially the educational, religious and charitable institutions at home. A few emissaries paralleled the Palestinian Shaliahs. Isaiah b. Aaron was sent by Isaac Abraham Solomon, the Hakham Bashi of Baghdad, in the winter of 1894–95 to raise funds to relieve the dire effects of political and economic unrest. A malevolent regime had executed seven Jews and imprisoned several; it had raised taxes and special levies, and imposed a head tax on the dead since 1880. Natural causes had added to their misery. The Tigris River had overflowed its banks because of excessive precipitation and destroyed 150 Jewish houses, many of their owners losing their lives. Starvation had driven many away from the country. Synagogues were inundated. The poor, orphans, widows and elderly were homeless. The letter making this tragedy known was signed jointly with the Hakham Bashi of Aleppo, Abraham Ezra Dwek.[5]

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Amara, the capital of Amara province in Iraq, developed as a significant market and river port on the left bank of the Tigris.[6] The Jewish community there in 1889 was in urgent need of a synagogue and school building for the seventy children of indigent parents. The Hazan, Hakham Nissim Joseph Musri and the Gabai, Abdallah Ma-ullam Hyeem, sponsored by the rabbinates of Baghdad and Basra and the Sassoon family, canvassed for assistance in India, Burma, China and Singapore.[7]

The function of an Iraqi organization called "Hachnasath Kallah" was to collect funds to marry off girls of impoverished families. The Gabai of that institution, Ezekiel Ezra Joshua Ha-Levy, conducted a successful campaign in 1892. During his visit in Calcutta he lived at the home of Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena.[8]

Close to the hearts of Indian Jews was the maintenance of the sacred places in Iraq. The tomb of Ezra the Scribe at El-Ozeir, for

example, played a unique role in their susceptibilities. A description of the site of the tomb is given by a traveler in the mid-nineteenth century.[9] "Three days' journey down the Tigris in the middle of the desolate and barren desert El Ozeir, rises, on the shore of the river, a large square building, in which is the tomb of Ezra. The building is surrounded by some smaller houses, and contains two spacious rooms, leading one into the other, of which the first belongs to the Mussulman (Moslem), and the second together with the tomb, to the Jews. A dim half-darkness reigns in the apartment, into which a faint light from without is admitted through the door. There is a catafalque here, 16 feet long, 10 high, and 6 broad. Inscriptions, now illegible, cover all the four sides of this catafalque, over which are spread costly tapestries decorated with gold; and many rich decorations ornament the room. Although in the midst of the desert, and surrounded by tribes of Arab robbers, there is nothing to fear for the safety of these treasurers; as, from the veneration which the Arabs pay to the tomb of Ezra, they are safe from being robbed, and, according to tradition, no robber would be able to leave that sanctuary without having first restored to its place that which he had taken away.

"The ships cast anchor not far from this tomb and all travellers, without distinction of faith, betake themselves to it, in order to pray. The stranger, who has spent some days in the desert, cannot divest himself of a deep religious impression when, in the middle of the wilderness, he perceives this wonderful tomb.

"The tomb of Ezra was for me an object of repeated inquiry; for as the Bible neither mentions his death nor the place of his burial, I entertained some doubts as to the identity of the tomb. From the Seder Hadoroth, and other historical works, I have, however, perfectly convinced myself of the fact. They relate that Ezra went to King Artasatha (from whom he received letters), in order to beg for some advantages for his brethren dwelling in Jerusalem, and that he died near Babylon. The Bible likewise mentions one part of this assertion. The place of burial is not distinctly named by the Seder Hadoroth; I therefore keep to tradition, as, after a most accurate investigation, I could not find anything more correct. The anniversary of the death of Ezra is fixed on the 9th of January in the Selihot of the Portuguese Jews: the Seder Olam says that he died in the beginning of the year 3500, according to Biblical calculation (—— 260 B.C.E.).

"Many Jews from Baghdad and Bassora celebrate the Feast of Weeks at the tomb of Ezra and take part in the pious ceremonies.

The Arabs know the object of these pilgrims, and place no hindrance in their way."

So numerous were pilgrims and other visitors that the authorities were pressed for space. For fifteen years before 1883, appeals were made in vain to various communities to underwrite a new "Khan" or caravansera. A number of Calcutta Jewish residents did contribute. With Rs. 2,000.00 still needed, the Gabai asked Mozelle Ezra, wife of Elia D. J. Ezra, for Rs. 1,000.00. She generously donated Rs. 4,000.00 An improved building was then erected with a plaque commemorating the lady's unusual philanthropy.[10] She made further gifts of about thirty Parochets woven in satin and Zaree (silver thread) to synagogues in Baghdad and six "Kabawat" (covers) for the tombs of Ezra Sopher, Ezekiel Nabi and others at the cost of Rs. 5,000.00.[11]

David D'Beth Hillel corroborated the findings of Israel Benjamin when he reported: "Nobody watches there, saying that it is of no use because whoever should take a single thing from the place would be badly treated."[12] Bearing out the truth of this assertion, a story was current among the Jews of Calcutta that a severe fate befell two Jewish residents of Dinapur for having taken away a cruse of oil when they visited the tomb.

A leaflet found by David Sassoon in Bethel Synagogue, Calcutta, emphasizes the role of the contributions to the holy shrines in the mother country.[13] He explains: "The synagogue authorities draw the attention of the congregants to the gifts of Kabawat and Parochets offered by Rahma, the wife of Jacob Aaron b. Faraj Hayyeem b. 'Abdallah Joseph in Calcutta.[14] The former (Kabawat) were dedicated to the shrines of Ezra the Scribe, Ezekiel the Prophet, Joshua the High Priest, Sheikh Isaac Gaon, and the graves of the Gaons, which are near the Cave of the Prophet Elijah (situated near the Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel). A photograph of this most interesting place is published here for the first time. The latter (Parochets) were given to the following synagogues and schools: Slat Adonenu Ezra Ha-Sopher (the Synagogue of Ezra), [the Synagogues of] Isaac Gaon, David Sassoon, Jacob Semah, Meir Sliman, Isaac Sopher, Saul, Reuben Shooker, Manasseh, New Synagogue, the Great Synagogue, the Small Synagogue, Reuben Ezekiel Manasseh, Moses Dahhan, Isaac Shalom, Farhah bint Dabbi, Midrashim, and the School of David Sassoon, all in Baghdad. The patterns may be taken from Hakham Mordecai b. Obadiah Halevy in Calcutta. The worshippers are urgently requested to perform this great Miswah."[15] It is noteworthy that among these gifts the offerings for the shrine and synagogue of Ezra take the first place.

Next to Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, the name of Ezra Ha-Sopher has figured as being efficacious to prayer and saving power. Before setting out on a journey, being admitted to hospital or performing an act dangerous to life, a light was lit in their honor. Talismen were dedicated to their names. They were the subject of vows. For instance, a couple to whom only daughters were being born might make a vow that, should their next child be a son, he would be named for either or both of the two patrons.

An appeal for the Yeshiba of Ezra Ha-Sopher was made in 1892.[16]

Provision was also made in several locally drawn-up bequests, either in the form of a single payment or small regular amounts to be paid to synagogues, schools or shrines in and around Baghdad and Basra.

Arabic-speaking Jews in other places were also aided; for instance, funds were raised in 1884 to redeem prisoners in Yemen.[17] On the other hand, significant events in India were taken note of in Baghdad. Shelomo Bekhor Hussein congratulated the communities of Bombay and Calcutta on the marriages of Joseph, son of Sir Albert Sassoon of Bombay to Rebecca Masuda, daughter of Jacob Aaron, and of Aaron N. E. Judah to Hannah, daughter of Immanuel R. Belilios, in 1874. At the same time, he appealed for funds to be utilized by the committee, headed by Lord Rothschild, formed to celebrate the 90th birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore, by "buying fields and vineyards and building the wastelands of the Holy Land."[18]

## *II. Synagogues*

Professor Salo Baron points out that, to underscore the sanctity of the synagogue, Solomon Duran of Algiers approved the custom of entering without shoes; but this, he says, seems to have been a conscious imitation of Moslem observance to counteract their gibes on Jewish irreverence for our houses of worship.[19] A trace of this custom was evident in the attitude of some congregants, especially in the early days in Calcutta, who would enter the Ark room without their shoes.

In the absence of communal halls or meeting places, the synagogue was used as a "Beth Kenesset" or place of assembly. Here were held meetings of community organizations. Newcomers to the city in straitened circumstances might, for a short while, make it their home. While Bombay had facilities for communal hostelry, Calcutta did not. Repasts of sacred or semi-sacred character were allowed,[20] especially those connected with Seudah Shelishith (the third meal of the Sabbath), and the conclusion of the 3rd, 7th, 22nd and 30th days, 11th month and first year of mourning as well as anniversaries.

The dignity of the synagogue worship was at times reduced by

querulous voices in protracted controversies of ritualistic minutiae; for instances, pronunciation, intonation or liturgical order. Again, some, especially those in economic distress, who wished to vent a grievance in the hearing of a representative gathering, chose the Sabbath or Festival. As Baron says, "Every citizen . . . could invoke the assistance of the congregation by stopping the divine service and preventing its continuation until he had aired his grievances against the established communal leadership and received or was promised satisfaction."[21]

The sacred character of the synagogue seemed to have been completely disregarded when synagogue benches were used for sleep on Kippur night and between Musaph and Minha (about 2½ hours). Or rather there was a warmer, less formal attitude to the house of prayer; when the need arose it could serve as a second home.

Membership of a synagogue tended not to be acquired but inherited. A family "belonged" to the synagogue chosen by an earlier generation, and developed a kind of "local" loyalty. Occasionally, disagreements led to migrations from one synagogue to another but generally this loyalty persisted.

*Minyan:*

The three Calcutta synagogues, built in the vicinity of a populated Jewish community, experienced no difficulty providing quorums for prayer (Minyan) into the twentieth century. However, as Jews began relocating away from the neighborhood, the shortage of men for Minyan became slowly felt. The first to fall prey to a shifting neighborhood was Maghen David, as early as the third decade of the twentieth century, during the lifetime of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. The synagogue authorities were obliged to employ "Asarah Batlanim" to come in twice daily, though their emolument was no more than a pittance. For the most part unemployed or retired, they gathered in the courtyard of the synagogue a half hour before the commencement of afternoon services and exchanged reports on the day's happenings and the latest in the world of gossip, usually over a cup of tea.

Neveh Shalome, in the same courtyard as Maghen David, managed to keep the wolf at bay with the assistance of the boys of Bar Mitsva age from the Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah. Ezra Arakie, in control of both institutions, made it incumbent upon the pupils of this free school to attend services twice daily. At his death in 1942, the boys were required to attend less frequently but in rotation till the obligation was removed completely. The synagogue then had to hire Minyan men.

Bethel was more fortunate. Its ministers, Revs. Abraham and Albert Twena, lived with their families in an adjacent house belonging originally to the proposed communal school over which Bethel held sway when the school scheme was abandoned.[22] The male members of this family could always be counted on to complete a Minyan whose nucleus was a handful of "regulars" induced by their loyalty to the senior minister and by the fact that this synagogue was closest to the new Jewish neighborhood. When, in the mid-fifties, the Twena family left for Israel, the need for a paid Minyan was felt.

Even Maghen Aboth, the synagogue-prayer hall inaugurated by Hakham Shelomo Twena, where the poor assembled, was hit by Minyan shortage after the death of Joseph Twena, the founder's son and leader of the congregation. Attendance was further discouraged by the feud between the founder's daughters and the Elias group, terminating in a lawsuit which discouraged worshippers. Weekday services were discontinued while Sabbath and Festival services were made possible only with a hired Minyan.

In far the best position was Shaaré Rasone, the synagogue-prayer hall in the newest Jewish district. Before the mass Jewish emigration, it often counted double the minimum number on weekdays and a goodly number on holidays. More recently it has also had its travails in obtaining voluntary worshippers, especially on weekdays, and particularly after the departure of its minister, Rev. Abraham Joshua Silas, for England. But the management, at least till 1964, seems to have adopted the principle of not subscribing to a paid Minyan, preferring no service to one where attendance is not entirely voluntary.

With the increase in Minyan "establishments" unequal in capacity or willingness to pay, as well as the thinning of the Jewish population, an incidental but noticeable "market" was created. A bargaining posture was fostered in prospective and employed Minyan men, at least in part the consequence of emigration, bringing about shifts in personnel. This followed the pattern of deteriorating standards in religious observance and is the subject of our final chapter.

*Auction of Mitsvahs:*

Common in the Arabic centers of Jewry was the auction of synagogue privileges called "Damayin." Moses Dwek introduced the practice in Calcutta[23] in lieu of seat rents which were unknown in that part of the world. Until the synagogues were endowed over the years, this was the main source of income.

The Mitsvahs were auctioned in synagogue after the prayer for the congregation while the Sepher Torah was still on the Tebah

(reader's desk). For the ensuing month the "sale" took place on the Sabbath before Rosh Hodesh and for a Festival on the prior Sabbath. Exceptions were Aliyas for the Sabbath morning, because these were distributed at the discretion of the Madlik, that is, the buyer of the privilege of lighting the lamps and Aliyas of Sabbath afternoon and of Monday and Thursday; the latter were available for the poorer members who could not afford to pay for Mitsvahs on other days. While this arrangement "remembered" the poor, it was still discriminatory insofar as they were excluded from participating in the Mitsvahs of special days. This became the accepted practice of all synagogues except Shaare Rasone, where privileges were presented at the discretion of the Board of Management. This, however, did not obviate discrimination since those honored were too often Board members or others who were likely to make sizable "voluntary" contributions (Misheberakh) to the synagogue.

Auctions were conducted in Arabic and the buyer was blessed in Hebrew at the end of each transaction. As in any auction, the highest bidder won the right to the Mitsvah. As long as the auctioneer, usually the Hazan, did not mention the buyer's name, he accepted higher bids; once a name was announced as the buyer, even though a higher bid was subsequently offered, it was not entertained. It did sometimes happen that the Hazan did not hear a bid, an inevitable source of ill-feeling and recrimination. Purchases of one hundred and one rupees were popular because the numerical value corresponds with the Hebrew letters Mem, Yod, Kaf, Aleph, Lamed (Michael),[23a] the angel traditionally known as the advocate of the People of Israel. Others coincided with the numerical value of the letters of the Tetragrammaton — 26; some offered 52. Incidentally, in response to the first appeal on behalf of modern Zionism in 1921, Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, Senior Minister of Maghen David Synagogue, donated Rs. 1352.00, representing the fifty-second multiple (for the number of weeks in the year) of the Tetragrammaton.

The following privileges were outlined by Moses Dwek:[24]

1. Pittoom Haketoreth — reading aloud the introductory passages till the Hazan takes over at Hashem Melekh.
2. Halbashath Rimonim — on the eve of the Sabbath and Festivals, the Shamash removes the Torah bells and cloth covers and places them in front of their respective Sephers. The buyer of the privilege then adorns the Sephers with the bells and covers — the honor of beautifying is regarded as a Mitzvah.[25]
3. Zemiroth — chanting of the Psalms by two or three or more boys, one at a time.

4. Opening of the Hekhal or drawing the Parochet (curtain) leading to the Ark and opening the raised Torah for the congregation to recite Vay Zothe Ha-Torah.

5. Carrying the Sepher (if more than one, the privileges were sold separately) from the Ark to the Tebah.

6. Carrying the Sepher of Haphtarahs.

7. Opening the raised Sepher Torah on the Tebah before the reading for the congregation to recite Vay Zothe Ha-Torah a second time.

8. Somekh — standing on the left of the minister as he reads the Torah, to guide him and provide assistance if required.

9. Announcement of the New Month — (this practice was discontinued and later recited by the Hazan only).

10. Substitution — if, for some reason, a buyer was not present in synagogue, the substitute replaced him. This referred to any or all of the privileges. (This also was later discontinued.)

11. Distribution of the myrtle leaf for the Habdalah ceremony to the entire congregation, each congregant being given a few twigs to make the Berakha on spices. (For the Berakha on a flame, movable candle stands were conveniently located at various points in the synagogue on the termination of Shabbath.)

12. The Aliyas to the Torah.

13. Carrying the seven Torahs on Kippur night including the Sepher Kol Nidre; each was sold separately.

14. At a Brith Meela in synagogue, the adornment of Elijah's chair with bells. On a week day, the passing round of a silver tray of Elijah decorated with lit candles for receipt of contributions of coins of copper, silver or gold which accrued to the synagogue. Later, the money was given to the Abi Haben (father of the new born child) if the family was in difficult circumstances.

The adoption of the system of auction strengthened finances. A major factor in its success was the large-heartedness of the early members. At the time of his writing, however, about 1855, Moses Dwek complained that generosity had waned and the assets of the synagogue were being used for purposes other than the building fund for which they were originally intended.

Elkan N. Adler, the Anglo-Jewish bibliophile, author and traveler, in a talk delivered in London on December 6, 1914, and reprinted from the *Jewish Chronicle,* entitled "Some Quaint Jewish Customs,"[26]

says about Oriental Jewry generally, "The offerings belong to the Rabbi but the product of the sale of Mitsvahs is applied to the synagogue structure and so these are clean and well-kept."

So long as they were published, the local Jewish newspapers carried reports of auction proceeds. For 5648 (1887–1888), Maghen David benefitted by Rs. 6,174.00 and Bethel by Rs. 4,409.00[27] For Tishri 5649 (the High Festivals of 1888), Maghen David sold Rs. 3,910.00 worth of Mitsvahs and Bethel Rs. 2,670.00[28]

The offerings went to the synagogue coffers, except on Sabbath afternoons and weekdays when Vay Zothe Ha-Beracha was read and they accrued to the Shamash. In the nineteenth century, before Maghen David was built, donations to other institutions, local and abroad, were announced in synagogue.

Other practices may be seen in the body of rules of Maghen David Synagogue.[29]

*Appurtenances:*

As in the days of the Talmud, Torah scrolls were contained in wooden cases (Teek) overlaid with silver or covered with rich velvet. Dedicated to the memory of a deceased or the gift of a living donor, the Torah bore the name of the person, inscribed on the inside of the minaret-like top of the case. If a memorial, the date of death was included in the inscription.[30]

Also found inscribed at times was a condition made with the synagogue authorities that the donor had the right to remove the Torah from that synagogue to wheresoever he wished. Such a condition was made by the family of Joseph Abraham Dwek in 1874.[31] Conditions might also be made orally at the time of presentation. These oral statements were seldom recorded subsequently. To put the records straight, the Secretary of Maghen David Synagogue announced in August, 1888 that those who had made conditions by word of mouth should register them with the Board.[32] A register of this type, however, was not available in latter days.

The majority of the scrolls of Torahs were imported from Baghdad and the cases with its embellishments made locally or in China by expert Chinese craftsmen who overlaid them with beautiful gold-embossed floral patterns. This was typical of the Torah presentations made by the Ezra family who had prolific business dealings with China.[33] Four of these Torahs were: one each in Maghen David and Bethel, donated by Elia D. J. Ezra in memory of his father, one as a memorial to his daughter, Hannah, wife of Joseph

Hyeem Simon Isaac, and one in his own memory, both of the latter at Maghen David.[34]

Through the year, Torahs were brought out and used in services in strict rotation, according to numbers allotted to each. However, where a Torah was dedicated to the memory of a deceased, it was brought out in precedence to the next one on the list if that day happened to be the anniversary of the person commemorated.

Shalome Cohen must have brought a few Torahs with him when he migrated from Surat to Calcutta. Thereafter, more Torahs arrived at regular intervals. On May 24, 1843, one reached the East Indian port in the name of Joseph Jacob Raphael[35] and another on November 10, the same year.[36] The consecration would take place in synagogue on the following Sabbath morning before services.[37] It was taken in circuit around the Tebah to the singing of Pizmons (hymns) and clapping of hands as on Simhath Torah. Gradually, the Sabbath morning dedication was dropped, Shabuoth and Hoshanah Rabbah, after the overnight vigil, being preferred. The Torah was displayed during the Hatimah or Tikkun at a private home, usually of the owner, and carried in procession to synagogue where the congregation rejoined over it on the Simhath Torah pattern.

At one period in 1888, during which seven Torahs were presented to the Maghen David Synagogue, it was felt the Hekhal or Holy Room would have to be enlarged.[38] In two years, twenty Torahs had been received in the two synagogues. This started some people thinking: If the total expense in bringing out a Sepher Torah was computed — including the actual cost, the festivities and other offerings — it would come to the unbelievable figure of Rs. 20,000.00, that is, Rs. 1,000.00 per Sepher.

About the same, a *Paerah* correspondent asked: "With that money, how many indigent girls could have been provided with dowries; how many widows maintained, how many impoverished benefitted? What is the more important Mitsvah? Adding to the number of already numerous Torahs or feeding the starving poor?" He called the attention of readers to an incident in Baghdad when the Rimmonim (bells) and other appurtenances of moth-eaten Torahs were sold and the proceeds applied to charity. He recommended that the import of Torahs cease forthwith. Those who wished to subscribe to a Torah should donate the Rs. 1,000.00 to a board of trustees who would invest the corpus and out of the interest pay the local poor. "How many families both in Bombay and Calcutta have small children who go to bed hungry?" If his proposal were accepted, a donor's cash presentation would be deemed the equiva-

lent of a Sepher Torah. A Misheberakh (benediction) would be made on that day subsequently throughout his lifetime and the day of his death would be observed in perpetuity with a Hashkabah (memorial prayer).[39]

This proposal was too revolutionary an innovation, and the age-old tradition continued. The ark-rooms were bursting at the seams. By the 1930's Bethel had over ninety, Maghen David over eighty, Neveh Shalome about fifty and the two prayer halls between them about fifteen. Maghen David sent some in answer to a request from the Yemen about that time. In the process of liquidation of the local Jewish community, some Torahs were taken away by the emigrants, many were sent to Israel and a few were left.

An interesting advertisement appeared in *Paerah* in 1885. Entitled, Goral Kodesh or Holy Lottery (!), it announced the raffle of a Torah at five rupees a chance with seventy chances. The scribe (probably a local Hakham), it stated, was a very pious man. Tickets were drawn on Purim Shushan at Bethel Synagogue.[40]

A rare custom peculiar to Baghdad and those centers that followed its Minhag (religious tradition) was the "Sepher Haphtarah." The Haphtarahs (prophetic portions) were written on a scroll fitted into a case as the Torah scrolls were. Moses Dwek, a Syrian immigrant, remarks that he was not aware of the custom of Haphtarahs till he saw one in the synagogue of his uncle Shalome Cohen in Calcutta.[41] This was the influence of the settlers from Baghdad. Maghen David had two of them. One, a gift of the Ezras, was in a silver covered case with a floral design washed in gold and made in China to match their other Torahs; this scroll was written in Baghdad. A second was in a wooden case covered over with velvet. As the cloth wore, it was overlaid with silver, the precious metal supplied by the synagogue, and labor paid for in 1958 by Joseph Solomon Curlender in memory of his wife, Minnie. The Haphtarah scrolls were pointed with vowels and supplied with signs for the traditional chant.

The multiplicity of Torahs was paralleled by an extravagance in Parochets (curtains or decorative hangings). Each ark-room of the three synagogues was semi-circular and had three entrances. Only the middle doors were usually open; on Kippur, the other portals were likewise open. Each set of doors, open or otherwise, was overhung with a curtain. In Maghen David, the wall behind the elevation in front, that is, the western wall of the main hall, was also thus decorated.

Parochets were made of cashmere wool or velvet or silk[42] In the middle, the inscription, worked into a superimposed rectangular

piece, stood out in gold thread. Like the Torahs, they were presented to the synagogue in memory of deceased people or by the living in their own behalf. In synagogue, these Parochets were as reverently kissed by some congregants as the Torahs. Strangely, they were used also as bier covers of owners or their relatives and returned to the synagogue.

Back of the synagogues, charity boxes were constructed with slots representing local charities and those of the Holy Land, and the shrines at Baghdad and Basra.

The most prized Tallith was the large one made of woollen fabric imported from Aleppo. Silken types were used too. These and other religious articles were sent out from Baghdad, Basra, the Holy Land and Leghorn, Italy, and sold locally.[43]

It is now left to consider the customs and practices connected with the three crucial stages of personal life — birth, marriage and death.

### *III. Milestones in a Lifetime*

*Birth:*

A woman at childbirth and forty days thereafter was considered exposed to evil spirits, as was the baby. They had to be protected by sometimes specially written charms and amulets. These mystical safeguards were worn on the mother's person or hung at her bedside. Care was taken that visitors interrupted their calls at the residences of recently delivered infants by stepping over a neutral threshold en route (Dusan el-Atbah), that is, where there was no childbirth in the prior six weeks.

Particularly vulnerable was the sixth night (Leilt el-Sittee) when a constant watchfulness over the child and a ceremony called "Shashah" were performed. "All the little boys of the neighborhood approach the house with pieces of water-melon peels or potsherd in their hands, over which the prepared liquid (saffron and water) is poured out, whereupon the boys repeatedly shout the word "Shashah," casting away their peels or earthenware. When returning, they are rewarded with sweets or roasted watermelon seeds."[44]

At the birth of a male child, the eighth night called Leilt Akd-el-Yas also was potentially harmful. The night was so called, according to a tradition of the Baghdad Jews, by association of the use of the myrtle leaf (Arabic, el-yas) with the name of the Prophet Elijah (Arabic, Khidr Elyas). "However ingenious the etymology is, we know that the use of myrtle in burial, wedding and birth ceremonies goes back to Talmudic times and serves the purpose of protecting

from demoniac powers."[45] For the same reason, incidentally, was the myrtle leaf used as spice for Habdalah, since, according to the mystics, that evening marking the end of the Sabbath is also demon-infested. Family and friends observed the vigil of Akd el-Yas by feasting and song while the Chair of Elijah elaborately decorated and containing a copy of the Bible, took pride of place.

The Meela (circumcision) took place either in synagogue or in the home. On the Sabbath, the synagogue was preferred.

The greeting for the birth of a boy was Siman Tob U-Kaddum el-Khair (an auspicious sign and harbinger of good fortune) and that for a girl, Mazal Tob.

*Marriage:*

About the status of women in India, Jacob Sapir[46] had this to say in the mid-nineteenth century: "Though women in India are numerous and are looked down upon by their husbands to a greater extent than all the ancient lands, the Jewish women are few in number and well respected. The community is a small one and the majority are from distant lands and not all brought their wives with them. Further, the excessive heat was difficult for the foreign-born men to endure, how much less could the weaker sex. . . . They are afflicted by illness and have a high death rate. They do not have large families. . . . The Baghdadians marry only virgin girls below the age of seventeen years. Beauty and talent are sought after. So the more particular bring out their wives from Baghdad, Syria and the Holy Land. They do not marry for money. The local Jews are not prolific, for if they were, in the fifty years or so of their settlement, and being joined constantly by newcomers, they would have been much more numerous."

In the nineteenth century, families with common ethnic backgrounds tended to marry within their groups. For instance, Raphael Mulla Isaac of Persian extraction married Begum, daughter of Ephraim Mulla Elias in March, 1855 and Awad Seadyah Awad (H. S. Howard) from Yemen, married the daughter of Abraham Joseph Taazi in March, 1858.[47]

A Bengali proverb has it that a girl of twenty is considered old. In common with the general social practice in the East, girls as early as age ten and usually between twelve and thirteen were given in marriage and boys between eighteen and twenty became grooms.[48] In the second half of the nineteenth century couples became more prolific, families of eight and ten were characteristic and one couple

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became parents twenty-four times! Most of the children survived.

The time-hallowed procedure of arranged marriages was the order of the day till well into the twentieth century when, with the influx of western ideas and mores, marriages took place at the initiative of couples themselves. Marriage brokers were usually women, and their help was particularly sought after in "disposing" of girls who were older or less attractive. Nor was theirs a "business" without competition. Pleasantly they may be called co-operators with the Almighty in bringing couples together. Their fees were standard — a complete suit of raiment from head to foot. When families unfamiliar with each other were introduced, a searching inquiry was undertaken to the third and fourth generations. If the labors of the broker came off well, a tray full of candy, flowers and a piece of jewelry was sent to the girl from the boy's parents. This constituted the confirmation of agreement for marriage called in Hindi "Bath Pakka." The Sabbath following the bride-to-be received a similar gift and the boy's family was invited to dinner. Boy and girl met here for the first time.

The marriage settlement would be negotiated, occasionally at the home of a neutral mutual friend.[49] If a legal document was not drawn up, particularly in the nineteenth century, the community's machinery was set in motion. A prominent member would be made custodian of the dowry prior to the wedding ceremony. Moses Dwek often filled this role.[50]

The Ketubah could contain interesting clauses. Ezekiel Hyeem b. Saleh Halevy promised to treat his wife decently and to consider the contractual document as if it were an act of Parliament at Westminister (London, England).[51] Sillman David David pledged to support and maintain Mordecai, the son of his future wife Sarah and her late husband Jacob Mordecai Sabti, till he attained the age of 18 years.[52]

Jews living in the outlying cities along the River Ganges, such as Dinapur, Gorakhpur and Bhagalpur, looked to Calcutta for marriage partners, the wedding taking place in the home town of the bride. The Ketubah was written in Calcutta in any case. On one occasion, when Sarah, daughter of Hyeem Elias Dwek of Dinapur, was married to Ezekiel Daniel of Calcutta, the Ketubah was written in Dinapur, probably by Moses Aaron Lanyado, who journeyed there to perform the ceremony and sign it. It was co-witnessed by Isaac Yahya Manasseh of Dinapur. The fact of the marriage was not made public for quite a while as the groom was an elderly man and the

Ketubah was one not given to women marrying for the first time.

About three years later, during the visit to Calcutta of one of the bridal party for the marriage of Ezekiel Daniel's son by a previous marriage, the Dinapur Ketubah was shown to Moses Dwek, who detected that it was erroneously written. He re-wrote one on his prescribed form and had it signed by Lanyado in Calcutta and Manasseh in Dinapur.[53]

The marriages of the Dweks between 1815 and 1820 were performed at their residence in Chinsura, a few miles from Calcutta.[54] Among these marriages was one between uncle (mother's brother) and niece in 1820.[55] This combination was uncommon but permitted.

The early settlers occasionally ignored the ban on weddings taking place during the Omer period, both after and before Lag L'Omer.[56]

The foregoing and other customs following have, since the second quarter of the present century, been more an exception than the rule. On the other hand, they would have been very common to earlier generations.

*Mileek: (Engagement)*

The celebration is held at the home of the girl's parents where the groom's family arrives with an array of trays containing flowers and candy. The "master of ceremonies" is the "dakaka" — a woman adept in the art of drumming and playing on the tamborene. She also displays her expertise in balancing a glass full of liquid or the candy tray on her head. The drumming rends the air and is often out of harmony with the sharpness of her rather discordant singing. Perhaps the purpose of the drum and melodist is to drown out the cacophany of chattering women, vocal men and playful children.

The occasion is highlighted when the ring is put on the girl's finger by her future mother- or father-in-law. If the mother is a widow or the father a widower, they are excluded from this ceremony, probably to preclude all association with sadness or ill-luck, in which case a sister or a brother's wife or a near female relative fills the role. The fiancé was banned from doing it himself, as it constituted Kiddushin or betrothal which, in the event of the termination of the association, required a bill of divorce. The law was stringently enforced in Calcutta. About the early twentieth century, a couple decided to end their "engagement." References to Jewish

courts in Baghdad and Jerusalem brought decisions that only a divorce could separate them permanently, as the man himself had given his "fiancé" the ring.

Festivals during the engagement period call for trays of flowers, candy and gifts from the young man to his affianced. The auspicious days include: Rosh Hashana, Pesah, Shabuoth, Sukkoth, Hanukka, Purim, the evening after Kippur, and at the conclusion of Pesah, called Leilt Ras el-Sana — Night of the New Year.

*Khadba:*

This function takes place a week to three days before the wedding. It is essentially the bride's. The groom and his family go to her home with flowers, candy and henna. The important moment comes when the henna (Arab, Hani; Hindi, Mendhi) is applied to the couple's outstretched fingers. This green substance is a product of a white flowered Asiatic shrub, *Lawsonia Inermis,* which leaves a red color if allowed to stand for a long time. It is covered over with specially prepared silver paper. The ceremony is borrowed. The Mohammedans apply henna to the hands and feet of a betrothed couple, a custom noted by Weitzstein, Prussian Consul in Damascus, Syria, about 1875. At such occasions, Wafs or hymns are sung in the presence of the bridal couple such as is found in the biblical Song of Songs and the Talmud.[57] Various reasons are adduced: Warding off the evil eye or producing the hue of royalty. Later, the pulp of ground celery leaves was used when girls objected to the tint left by the henna.

The entertainer is again the "Dakaka" who sings appropriate hymns and other songs, blessing the couple, their parents and families. At the conclusion of the singing, the Nakda, a substantial piece of jewelry is presented to the bride by the groom's mother, sister or other near relative.

The building of the new home is the cooperative effort of both families. The bride supplies her trousseau, jewelry, furniture, gold-embroidered house shoes, an endowment for the children and Tallith cover and cap for the groom. The latter's family contributes the mattress, the bridal garments and the wedding expenses.

*Toowafah:*

Saturday night before the wedding. The groom sends trays of candy, flowers and molasses to the bride followed by a get-together

of both families. The couple step over a goat or sheep as Kappara (atonement). The animal is killed and its meat distributed to the poor.

The Shabbath before the wedding, the groom is called to the Torah as Li'heyoth Hathan (groom to be).

*The Wedding:*

In Calcutta, the earliest custom was to have the entire ceremony in private homes. From 1875 or thereabouts the Kiddushin (first part) would take place in the home and the Nisuin (second part) in synagogue.[58] Rev. E.M.D. Cohen, senior minister of the old Neveh Shalom and Maghen David Synagogues, recommended in his paper *Paerah* in the 1880's that weddings be performed solely in the synagogue,[59] and this became the most common custom. When synagogues became the venue of all weddings, Minha (afternoon service) would precede or follow the ceremony.

The celebrant is chosen by the groom who also appoints the maids of honor and pays for their dresses. The ceremony was on rare occasions performed by the groom's or bride's father.

Distinctive is the addition of the word Matsliah in the last benediction משמח החתן עם הכלה ומצליח.

Some weddings, especially in the nineteenth century, were held on Tuesday, twice blessed of the days of creation.[60] Monday and Thursday were selected occasionally.[61] As the nineteenth century advanced and the Christian Sabbath became increasingly observed as a holiday by commercial houses, Sunday morning or afternoon became the popular day for nuptials.[62]

A reception follows in a ballroom, public-hall or club where confection and drink, both strong and soft, are served. In the twentieth century the spacious lawns of Sir David and Lady Ezra and Benjamin and Rahma Elias were sometimes made available.

Two weddings in 1875 brought together some of the leading Jewish families in Bombay and Calcutta. Joseph, son of Sir Albert Sassoon of Bombay and brother of Mozelle Elia Ezra, married Rebecca Masuda, daughter of the late Jacob Aaron Faraj Hyeem Abdulla Faraj and granddaughter of Ezekiel Elias Musleah, on Sunday, June 13. Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah, grandson of Ezekiel Judah, co-founder of Bethel Synagogue, married Hannah, daughter of Immanuel Raphael Belilios on Tuesday, June 15.

Both weddings were attended by Englishmen, Armenians and Parsees. Joseph Sassoon's bride was accompanied to the canopy on

the Tebah about two feet above ground level by Elia D.J. Ezra, his brother-in-law. It was held by posts over the bridal couple by four appointed bearers. (In later years, the canopy was affixed by posts to a slightly raised platform situated in the front of the synagogue, where the ceremony was held.) The immediate families stood on the Tebah while the rest of the invitees stood below. Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay performed the ceremony and Elia Shalome Gubbay and Reuben Shooker were witnesses. *Paerah* notes that the couple wore western dress and the bride was bedecked with jewels. The Ketubah was read after the Kiddushin.[63]

Aaron Judah's wedding was similar except that he wore Arabic garb whose outer garment is the "Dagla," a long coat, while his bride was attired in finery studded with gems and pearls. The ceremony was conducted by Saul M. Lanyado and the witnesses: Rahamim M. Cohen and Moses (Elias) Dwek Cohen. The reception took place at Elia Shalome Gubbay's residence.[64]

The ceremony concluded, the bride and groom step down and proceed to the Ark room to "make Zoor" (respectfully kiss each Sepher Torah). On their return they are felicitated by each congregant.

At the wedding dinner, the Sheba Berakhoth (seven blessings) over wine are recited as at the wedding ceremony. Amidst great rejoicing that night and on the six following nights, a large candle is lit and hymns are sung. The candle is preserved, to be used again should the couple be blessed with a son, on the night preceding the Meela, called Agd-el-Yas.

The morning after the wedding, the bride's mother sends baqlawa — a product of wheat, almonds and sugar — to the couple for breakfast. It is an indication of the consummation of the marriage. Every morning for a week, other relatives take it upon themselves to send baqlawa. It was customary not to leave the couple unattended for a week, nor do they leave home except to go to synagogue for Sabbath services. The groom is given a special seat in the front of the synagogue accompanied by Shushbeeneen (groomsmen). Before he is called to the Torah, the Pizmon שוכן עד תשב באיתן is sung. This Sabbath is also called Sabt el Nisswan (Sabbath for the women) because it is eminently a women's day when members of the fair sex gather in the new home to honor the bride. Towards evening, men assemble and a dinner consisting of fish, cakes and other confection is served.

The first visit to her parents' home after marriage is an auspicious occasion called Fatah Wooch; all relatives are usually invited. No

special ceremony is associated with this type of get-together.

During the first year after marriage the couple receive gifts, confection and flowers on Hanukka and Purim from the bride's parents.

Preparing the first few items of clothing for the expected baby is an occasion for another female assemblage. The entire "trousseau" of the first born is a gift of the grandparents, who also pay for the hospitalization and other charges associated with the birth of the child.

Local Jews tend to be superstitious about divorce to the point of fear and will have no part of it. They flee from those religious ceremonies as from a contagious disease and shut their windows overlooking the venue of divorce proceedings. Immediately following the rites, the couple race off to the Mikvah and make ablutions and garments worn during the divorce, considered unclean, are given away.[65] Some stay away from the home till sundown.

*Funeral and burial customs:*

Death is announced in synagogues, except on Saturday and Festivals. The ritual washing take place in the house while the women let their hair loose. Before the bier leaves the house the mourners rend the garments and the Way-hu Rahume is read, followed by a short Kaddish. On the way to the cemetery, the hymn of Solomon Ibn Gabirol שוכני בתי חומר is chanted aloud with congregational responses. We might, incidentally, make a contrast here between the freedom of religious movement in India and the strictures of medieval Jewry. "Loud recitation of prayers in synagogues prompted the otherwise mild Pope Gregory the Great to pass an edict that synagogues could be removed if their worshippers disturbed their fellow Christians in neighboring churches. Evidently for the same reason, the Council of Narbonne in 589 forbade the Jews to chant funeral psalms."[66] This was no problem for Calcutta Jews as the mode of worship of native Hindus and Moslems was loud too.

For a woman, the last one hundred yards from the cemetery, Eshet Hayil[67] is recited. An involved superstition prohibits sons from carrying their bier of their father. Mourners tie a handkerchief around their necks, perhaps to express the restrictive fetters of the first week of mourning. The special Kaddish usual after burial in the Spanish rite is not known in this ritual and is said only on Tisha b'ab. Services are held in the house of mourning during the first week when blessings on fruits are the custom of Indian Jewry

following Baghdad. It has something to do with aiding the soul on its journey in the after-world. Also, on the twenty-second day after death, called Shahr al-Naks (incomplete month), the thirtieth day or Shahr el-Tamaam (complete month); the eve of the completion of the 11th month, Sant el-Naks, and the day of the first anniversary, Yom el-Sana.

On the eighth day after burial the superstructure of the tomb is built, with bricks and mortar above the ground to a height of about 2½ ft. The head stone is installed soon after. There are no strictures against visiting the cemetery during the year of mourning. It is customary to do so on the third, seventh, twenty-second and thirtieth days after burial, on any other day when cemetery visits are normally allowed, and particularly on the eve of Rosh Hodesh.

For people who do not live till their seventieth birthday a vigil called Tikkun Kareth is conducted, preferably before the end of the first month of mourning.[68]

In the first year during Hanukka and Tishab'ab a food called "Kaleicha," consisting of flour mixed with butter and sugar and baked into flat cakes, is distributed among relatives and friends. This is regarded as a kind of conscience money to absolve the departed from any obligation which he may not have discharged during his lifetime. The recipients make the Hashkabah (memorial prayer) and say "I have forgiven so-and-so, son of son-and-so."

On Sabbaths and festivals a mourner passes round the congregants a bottle of rose water and they recite the prescribed blessing for spices, also as aid to the soul of the receased.[69] This custom too is peculiar to the community.

In memory of the departed, many sacred articles are dedicated to the synagogue — Sepher Torahs, prayer books, Parochets (synagogue curtains) and oil for the eternal light.

In previous generations it was not uncommon for Jews to have their shrouds prepared much before death was near. One such elder got a team of Jewish women together in synagogue where the shroud was sewn without the knowledge of his family. It was only when he was giving his final instructions that the fact of an existing shroud was made known. Some were so meticulous about the proper conditioning of their shrouds, they would have them aired and sunned occasionally without a ruffle of superstition or dismay.[70] Baghdad material called Kittan would be used as long as it was available. When imports of that texture ceased, locally manufactured material took its place.

Graves were never used for more than one burial. Reservations were made to ensure interment at a locale of one's choice. This is an

old custom. "The Jewess Rufina, Archisynagogus, has erected this tomb for her freedmen and wards, so that no other person should have the power of burying anybody there."[71]

Candles are set at the head and feet of the deceased as the body is lowered to the floor prior to being bathed.[72] When an elderly person dies, the women gather around the body to gaze at the face of the deceased. Whoever has a wish makes it at that time, declaring the dead an intermediary between God and the living. The custom applied more particularly to childless women who drink some of the water with which the deceased is bathed.[73]

Funerals took place at the home of the deceased; only at times was a body bathed in the Rehitsa room of the cemetery. Women scream cries of mourning that could unnerve standers-by. When they follow the bier they add to the confusion. It was therefore decreed that women should stay home.[74]. Jacob Sapir[75] observed the activities of professional women mourners who led the female members of the bereaved family in frenzied and heart-rending wailing: "The outgoings during the seven days of mourning are considerable, as they host rich and poor every day at feasts comparable to those of nuptials or a Meela, serving confection and fruits, the benediction on which are considered beneficial to the departed soul. This is the order on the thirtieth day and the end of the twelfth month . . . the guests sit on the floor with the mourners to participate in the meals. . . ."

Though Sapir a rationalist, protested against the inordinate spending, he agreed that the custom of uttering benedictions is deeply-rooted in Jewish tradition, acknowledging that death is not the end and the soul lives on and is helped on its way by the religious practices of the living. He makes mention of another custom geared to the same purpose — the hiring of ten people (or two) to study Mishna, Zohar and other parts of the Torah at the home of the mourners, night and day, for seven days. They take turns to sleep. The mourners see to it that these receive their meals, coffee and cigarettes. The more affluent appoint "readers" for a whole year.[76]

The conduct of the poorer classes at these functions left much to be desired. Shabbily clothed and unschooled in the conventions of society, they would ease all restraint when served with delicacies they could not afford and in quantities they rarely saw. People of higher social status accepted their participation with reluctance and on at least one occasion in 1886 had to order guards to ban their entry.[77]

It is customary not to call a living person by name in the cemetery as names are usually mentioned there in memorial prayers.

## *Chapter 13*

## RITUAL

By far the largest number of Jews in Calcutta came from families that originated in Baghdad, Iraq. The earliest nucleus had indeed come from Syria, but this group was not sufficiently reinforced to make them distinct; and, in order of numbers, Yemen, Persia and Egypt were each represented. However, the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century these were all submerged in the sea of migrants from Baghdad is evidenced by the pattern of worship and ritual followed in every one of the five synagogues. Thus, with the sole exception of the Torah chant, the principle of "Landsmanschaften" (common ethnic background) did not apply. Mild suggestions were made from time to time that customs of differing origins be adopted, but these were quickly smothered. Even the Ashkenazim, with peculiar ritualistic antecedents, only a handful in the best of times, were never really concerned about organizing a separate congregation, if only for the holy days and festivals. From disparate backgrounds, and for the most part professional and businessmen, those of them who had religious propensities, worshipped with their Sephardi co-religionists; some did so with Ashkenazi prayer books.

The ritual followed in the Calcutta community for over a century and a half will be outlined in this chapter.

### *I. Daily Services*

*Commencement and Duration:*

The Baghdadians in India commence their services rather early in the morning, on weekdays at 5:15 a.m. and a little later on Shabbath. The former lasted about an hour and a quarter while the latter took two and a half hours and finished about 8:15 a.m. The Rosh Hashana service took five hours to complete, and a two and one half hour interval separated the Musaph and Minha on Kippur.

Probably the most decisive reason for the early services was the need to be at the place of work by 9 or 9:30 a.m.; and since it was often necessary for the men to do some of the essential daily shop-

ping for their womenfolk, who led somewhat sheltered lives especially in the early years, this is all the more understandable. The tropical climate might have been another factor: while in summer the heat could be oppressive after mid-morning, the cold in winter was not sufficiently harsh to keep enough people from going to the synagogue for prayers. Besides, the Asiatic was an earlier riser than his Occidental counterpart. It is reasonable therefore that he would want to worship as close to the hour of sunrise as possible.

The following are common to most Eastern communities. An attempt is made here to draw the aspects of the Calcutta practice that were interesting or picturesque.

In reciting the *Shema,* the fingers are flexed over the eyes in a manner that represents the spelling Shaddai, the name of Almighty God. The three middle fingers are outstretched, forming the three stems of the letter Shin, the thumb and little finger bent to represent the letters Dalet and Yod, respectively. The worshipper is thus aided in his concentration upon the Divinity.

With the *Tephillin* on, the worshipper draws his hand with the Tsitsith to the Tephilla of the head and arm at the mention of "light" — with יוצר אור , יוצר המאורות and ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה (in the Megillah). It is also done when reference is made to the Tephillin commandment in the קדש לי and שמע. In common with the Baghdad custom, the Tephilla of the hand is put on while seated, presumably to bring out the pre-eminence of the Tephilla of the head,[1] but there may be a mystical significance.

*Kohens* bless the congregation at every Shahrith service, daily, Sabbath and Festival,[2] and twice when there is Musaph. Also on fast days, when they bless even in Minha.[3] As in other communities, the Kohen does not bless in Minha, for at that time of day even a priest might be intoxicated. They were permitted to bless on fast days, however, because there was no possibility of being intoxicated.[4] On Tisha B'ab they do not bless in Shahrith.[5]

*Widdui* is said every day, striking the chest lightly with each confession, with some exceptions: on auspicious days when expiatory prayers are not read, יהי שם is followed by the one paragraph Kaddish.[6] In addition to the Festivals, major and minor, Widdui is not said on the day a Meela is performed in the synagogue, or if it is to be performed at home but the Abi Haben or Sandek (Arab. Sindaak) are present in synagogue; or when a bridegroom is in synagogue within seven days of his marriage.

The *Omer* is announced without the benediction, every morning, including the Sabbath, before the second recital of Ashrei.

*Pittum Ha-Ketoreth* (formula for the incense compound) is repeated before Alenu.[7]

The *Amidah* for Shahrith and Minha is repeated unless there is a Minyan of just ten (including the Hazan), presumably because it was considered improper for nine men only to respond to multiple mentions of the name of God. No distinction was made in Calcutta between the eve of Shabbath and other days, unlike Baghdad when the Minha Amidah was repeated on the eve of Sabbath only and not on other weekdays.[8]

In another departure from the Baghdad custom, Widdui and Psalm 126 are not recited after Alenu in Arbith or after Kaddish Tithkabbal.[9] Instead, this Viddui was usually said at bedtime by the pious. The Hebron Sephardim adopted the Baghdad custom but those of Jerusalem did not.[10]

Mourners read every *Kaddish* except, of course, Tithkabbal which is recited by the Hazan. After the Rabbis' Kaddish before Alenu in Arbith, the invocation רבנן ברכו את ד' המבורך is said.[11]

## *II. Shabbath*

On the eve of the Sabbath, the following is the *order of service:*

ד' מלך ירגזו עמים, מזמור לתודה, במה מדליקין,
אמר רבי אלעזר, מזמור לדוד, לכה דודי.

Then the congregation rises and says Psalm 92 and the one paragraph Kaddish. After Alenu, the Hazan says "Rabbi Hananya," and the entire congregation recites the Rabbis' Kaddish without singing the Yigdal.[12] במה מדליקין is not said if the Friday was a Festival or the eve of a Festival or Hol Ha-mo-ed or the eve of Shabbath Hanukka or the eve of Hanukka. Nor is it said in the house of mourning because of the paragraph beginning על שלש עברות נשים מתות בשעת לידתן (for three sins women die at childbirth) and lest the deceased died at childbirth and it hint at a possible sin of hers, it is omitted in all cases.

*Shabbath Greetings* are Shabbath Shalome; but before Shahrith on Saturday morning it is שבתא טבא.[13] After Kiddush on Shabbath or Festivals, children kiss the right hand of their elders before receiving their blessing.

The Shabbath and Festival lights called "Tiryah" comprise of seven oil wicks in glasses that fit into a metal slate with specially contrived circular slots. The slate is suspended with brass chains under a colored glass plate and hangs from the ceiling.

Boys sing in rotation the Zemiroth on Shabbath and Festival mornings.

Baghdad had no distinctive melody for Yotser and Nishmath.[14] The early Hazans of the old Neveh Shalome and the Maghen David Synagogues, having hailed from Aleppo, these passages did have a distinctive chant which was passed down.

*The Reading of the Torah:*

When the Sepher is taken out of the Ark room, it is raised open before the congregation at the Ark or a short distance in front. The congregation responds: . . . וזאת התורה ברוך הבא בשם ד׳ as one of the congregants, usually a pre-Bar Mitsva boy, points to the beginning of the day's reading with a pointer called the "Mahwi." When the Sepher is brought to the Reader's desk, the process of raising and response is repeated.[15]

The Baghdad custom does not require an *Oleh* (man called to the Torah) to wait till the next Oleh arrived, since there are already supposed to be three people standing next to the Sepher — Hazan, Somekh (one who prompts or corrects the reader) and the Shamash.[16] Though, in Calcutta, the Shamash does not stand by between Olehs, the previous, does not await the arrival of the next, Oleh. A "Parnas" is not required to be master of ceremonies during the Torah reading. A Somekh substitutes for him and serves a more practical purpose since Baghdad Jews are meticulous about the correct rendering of the traditional notation and, of course, the text, of the Torah.

The reading of the Ten Commandments and Moses' Song at the Sea is auctioned and read by the highest bidder. This differs from the Baghdad practice where the privilege belongs to the Hazan; if he wishes to sell it to the congregants, the proceeds are his.[17] On Shabbath Yithro, the "Ten Commandments" is the sixth, on Shabuoth it is the Mashlim or last, portion. On Shabbath Shirah, the Song is the fourth, on the Seventh Day of Pesah, the Mashlim or last, portion. While there is no distinctive melody for the Song, the verses are concluded on variant notes.

On Shabbath Zakhor and Shabbath Shekalim, a special prayer is recited by the person called to read the Maftir.

Passages of the Torah unfavorable to Israel are read in an undertone such as the passages called Tokayha (Deut. 28:15-68, Lev. 26:14-41, 43) and other portions like Deut. 8:19-20.

Offerings are made at the conclusion of the Aliyah to the Torah; and, in common with other Sephardim, the Hashkabah is said at that juncture.

The Kaddish after the Torah reading is recited by the last Oleh and not by the Hazan.[18]

The Haftarah for Shemoth follows the rite of Tunis (Ezekiel 16:1-13) and for Bo, the Italian rite (Isaiah 18:7-19 end). These were printed in Livorno (Leghorn, Italy) editions of the Shabbath prayer book with the Book of Exodus. Since these were not readily accessible, booklets printed in Bombay and Baghdad contained the required portions. In some editions, also included are the verses from Isaiah 61:10, 62:5, read when a bridegroom is in synagogue on the Shabbath following his marriage.[19]

A boy does not have to be Bar Mitsva to read the Maftir and Haftarah. Whenever he is proficient, he is called to the Torah for the Maftir portion only, preferably on a Festival like Hanukka, Sukkoth or Simhath Torah, and he also reads the Haftarah. Of course, he puts on Tephillin only on attaining the age of thirteen years. Paper bags with candy and confetti are distributed to congregants and these are showered at the boy at the conclusion of the reading.

The rules of Maghen David Synagogue, announced in September 1884, attempted to prohibit the latter custom. The shrill outcry, called "Halhil," of Arabic-speaking women to felicitate a celebrant also was banned. A *Paerah* correspondent[20] was outraged at the development. He upbraided the attempt to stifle age-old customs in the name or decorum or possible adverse criticism of the casual gentile visitor. He was voicing the feelings of the overwhelming majority of the community because the strictures were never implemented, though they re-appeared in the revised rules a decade later.[21]

In Calcutta, the *cantillation of the Torah* resembles the Syrian notation, while the other main center of Jewry in India, Bombay, follows the notation of Baghdad. This variation may be attributed to the differences in the origin of the early settlers in these cities. Bombay received its early Jewish settlers at the end of the eighteenth century from Yemen and Baghdad proper, and their customs are very similar. During the first twenty years of Jewish settlement in Calcutta, however, migrants came in the main from Aleppo, Syria. The Hazan of its first synagogue, founded in 1825, was Moses Dwek, a Syrian Jew, the son-in-law of Shalome Cohen, the first Jew to settle permanently in Calcutta. He later assumed the presidency of the community in addition to his ministerial duties and his influence, both personal and official, must have been considerable.[22] This explains

why the second synagogue, built in 1856, adopted the Syrian mode of cantillation, though the Hazan and the congregants by that time in the main were of Baghdad extraction. The process of "Syrianization" of certain aspects of *public worship only* was continued during the tenure of office for over forty years of E. M. D. Cohen, the grandson of the first Hazan, carrying over to the third and largest Synagogue built by Elia D. J. Ezra in 1884. In other religious practices, however, the Baghdad Jews retained in large measure their own customs and ritual.

It is well-known that the Syrian practice came under the influence of the Spanish rite when Spanish exiles found their way to North African countries, the Holy Land and Syria. Iraq did not receive a large Jewish influx from Spain. The writer has, therefore, found a striking similarity between the cantillation of the Torah as known in Calcutta (itself borrowed from the Syrian rite), and that of the Sephardi Congregations of Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia and Shearith Israel, New York.

After the reading of the Torah, the Baghdadians would say no *prayer for the government,* only one for the congregation;[23] this was probably a reflection of the oppression the Jews were subjected to in Iraq. But in India, where they were free and prosperous and loyal to the British Government, the Ha-Nothen prayer was recited regularly.

*Psalm 29* was recited in Baghdad while the Sepher was still on the Tebah. Only when it was being carried back, Yimloch was begun. In Calcutta, however, immediately after Yimloch it is carried back and Psalm 29 is recited en route. Some eager congregants did not even wait until the completion of Yimloch, probably a carry over from the old Baghdad custom.

The entire *Musaph* is read aloud in repetition and Adon Olam is not recited after the morning prayers.[24] Some congregations sing Yigdal in its stead.

Sprigs of myrtle are distributed before Arbith to each congregant for spices in *Habdalah*.[25]

### *III. Festivals and Other Holy Days*

*Rosh Hodesh:*

Psalm 104 is chanted on Rosh Hodesh before Arbith and at the time of the Levitical psalms in the morning. A question was asked in 1888 by the Jews of Mandalay, Burma, if it is read also on the Sabbath.[26] The editor of *Paerah* replied in the negative.

*Birkat Ha-Lebanah* is preceded by the chanting of Psalm 19.[27]

On Rosh Hodesh and on Pesah (except for the first two days) when the Hallel is abridged, the preliminary benediction is omitted.[28]

*Elul:*

Hattarat Nedarim (Absolution of vows)[29] is performed before Kippur on four occasions, after Shahrith — forty days before Rosh Hashanah (19th Ab, if it falls on a Friday it is moved up a day to Thursday), the eve of Rosh Hodesh Elul (Thursday, if it falls on Friday), the eve of Rosh Hashanah and the eve of Kippur. Selihoth is recited every morning about an hour before sunrise during the month of Elul and the Ten Days of Penitence (except, of course, on the Sabbath and Rosh Hodesh itself). Until the second or third decade of the twentieth century, people in the Jewish neighborhood would waken to the cry of "Selihoth" (at about 3 a.m.) — that was probably before alarm clocks became common.

*Rosh Hashanah:*

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah and/or Kippur it is customary to visit the graves of parents, relatives and other pious people and recite prayers.[30]

The "silent" Amidah in the Arbith of the eve of Rosh Hashanah, Kippur and the Festivals of Pesah, Shabuoth and Sukkoth is recited in tones that are clearly audible. One theory traces the custom to the pre-printing era when books were scarce and congregants had to be guided in the long prayer. Another opinion maintains that it was for the benefit of vistors who were more numerous on those auspicious days and did not carry prayer books on their travels. After Arbith on the above-mentioned days, Yigdal is sung[31] whereas on the Sabbath it is not.

A few significant changes are evident in the local custom for the home ritual of the benedictions over fruits and vegetables on Rosh Hashanah night. The following order, differing slightly from other centers and sanctioned by Hakham Joseph Hyeem, was used in India.[32]

*Fruit*

1. תמר (Arab. תמר, Indian, Khajoor) Dates, and say בורא פרי העץ
2. רמון (Arab. רמאן, Indian, Anar) Pomegranate.
3. תפוח (Arab. תפאח, Indian, Aphel Marabba), Apple preserve.

*Vegetable*

4. רוביה (Arab. and Indian, Lubia), French or string beans, and say בורא פרי האדמה.
5. קרא (Arab. קרע, Indian, Kaddu), pumpkin.
6. סלקא (Arab. סלק, Indian, Polesag), spinach.
7. כרתי (Arab. כראת, Indian, Lusson gans), a variety of spring onion or scallion.
8. ראש כבש (Arab. ראס כבש) sheep's head, and say שהכל נהיה בדברו.

Hakham Joseph Hyeem remarked[33] that since the Arabic for Rubia is Lubia, the fourth formula should read:

שירבו זכיותינו ותלבבנו

but the recommendation was not implemented in India.

Baghdad Jews latterly omitted No. 7[34] because the vegetable used there עורדין (זערור) was the last of the season and called by them מכשח אל כיראת (= the banisher of the bounty) and therefore an inauspicious omen for a new year. Indian Jews, however, using a different vegetable, lusson grass, were not concerned by its natural or connotative reflections. But they did discontinue, like their Baghdad co-religionists, the eating of fish because of a similarity of sounds between דג (Dag = fish) and דאגה (De-aga-trouble, worry).[35]

Nothing sour or acid is partaken of on Rosh Hashanah, such as raw fruits or any food that sets the teeth on edge, e.g. the Arabic dish Khatta.[36]

Instead of salt for the Motsie, *sugar* is used.

On the second night and day, the Piyyut (liturgical poem) חון precedes the Psalm. They are the final three verses of the Piyyut תחון בת אהובת אל קמה.[37]

Before Alenu in every High Holy Day service, Psalm 24 and a special prayer for sustenance and opportunity for the study of the Torah are read. Yigdal and the Rabbis' Kaddish, recited by the entire congregation, end each service.

*Morning Service:*

All the Piyyuts of the morning services on Rosh Hashanah and Kippur are sung before ברוך שאמר to preserve an unbroken continuity thereafter. (According to liturgical practice, nothing should intervene between ברוך שאמר and the end of the Amidah).[38] The Somekhs (two men on either side of the Hazan) repeat the last stanza of the Piyyuts and the Hazan renders it again singly.

*The Shofar:*

The blessing over the initial blasts is said with the congregation standing; during the blowing, the congregation is seated "to confuse the Accuser." The order of the blasts: תשר"ת (three times), תש"ת (three times), תר"ת (three times) = thirty blasts. In the Musaph: תשר"ת, תש"ת, תר"ת once each for מלכויות זכרונות and שופרות, both during the silent Amidah and the repetition = sixty blasts. The final ten blasts תר"ת, תש"ת, תשר"ת are blown after the first paragraph of the Reader's Kaddish.

In returning the Sepher to the Ark, a series of verses is chanted beginning לעולם ה'. (On the second day, חון תחון is sung.)[39]

*Afternoon:*

Rosh Hashanah afternoon is spent reading the Book of Psalms in groups, usually at certain homes that have acted as hosts — sometimes for decades. A light repast of confection and fruits is served. After Minha, prayed at home, each group repairs to the water's edge — (the Jewish quarter was near a stream that connected up with the River Hooghly upon whose bank Calcutta is situated) to conduct Tashlikh (ceremonial casting off of sins), even if Rosh Hashanah fell on the Sabbath. In the latter case, non-Jewish domestics carried the books. (Very lately, some refrained on the Sabbath). In the earlier decades, the Hooghly itself, about a mile from the Jewish neighborhood, was the scene of the ceremony.

*Kippur:*

White fowls are used for Kapparah on the eve of Kippur.[40]

The striking Piyyut, Lekha Eli,[41] begins the evening service.[42] The congregant carrying the Sepher Kol Nidre reads the שהחיינו, and not the Hazan. Prayers for the Government and the congregation are followed by varied prayers for local people and officers.[43] The highlight of the Selihoth of Arbith (as that of Musaph the next day) is the spirited responsive singing of אל רחום שמך before the open Ark. The opening Piyyut of Neilah, common to other Sephardi rites, also has a rousing melody.

Before the reading of the Torah in the morning, the Pizmon שעה נא באימות by Hakham Sasson of Baghdad is chanted;[44] this ties up with the theme of the death of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, the opening words of the Torah reading.

The Musaph repetition is initiated by the Piyyut ינוב פי [45] chanted by the Somekh, who also chants the Piyyuts אשרי עין [46] and שמם.[47]

The Piyyuts, considered additions to the Amidah, are rendered by the Somekh (one who stands beside the Hazan) to preserve the unbroken continuity of the regular parts of the Amidah by the Hazan.

During the *Abodah* service, the congregants prostrate themselves on the floor at the proclamation of ברוך שם.[48] Matting and floor spreads are used for the occasion.

On one of the days of Asereth Yemay Teshubah, chosen conveniently, the pious custom is to conduct a special "Moda-ah" pledging continuance of acts of dedication and consecration.[49]

*Sukkoth:*

In the nineteenth century, more Jews constructed Sukkahs in their homes than in the twentieth; this decline has been attributed to growing embarrassment and unwillingness to attract attention.[50] However, there never was any overt or concealed resentment on the part of the general community. The reason went deeper and concerned the level of religious observance of the local community. With the passage of the twentieth century, a progressive indifference in religious matters set in and affected adversely the observance of ceremonials and religious customs. Even the Pesah Haggadah reading was watered down from the active participation of the family to a situation where those who could read Hebrew participated while the younger members filled the role of spectators.

Before entering the Sukkah, a beautiful prayer is offered. Then at the end of the Festival a farewell prayer yearns for the messianic Sukkah. In a corner of the Sukkah is a chair reserved for a very special "guest." On each night a different "guest" is invited — the greats of biblical history — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, David. On the chair is a bible open to an appropriate portion dealing with the life of the guest patriarch. In close proximity is a glass with an oil wick lit in his honor. And as part of the Kiddush, the following is recited: עולו אושפיזין עילאין קדישין עולו אבהן עילאין קדישין Come, O exalted and holy guests; come, O holy and exalted fathers תיבו אושפיזין עילאין קדישין Be seated, ye guests from on high זכאה חולקנא . We are fortunate to have you. To feel the close companionship in this manner on the happiest of all Festivals with the great of the Jewish past is an imaginative and inspiring tradition. Selected Pizmons (hymns) are chanted in honor of each special "guest."

On Sukkoth and Pesah it is customary to visit with friends and relatives and superiors. As guests leave, rose water is sprinkled into their hands from a specially designed receptacle called "Kumkum." They make a benediction for spices.[51]

Some attend special celebrations in synagogue every evening of Hol Ha-mo-ed Sukkoth singing songs and making merry, reminiscent of Simhath Beth Ha Sho-abah, the joyous observance of the ceremony of waterdrawing at the Temple. Of this celebration the Talmud says: "He who did not witness this celebration, did not ever experience joy."[52]

In the Hallel, the Lulab is waved thus, (India being east of the Holy Land): Hodu (south), La Shem (no waving but face westward), Kee (north), Tob (east), Kee (upward), Layolam (downward), Hasdo (west). A (south), Na (north), Hashem (no waving but face westward), Ho (east), Shee (upward), A (downward), Na (west).

The Hoshanas are recited before the reading of the Torah, rather than the older custom, after Musaph. Though the Baghdad custom was to omit the Hoshanas on Shabbath[53] it was customary in Maghen David, Calcutta, to chant them.

*Hoshanah Rabbah:*

A night-long vigil takes place, preferably in the Sukkah. It is called "Hatimah" (sealing) derived from the tradition that the fate of all human beings is sealed in the Book of Life that night. It was believed that between Rosh Hashanah and Kippur the righteous are written in the Book of Life; the wicked are not. The average person's fate, however, is not "sealed" until Hoshanah Rabbah which is called Kippur Katan (miniature Kippur). People congregate in the same manner as on Rosh Hashanah and read the entire book of Deuteronomy, partake of a repast and study portions of the Zohar. After midnight, the whole Book of Psalms is recited, interspersed by seven Selihoth. The Selihoth are read preferably by people named Arbraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph (or Pinhas) and David, as these Selihoth appeal to God in the name of these patron patriarchs.[54] Women keep awake as do the men. In order to ward off sleep, they indulge in the tedious process of forming tiny grains of kneaded wheat called שערי. On Shemini Atsereth it is cooked with rice.[55]

Because of a similarity in the procedure of Rosh Hashanah, Shabuoth and Hoshanah Rabbah studies, all three are called "Hatimah," though the name can aptly be applied only to the latter.

Morning services are held in Synagogue at 4.30, for that is the time the vigil ends, while sun rises at about 5.30. Nishmath is not said. A Misheberakh for the congregation concludes the seven circuits.

*Shabuoth Vigil:*

The manual used on Hoshanah Rabbah also contains the order of readings for the first night of Shabuoth — first and last few verses of each Parasha of the Pentateuch (dwelling at length on the two descriptions of the revelation on Sinai) and the rest of the biblical books (with extended readings of the Haftarah for the first day of the Festival — Ezekiel, Chapter 1, and the entire Book of Ruth). Following refreshments, some Zohar is recited before setting out for early morning services in synagogue at 4 o'clock (sunrise at about 5).

*Simhath Torah:*

The Torahs are displayed on specially constructed stands outside the Ark room in preparation for Simhath Torah.[56]

It is a custom to visit each local synagogue in the neighborhood and reverently kiss each Sepher on display outside the Ark room.[57] This religious act called "Zoor" is performed at other times too. Israel Cohen recounts the following.[58] "The structure (of the Ark room) was different from all other Arks that I had seen, as when the curtain was drawn and the door was opened, one passed into a capacious chamber with a semi-circular wall, along which was built the cabinet containing the scrolls. There were over a hundred scrolls altogether (some consisting only of the Haftaroth), all contained in silver cases with finely wrought designs, to preserve the parchment from becoming mouldy. . . . I noticed a pious old woman who went slowly from one scroll to the other, touching each in turn with her fingers, which she reverently brought to her lips. It was the most touching scene of religious devotion that I saw throughout Far Eastern Jewry."

Following Arbith on *Shemini Atsereth,* a Sepher Torah is placed on the Tebah as a congregant stands by.[59] At least one other is carried through seven circuits around the Tebah while Psalms 29 and 150 are chanted and Pizmons sung.[60]

Before ברוך שאמר the next morning, the Piyyut צמאה נפשי by Abraham Ibn Ezra is chanted.[61] The seven circuits are performed as they are on Simhath Torah.

On the afternoon of Shemini Atsereth, a ceremony called Hathimath Ha-Torah is observed. The Hazan allocates a Parasha (weekly portion) to each congregant, one Book of the Pentateuch at a time. On the completion of each Book, the prayer usually said after each of the five divisions of the Book of Psalms is recited. Deuteronomy concluded, the Hazan recites aloud the final chapter[62] and begins a reading of Genesis as far as chapter 2, verse 3. As the prayer belonging to the fifth Book is concluded, the congregation says the Kaddish יהא שלמא and Minha is begun.[63]

Some continue to use the Sukkah on Shemini Atsereth, thus expressing a reluctance to abandon it.

On Simhath Torah morning, as the Torahs are taken from the Ark and returned thereto, Pizmons are sung instead of the usual psalms. They are sung also before each Oleh.[64]

Hathan Torah and Hathan Bereshith are called simultaneously to prevent a pause between the conclusion and commencement of the Torah, symbolic of the idea that the Torah has no beginning and no end but an ever-recurring expression of the will of God.

No Festival is more joyous to a Jew than Sukkoth and Simhath Torah, because of the songs traditionally sung on these occasions. After the evening meal on Sukkoth these songs or Pizmons are sung with great zest. On Simhath Torah they enliven the Hakafas and, read between each Aliyah, provide the special atmosphere of the Festival. In this connection the present writer might mention the compositions of his own forbears Saleh ben Yoseph Musleah and Nissim, his son, included in editions of Pizmons printed in Bombay and Calcutta. Saleh and Nissim both held rabbinic positions in Baghdad; the former died about 1785.[65]

Hymns or Pizmons are also chanted in synagogue in honor of a Hathan, Abi Ha-ben and Bar Mitsva; for the Maftir portions on Shabbath Zakhor, in honor of Purim; Shabbath Ha-hodesh, for the advent of the month of Nisan; Shabbath Shirah for the Song at the Sea and Yithro (Shabuoth as well) for the Ten Commandments;[66] and Shabbath Hanukka. Each has a distinctive melody.

Pizmons for Shabbath and the termination of the Sabbath complete the repertoire.[67]

*Hanukka:*

Hanukka is observed with comparatively little ceremonial. The festivities surround the lighting of the Hanukiya. These are made of brass or tin strips in the shape of a triangle at the bottom of which is

a row of nine rings (or eight and one on the top for the Khadamah or Shamash) to hold glass oil lamps. The Hanukiyas or Menorahs are nailed to the wall. Each boy over thirteen years has his own Hanukiyah.[68]

Each child is presented with a colorful Hanukkah sheet of glossy paper on which is printed in gilt letters: the divine name at the top, a seven branched Menorah with Psalm 67, the benedictions for the lighting and הנרות הללו. At the bottom, the child's name is inscribed. These decorations adorn the wall near the Hanukiyah. The children participate in the lighting too. After the head of the family lights the first wick, each child assists in lighting subsequent wicks. There is no song comparable to "Maoz Tsur" but in Baghdad the hymn "Yah, Hatsel Yonah Mehaka" would be heartily rendered.

Dairy products are consumed to commemorate the victory of Judith over Holofernes. The beautiful Hebrew heroine, having intoxicated the tyrant, according to the story, fed him cream and cheese and then slew him. A popular dish was "Halwa" made with flour, sugar, oil, almonds and cardamom.

*Tu B'Shebat:*

The observance of the New Year of Trees is best described by a Jewish chaplain in the American Forces during World War II, Rabbi David J. Seligson.[69]

"There are certain interesting differences and a definite beauty of custom and ritual which we have lost in the West. Their minhag is based on a little known ritual, found in a book called "Pri Etz Hadar," edited by Belleforte brothers of Livorno (in 1823). It is made up of selections from our classical literature which refer to the fertility of the soil, to fruits and harvests. Each selection from Bible and Rabbinic source is accompanied by the intricate passages from the Zohar which ascribe special merit to the performance of the Mitzvot (commandments) and Brachot (blessings) of the festival. The custom is to invite guests, ten men or more, exclusive of the ladies, on the eve of the festival. The table is spread with many kinds of fruits and nuts (there were seventy different varieties in the Ezra home). Grace is followed by a Kiddush (sanctification prayer). Then each one of the male guests takes a water or oil-made biscuit, makes the Mezonot (cake) benediction. Then, each in turn partakes of a fruit or nut after the proper Haetz (fruit) benediction. The entire party then proceeds to partake of the species that have been blessed. Four cups of wine are tasted between the various

Brachot. The first cup is white colored wine, the second cup is 3/4 white and ¼ red, the third, half and half and the last is ¼ white and 3/4 red. The entire proceedings are interspersed with readings from the Zohar and the ceremony is concluded with the singing of Eastern melodies many of them showing the marked influence of the Orient.

"Some such customs take place in every observant Jewish home here. The poor of the community also look to this day for gifts of fruits and monies. Large parties are organized for the children of the community in the various schools. Generally, it seems that they make much more of Tu Bi Shebat than we do in the West. I am told that this ritual is performed throughout the East and among all those communities which look to Baghdad for their spiritual guidance."

Locally, the Festival is called "Tob Shebath," giving the day an auspicious designation.

The observance is held in the evening and lasts about three hours. But if the Festival falls on the Sabbath, the ceremony takes place on Friday in the early afternoon "because people are not accustomed to leave their homes on Friday night."[70]

A century before, another westerner, Rabbi Jacob Sapir, viewed the Tu B'Shebat proceedings in a very different light. A Talmudist and a rationalist, to him the semi-mystical ceremony was offensive and galling. He wrote a diatribe on what he thought was a travesty in law.[71]

On Shabbath Beshallah, a special porridge made with pounded grain, carrots and chicken called "Harisi" is relished.[72]

*Purim:*

Shabbath Zakhor: two congregants read the מי כמוך of Yehudah Halevi[73] after the reading of the Torah, with the Sephers still on the Tebah. The Hazan takes over from the last few verses.[74] Arabic translations are available but not used during the service.

Except for the reading of the Megillah, there is nothing distinctive about the celebration of Purim. The men present the equivalent of a half shekel (one rupee or twenty United States cents) for dispatch to the Holy Land (Arba Aratsoth) before the evening service (except when Purim falls on Saturday night, when it is given the previous Thursday at the termination of the Fast of Esther). Feet are stamped at the mention of Haman and his sons during the reading of the Megillah. In Baghdad, it was read also on Purim Shushan[75] but Jews of India gave up the practice.

Evidently it is the name of the festival (Purim = Feast of *Lots*) that has given the association with games of chance and in some families card games and others are exceedingly popular. There used to be an elaborate custom for the exchange of gifts, especially between parents and married children as well as between one married member of a family and another. A tray (Indian, Khooncha) of sweetmeats is sent by one party and the recipient is expected to reciprocate. Even more common and something that endears the festival to children is the receipt of Purim money from their parents and relatives.

A word about special Purims celebrated by Baghdad Jews on the 11th of Ab and 16th of Tebeth. These are called Nes Tahmasp from the name of the King of Persia connected with one of the incidents, or Nes Le-Babli-yeem (Miracle of the Babylonians). In the seventeenth century, there were frequent changes in political overlordship of Baghdad between Persia and Turkey for two reasons: (1) Its strategic geographical position vis-a-vis the two countries, reminiscent of the Israelite kingdom in the midst of Assyria-Babylonia and Egypt. (2) The division of the population between the two Moslem sects, the Shiahs favoring the Persians and the Sunnis the Turks.[76]

Sassoon, in his epoch-making two-volume catalogue of oriental and Samaritan Manuscripts, called "Ohel Dawid"[77] mentions the following facts: In the days of Shah Abbas and his successor Shah Sufie, Kings of Persia, Baghdad was under the cruel Persian rulers who maltreated and robbed the inhabitants. Many died of hunger and some were put to death by the local Persian regime. It was a time of trouble for the Jews of Baghdad, who cried to God for succor because of their persecutors. No one would undertake to report the conditions at Baghdad to the Sultan of Turkey at Constantinople.

Fortunately, a Baghdad Jew laid his hands on some secret document and at the risk of his life bravely brought it to the Sultan. Disguising himself as a Moslem with a turban on his head, and walking haltingly, he arrived at the royal city. At first the gate-keepers were hesitant about allowing a stranger, so poorly-clad and with clothes stained with the dirt of the road, to enter the royal presence. Convinced by him, however, of the urgency and importance of his errand they admitted him. He was well-received by the Sultan Murad IV and his ministers. On reading the secret document incriminating the Persians, and infuriated by its contents, the Sultan is reported to have mustered his forces and marched on Baghdad.

The story goes that he entered the city stealthily by night in the guise of a dervish or hermit to make a reconnaissance and enjoyed

the hospitality of a widowed Jewish woman. It is believed that the Sultan, in biblical fashion, and in order to appease his anxiety over the outcome of his campaign, mentally fixed on a sign, that if his hostess would offer him full loaves of bread it would signal his victory; if broken loaves, it would be an inauspicious sign.

Assured of the success of his venture, he is supposed to have laid siege to the city of Baghdad for forty days till the Persians surrendered. Sultan Murad entered the city on 11th Ab 5398 (1638) and relieved the suffering inhabitants.

The first deliverance of the city of Baghdad is commemorated in a wedding song.[78]

The second occurrence happened almost a century later when Baghdad was under the rule of Sultan Mahmud of Turkey in 1733. The Persians, led by Shah Tahmasp, besieged the city but were repulsed by the Sultan and a great victory was won on 16th Tebeth which was declared an auspicious day. Both the above events are called The Miracle of Tahmasp from the appellation of the latter.

It is interesting that still another Purim was instituted by the Rabbinate of Baghdad for the 17th Adar corresponding with March 11, 1917, when the British Army entered Baghdad during World War I.[79] But the Jews of India, having emigrated already, are not even aware of its observance.

*Nisan:*

The Hebrew month of Nisan traditionally marks the anniversary of the erection of the sanctuary by the Israelites in the wilderness and the subsequent gifts of their princes. It is commemorated by appropriate readings from the Books of Exodus and Numbers as well as other biblical passages[80] followed by the Rabbis' Kaddish. The prescribed study runs from the eve of Rosh Hodesh Nisan until the eve of Pesah.

On a Tuesday in Nisan before Pesah (Tuesday being the day of the week vegetable life was created) a benediction is said over the sight of the first bloom.[81]

*Pesah*

*Search for Leaven:*

An interesting prayer is recited after the usual formula for annulling the leaven: "Just as we have removed the leaven from our home and burnt it, so may we merit removing the evil inclination from our

midst all our days. May we cleave to the good inclination, to Thy Torah, in love and reverence for Thee, we, our children and our descendants."[82]

*Erub Tabsheeleen:*

Recited both at home and in synagogue on the eve of the festival (a Wednesday or Thursday). The Matsa (or bread on Shabuoth or Sukkoth) used for this ritual is eaten at Seudah Shelishith (third meal, late Shabbath afternoon) on the ensuing Sabbath.

*Haggadah:*

Before leaving for evening services it is customary for the head of the household to examine the table and the tray with the requisite items for the Seder. The large copper tray is covered with a silk cloth.[83]

The arrangement:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ג׳ מצות<br>3 Matsas | |
| ביצה<br>Egg | | זרוע<br>Bone |
| | מרור<br>Bitter Herbs<br>(Lettuce) | |
| כרפס<br>Celery | חזרת<br>Hazereth<br>(Lettuce) | חרוסת<br>Haroseth<br>(Hallek)<br>זלויק |

The Haroseth is date juice called Hallek, giving the ordained brown color of mortar and a sweet taste. Lettuce is used for both Hazereth and Maror. The choice of this vegetable as "bitter herbs" can be questioned on the ground that it does not have a pungent taste as is the required attribute of Maror. Perhaps a different variety of lettuce was used in Baghdad.

The breaking of the middle Matsa has a distinctive procedure. Since the specially baked Matsa Shemura is flexible, it is broken into the form of the Hebrew letters Dalet and Waw, the latter bring the *larger* piece because it is eaten as the Afikomen, reminiscent of the *happy* occasion of the eating of the Paschal sacrifice to one's satis-

faction. This piece is placed in a napkin and slung over the shoulder of a member of the family, usually the youngest. Before receiving it, he says משארותם צרורות בשמלותם על שכמם. (The children of Israel took their dough before it was leavened with their kneading-troughs bundled in their clothes upon their shoulders). The bundle of Matsa symbolized just that.

The smaller piece in the shape of a Dalet is put back as the middle Matsa. Being the *smaller,* it signifies appropriately the "bread of affliction."

During the recitation of הא לחמא עניא, each participant places his hands upon the three Matsas included in which was the "little Matsa" — the poor man's lot.[84]

The four questions are not asked by the youngest but is chanted in unison. Just prior, the leader asks the member who carries the Afikomen:

| *Hebrew* | *Arabic* | |
|---|---|---|
| מאין באת | מנין ג'ית | Whence have you come? |
| | ממצרים | From Egypt. |
| אן אתה הולך | ולוין כתרוח | Where are you going? |
| | לירושלים | To Jerusalem. |
| מה לך צידה לדרך | אש ג'יואגתך | Do you have provision for the way? |

No answer is expected of the third question. Some families have the youngest hit his head lightly against the table. More appropriately, he should point to the Afikomen as his provision.

The tray is covered as והיא is recited and the second cup raised. The cover is removed immediately thereafter.

Additions exclusive to Aleppo, Yemenite and Baghdad rites are derived from the Midrash[85] אמרו רבותינו, אתה גאלת ומנין and ערכו שבח אמונים.[86]

Another distinctive characteristic is the treatment of the account of the plagues. From ביד חזקה, the leader recites the passages through by himself till the end of the description of the plagues. In preparation, an earthen vessel is placed before him on a side table with a special cup full of wine (not the one he is going to drink from). As he mentions the following words, he pours some of the wine into the earthen vessel: דם, ואש, תימרות עשן in the paragraph beginning ומופתים, each of the ten plagues as well as their three mnemonics. No wine remains in the cup after the final word באז"ב. The leader washes his hands before he pro-

ceeds, indicating that the ceremony, then completed, was something of an abomination that caused ritual impurity.

The Hallel is sung responsively, each family member taking a turn acting as leader.

The only supplementary verses chanted at the conclusion is the Had Gadya, to no distinctive melody. The biblical book of the Song of Songs and a specific Pizmon for the month of Nisan נכון לבו terminate the Seder.

No unanimity exists for the place in the Seder of eating the egg. Some eat it before עבדים , others, as part of the meal. All recite the formula זכר לקרבן חגיגה before eating it.

The cup of Elijah does not figure in the Haggadah ritual.

*Prayer for Dew/Rain* is introduced by the following:

מדכר עבדיכון קודמיכון דיעבר זמן הגשם (הטל) ובא זמן הטל (הגשם) לחיים ולא למות לברכה ולא לקללה לשלום ולא למלחמה ישוב בסתר עליון תזיל טלנו (גשמנו) בעתם.

This order differs slightly from that found in סדר תפלות כמנהג בגדאד.[87] Interesting is the omission of לחירות ולא לעבדות (may there be freedom and not slavery), reflecting the freedom enjoyed in India.[88]

The prayer for rain on Shemini Atsereth or dew on Pesah is said before returning the Sepher Torah to the Ark and not after Musaph. In the collection of Hyeem b. Pinhas Hariri, seventeenth century Persian Jew, this arrangement is specified.[89]

The Festival of Pesah is ushered out by a picturesque ceremony in the home. On the evening following the conclusion of the Festival, members of the family greet each other with the words Sant-el-Khadra (Arabic, a year of good fortune), lightly stroking the other with green leaves or a vegetable and offering blessings and good wishes.

*Shabuoth:*

The night vigil, described above, is the distinctive ritual. During the day, as a wheat paste (Indian, Sattu) is eaten, ויצבט לה קלי ותאכל ותשבע ותותר (Ruth 2:14) and the benediction שהכל are said.

*Tisha B'Ab:*

A group of elegies whose initial letters spell the word נביא"ה are read one a day from the second day of Ab till the eve of Tisha B'Ab except, of course, Friday and Saturday. Since Arbith, immediately following Minha, is read in synagogue before sunset, and it is thus still Rosh Hodesh, the elegy set for the second day in Ab is postponed to the next afternoon. The last two elegies have, therefore, to be read on the final evening before the Fast.

The Hazan and congregants change their usual seats in synagogue on Tisha B'Ab, as is required of a mourner for the first thirty days, and sit on the mat-covered floor.

The reading of the Book of Lamentations is silent, except the last chapter which the Hazan chants aloud.

At the mention of the number of years since the Destruction, the synagogue is blacked out for a few seconds.

The Tephillin is put on privately at home before going to the synagogue, reading שמע קדש לי, אלהי נשמה (omitting שעשה לי כל צרכי).[90] Therefore they are not worn in Minha.[91] No Haftarah is read in Minha.

Parts of the Book of Job are read following the morning service.

At the termination of the fast, some pass around rose water for the recitation of the benediction on spices.[92] The same is done at the termination of Kippur. After each of these fasts, Birkat Ha-Lebanah is recited in congregation. Both days occurring during the monsoons, often an overcast sky or inclement weather rules out the observance of this practice.

## *IV. Home Readings*

The only Arabic used during public prayer is the translation of the Aramaic interpretation of the Haftarah of Tisha B'Ab. The ritual use of Arabic called Sharh is for the edification especially of the women in home readings.

The Jews of Baghdad and subsidiary communities held very highly the participation of the members of a family in joint home study, especially on Festivals. It gave them opportunities, increasingly rare in recent years as a result of the varied interests and activities of family members during the week, to come together as a unit. This may be one explanation, at least partial, of the cohesion of the Baghdadi family and their low rate of divorce.

Here are some of the subjects of study:

1. Corresponding to each Parasha, the Sabbath readings include portions from the Nebee-im and Ketubim and Mishna, so that once a year the entire cycle of the Bible and Mishna is covered. For example the lectionary for Shabbath Wayakhel is Jeremiah Ch. 31-36, Proverbs 1-5 and Mishna Shabbath (to recall the reference to Shabbath in the Torah reading).

2. On Purim night the Megillah is read also at home following the synagogue service.

3. As mentioned above,[93] the Baghdad Jew is proud of his "guests" on Sukkoth. The seven exalted and holy patriarchs from Abraham to David, grace his Sukkah every day and night of the Festival. He welcomes them during Kiddush with a lengthy prayer and reads about their lives in appropriate passages.[94] Zoharistic selections complete each day's study.

4. On the seventh night of Pesah the family get together after the festive meal to recall the story of the crossing of the sea. The portions from Nebee-im and Ketubim and Gemara recount the messianic hopes of the Jewish people.

5. Shabuoth is particularly noteworthy for its study sessions at home.

The Azharoth of Solomon Gabirol, which is a poetic rendering of the 613 Commandments, is read in two parts, one for each day of the Festival — on the first day, the Positive Commandments, while on the second day the Negative Commandments, are recited. The Arabic translation is omitted. On each day, half the book of Ruth is chanted in the traditional cantillations. The entire book of Psalms is read, the Festival being observed as the anniversary of the death of King David, traditional author of the Psalms.

On the night of Shabuoth there is a vigil of study at which candles are lit for the souls of departed relatives. The same procedure with different readings, is followed on the night of Hoshanah Rabbah called Hathimah, expressing the silent wish of גמר וחתימה טובה. Seven Selihoth services are recited during the reading of the Book of Psalms.

6. On each day of Pesah one chapter of the biblical Song of Songs is read with the interpretative Targum based on the Midrash and an Arabic translation of the Targum.

7. On the Sabbath intervening between Pesah and Shabuoth, the Mishnaic Tractate Aboth is read with Arabic translation after each paragraph.

The Pesah Haggadah has been translated into Arabic and is read by most of the older families in Arabic as well. In India, with the use of English, the Haggadah is sometimes read in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Other liturgical pieces rendered into Arabic are Yehuda Halevi's מי כמוך for Shabbath Zakhor (the translation is not recited in synagogue but is meant for private perusal) and the Haftarah for the morning of Tisha B'Ab, and its Aramaic interpretation.

### *V. Some Kabbalistic Practices*

The most basic source for Baghdadi mystical ritual and law is Ben Ish Hye by Hakham Joseph Hyeem, published in Jerusalem in 1898, and subsequently in Baghdad in 1902, and recently reprinted in Jerusalem by Saleh Moshe Mansoor. Hakham Joseph Hyeem was the last of the great rabbis of Baghdad. At the age of twenty-six, he succeeded his father and more illustrious grandfather Moshe Hyeem in 1859, and remained the spiritual leader of Baghdad Jewry for half a century, while his influence extended to the communities of India and China. Though very wealthy, he was noted for his modesty and humility, his wide learning, his unusual eloquence and his service to his co-religionists.

He was imbued with the love of the Kabbala of Isaac Luria, the אר"י and introduced into the prayers and the ceremonial a number of mystical and Kabbalistic practices. Earlier, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, Baghdad was the seat of Kabbalistic and astrological studies.[95]

The Zohar and other Kabbalistic treatises were popular studies and parts of these found their way in the prayer book. For instance, the revelation vouchsafed to Elijah the Prophet (Petihath Eliyahoo) which forms the introduction to the Idra (a main section of the Zohar) is read twice daily before services. It contains the fundamental principles of Kabbala and the formula of faith according to the Prophet. It is read also as a prelude to the Rosh Hashanah Kiddush followed by five biblical verses in this order:

(Gen. 6:8) ונח מצא חן בעיני ד׳ — 12 times
(Gen. 26:12) ויזרע יצחק בארץ ההיא.. — 12 times
(Ps. 36:10) כי עמך מקור חיים באורך נראה אור 10 times
(Ps. 97:11) אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה 17 times
(I Sam. 25:6) ואמרתם כה להי ואתה שלום וביתך 10 times
שלום וכל אשר לך שלום
תחל שנה וברכותיה

The regular Kiddush follows.

Elijah's revelation also introduces the Haggada ritual and that of the first bloom in the month of Nisan.[96]

Certain numbers became auspicious by mystical association. Thus, the numerical value of the letters of the Tetragrammaton adds up to 26, and the double of it becomes 52. Similarly, 101 equals the value of the letters in the name of the angel Michael. All of these were favorite bids for auctions in synagogue.[97] For some other mystical reason, the number was said to be effective in warding off the evil eye and therefore usually found their place in marriage documents.[98] Most of the local Ketubah sums ended in 555; many used the number 2 for the same reason, e.g., 2555, 5250.[99]

We had mentioned[100] the affinity between the local community and the sacred shrines in the Holy Land and Iraq. It was believed that the great teacher in Mishnaic times, Rabbi Meir, was a guardian angel with miraculous powers. So he was nominated "Baal Haness" (author of miracles). The fund in his name at Tiberias found a ready place in the lives of the Jews of the Orient. Businessmen trusted in him as on an "insurance policy," so to speak, for protection against damage, theft, fire and drowning at sea.[101] In times of trouble or danger, oil wicks were lit and a prayer was recited ending with the words אלקא דרבי מאיר ענני (The God of Rabbi Meir, answer me!).

Just as Karo in the Shulhan Arukh provides a specific manner for tying shoe laces, probably based on a Kabbalistic formula, Hakham Joseph Hyeem, also in the name of Luria, introduced a specific formula for the morning washing of the hands. The pitcher or other vessel containing the water must first be held in the left hand and water poured over the right; it is then held in the right hand and water poured over the left. This is done three times in single separate actions. He says: "The evil spirit is uprooted only by alternate washing."[102]

The mystics believed that there are four "worlds" called בריה, יצירה, עשיה and אצילות. The last mentioned or the highest world contains the Sephiroth or heavenly spheres; in the עשיה world are the Ophanim, the angels that receive the prayers, control the actions of men and wage war against Sama-el or evil; the world of יצירה is the seat of the ten classes of angels, with their chiefs presided over by Metatron; in the בריה world are the souls of the pious, the divine throne and the divine halls (Idroth).[103]

The Shahrith or morning prayer is divided into four sections, each section dedicated to the השפאה or spiritual influence of one of the "worlds." Thus until ברוך שאמר the "world" of עשיה is in-

voked; until יוצר the "world" of יצירה; until גאל ישראל, the "world" of בריאה and the Amidah invokes the world of אצילות.

What is said to be another innovation of the אר"י is in the order of the Arbith service. The daily Arbith starts with (a) כי א-ל רחום (Deut. 4:31) followed by (b) והוא רחום (Psalms 78:38) and (c) ד' צבאות עמנו (Ps. 46:8), (d) ד' צבאות אשרי אדם (Ps. 84:13) and (e) ד' הושיע המלך יענינו (Ps. 20:10) and concludes with ויברכו שם כבודך (Neh. 9:5b); c, d and e were said to have been uttered by the three Patriarchs respectively.[104]

Before taking out the Sepher Torah from the Ark, בריך [105] is recited,[106] pledging personal loyalty to the Torah and praying for divine protection and sustenance. It is necessary, according to Luria, to read it at Shabbath Minha too, and so the local custom requires.[107]

The Minha on Shabbath was held early enough to have congregants go home for Seudah Shelishith (the third Shabbath meal) understood to be efficacious in saving power at the pre-messianic wars of Gog and Magog. Some partook of a fourth meal after Habdalah on Saturday night. According to Zoharistic belief, the practice would preserve the bones after death till "the end of days."

Some refrain from eating or drinking from sunset on Saturday until a half hour thereafter at the termination of Shabbath because it is believed Mazikim or harmful spirits return to purgatory after Shabbath. For the same reason, lights are not put on till it's time for Habdalah, so as not to attract the attention of such spirits. On the other hand, it may also be attributed to the Sabbath law against creating artificial light.

The pious read parts of the Zohar called Tikkunim throughout the month of Elul and the Ten Days of Penitence.

According to Luria, Hakafas (circuits around the Tebah) are performed following Arbith on the night of Isru Hag of Simhath Torah prior to restoring the Sephers to the Ark room.[108] The ceremonious return to their usual place enhances the honor of the Sephers.

Another Lurianic ordination is a special vigil on the anniversary of the death of Moses on the 7th of Adar night and day,[109] consisting of selections from the Mishnah, Gemarah, Midrash and Zohar. The manual of prescribed readings has, in a second section, similar study for the death anniversary of Luria himself on 5th Ab.[110]

Also borrowed from Luria's ritual is the special arrangement for the search for leaven. Before the search, ten pieces of Hamets are "hidden" in corners of the house. During the ceremonial search, the master of the house carries a lighted candle and a plate to contain

the Hamets that is "discovered" but which already holds one additional piece of Hamets, some salt and a knife. The knife is to remove, if necessary, Hamets that might be found in holes and crannies. The salt has a more mystic significance. Satan and his band are extremely envious of this Mitsva of searching for leaven. Salt acts as a deterrent to him. The letters ( מל"ח = 78) have a numerical value three times the value of the Tetragrammaton, and thus has the power to drive away the devil. Further, salt is סימנא טבא, סימן לקיום. Since salt is a preservative, it will merit for the one who searches many more years of performing that Mitsva.

Before each division of the Seder service in Pesah, the mystics require a series of biblical verses, many of which are repeated before commencing each section. For example, before the הא לחמא עניא the following are said פי צדיק יהגה חכמה ולשונו תדבר משפט
פי ידבר חכמות והגות לבי תבונות
פי יספר צדקתך כל היום תשועתך כי לא ידעתי ספורות
חסדי ד' לעולם אשירה לדוד ודוד אודיע אמונתך בפי
רוממות א-ל בגרונם וחרב פיפיות בידם
מן המצר קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה

The anniversary of the death of the Tana, Simon bar Yohai, the traditional author of the Zohar, is observed in the Holy Land by a visit to his grave at Meron, a tiny village near Safed. There, with bonfires, singing and dancing, the participants continue their rejoicing late into the night. The study of the Zohar accompanies the celebration called Hillulah. Outside the Holy Land, especially in Sephardi centers, the Hillulah is celebrated in synagogue with great rejoicing, as well as the individual study of the Zohar.[113] Many attended the local Calcutta synagogues. This used to be one of the significant events in the religious calendar; for example the *Maggid Mesharim*[112] lists a number of prominent persons who were present for the celebration.[113] In recent years, a bare handful of persons could still be found at the synagogue for the event.

The mystic masters figured also in the Hattarat Nedarim during the penitential season. The declaration of vows concludes

לשם יחוד ... לדעת רבי שמעון בר יוחאי ולדעת רבי אלעזר בנו ולדעתרבי יצחק לוריא אשכנזי המקום ברחמיו יעזרנו על דבר כבוד שמו ...

### *VI. Some Superstitious Practices*

Harmful spirits were said to dwell in trees. So it was considered unwise to walk under a tree after dusk.

Occasionally, and especially in the days between Passover and Shabuoth, Jews from Iraq, Persia and India would visit the tomb of Ezra the Scribe and other shrines to pray and supplicate before God. People in distress, particularly barren women and those who frequently miscarried, poured out their souls for many hours together in solitude, in the hope that the sacred patrons there interred might intercede on their behalf. Others gave thanks to God with songs and prayers for the fulfillment of their desires through the merit of these patriarchs.[114]

Some months of the year were thought to be particularly inauspicious for deaths in certain families. For instance, when, at age seventy-five, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Gabai of Arba Aratsoth for many years, took ill on Adar 2nd 1887, he suspected he was going to die, as his father, grandfather, mother, sister and other relatives succumbed in that month.[115]

Antidotes set for certain ailments are often based on superstition.[116]

*Hasbah:*

Children afflicted with measles are taken to synagogue and carried around the Tebah. Two similarly affected must not visit the synagogue at the same time.

*Charm Against Death of Children:*

Parents who have previously lost children at birth, should treat the new-born child as if he was not theirs, fittingly called "Ibn-il-Darb" or "child of the street." The mother does not give suck. A wet nurse is hired. The child's sex is camouflaged — a boy baby is dressed like a girl and vice versa. A male child is made to wear an earring and a female infant a nose ring.

*Msahbah:*

The underlying belief here is that evil spirits traverse the length and breadth of this world, and much like the worship of the ancients, had to be appeased. Moving into a new dwelling place required the friendship of not only human neighbors but demonic ones too. The process of reconciliation began the night prior to one's moving. The following were sent as harbingers of peace — a bible, a mirror, a new pitcher full of water, candy and a green vegetable.

*Mai Har:*

Hot water is not poured on the ground. Should a container of hot water be emptied, the spirits are addressed: "Put your bowls on your heads, hot water is coming on you."

*Mai U-Milh:*

To cure one who suffers from a recurring malady whose prognosis is unknown to medical science, he is taken to the river's edge before sunset. Salt is thrown into the river as a sign of reconciliation with the demons who, it is believed, caused the illness.

*Bizzoonah:*

Cats and dogs were not reared as domestic pets. A black cat with bright eyes is regarded as demon infested and not beaten but driven away by knocking on the floor.

*Dig Dig:*

A quaint custom concerning one with a stye on the eye-lid. He knocks at the door and announces his identity with the words, "Dig-dig min eini l'einkum yizbek." (The boil from my eye shall enter yours). This is done at three residences.

*The Evil Eye:*

Shells and imitation turquoises are joined by a gall-met which, it is believed would split if the wearer is struck by an evil eye. It serves the same purpose as a lightning conductor — absorbs the impact of the envious eye. "On a small triangular velvet pillow is fastened a row of three imitation turquoises called in Arabic 'Dehhash' to which are joined three shells, in Arabic, 'Wada.' The gall-met which is suspended from the pillow is connected with a bigger piece of imitation turquoise, which has seven holes."

The remnant of the wicks of the Hanukka lights when burnt are used as charms for various purposes.

*Tarkah:*

Numerous charms are antidotes to fright. A horseshoe is heated

to red heat, water poured over it, the resultant vapor beating upon the face of the victim, and the water collected in the container of horseshoes, he drinks.

*Dahin:*

A little water is thrown over the place where the shock is sustained and is scoured for dirt. Some of the water is smeared over the victim's body saying, kil il ard sawwa, aana ajeed minkom dawwa, taynee il aafoo il kaan aadi tow koom. (The entire ground is as one. I ask a cure of you. Pardon me if I have troubled you.)



Readings during Hoshanah Rabbah vigil in the Sukkah (Tabernacle.)



Scrolls of the Torah carried ceremoniously on the festival of of Simhath Torah (Rejoicing of the Torah).



European children enjoying an outing in the care of their native maids.



Theodore Herzl Day being observed by Zionist youth, chaired by Rabbi David J. Seligson, American chaplain in the China-Burma-India sector, World War II.



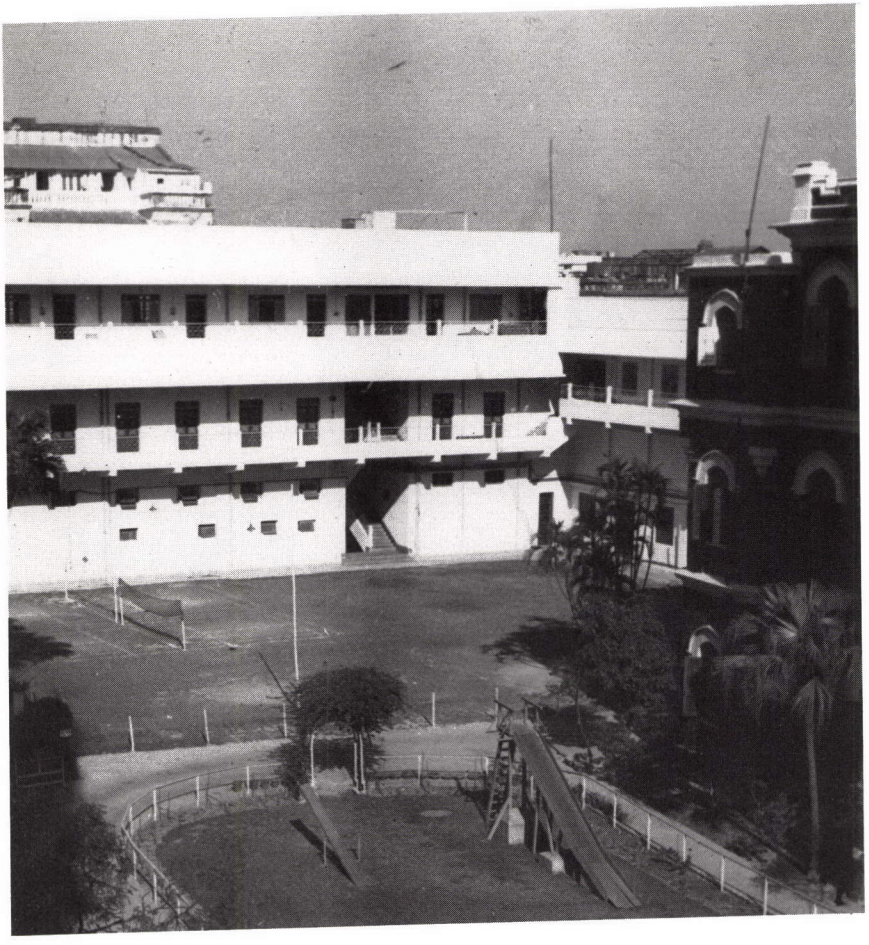
The author with Baghdad-born Ezra Hadad (center) and Nissim B. Elias during Hadad's visit in Calcutta as emissary of the United Jewish Appeal in 1956.



Sara (Mrs. A.) Curlender at foundation stone ceremonies of the Jewish Girls School, 1956. Looking on are (L to R) Bernard V. Jacob, Rahma M. Luddy, Marie Mordecai, Joseph Curlender, David J. Cohen, Maurice Jonah and A. D'Souza, Inspector of Anglo-Indian Schools. Mordecai Levi (foreground right) supervised the construction.



Jewish Girls' School – Old Building.



Jewish Girls' School – New Building.



Memorial to Queen Victoria – a striking likeness to the famed Taj Mahal.
Today it is a picture gallery and museum.



Paradesi Synagogue, Cochin
*Courtesy: Dr. Solomon S. Brav*



Jews' Street, Cochin, at the head of which is the clock tower.
*Courtesy: Paul Yager*



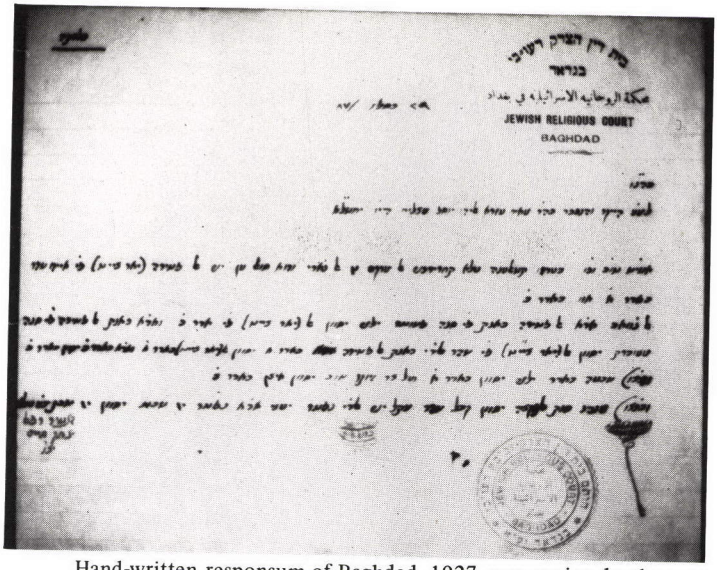
The prayer-hall and Kuppa at the entrance to the Calcutta cemetery. Interment is below the ground. The masonry superstructure secures the headstone or marble slab in place.



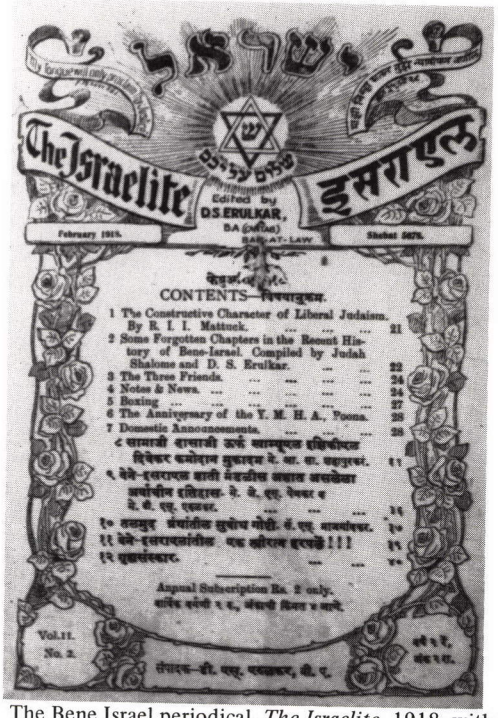
Jewish Cemetery at Darjeeling in the Himalayas, 6000 feet above sea level.



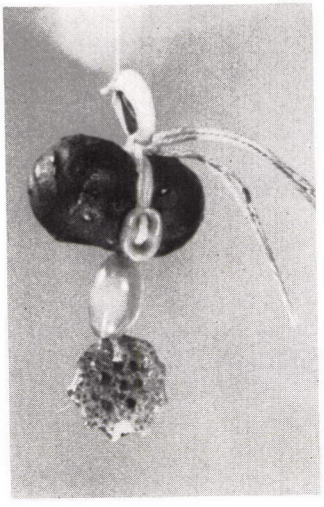
Shoulder-borne bier of Benjamin Nissim Elias being carried out of his residence, 2 Albert Road, Calcutta.




Hand-written responsum of Baghdad, 1927, concerning death anniversaries in the month of Adar.

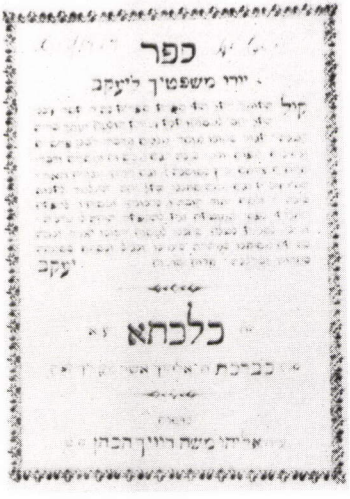



The Bene Israel periodical, *The Israelite,* 1918, with Marathi English and Hebrew script.

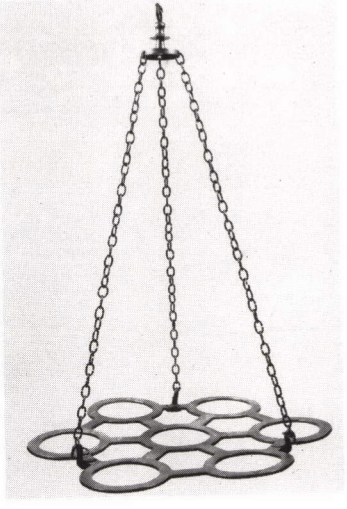




Afsa and Dahash—prophylactic against the evil eye, and a symbolic 'hand' of divine protection worn as a charm.




Copy of *Yoru Mishpathekha Le-Yaakob*, 1882, presented by the author to Isaac Mordecai Cohen.



Tiryah – seven-apertured metal slate to hold glasses of oil wicks, lit on the eve of the Sabbath or festival.



No. I Vol. I.

THE JEWISH GAZETTE

פַּרְאָה

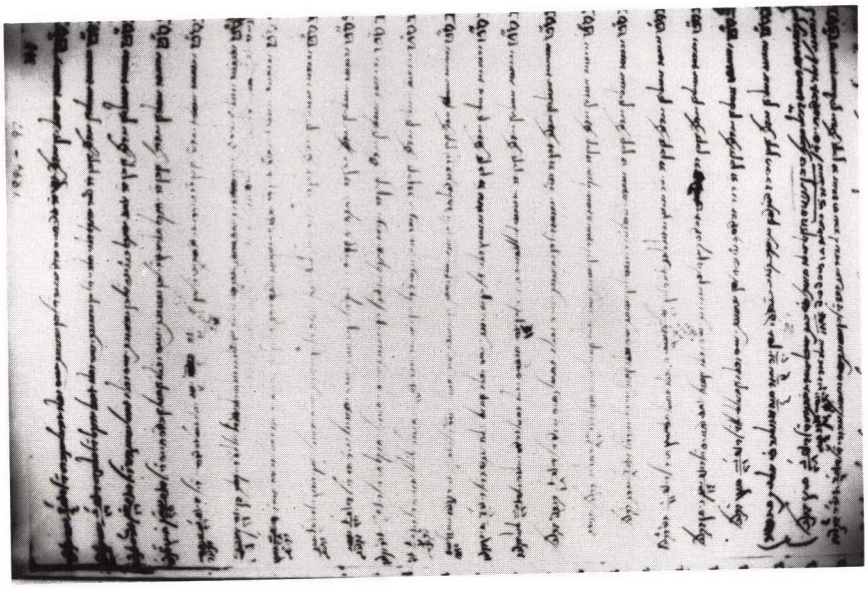
PAIRAH.

CALCUTTA, FRIDAY, JUNE, 21, 1878.

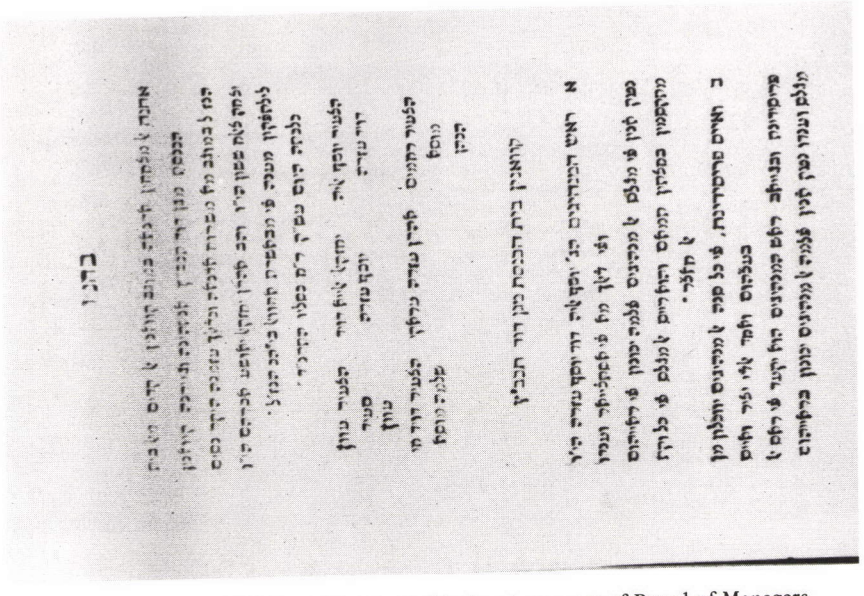
The first issue of the Judeo-Arabic newspaper, *Paerah,* 1878.



Letter, 1889, appointing Elias Joseph Musleah collection officer of the Holy Land Academy of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness in Tiberias, Israel.



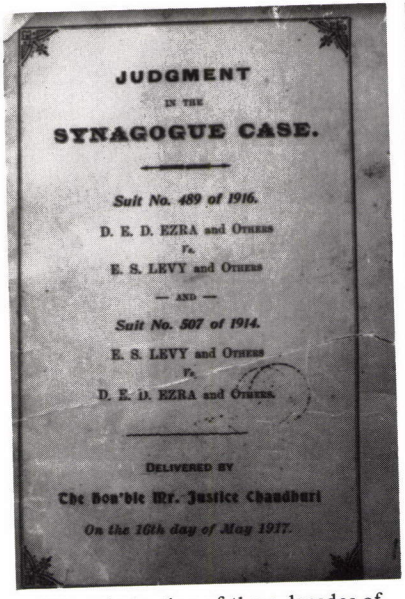
A page of Saul Moses Lanyado's register of circumcisions.



Maghen David Rules, 1894, in Arabic, bearing names of Board of Managers.



The Copper Plates given to Joseph Rabban
by Raja Sri Bhaskara Ravi Varma in the year 379 C. E.
*Courtesy: Dr. Solomon S. Brav*



JUDGMENT

IN THE

SYNAGOGUE CASE.

*Suit No. 489 of 1916.*

D. E. D. EZRA and Others

Vs.

E. S. LEVY and Others

— AND —

*Suit No. 507 of 1914.*

E. S. LEVY and Others

Vs.

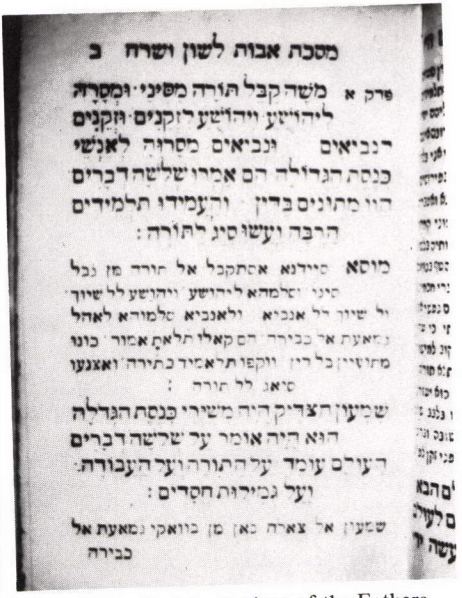
D. E. D. EZRA and Others.

DELIVERED BY

The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Chaudhuri

*On the 16th day of May 1917.*

The culmination of three decades of communal strife.



מסכת אבות לשון ישרה ב

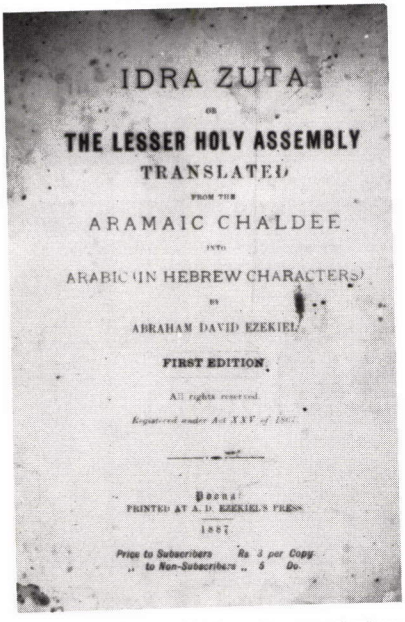
פרק א משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה
ליהושע ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים
לנביאים ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי
כנסת הגדולה הם אמרו שלשה דברים
היו מתונים בדין והעמידו תלמידים
הרבה ועשו סיג לתורה:

משא מיידנא אסתקבל אל תורה מן נבל
סיני ומסרהא ליהושע ויהושע לל שיוך
ול שיוך לל אנביא ולאנביא סלמוהא לאהל
נאעת אל כביר הם קאלו תלאת אמור כונו
מתוזיין כל דין ווקפו תלאמיד כתירה ואצנעו
סיאג לל תורה:

שמעון הצדיק היה משירי כנסת הגדולה
הוא היה אומר על שלשה דברים
העולם עומד על התורה ועל העבודה
ועל גמילות חסדים:

שמעון אל צדיק כאן מן בוואקי נמאעת אל
כביר

Pirke Aboth–The Sayings of the Fathers –printed in Calcutta, 1844, with Arabic translation for home reading.



IDRA ZUTA

OR

THE LESSER HOLY ASSEMBLY

TRANSLATED

FROM THE

ARAMAIC CHALDEE

INTO

ARABIC (IN HEBREW CHARACTERS)

BY

ABRAHAM DAVID EZEKIEL

FIRST EDITION.

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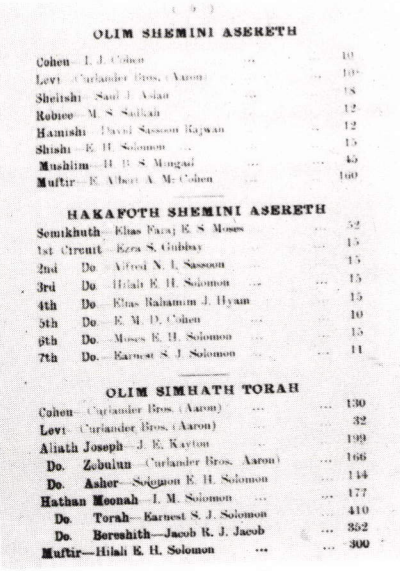
Poona:

PRINTED AT A. D. EZEKIEL'S PRESS.

1887.

*Price to Subscribers Rs. 3 per Copy.*
*" to Non-Subscribers " 5 Do.*

The English translation of a mystical work, which created a stir in both India and the Holy Land.



OLIM SHEMINI ASERETH

| | |
|---|---|
| Cohen—I. J. Cohen | 10 |
| Levi—Curiander Bros. (Aaron) | 10 |
| Sheitshi—Saul J. Aslan | 18 |
| Rebiee—M. S. Salkah | 12 |
| Hamishi—David Sassoon Rajwan | 12 |
| Shishi—E. H. Solomon | 15 |
| Mushlim—H. B. S. Mugaai | 45 |
| Muftir—E. Abeel A. M. Cohen | 100 |

HAKAFOTH SHEMINI ASERETH

| | |
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Record of Auction.

*Chapter 14*

## RESPONSA AND OTHER JEWISH LEGAL ACTION

Whenever Jews migrated they turned for authoritative opinion on questions of Jewish law to the rabbinate of the "old country." An example of this may be seen in North America where the early settlers in America would send their religious queries to Amsterdam or London, not to the rabbinate in Philadelphia.[1]

One of the main characteristics of the small centers of Jewry east of Aden, in India, Burma, China and Singapore was that, though far removed from the mother countries of the Near East, including the Holy Land, they continued to draw spiritual and religious sustenance from there. An extensive correspondence grew up between the Baghdad rabbinate and its eastern "dependencies." It was while Hakham Moses Hyeem Abdallah held office as Hakham Bashi of Baghdad 1785–1837 that the authority of the rabbinate there was first acknowledged among the Jews of India.[2]

The first major responsum was an opinion in the case of drowning of the newly-wed Ezekiel Dwek.[3] It mentioned the incidental evidence of a non-Jewess as being sufficient to free the wife from remaining an Agunah (= deserted wife).[4]

Other more important questions concerned the relationship between Arabic-speaking Jews and the older Jewish communities of India, the Bene Israel, who, it was alleged, did not practise the rabbinical laws of Gittin (divorce) and Halitsa, and the Black Jews of Cochin who claimed to have been the slaves of the White Jews and received their freedom. The rabbinate gave their approval to the Cochin Jews' acceptability.[5] The status of the Bene Israel is still to be clarified even in their new home in Israel.[6]

Baghdad and the Holy Land were requested to arbitrate in an internal communal dispute between Maghen David and Neveh Shalome Synagogues in Calcutta in the last decade of the nineteenth century. A lengthy correspondence ensued.[7]

Laws involving the marital status of emigrants from the Near East were invoked in responses sent to Calcutta by the Baghdad rabbinate between 1839 and 1854.[8] The language of this correspondence

is in the main, Arabic; between Calcutta and Jerusalem, Hebron, Shiraz or Cochin, Hebrew was the medium.

Hakham Abdallah b. Abraham Somekh was Hakham at Baghdad between about 1860 and 1889. A student of Hakham Moses Hyeem, he wrote several learned treatises on Jewish law and ritual.[9] The best known work was entitled *Zibhay Tsedek* and dealt with the laws of Shehitah, in which sphere he was considered the leading authority of his day, as well as with the rest of the second part of the Shulhan Arukh. When, therefore, a controversy erupted in 1877 over the competence of a local Shohet, the elders referred to him for an opinon.[10]

The matter was in connection with Hakham Abraham Elias Ezekiel Solomon, a recognized popular Shohet of animals who, because of failing eyesight, voluntarily gave up the practice upon finding his knife defective. With medical treatment, however, he regained his sight. The question was whether he could stand by while Joseph Simon Awad Cohen, authorized to slaughter birds only, killed the animals and gave them to Hakham Abraham to examine the lungs. Secondly, whether he could be authorized again by Joseph Cohen in the art of sharpening the knife.

The answer to the first question: He could not kill animals, in accordance with the principle: "He who is not competent to examine the lungs is likewise unfit to perform Shehitah."[11] To the second question came an affirmative answer.[12]

But Hakham Abraham had, meantime, himself written to Hakham Abdallah with a different version. He claimed that his knife was in perfectly good condition and no one in Calcutta was qualified enough to prepare a ritually acceptable knife. There was accordingly no possible reason for his own disqualification. On the contrary, he questioned the eligibility of the Shohet then slaughtering for the community. His eyes were weak and hands trembled. In a separate responsum, Hakham Abdallah seemed to be persuaded by the latter arguments on the grounds that although the present incumbent and successor to Hakham Abraham had been in Baghdad a year before, he did not present his knife for inspection and from inquiries it appeared he was no Shohet.

Shehitah was a frequent cause of difference in the community. An established Shohet was paid a fixed monthly emolument or on a day-to-day basis, depending on the number of birds killed. The latter payment was made by the hand of native domestic servants. The question was: Is the Shohet permitted to receive the cash on a Festival through his own non-Jewish servant or to have the customer's servant place it in a bag belonging to the Shohet.[13]

An anonymous correspondent in *Paerah*[14] replied that a Shohet in his piety should never accept fees for his labors. If he did so on a Festival day, it would be like someone who opens his store and does business on that day, though he receives the payment through a Moslem servant. Besides, those who resort daily to such transactions are the poor, since the wealthy make monthly payments; let the Shohet, therefore, treat his Festival slaughtering as a Mitsva. This issue, however, was never resolved and Shohets interpreted the law as they saw fit, generally in the breach.

According to a custom among Shohets, they do not slaughter ducks in the months of Tebeth and Shebath if they do not receive the liver, for there was a widespread superstition that there is a time during those months when the Shohet might himself die if he killed a duck without claiming the liver.[15] One of the local Shohets preferred to observe this custom. It assumed greater significance among Arabic speaking Calcutta Jews, as in Arabic the word for duck is בט (But) containing two of the three letters in the word שבט. A connection was derived between the שוחט whose name starts with a ש, the בט duck, and the Hebrew month שבט!

A quarrel ensued on one occasion when a superstitious Shohet declined to kill a goose in Shebath. Only a few Shohets observed the custom. And since in the late nineteenth century Joseph Simon Awad Cohen, who did not subscribe to the belief, managed to survive for many years, said a correspondent in *Paerah,*[16] there couldn't be anything to it.

The Jews of Calcutta and Bombay were in the habit of using trams or trolley cars on the Sabbath and Festivals. In 1874, when Hyeem Jacob Cohen, Shaliah of Safed, visited in Calcutta on his second mission, this mode of transportation was quite common. The Hakham was outraged. He wrote a treatise entitled "Imray Shabbath"[17] explaining the grounds for the prohibition against riding.

1. The biblical prohibition against traveling twelve miles, the punishment for which is flagellation.
2. The prohibition of carrying four cubits in a public thoroughfare — the penalty being death by stoning.
3. The prohibition of handling and spending money.[18]
4. The profanation of the Sabbath in public: one who transgresses is called a Goi in every respect.
5. Traveling by rail even within city limits is forbidden as it is considered a weekday chore.
6. It is not like traveling in a wilderness which is fraught with

danger and a person is allowed to travel to escape that situation, but travel in the city is not dangerous.

7. It is not like traveling by sea, obviously because he cannot stand stationary in the midst of the ocean or sea.

8. Harmful spirits were partially created at twilight on the sixth day of creation.[19] Their formation not being complete by the time the Sabbath set in, God stopped their creation in honor of the Sabbath. If God ceased His work on the Sabbath, man too must do so. (The premise here is that travel is tantamount to labor.)

Calcutta Jewry lived wholly within city limits and communications in Eastern India were not as highly developed as in the western part of the country. The Jews of Bombay were also faced with a similar problem. There a railway system connected the neighboring suburban areas where Jews lived. Some time after 1875, the community sought permission from the Baghdad rabbi, Hakham Abdallah Somekh, for use of railways. His responsum[20] made it clear that travel by railway outside the twelve mile Sabbath limit plainly contravenes the Law. Within the Sabbath limit, however, it is permitted as it is not considered a weekday chore, provided travel is not used for purposes other than the Sabbath. The opinion of Hyeem Jacob Cohen was thus rejected.

A further question was asked concerning the legal propriety of the use on the Sabbath and Festivals of the palanquin, a means of transportation before the spread of railways in India. The answer was different for Sabbath than Festivals. The palanquin was forbidden on the Sabbath, but not on Festivals except for weekday chores. But railways and carriages which run anyway on Jewish holy days, may be used on the Sabbath and Festivals within restricted limits.

Conflicting rabbinical advice thus resulted in multiform observance. The strictures of the emissary Cohen had their desired effect in Calcutta. People riding on the Sabbath in ignorance ceased to travel even to synagogue on the holy day. But they were not convinced about not riding on Festivals. With the introduction of the automobile early in this century, Somekh's license to use the railway was mistakenly turned into laxity about riding even the automobile on Rosh Hashana and Festivals and the most observant had no scruples about it, as it was sanctioned by local tradition.

Bombay Jews used the trolley cars or trams on the Sabbath and Festivals but with a unique innovation since the early 20's of this century. Sir Sassoon David, a wealthy Jew, as chairman of the local

electric supply and tramway company, devised a coupon, good solely on the Jewish Sabbath and Festivals for the use of Jews only "to be handed to the conductor who will issue a ticket in lieu thereof."[21]

The question would be revived from time to time. On one occasion several years later Hakham Solomon Twena was asked if it was permitted to ride in a train (electric trolley car or tram) on the Sabbath and Festivals. The answer, as we might expect, was an emphatic "no."[22]

The rickshaw, a two-wheeled carriage drawn by a man, was commonly used by observant Jews in place of mass public transportation. This is surprising, first in view of the law against riding which explains its objection "lest he pluck a branch" (Babylonian Talmud) and "because of the rest required for an animal" (Jerusalem Talmud); one would imagine these strictures would apply with greater force in the case of human beings. Quite apart from the law, there is the basic indignity towards a fellow man; but this depends on the standard employed and the values of the local community.

The accepted theory among Kabbalists was to ban translations of mystical texts. In 1888, a native of Poona (near Bombay), Abraham Sillman Ezekiel, however, translated the Idra Zuta into the Arabic spoken in India.[23] It caused a furor both in India and the Holy Land. The Jerusalem and Hebron rabbinate wrote very critically about it,[24] declaring the translation a transgression and demanding its withdrawal and disposal to the Genizah. One of the main arguments was the anxiety lest it fall into the hands of ignorant and amateur persons who would misunderstand its anthropomorphisms.[25]

The Indian Jewish community was divided. The conservatives called for the translation's withdrawal. Rabbinic hands were strengthened by Nissim Israel Sassoon and Jacob Isaac Alafia, Shaliahs of Jerusalem in India.[26] A staunch promoter of its cause was Elias Sillman Mani, an intellectual visitor from the Holy Land whose esoteric treatises were far above the capacity of local readers.[27] Hakham Solomon Abid Twena earned unpopularity by chastizing Ezekiel for criticizing the rabbis. He quoted Deuteronomy 17:11, reposing authority in contemporary rabbinates, and the verse "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law," proclaiming the universal validity of the opinions of the rabbinic councils in the Holy Land. He declared further that one of the causes of the destruction of the Temple was disrespect for rabbis.[28]

The liberals were quick in reply, the translator loudest in his own defense. He claimed he had translated Idra Zuta only (not Idra Rabba), which was sanctioned by Rabbi Hyeem Vital who was quoted to have said, "In Bar Yohai's days, translations were forbidden but

since his (Vital's) time Idra Zuta's translation was permitted."[29] He claimed further, the rabbis had passed arbitrary judgment as they had not seen the translation which, he argued, was as flawless as humanly possible. He quoted the Arabic proverb,[30] "He who goes to the judge unilaterally will emerge satisfied." They had not given him a chance to present his case before reaching a verdict. Besides, Bar Yohai himself wanted people to read and *understand*.

"Should it be like a sing-song without understanding?" (referring to the traditional chant of the Zohar by Baghdad Jews). He said he intended translating the entire Zohar and Talmud. (He actually translated four chapters of Talmud but never having quite finished with the rhubarb over the translation of the Idra, he committed the manuscript of Talmudic translation to flames and never did publish any other work.)[31] But he was said to have gained wide acclaim the world over with requests to assume the role of teacher.[32] In Calcutta his patronage came from Manasseh Ezekiel Abraham[33] and two who preferred the pseudonyms "Mr. 77" (Khwaja Sab'a Sib'een) and "Mr. Alef" (Khwaja Alef).[34]

Though no further legal arguments seemed to have developed, it is of interest here to follow the consequences of this conflict. E.M.D. Cohen, the editor of *Paerah*, whose own sympathies were evidently with the translator, after having the controversy sizzle for many months, thought it time to put an end to it as a subject published in his newspaper. In a note he summed up his own position on the conflict. The rabbis of the Holy Land could not take any other stand; but, he continued, some who call themselves "Hakham" with whom we should not mix, have brought disrepute upon an honorable man (the translator Abraham Sillman Ezekiel).

He was referring, almost certainly, to Hakham Solomon Twena, who, at the time, must have been in open conflict with himself over the inter-synagogue strife, the latter being the Minister of Maghen David and the Hakham one of the mainstays of the Neveh Shalome party. The discord came to the fore when Cohen went overseas in the spring of 1889. Twena was then making plans to supersede *Paerah*, which ceased publication on the editor's departure. While the latter was abroad the first issue of *Maggid Mesharim* appeared in November, 1889 under Twena's editorship.

Further evidence of Cohen's partisan sentiments was afforded in the publication, after the close of the controversy in print, of a letter from a friend of the translator in London with the information that the British Museum had a translation of the Idra Zuta which was published in Tunis.[35]

A question posed in 1842 to the London Beth Din on whether Freemasonry could be practised by Jews got a negative reply.[36] Evidently unconnected with that ruling was an entry in Eleazar Arakie's diary two and a half years later: "The freemason left (my house)."[37] Evidently he had paying guests.

There must have been a few Jewish prisoners serving sentences in Calcutta jails. The query was put to the Calcutta Jewish community through Michael Hyeem Saleh by the Head Jailor of a local prison: Must a Jewish prisoner put on the Tephillin? The anonymous answer, without quoting any law, but probably written by Moses Mayohas, ruled in the affirmative. "A Jew," it said, "must not cease putting on the Tephillin for even a day."[38]

Ketubahs were written by hand and beautifully adorned. In 1883 when printed copies made an appearance in Bombay, they met with strong objections and declarations that they were legally inadmissable. At that time Yehiel b. Adon, a member of the Jerusalem Beth Din, who was visiting in Bombay countered the opposition in a responsum in which he likened the Ketubah to any other promissory note. Just as these were printed, so could Ketubahs. He quoted another authority who held that printing is like writing.[39] Strictly speaking, he continued, a printed "Get" too would be permitted. But, because of the scribal intricacies, it has become accepted to write out "Gets." Therefore, Ketubahs and other documents of less complexity may be printed.

On one occasion in 1887, a Sepher Torah was found deficient in a letter on a Thursday.[40] The congregants thought another should be taken out and used but Moses Abeasis felt otherwise. He had the scribe make the correction there and then and another was not brought out. As he explained later,[41] most of the legal authorities agree that a second Sepher Torah should never be taken out even on the Sabbath. Among them he listed Maharil,[42] who based his opinion on Maimonides, who had himself permitted the use of a Sepher Torah after its defect was discovered. In spite of some disagreement about Sabbath days, there is unanimity about not taking out an alternate Sepher Torah on a weekday but correcting the defective one.

Abeasis expressed himself with greater emphasis in a more serious issue. Can a factory owned by a Jew work on the Sabbath? The question was asked in connection with the alleged working of the Eastern Press, Calcutta, that printed the *Paerah* בין השמשות (after sundown till about a half hour thereafter) on Friday evening. A local reader under the pseudonym of Mesheeb Ka-halacha con-

siders[43] that it was permitted in accordance with the law of contractual labor.[44] The actual work, i.e., the printing, having been completed before sunset, all that was left was the folding of the paper etc. The only possibility of objection would be on the grounds of מראית העין, i.e. one who looks superficially might think that the Sabbath was being desecrated.

Abeasis rejected this opinion by proving the analogy advanced by Mesheeb Ka-halacha as irrelevant and declaring the practice of *Paerah* unlawful.[45] This was in July, 1888. It is significant that when, in less than a year, *Paerah* shut down and *Maggid Mesharim* made its appearance, the latter was published on Thursdays.

Several religious legal documents besides Ketubahs were drawn up under the auspices of Moses Dwek.[46] In addition to some of these Hakham Aaron Abigedor too supervised the writing of other documents.[47]

We have mentioned previously[48] that in the very early years of the nineteenth century some Calcutta Jews possessed slaves. Often these slaves were freed according to Jewish law. One such legal document concerned the manumission by Ezra Ezekiel Musleah of his female slave Ruhama at Calcutta, Wednesday 22nd Ab 5604 (= August 7, 1844).[49]

Also of special interest are the documents given to proselytes especially in Abigedor's register: As Sassoon points out[50] the register contains the names of many female proselytes who were married to Jews.

Slaves and proselytes kept the local authorities occupied. For example, a Jew who arrived in Calcutta from Basra via Persia was required to immerse as a proselyte because he could not substantiate his acknowledgment that he was taken captive to Shuster, Persia, in his early youth.[51] In 1879, a slave of Moses Joseph Ezra, brother of David Joseph Ezra, was sent to Calcutta to be converted to Judaism, as Moslems were not allowed to change their faith in Baghdad. The circumcision took place at the Ezras' home.[52]

Before the advent of Hakham Solomon Abid Twena in the early 1880's, Calcutta Jews would await the arrival of learned Jews from other parts of the world, especially rabbinical emissaries to perform divorces.[53] In the mid-nineteenth century, however, one of the so-called emissaries from the west who had settled in Calcutta became the locally recognized performer of divorces.[54] However, during Jacob Sapir's stay in Calcutta he discovered that this man was an imposter, who had taken in the elders and become the interpreter and arbiter in all matters of Jewish law and practice. Even when

they discovered the deception and the truth was known, they allowed him to retain the competence in religious matters.

With the appearance of Jacob Sapir, however, some of the elders appealed to him to investigate the credentials in question. At this Sapir balked on grounds of marring a livelihood.

Soon thereafter the resident "Hakham" himself approached Sapir for advice on a divorce of an Ashkenazi, whose name was giving him trouble; but, had he been familiar with the Shulhan Arukh, he would have found the regulations therein. Sapir took it as an opening to subject him to an examination at which he was found to be neither a teacher nor a Shamash and certainly unlearned in the intricacies of writing "Gets." A cursory glance at the divorce documents he drew up gave evidence of being full of flaws. Sapir exposed his ignorance on one occasion in synagogue in the presence of the elders who seemed to be unperturbed at the outset but later were duly humiliated for upholding him.

Sapir thereupon referred the matter to various rabbinic authorities including the Jerusalem rabbinate, enclosing copies of the issued "Gets." They were unanimous, as was expected, that the divorces granted were null and void. The rabbinate addressed a separate document to the community[55] requiring the persons purported to be divorced and still in the city to undergo a repeat ceremony. The previous performer was disqualified. Further, Calcutta was advised to have a Beth Din with at least one member qualified in Jewish law.

Overwhelming and weighty evidence against their divorces convinced the divorcees to heed superior rabbinic advice and to go over the necessary proceedings. These Sapir and two other Hakhams in Calcutta conducted free of charge, lest he should be blamed for annulling the previous proceedings for his personal gain.

Another question concerned a "Get" given in Calcutta by Ezekiel Dwek to his wife Mazal Tob, daughter of Abraham David in 1872. Upon the delivery of the "Bill," the husband disputed the validity of it saying, "I gave her the divorce under compulsion." In support of his contention, Ezra Abraham Shamash filed the testimony that, from the inception of the proceedings, the man was crying, hitting his head and tearing his clothes. But his testimony also contained evidence of normal procedure where the wife was asked (in Hindustani) immediately prior to the handing over of the "Get" to her: Will you accept this bill of divorce of your own free will and unconditionally? And she answered, Yes. The husband then handed over the "Get" to her.

The Baghdad Ben Din, comprising Obadiah Abraham Halevi, Nissim Aaron Elia Cohen and Sassoon Elias Hakham Rab Moses Halevy, rejected the appeal on the husband's behalf on the grounds that the testimony of Ezra Abraham Shamash was contrary to that of the two witnesses to the "Get," according to which the husband said nothing between the annulling of previous statements about the "Get" just prior to its delivery and its actual delivery.[56] Therefore the "Get" was valid and the woman free to re-marry.

The divorce was granted in February, 1872 but the matter was referred to the Beth Din in November, 1873. Why there was such a long interval is not clear but quite possibly the husband challenged the validity of the proceedings only when an offer for re-marriage was made to his former wife. The Baghdad decree was contested when it was read out in the two synagogues, Neveh Shalome and Bethel and Isaac Joseph Dwek, obviously a relative of the husband, announced that, before implementing the verdict, the Jerusalem Beth Din should be approached.[57] This was in fact done about a month later.[58] The decision upheld the validity of the "Get" and the Baghdad verdict.[59]

There was a case in 1874 of Sillman Isaac Hakham Nissim Musleah who had his betrothed in Baghdad, and in Bombay became engaged to another girl; timely intervention by the Baghdad Beth Din prevented the marriage from taking place. The man then went on to Calcutta where he did get married.[60] Too late came the admonition from the Baghdad rabbinate that Calcutta should have no hand in his marriage plans as the bethrothed girl in Baghdad had come of age and was prepared to get married.[61]

Several announcements concerning the Agunah (deserted wife) would appear in the local Jewish press. This seems to have been a pattern in Iraq and Syria in the second half of the nineteenth century. Men already betrothed disappeared; some of them made their way to India and were sometimes "discovered." Of these at least one did not wish to return. A typical announcement appeared in *Paerah*, June, 1882:[62]

" 'A Voice Cries Out In Aid of the Agunah.' The community of Aleppo respectfully informs your community that about two years ago three men . . . abandoned their wives who do not know the whereabouts of their husbands and are in straitened circumstances. If readers of *Paerah* have seen these men or are aware of their present address, they should contact the editor. This is a great Mitsva. . . . A description of the men follows. . . ."

The first ever agency "Get" received in Calcutta from the western

hemisphere was in 1876 in connection with the divorce of Rahel Khatoon, daughter of Abraham Aaron Cohen, whose husband, Kalonymous Michael Joseph Cohen, an Ashkenazi, was in London, England.[63] Yet another was that of Simha, daughter of Ezekiel Hyeem, whose husband Hyeem Emanuel was in San Francisco, California in 1892.[64]

Occasionally a man divorced his wife prior to his imminent death to free her from falling into the clutches of an unscrupulous brother by the operation of Halitsa. This Jewish law requires the dead man's brother to marry his widow if he dies childless; in practice, however, this situation leads not to marriage but to Halitsa. In rare cases there were men who were prepared to take advantage of the legal situation, and this was a source of anxiety for childless wives. As a precaution, therefore, a type of divorce called "Get Zeman" was contrived in Jewish law stipulating that divorce would take effect just prior to the husband's death. Such a "Get" was given by David Seadya Cohen to his wife Rahel nine days prior to his death in November, 1845.[65]

Recalcitrant husbands would refuse to grant their wives divorce even though it was established they ill-treated them beyond endurance. For this there was no remedy.

After Hakham Shelomo Twena's death in 1913, divorce administration fell into a parlous state. Indiscriminate divorces were conducted by irresponsible persons who carried out the procedure without compunction. Only during this writer's rabbinate in Calcutta from 1952 to 1964 was order restored.

Prior to his arrival there, it was suggested[66] that "the Government of India should frame a Jewish Divorce Law so as to regularize" granting of "Gets" on the lines of the Parsee Marriage and Divorce Act drawn up after "anomalies were found" in their procedure and administration of religious divorces. It may be said that Parsee Law of Divorce could be set down as clear statute. But Jewish Divorce laws are so numerous and intricate that it would be beyond the competency of even a rabbinical court to set them all in a code to be presented to the judiciary in Calcutta.[67]

Excommunication or Herem was invoked in Calcutta in the first half of the nineteenth century but not as stringently as in European or Spanish centers of Jewry. It was used as a threat or as a disciplinary measure but never to the bitter end. Though the Jew in India was dependent for his religious life on communal institutions like circumcision, prayer, education and burial, socially and economically and certainly politically, he was considered a unit with

his non-Jewish neighbors and therefore independent of fellow Jews for his livelihood. Its efficacy locally was tested only once. Dislodging a Jew from his place of residence even by due processes of law was looked upon as a churlish act and highly offensive to the feelings that should exist between Jew and Jew. When the victim was an orphan, extreme penal measures were required. In 1845, Rahma, daughter of the late Ezekiel Elias Musleah, though a very wealthy beneficiary of part of her father's estate, was ejected by her Jewish landlord Jacob Khashani; the latter was, therefore, excommunicated.[68] Previously Jacob and his son Ezra had gone through a long legal wrangle over Rahma's tenancy and many members of the Jewish community, including Eleazar Arakie, appeared in court on her behalf.

One of the facilities banned by Herem was attendance at religious services. Evidently the Khashanis attempted to break the ban on January 13, 1849 and were worsted in an open brawl in synagogue. Ezra left soon thereafter for Singapore and Jacob lived in seclusion and died four years later. His tomb[69] bears the simplest of inscriptions. As a mark of communal disdain he was buried in a section of the cemetery set aside for victims of suicide.

As a weapon of threat Herem was used in September, 1844. After an incident involving damaging and unjustified charges against a married woman, the community decided to ostracize any one who cast aspersions on the character of a married woman.[70]

With the weakening hold of religion and the watering-down of the Kehilla or central communal set-up, the religious ban was no longer resorted to from the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the best of times the monsoon season was a difficult period of the year for burials. Trenches, normally water-logged because the city was situated at sea-level, became inundated. The awkwardness was increased in 1916 by the cutting of a canal in the vicinity of the cemetery, which caused a greater undercurrent of water in the area. Following or during a long spell of rain, bodies were laid in deluged trenches that exuded a foul stench.

Michael Moses Wolff had become interested in Oseh Haised matters in 1901 and was Joint Honorary Secretary with Ezra S. Gubbay. He was the brain behind its administration for a quarter of a century and initiated several improvements. With the problem of watery graves he grappled energetically. An engineer by profession, he modelled a built-in coffin of cement to fit the grave trenches. Angular cement pieces when joined and covered with a cemented lid, made the interior impervious to water. Earth to the depth of

six inches served as the base above which on all sides were appertures connected by narrow channels to the perforated outer walls two inches thick.

Many opposed the proposed innovation, for the local practice was to bury without coffins in the bare earth.

In August, 1921, Wolff strengthened his own hands by soliciting the support of 100 people who signified their approval by subscribing their signatures to a document. Wolff's was the 101st (numerical value for Mi-chael, his own name).[71] It is a miniature catalog of some of the prominent persons in the community at the time. Included were Elias Hyeem Hilali Solomon, Joseph Solomon Twena, Meyer Ezra Musleah, Elias Hye Saleh Moses, Joseph Hyeem Judah, Immanuel Jacob Cohen, Hyeem Hyeem Cohen, Samuel Shalome Dwek, Saul Mordecai Sopher, Benjamin Nissim Elias, Jonah R. J. Jacob, Abraham Abid Twena, Ezra B. Moses, Sassoon J. Cohen, A. J. Leveroy, Sam Rassaby, Abraham Jeremiah, R. M. Cohen, David Girjee Raymond and Reuben Saleh Baher. Many of these were traditional and conservative and well-versed in Jewish learning.

But they did not muster enough confidence. Only the authoritative opinion of the rabbinates of Baghdad, Jerusalem and London would satisfy the objectors. Accordingly, in December, 1921 these rabbinates were written to in identical terms. Wolff made sure he had the law on his side when he quoted, "If the deceased is put in a box with one jar of earth under his head and the box is perforated, it is sufficient."[72] He felt that both those conditions were fulfilled in his "Standard Grave."

All three rabbinates gave their unqualified approval with varying emphasis.

In a responsum dated January 1, 1922 and signed by Sassoon Khadooree Ezekiel Ezra Elia, Baghdad commented that it did not quite understand the query. If the box was made entirely of cement it was permitted, as cement was earthly material. If the casket was of wood, however, and only covered over with cement, the Zohar, it pointed out, did not approve. But, under the unseemly and distressing circumstances of interment during the monsoons, even the Zohar would permit that which it ordinarily prohibited.

The Jerusalem reply was dated Tebeth 5682 (= December/January 1921-22) and written by Hananiah Gabriel and subscribed to by Hyeem Moses Elyashar, Rishon Le-Sion, who was then too old to reply at length. Three others concurred: Abraham Philosoph, Joseph Meyer Levi, David Papo.

First, the responsum deals with the question of whether burial in

a coffin is permissible. Quoting several authorities,[73] he infers that there is no injunction against burial in a coffin. Some say, however, it is more meritorious without it. Jacob Saul Elyashar, author of "Simha Le-ish" and Rishon Le-Sion at the end of the nineteenth century, preferred the removal of the bottom panel of the coffin. The opinion continues to consider the cemented casket as described, about whose propriety even "Simha Le-ish" would agree. The case is further fortified by the alternative of an undignified burial which, the Talmud[74] points out, should not be allowed.

The Shaliah of the Jerusalem Sephardim, Joseph Hyeem Schrim commended the scheme.

In a letter dated January 17, 1922 the secretary to the Chief Rabbi (J. H. Hertz) replied as follows: "Your letter . . . has been placed before the Beth Din and after careful consideration of the scheme . . . I am instructed by the Chief Rabbi to inform you that it is permissible in every way."

As if the unanimous opinions of three rabbinates were insufficient, Wolff wrote to three others — the Shaliah of Tiberias, Isaac Cohen, the Shaliah of Hebron, Abba Yair and the Shaliah of Bethel (the Russian Jewish community in Jerusalem) — all in August, 1922 and all sent affirmative answers.

Despite all his efforts, however, the "Standard Sanitary Grave" was never implemented. In March, 1926, on the occasion of Flora Sassoon's visit to Calcutta to her daughter, Rachel David Ezra, Wolff sent her the entire correspondence. What could she do but endorse it? But apart from underwriting the cost of the publication of the opinions, Mrs. Sassoon did not wield any greater influence.

At the general meeting of the Oseh Haised in August, 1926, Wolff made a final appeal for the adoption of his plan but to no avail. He and his Joint Secretary were not returned to office — the deathknell to five years of research, correspondence and persuasion. Nothing helped — the community was not prepared for a novel venture to replace the traditional burial, the indignity notwithstanding, even with rabbinic blessings.

Most of the legal action and controversies outlined belong to a period ending roughly with the first quarter of this century. In more recent years members of the community have been less familiar with the letter of the law and, by and large, more tolerant of its breaches. On the other hand, in the first hundred years or so of their existence as a community, Calcutta Jews appear to have been very conscious of their traditions and their meticulous preservation. The fact that

they did not have a rabbi or Beth Din for most of this period did not prove an obstacle — for they were ever prepared to "write home" for a ruling. And yet the authoritative pronouncement was itself ignored if it did not pander to the stubborn conservatism and idiosyncrasies of many local people.

## *Chapter 15*

## EDUCATION

Though a Jewish community in Calcutta was extant since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a Jewish school started functioning there only in January, 1881, when the Jewish population numbered about 1500 souls. A primary reason for the delayed establishment of a formal center of education under Jewish auspices was the adoption by the early settlers of a traditional means of imparting instruction from father to son[1] or through a private instructor who earned his livelihood teaching children of well-to-do parents in their homes[2] or at his residence. That Bombay and Poona, the latter with a handful of Jewish residents who emigrated from the same countries as their co-religionists in Calcutta, possessed Jewish schools much before Calcutta did, seems to indicate the existence of a more active and public-spirited community in those western cities. Undoubtedly the presence in Bombay of the family of philanthropic Sassoons expedited the formation there of a Jewish school which Calcutta, despite its benefactors such as David Joseph Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay, did not achieve in over half a century of organized community life. Internal dissensions also seem to have hindered its establishment.[3]

A Talmud Torah of sorts existed at the home of Eleazar Arakie in the mid-nineteenth century. As a teacher he had a large following, which included many of his former pupils. The work of Istad (Arabic, teacher) Eleazar made a lasting impression. One of his own teachers was Hakham Eliyahoo Musleah, grandson of the head of the Baghdad rabbinical academy from 1778 until 1785. Incidentally, in keeping with Eastern convention, Istad Eleazar indicated reverence for his former teacher by refraining from calling Hakham Eliyahoo's grandson and namesake by his personal name. He addressed him as "Abuyee" (Arabic deferential designation meaning "my father").

Eleazar taught both boys and girls, an unusual development for an era that frowned upon Torah education for women. Among his students were Moses Barook Solomon Moosa, Joseph Simon Awad Cohen, whom he later authorized to be a Shohet, the later Hazans of the Calcutta synagogues, Saul Moses Aaron Lanyado, Elias Raha-

min Joshua Halevi and Elias Moses Dwek Cohen. He taught the slave boys of Jewish masters[4] probably of the black Cochin Jews, and two non-Jews, John D'Cruz and Ras Shankar, the drummer,[5] presumably preliminary to becoming proselytes. Of the Jewish girls, Rachel, daughter of Joseph Hakham Eliyahoo Musleah, Sarah, daughter of Isaac Solomon (Benjamin), former Nasi of Basra, and Hannah, daughter of David Hakham Aaron Gubbay.

Individual payments, in accordance with economic standing, were made to the teacher. But the poor were not forgotten. The community remunerated Arakie for his instruction of the children of indigent parents from January, 1843 to June, 1853.[6] Why the arrangement ceased is not known. The community may have terminated the project for lack of funds. It is doubtful whether an alternative plan was effected.

Students were so numerous even after the Talmud Torah no longer operated that Arakie continued his operations as a private school and employed assistant teachers. Among the teachers were his brother Shalome, Ezra Judah Rahamim Ezekiel Siman and Sassoon Joseph Dwek, Ammam, daughter of Hilali Solomon, Zebeda, daughter of Jacob Benjamin Elia and Dinah, daughter of Eliyahoo Joseph Musleah.

Jacob Sapir makes no mention in his *Eben Sapir* of the Jewish educational set-up in Calcutta. Solomon Reinmann, the Cochin traveler, at about the same time, however, makes note of a school in which boys learned Bible, Hebrew grammar and language as well as other languages. He mentions particularly their efforts to bring wisdom into the hearts of indigent boys to enable them to earn a livelihood when they grow up.[7]

The school was none other than that of Arakie, who endeavored, with extremely limited facilities and with minimal support, to provide an educational center. The Hebraic course of studies must have included readings in rabbinic texts, primarily the volume *Hok Le-Yisrael* which was very popular in that generation and subsequent ones. The text is an assortment of biblical, talmudic and mystical writings compiled by Hyeem Vital based on the works of Isaac Luria, with additions by Hyeem Joseph David Azulai (Rab Hida). From Reinmann's reference to "other languages" it might be deduced that English and other secular subjects were included in the curriculum, though these could only have been on an elementary level.

Those who were interested in a better general education attended secular schools administered by Christian missionaries or privately. Ironically, one of them was Arakie's son, Ezra, who went to one such

school in China Bazar in the Jewish neighborhood, unconnected with China Town.[8] He nevertheless benefited by the instruction his father could give him at home. This might indicate that the facilities available at this first "school" were not considered good enough to those who opted for a lay education in one of the city schools.

This semi-official mode of instruction ceased with the death of Eleazar Arakie in 1864. During the next decade Aaron Hakham Abigedor Azriel may have filled the void but the extent of his activities is not available.[9] However, he was undoubtedly the most prominent leader, teacher and spiritual guide of his day.[10]

The poor were hardest hit by a lack of organized Jewish education and their children roamed the streets. Parents could not afford the pittance of school fees nor could the simple-minded immigrants from the Near East direct their young in the new environment. In this field, apathy and complacence were often characteristic of the wealthy.[11]

Relief for the loss of Abigedor came in the person of Hakham Moses Mayohas, an emissary from Jerusalem in 1871,[12] who made Calcutta his home. He issued the first of several calls for the inauguration of a school "for Hebrew and English," so that the poor could provide for themselves instead of living on charity. "Do we not have an abundance of people who are sufficiently endowed by the Almighty?" he cried out in disgust.[13]

The initial call was well-received. Raphael Elias Sassoon undertook to canvass among the influential and well-to-do; Elia Shalome Gubbay, next in affluence to the Ezras, was very receptive to the idea. But for the instruction to have permanence, there had to be acceptance on the part of the rank and file too.[14]

In Western Jewish eyes a community without a school for Hebraic studies was anomalous. A scholarly Ashkenazi settler in Calcutta, Ephraim Levensohn grandson of a rabbi[15] became enthused with the project and he mentions the interest aroused in David Joseph Ezra and Aaron Shalome Gubbay.[16] Ephraim had a flair for poetic expression and in a poem[17] he chided the local leadership for being remiss in its sacred duty of educating the children. A vigorous response,[18] also in verse, from an affronted indigenous citizen started a series of ding-dong snipes that could sometimes be called libelous.[19]

Moses Mayohas' efforts seemed to be bearing fruit. In April, 1874, a house was bought with funds collected for the projected school "near the new synagogue — Bethel" for Rs. 6,500.00 through the efforts of three members of the Jewish community — Ezekiel Saleh

Hakham Aaron Gubbay, Aaron Shalome Hakham Aaron Gubbay and Raphael Elias Sassoon.[20]

A strange thing then happened. In July that year a statement of the donor account was entitled, "Funds collected for the purchase of a building in the vicinity of Sukeas Lane *for the Bethel Synagogue.*" This was the first indication that it was not to house a school after all but let to augment the Bethel treasury.

The opening of the school was shelved by the maneuvering of the Bethel Board, whose membership was almost identical with the group which was responsible for soliciting funds for a school. Undoubtedly a lack of adequate financing for recurring maintenance was the stumbling block in getting the school started. Once the building was leased, however, and the rents applied to the salaries of the Bethel staff, it removed an incentive for on-going efforts to provide for capital funds or at least for subscriptions to underwrite maintenance, and this notwithstanding the Board's apparent intention to turn it over ultimately for the use of a school.

Reflected in lengthy correspondence in *Mebasser* is bitter partisan reaction.[21] Those who still attended the older synagogue, Neveh Shalome, were understandably more vociferous. The funds for the school, they argued, had come from all sections of the community for a joint communal project. The diversion of those funds for a different purpose, particularly for only one of its constituents, was unwarranted and arbitrary. The Bethel plea, on the other hand, was based on expediency. Rather than leave the building inoperative and unprofitable, it was being put to use, albeit on a temporary basis.

Cudgels were taken up on behalf of the projected school by *Mebasser* readers in Bombay and Poona. Appeals were directed to the wealthy Calcutta residents while each local faction was advised to show restraint. A particularly enlightened letter was received from Bombay;[22] after commending each correspondent for presenting his case cogently and eloquently, the writer summed up the prevailing situation: One speaks, another answers angrily; one makes biting statements, the other does likewise; one rides on the wings of his imagination, another is carried away atop his fancy thoughts; they do not see eye to eye — this is not the way to go up to Bethel.[23]

Almost a year elapsed from the time Moses Mayohas had launched his initial appeal, and yet the fate of the idea was quite uncertain. But he did not lose heart. In a City of Palaces (as Calcutta was called), he exclaimed, couldn't they put up a miniature palace — a school? He commended to local philanthropists the example of David Sassoon of Bombay who had addressed himself to the educa-

tional needs of the poor of that city by financing the erection and maintenance of a school. The two Eliases — Ezra and Gubbay — he thought, could well be the mainstay of the project.[24]

But the earnestness of his supporters tapered off. A lack of organized Jewish educational facilities was decried from time to time by fellow Jews in Rangoon, Burma[25] and Hongkong,[26] but nothing materialized. Other local attempts were made. At one time, Howard S. Howard took over the drive, but nothing tangible came of his efforts.[27] In December, 1876, Shalome Joshua Arakie announced the establishment of a school with the assistance of a Bengali instructor who taught English. Though a plea for support was issued in *Mebasser,* no mention was made of the locale or other details.[28] The measure of patronage, if he enjoyed any, is not known. Thus private tutoring was still the only means of Jewish instruction available; such a tutor was Jacob Shalome Arakie.[29] Mechanical Hebrew reading, the traditional biblical chants and reciting of the prayers and Passover Haggada were passed on to the young.

On the other hand, Jewish children attending sectarian schools excelled in their studies. The first time a Jewish boy in Calcutta won a medal for distinctive scholastic achievement was at Doveton College in 1874 when Yahya Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay was awarded a medal in the presence of the Lieutenant Governor.[30]

However, agitation for a school persisted. In 1879 an appeal to Mozelle Ezra, wife of Elia Ezra and daughter of Sir Albert Sassoon of Bombay was made to extend her proverbial generosity to financing one.[31] Probably in response, the founding of a school at 32 Ezra Street opposite the office of E. S. Gubbay & Co. was advertised. The following announcement appeared in the general English language press:[32]

> "A day school is about to be established in Ezra Street for the education of Hebrew children. The Hebrew community in their Gazette of the 12th ultimo invite the parents and guardians of the Jewish children to apply to the editor for admission. It is proposed to receive 100 poor children in payment of Rs. 200.00 monthly from the Jewish community. The projectors hope to obtain a grant from Government."

According to the Gazette mentioned above, the projected institution purported to prepare students to the University entrance examination, and in token of their success, graduates would receive a certificate from a large government college. Only English was to be

taught at the outset; Hebrew would be introduced later.[33] Yet the scheme did not materialize; it had to be abandoned for lack of adequate support from parents.[34]

The school was experiencing a slow birth. Another scheme was undertaken again by Moses Mayohas in November, 1879. He was instrumental, with the active help of a few ladies, in raising over a thousand rupees as well as an assurance of monthly subscriptions. Further donations were made for the purchase of furniture and books. But this project, too, ended in failure.

### *I. The Jewish Girls' School*

It was a compelling need that finally made the school a reality after Christian missionary activity had invaded the Jewish neighborhood. A school for boys and girls called the "Old Mission Room" started functioning there in 1874 under the direction of Mrs. Hannah, a Christian of no mean courage and missionary zeal.[35] Despite inadequate funds — there was a deficit of Rs. 70.00 in 1877 — and in the face of obvious obstacles — she managed to enroll, by the end of that year, fifty or sixty Jewish children and some non-Jews, notably Parsees (followers of Zoroastrian religion). A Government grant was also promised. The purpose of the school was to impart a general education together with the fostering of Christian belief in Jewish children.

Recruits were mustered from the illiterate middle class and poor parents, unaware of the real purposes of Mrs. Hannah, whose pursuasiveness won them over. Children of some well-to-do parents also attended, but most of the children of the latter class paid higher fees in better-known institutions. In the absence of a Jewish school, parents had no choice, thinking in simplicity that they had fulfilled the obligation to their children by sending them to some school. Mrs. Hannah's inculcation of Christian ideas was so thorough that small children who barely knew to recite the Shema, were conversant with Christian prayers and catechisms.[36] Mrs. Hannah left for England in December, 1877 and entrusted the school to one of the ladies of the committee.

Deprived of the aid of such an able missionary, this body had to resort to more direct means for achieving its aims. Pamphlets addressed to Christians only were handed out at the annual prize distribution of the Mission School held in December, 1880 at which a Jewish girl, Khatoon, daughter of Nathan Joseph Dwek was awarded three prizes and the first silver medal ever pre-

sented by the school.[37] Defining clearly the objects of the school and the difficulties in fulfilling them, the committee regretted that not a single conversion from Judaism to Christianity had taken place; however, many young minds were being indoctrinated in Church beliefs. It appealed to Christians to come to the assistance of the missionary movement in Calcutta by contributing to wipe out the deficit so that its activities should not cease but, rather, be stepped up. Soon afterwards a booklet printed in London, entitled *Ma-amar Ha-ahduth* in Hebrew, was distributed to the students of the school. This publication purported to prove the Trinity from the Torah, by taking verses out of their context.

By the beginning of 1881, about a hundred Jewish children were attending the school, paying Rs. 2.00 a month. The time to open a Jewish school had arrived. In fact it was started on Tuesday 18th Shebat 5641 (= January 18, 1881) following a leading article by Moses Mayohas in *Paerah*, of which he was co-editor, which announced the inauguration of a school for Jewish children at 29 Ezra Street, and appealed to Jewish parents to send their children there. A prospectus printed in English and dated February 10, 1881 was signed by Moses de Jacob Abeasis, an immigrant from Tunis and Malta, who may be considered the real founder of the school. He had taken the initiative in resisting the influence of the Church and this latest effort was about to bear fruit.

Intended for girls and little boys, the aim of the school was to transmit "a thorough knowledge of Hebrew religious principles together with a plain English education." On the first day there were eighteen pupils. By the end of January, fifty pupils were registered (of whom twenty-three were free scholars) and in a little more than a year the number rose to 108. Among his supporters, Abeasis made special mention in the prospectus of Moses Mayohas "as one who for many years labored for the good of this Institution, and who has spared no time and pains to persuade the parents . . . to send them (the children) to this school." Initial contributions amounted to Rs. 1165.00 and monthly subscriptions to Rs. 130.00. Two teachers comprised the first staff, who were joined within a month by a third with a knowledge of music and needlework. A competent teacher of Hebrew was also engaged. Abeasis examined the boys every Saturday in the Torah studies learned during the previous week. Children of indigent parents were educated free of charge, provided with books, stationery and lunch.

The school was moved to more spacious premises in February. The Missionary school suffered a temporary set-back, as its Jewish

enrollment dropped to ten in less than a month.[38] But the missionaries did not surrender. In a house to house campaign they tried to regain some of their losses by giving an assurance that no attempt would be made to influence Jewish children in favor of Christianty.

Clearly, such an undertaking was mere lip-service, but it worked so well that many withdrew their children from the Jewish school and re-admitted them into the Mission school. This caused an upheaval in the community as many members came out openly in favor of continuing support for the Christian institution.

The Jewish counter-offensive, however, now dealt a blow to the rival school. By utilizing the local weekly paper *Paerah,* as well as through personal contacts, the leading members of the Jewish community showed up the obvious purpose of a Christian school established in the Jewish quarter of the city with the subsidy granted by the British missionaries, who, it was reported, were operating on a budget for India of £1½ million per year. A general meeting of the community was called for March 13 to take up the challenge which struck at the very roots of Jewish life.[39]

The arguments of Moses Abeasis and Moses Mayohas were welcomed and agreement was reached that the Jewish school was a vital necessity and deserving of the support of every member. A committee was elected with the following as members:

Elia David Joseph Ezra, President
Elia Shalome Gubbay, Vice President
Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Hony. Treasurer
Moses de Jacob Abeasis, Hony. Secretary
Aaron Raphael Belilios
Howard Sayeed Howard
Manasseh Meyer
Raphael Elias Sassoon

Moses Abeasis was appointed Director in addition to the office of Secretary.

By the end of the third month eighty-four children were on the rolls, forty-nine of whom were free scholars.

The school which at the outset was known as "The Jewish Girls' and Infants' School," admitting boys between the ages of eight and ten, was re-named "The Jewish Girls' School" as, on April 5, 1881 — 6th Nisan 5641 the boys were removed to new premises, 40 Ezra Street, under the same management but with a different panel of four teachers, two for English and two for Hebrew. Thus emerged the Jewish Boys' School whose enrollment increased to fifty in two months.

This was possible with the cooperation of the private teachers of Hebrew, such as Jacob Shalome Arakie, who agreed to join the school with their pupils. Both institutions came to be known as one — The Jewish Boys' and Girls' School — though operating from separate buildings.

The numerical strength of the Girls' School exceeded that of the Boys', as some of the latter were being tutored privately by three teachers; after Eleazar Arakie, it was not considered vital to tutor girls.

School hours extended from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday (to 3 p.m. on Friday), with an hour's recess for lunch. Winter hours were from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Teachers of secular subjects taught the senior classes in the morning and the junior classes in the afternoon while the Hebrew teachers alternated that schedule. A half hour before the termination of class sessions daily, a prayer assembly took place. Of six hours of classroom instruction, four were devoted to secular subjects and two to Hebrew. In 1885 Hebrew was reduced by one half hour daily with a corresponding increase in secular subjects which in the sixth grade, the highest in the school, included Geometry, Algebra, Arithmetic, English Language, Latin or French and Physics. In 1887 a seventh, and in 1914 an eighth grade were added.

A serious clash over the curriculum ensued between the Secretary, Abeasis, and the Treasurer, R. M. Cohen, who made up the working committee. In order to bring the senior girls up to the standard which would make them eligible to continue their studies in higher institutions of learning, the English teacher agreed, at the instance of Abeasis, to teach French in addition while the Secretary himself volunteered to teach Mathematics on an honorary basis. This set-up continued despite the opposition of R. M. Cohen, who favored more Hebrew instruction than French, till the committee decided in favor of Hebrew, in June, 1881. The provision of Abeasis was, however, amply vindicated five years later when French was re-admitted into the curriculum in order that the school qualify for the Middle Scholarship Examination, a standardized test for eligibility to higher school studies.

Before the committee discussed the issue, Abeasis tendered his resignation, ostensibly on grounds of ill-health. Rendering Ecclesiastes 9:10 not strictly according to the traditional cantillation "whatsoever thy hand attained to do, do it with thy might," he pleaded that he could not do justice to his onerous duties, and no amount of persuasion would make him change his mind. R. M. Cohen was appointed Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. (Abeasis died

fully twenty-seven years after the occurrence of this dispute.) A second prospectus in eight months was issued over Cohen's signature.

At this time the schools were working on a deficit of about Rs. 30.00 per month. (Income Rs. 379.00, Expenditure Rs. 410.00.) The expenditure included the supply of lunch, clothes and shoes to indigent students. Subscribers agreed to augment their contributions by fifty percent to help tide over the deficit.

The limited space available to the schools, however, militated against their proper working. The rooms were dark, damp and congested and the defective drainage was prejudicial to the health of the pupils. As a result, progress was retarded. The Principal of the Girls' School suggested that no further admissions be accepted till the problem of accommodation was satisfactorily settled.

At the first annual meeting held in February, 1882 the Honorary Secretary, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, proposed a remedy. The funds that Moses Mayohas had raised in 1879 for the purpose of starting a Talmud Torah had been invested in the purchase of a building. The school scheme at that time being abandoned, the premises had been given over to the Bethel Synagogue for the residence of its Hazan. The Honorary Secretary proposed that the property should be restored to the schools now established for the purpose it was originally intended. As the President, Elia Ezra and the Vice President, Elia Gubbay, were sole trustees of the property in question, the completion of formalities would be facilitated. The property, however, was never returned.

Proselytizing activities of the church continued unabated and surprisingly, received fresh impetus from within the Jewish ranks. The "Training School" as the Christian school was also called, stopped functioning for want of Jewish students in June, 1881; the building from which it was operating having been bought by a Jew, Judah Ezekiel, who had the missionaries ejected.[40] Five months after the opening of the Jewish school, Mrs. Hannah, who had now returned from England, started to visit the Jewish school twice a week and was actually allowed to teach Bible and songs within the school curriculum! It is difficult to explain how a staunch advocate of Jewish culture, that was Rahamim Moosa Cohen, could be persuaded to accept the voluntary services of one who was at the root of the mischievous conversion scheme and the cause of inter-community strife. He silenced those who raised objections by attributing to her the love and welfare of the girls who were her ex-pupils.

The machinations of Mrs. Hannah were slowly bearing fruit. Gradually the girls were receiving Christian interpretations of the Bible and

the songs were none other than hymns sung in Mrs. Hannah's church. When this was detected, her classes were suspended forthwith, but she would visit the school twice or thrice a month in order to inform the girls of her intention to re-start her own school. She would visit them at home as well. Books and other gifts were freely exchanged.

Under the pretext of running a school for Portuguese and Parsees, she hired a room from a Jew, Raphael Isaac Joseph, at 71 Canning Street, in the Jewish neighborhood. The community became aware of her deception only after notices announcing the opening of her school on June 1, 1882, were sent to Jewish homes. On Joseph withdrawing his offer, the scheme was almost wrecked, but for the unseemly conduct of another Jew, Moses Ephraim Mulla Elias Cohen, who summoned Mrs. Hannah and offered her accommodation in his home![41] Though presumably some support was mustered, nothing further is heard of the Training School or of its founder and lone but resourceful operator. By the end of 1882 it was no longer in existence.[42] With the Mission School out of the way, at least for the next decade or so, the Jewish schools were free to progress without competition.

The strained financial predicament of the school was relieved somewhat by the opening, by Elia David Joseph Ezra, of a free school for sons of indigent parents on November 1, 1882. Later known as Ezra's Benevolent Institution, it was named initially Tehilla Le-David in memory of his father, David Joseph Ezra, who had died earlier that year. After Elia's own death, the property of the school and its management passed into the hands of the Jewish community of Calcutta, which appointed Moses de J. Abeasis, Aaron N. E. Judah and Abraham E. Gubbay to govern the Institution; in due course it came to be known as the Talmud Torah Institution. The passing of Gubbay who was secretary and treasurer, in October, 1906, necessitated the election of a successor. Early in 1907, the subscribers and supporters of the school decided to entrust its management to a representative committee annually elected. It soon assumed the title of Jewish Free School, Talmud Torah under the aegis of Ezra A. Arakie, who guided its destinies and reared it devotedly for over three decades. The period of his Honorary Secretaryship and the later change of name to Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah is the subject of the next section.

All boys above the age of six who did not seek admission into Ezra's school were transferred to a boys' department of the Jewish Boys' and Girls' School.

Having his hands full with the running of the Talmud Torah insti-

tuted by him, Elia David Joseph Ezra withdrew from the Presidency and Managing Committee of the Jewish Boys' and Girls' School in February, 1883 when Elia Gubbay was elected President. His influence, personality and unusual generosity made his tenure of office a most fruitful one, distinguished by all-round progress. On the recommendation of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen it was named "Talmud Torah Kehillath Jeshurun." For about fifteen years Gubbay contributed monthly, first Rs. 75.00 then Rs. 300.00 and, since the start of the boys' section, Rs. 400.00 (about two-thirds of the amount of the schools' subscriptions and about one-half of its expenditure). The termination of his contributions in 1894 forced the closing down of the latter department. Annual prize distributions would frequently be held in the spacious hall of his home. The school was moved to premises No. 8 Pollock Street, of which he was the owner, and as a result it received many facilities and conveniences otherwise unattainable, such as the construction, at his expense, of additional rooms on the terrace. He would pay over Rs. 400.00 for prizes and refreshments at the concluding function each year. He bequeathed more than Rs. 100.00 per month to the school, representing ten and one half percent of his residuary estate.

At the second annual general meeting of the Jewish Girls' School, Howard S. Howard was elected Vice-President, which office he shared from the following year with Joseph Elia Ezra; the committee was enlarged from eight to twelve. Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, one of the youngest members, was appointed Honorary Under-Secretary, despite his other pre-occupations. His zealous promotion of the welfare of the school was unflagging, and this manifested itself practically in daily visits.

At that time the boys' department had three teachers of Hebrew and two of English, while the girls were supervised by two Hebrew and five English teachers. Despite his resignation from the committee, Abeasis examined the boys' Hebrew classes. The gift of a piano from Elia D. J. Ezra helped to add music to the girls' curriculum.

A serious handicap to English education was the conversation of the children, especially the boys, in the native Indian language, Hindustani, spoken in most homes. English could not be read intelligibly by many. However, the Inspector of European Schools reported after an examination of the students that the standard of girls was higher than that of corresponding classes in European schools, particularly in Reading and Grammar, while that of the boys' department was lower than their counterparts elsewhere. For the first time in 1883 the combined strength of both departments reached

almost 200 — 115 girls and 70 boys — the latter having doubled in a year. Mention should, however, be made of the wide fluctuation of numbers from year to year because of migration; additional families were arriving from Baghdad while quite a few moved on to centers in the Far East.

The all-round progress of the school evoked the interest of the Parsee community, from whom came several applications for admission. The matter was debated at a general meeting in February, 1884 and the proposal to admit members of that community was rejected by an overwhelming majority, ostensibly on grounds of limited accommodation, although this necessitated a refusal to admit even Jewish girls. The consensus was, however, in favor of maintaining the purely Jewish character of the student body.

An important stage was reached in 1884, the year in which the schools were admitted to recognition as "European" and the pupils of the boys' school were pitted against boys from the best schools in India in competitive public examination. The result of the first Primary Scholarship examination sponsored by the Government's Education Department proved satisfactory both as to the number passed and the places held by the successful candidates. A series of three examinations, Primary, Middle and Entrance, for graded age levels was in vogue — the prescribed age limit being twelve, fourteen and sixteen. If a candidate in each group received good grades and was within the age limit, he was awarded a scholarship of Rs. 2.00 or Rs. 3.00 per month for two or three years. This led to irregularities in disclosing students' ages, many of whom were admitted into school with certificates indicating ages lower by at least a year. Certificates could, of course, be "arranged" through the synagogue authorities who did not mind cooperating. As a result, the school registers are not the most authoritative evidence of precise dates of birth. The next year witnessed a larger number of candidates, both boys and a few girls; one of the latter, Rachel, daughter of Nathan Dwek, placed fourth on the list of successful candidates.

A temporary set-back to the progress of the schools was the withdrawal by the Education Department of the Government of India of the classification of Jewish children as "European." The practical effect of this reclassification precluded them from the advantages of the scholarship examinations of the European and Eurasian schools held under the auspices of the Inspectorate of European schools. Following a representation to the Lieut. Governor of Bengal, Sir Rivers Thompson, on behalf of the community and on his recommendation,

the Government directed a restitution of its recognition to the school as a "European" institution. It was pointed out that three languages besides English were taught — Hebrew through the medium of Arabic, French to the girls and Latin to the boys.

The pleas of R. M. Cohen, Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, to be relieved of his onerous dual duties on grounds of pressing business commitments, were regularly heard at annual general meetings. For want of a suitable successor, however, the matter was postponed on each occasion. He held office for five years and did much to raise the school to a fairly prosperous state. In doing so, he rendered yeoman's service without extravagance or pretence. Regular numerical increase, fair results in examinations and the selection of a devoted staff of teachers marked the first five years under his leadership. When he did resign in March, 1886, E. M. D. Cohen, the Honorary Under-Secretary was appointed to succeed him and Aaron N. E. Judah became Honorary Treasurer. The energies of a new Honorary Secretary were immediately geared to improving the deficient finances, which he turned into a surplus within a year by canvassing for increased donations and subscriptions and enhancing school fees. While intellectual and moral advancement of the children was an important objective with him, institutional self-sufficiency was a cardinal consideration towards which he strove incessantly. He was destined to guide the fortunes of the school for four decades, and his zeal and devotedness had left an indelible impress on it.

The problem of finding a replacement for Miss Duffin, Principal of the Girls' School, who retired because of continued ill-health, proved difficult. The years 1886–87 witnessed three changes in this office till, in December of the latter year, Miss Duffin, though ailing, was recalled and continued till 1895. A miniature crisis presented itself in the interval. Miss Bryning, an excellent teacher, recommended by the Inspector of European Schools, resigned in consequence of an injudicious punishment she had inflicted on one of the girls. E. M. D. Cohen also submitted his resignation and only withdrew it after a new set of rules was framed, increasing the Secretary's powers and prohibiting the use of corporal punishment.

The following year, 1888, witnessed a substantial advance in the appearance of Jewish candidates at the Middle School and Scholarship Examination under the European Inspectorate.

The travails of the school were by no means over. In April, 1889, E. M. D. Cohen left on a tour of Europe and was away for less than nine months. This period proved most hapless, almost resulting in

the disintegration of the girls' department and the ultimate closing of the boys' department in 1895. Three members officiated for Cohen during his absence: Joseph Ezekiel Judah with whom was left a balance of about Rs. 1,000.00 and who resigned on account of ill health; Raphael Elias Sassoon, who left Calcutta in November and Jacob Abraham Cohen who handed back charge to E. M. D. Cohen with a debt of over Rs. 300.00. Several subscribers and donors, including committee members, had stopped paying, the latter having thus forfeited the right to remain on the executive body. Elia Gubbay, the President, threatened to reduce his handsome donation, covering almost a half of the total income, if the indifference of the community continued. No committee meeting could take place despite three attempts by the Honorary Secretary. That there was no prize distribution for five years is an indication of the critical position of the finances. The state of affairs in the community was so strained that it was found impossible to raise special subscriptions as had hitherto been done at such crises. Added to these difficulties was the failing health of Gubbay in 1890 — a serious impediment to the consolidation of the school's position. In these circumstances, Cohen managed the affairs almost single-handed till an improvement in the health of the President was discernable in April, 1895, when a General Meeting was summoned. Yet, the apathy was such that four attempts had to be made before a quorum was obtained. A sub-committee was formed to solicit subscriptions and donations from the Jewish community with a view to putting the finances of the schools on a sound and permanent basis.

The boys' department had ninety-three pupils on its rolls — its highest enrollment — in 1891 and also started presenting its older students for the University Entrance Examination (a qualifying test for admission into the Calcutta University). Thereafter a steady falling off in its numbers was evident. The salaries that the limited funds could afford for teachers was quite inadequate for the maintenance of an efficient staff. This drawback was more marked in the boys' section, whose male teachers looked for higher salaries. At the beginning of 1892, George Hart, whose energy and pedagogic ability had helped towards the steady progress of his students, resigned, and could not be replaced by a reliable and efficient person, though academically qualified. Degrees of themselves need not be a criterion of dedication to a cause or of pedagogic competence and administrative ability. The decline in fund-raising was most unfortunate as it necessitated indirectly the dropping of the "Entrance" classes, loss of recognition and the inevitable lowering of the status

of the school. This was all the more regrettable as, but for a lack of funds, the girls' section was well-equipped educationally to realize hopes of affiliation with the Calcutta University by bringing it to the status of a college, which Cohen wished to name "Jeshurun College." The boys' department dragged on an existence with a constantly fluctuating, unreliable and inefficient staff; in the selection of a few of the latter it had been particularly unfortunate and this was the immediate cause of its ultimate disintegration. While there were ninety boys on the rolls in 1890, the number had been reduced to thirty-seven in 1894 and the expenditure was considered to be out of all proportion with its usefulness. Paying and more advanced scholars left for better-known schools as doubts were expressed regarding the stability of the Jewish school. When it was announced that Elia Gubbay had finally and completely withdrawn his support, the number of pupils further declined to twelve in the first week of September, 1894 and, by the end of the month, before school closed for the festival vacation, the attendance was nil! Nine boys, of whom six were free, returned after the holidays, but they were absorbed into the girls' department. Though the boys' section ceased to exist for the time being, a nucleus attending the girls' section to the fourth standard (grade) could always be transferred to a separate department, should funds have permitted this at some future date.

The decision of Gubbay to discontinue his material assistance came as a surprise but was justified when considered against the backdrop of communal indifference. In the face of public opinion Gubbay agreed to renew his donations at Rs. 200.00 per month provided the boys' department was continued. However, with a recurring monthly deficit of Rs. 500.00 this was out of the question. An approach to Joseph Elia Ezra to make up the difference failed to produce the desired results. The sub-committee, therefore, reported that its efforts to save the boys' section had met with little success and considered that one good school was better than two indifferent ones. It further recommended that boys should be allowed to remain beyond the fourth standard, subject to the discretion of the Honorary Secretary, who might extend the concession to those whose character and general behavior were compatible with the privilege. Normally, some boys were admitted into other schools after passing the Primary Examination, and others were withdrawn in the lower classes because of lack of application or ability.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that in the course of negotiations Gubbay tentatively offered to make an outright gift of the property to the school, in lieu of his monthly contributions. Later, he withdrew

the offer, but it was hoped that his will would contain the bequest. In the event it did not though, as pointed out, there was a bequest extending to a little over Rs. 100.00 per month.

From this point our story concerns the girls' section alone.

The only consolation in the demise of the separate boys' section was the increased accommodation for the girls, several admissions having earlier been turned down owing to limited space. The first (ground) floor vacated by the boys was occupied by the infant classes. Admissions were more liberal, restricted only by the adopted policy that free pupils should not exceed one third of paying scholars. It was held out as an incentive for well-to-do parents that every third child who attended other schools deprived a poor child of free admission into the Jewish school. What this implied, of course, was that every three children paying full fees could defray the cost of educating one free student.

In the absence of adequate interest and support, why did E. M. D. Cohen and a few others persevere so stubbornly to maintain the school? Sir Stuart Bayley, Lieut. Governor of Bengal and President at the Prize Distribution of January, 1888, succinctly summed up the reason: "Ordinarily, if a school cannot afford to entertain and to retain (for changes are injurious) a qualified staff, one would recommend that the school be closed and that the scholars find their education elsewhere. But in the Jewish Community there are very good reasons why this advice should not be given and why you should adhere religiously to maintaining a national school for your children. It appeals to the national pride and religion and finally supplies a want, the teaching of Hebrew and instruction in the religion of your forefathers to the children of the community, which cannot be met with elsewhere in the city."

Rather than apply for a Government grant and be deprived of much of its independence, the committee would have the school lead a hand-to-mouth existence. Further, if the European Code Regulations were to be followed strictly, the hours devoted to Hebrew instruction would have to be considerably curtailed to make room for other required subjects. The original purpose of the organizers would thus most likely be defeated.

A tendency, which had to be counteracted, was that of teachers who left the staff of the school for one reason or another, started rival private schools, and drew away as many supporting pupils as their influence could muster. An increasing number of affluent parents moving away from the neighborhood of the school, which was in

the old Jewish area, was a further obstacle to higher enrollment.

Despite handicaps of staff and environment, both girls and boys fared well in public examinations. A few examples will suffice. Matilda Cohen won scholarships in Primary, Middle and Entrance Examinations. She was admitted to Bethune College where she later obtained the B.A. degree. She became the first Jewish candidate to receive a Master's degree from the Calcutta University.

Rachel Cohen repeated Matilda's performance to the F.A. level, took a five-year course in Medicine leading to the M.B. degree, which she obtained with honors, and was awarded a £50 scholarship tenable for two years; she finally left for England to continue her studies. The Entrance scholarships won by the above-mentioned were the two highest out of three only open to girls in that year.

Ramah Moses held Government scholarships in the Primary and Middle School Examination and, on the Entrance class being suspended in the Jewish school, joined Doveton Institution for Young Ladies from where, having studied for seven months only, she obtained the Gold Medal, the highest honor of the school, and passed the Entrance Examination, earning a scholarship.

Elias S. Moses, her brother, educated entirely in the Jewish school, passed the Entrance from here before the school was nine years in existence. He migrated to St. Xavier's, passed the F.A. and went on to become a Pleader or advocate in the junior courts. His career was, unfortunately cut short as he died at age thirty-eight.

Ezekiel Joseph Judah, obliged to leave the Jewish school at the suspension of the Entrance class, joined St. Xavier's and received a gold medal for English composition presented by Maharaja Sir Jotendro Mohan Tagore, and a silver medal of the Entrance class.

Elias H. E. Solomon, one of the truly brilliant alumni of the school, passed the Middle School Examination in 1909 and was placed second in Bengal with distinctions in Arithmetic and Algebra and awarded a Scholarship tenable for two years. He was the first pupil to gain the double distinction of Dux of the School and standing first among his school fellows in the Code examinations. He, therefore, received a gold instead of the usual silver medal. In November, 1907, before completing his tenth year he passed the primary School examination normally taken by twelve year olds, whereafter he was granted a double promotion. His sister Grace, under ten years of age, headed the list of successful candidates in Bengal to win the award of a silver star as a mark of special merit.

If the growth of the school was slow, it was all the more sure and sound. Notwithstanding the severe blow received by the demise in

1898 of Elia Gubbay, one of its original founders and supporters and its principal benefactor, the school was assured of permanence through the mobilizing of other available communal resources and the tenacity and determination of its Honorary Secretary. The High School class was revived in 1898 thanks to the magnificent efforts of the Principal, Miss Alice Bryning, who took over from 1st May that year. A complete re-organization of the classes and staff as well as a closer and more thorough supervision accompanied Miss Bryning's assumption of office. Operating with a staff of fifteen teachers for 150-200 children, the expediture of a single school rose to almost Rs. 800.00 a month, the average cost being Rs. 4.00 per child, a low rate compared with other schools.

High school instruction lasted till May, 1908 when the Inspector of European Schools ruled that education in Middle Schools was not to be carried to the High School stage. In the ten years or so of its existence the High School class graduated fourteen of the fifteen candidates who took the examination. Four received scholarships and six distinctions.

Additional religious instruction classes on Sunday mornings, open to children of the school from Class I upwards and to others attending outside schools, were inaugurated by Emma (Mrs. S. J.) Cohen, Miss H. Mashiah, Kate Judah and Matilda Cohen; Rahma Moses and Rahma R. J. Jacob were in due course enlisted to help.

The influence of Nahoum E. David who joined the Hebrew Department of the school in 1908 cannot be over-estimated. An unassuming but thoroughly learned man, he instilled love and appreciation for Judaism into all those who received his instruction. The head of the Hebrew section, Shalome Aaron Arakie, having died the previous year, David was appointed in his place. The curriculum of Judaica was expanded to include Hebrew writing, grammar and composition as well as history. The effects of his teaching were felt on student and parents alike. (His literary output is considerable, all in manuscript.) He found an able colleague in Emma Cohen, one of the earliest pupils, whose clarity and interesting method of imparting her subject won the hearts of all her students. Instruction at the Sunday classes included reading from the Bible and explanations in English. Attendance was regular and, at the end of the year students' knowledge was tested and successful candidates received awards.

Hebrew was taught in the school proper between the hours of 9:30-10:30 in the morning for the infant section and Standard I, and between 3 and 4 in the afternoon for the rest of the school. Teachers included Hakham David Einy, Shalome J. A. Cohen, Ezra

B. Moses, Joshua E. Levi, Elias Sassoon and Ezra Joshua. This arrangement, different from the one hitherto followed, had to be adopted from 1900 in conformity with an article of the Code for European Schools which required that secular education be given without the interruption of religious teaching. The pupils were graded into five sections, irrespective of age and secular grade, proficiency in Hebrew being the only criterion. The father of the present writer, Isaac Sassoon Musleah, when a boy of nine and only in Second Grade, was placed in the highest Hebrew class — and won the prize. Most students could read the original Hebrew with some degree of fluency and write the language fairly well, and a few were able to translate it through the medium of Arabic. Nevertheless the effectiveness of Hebrew instruction was marginal because of the mental effort required, especially in the primary department, to cope with two other languages — French or Latin and English!

Financial worries continued as resources diminished and the monthly deficit reached the sum of Rs. 150.00. On the other hand, the need to maintain a staff in keeping with what was probably the minimum efficiency desirable, broke down the resistance of the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen to a government grant. Reluctantly he applied for this at the turn of the century; and although Sir John Woodburn, Lieut. Governor of Bengal, promised a subsidy when he presided over the prize distribution ceremony in the year 1900, it did take four years to materialize. The delay was due to the unwillingness on the part of the Government to classify the school within the legal definition contained in the European Code, which was later relaxed to apply to the Jewish school as an exceptional case. A sum of Rs. 250.00 per month was sanctioned by Government to augment the school's slender revenue. Immediate anxieties over the future were allayed, staff salaries were increased, provision made for better furniture and equipment and the school was in a position to pay higher rent for enlarged and improved accommodation to meet the demands for new admissions.

Accordingly in the winter of 1904–1905, the school building was enlarged and improved in various ways. More light and ventilation were provided and the floorings throughout made granolithic. Structural changes were made for additional accommodation. The greatest boon was the installation of electricity, lighting the upper floor and providing each class with an electric fan. The latter was made possible through the good offices of Aaron Raphael Joshua, a member of the committee, who collected a goodly sum, from which he agreed to pay for the cost of electricity in excess of the cost of operating the out-

moded manual fans. His death two years later was all the more unfortunate. The expenses for the upper floor installation and movable stage fittings were reimbursed through entertainments given in the school.

The management continued to aim at higher standards and better facilities: a library, a playground and a gymnasium. What is more, if the building belonged to the school, the margin earmarked for the landlord would be saved. The nucleus of a library was formed with a donation of the Honorable Earle Richards who presided at the Prize Distribution in 1905.

The silver jubilee of the school coincided with the visit of the Prince of Wales (who later became King George V). While elaborate celebrations were prohibitive, participation in public functions in honor of the British Prince was linked to the auspicious jubilee year. The school furnished a contingent of twenty-nine voices for the special choir arrayed on the maidan at the public reception of welcome, and the subvention from the Royal Reception Committee enabled the children to enjoy a river trip in the Port Commissioners' launch "Buckland."

The initial Government grant was sanctioned for three years and thereafter for a further similar period with an increase of Rs. 125.00 per month, provided the committee raised an equivalent amount from subscriptions within the Jewish community and complied with requirements regarding employment of teachers and their scale of salaries. Both conditions were difficult to fulfill, the former demanding a full scale campaign within the community and the latter swelling the expense on staff emoluments.

It had to be done and it was. The school occupied an anomalous position under the European Code of Education, under which, although admitted to recognition since 1886, its status was almost undefined and it was not entitled to receive aid, except as a special case for limited periods. The status of Jews in education and their admission to the full benefits of the European Code were considered sympathetically by Government, which acknowledged the importance of the services rendered by this institution and its title to substantial consideration as regards both financial assistance and educational status. The disabilities under which the school labored were removed by amendments to the New Code of 1908 which, among other things, upgraded the school from "Middle" to "Secondary." These amendments came into operation from January, 1911. However, the award was made in recognition of the attainments of the Jewish Girls' School and did not confer added rights

on Jews as a community. Co-religionists attending other "European" schools were reckoned as non-European and were, therefore, debarred from competing in scholarship examinations under the Code. In fact, Jewish students very often failed to gain admission into these schools, where the Jews were classified as Asiatics and the non-European element was restricted under the Code fifteen per-cent of the total enrollment despite their willingness to pay higher fees. The benefits accruing to the Jewish community by the existence of its school became amply clear when the Cambridge Syndicate accepted the secondary status of the school and candidates first appeared for the Cambridge Junior Local Examination in December, 1912. Two years later the Cambridge Junior School Certificate Examination became compulsory for a School Leaving Certificate in Secondary schools and several girls became proud possessors of this documentary evidence of their educational achievements. The following year the school attained the status of "higher secondary" and was authorized to present candidates for the Senior Certificate "A" examination. It had since been sending a regular batch of students for this annual test with very satisfying results.

The public acknowledgment inherent in these official awards is ample testimony to the labors of the school's staff and managers. Apart from academic attainments, the school was obviously a force for good in respect to character building and in widening the horizons of children from a rather narrow environment. It should not have been necessary to plead for the claims the school had on the sympathy and interest of the Jewish community. Local support and encouragement, however, were scanty and spasmodic. The new evidence of the quality of work being done implicit in the award of the new status which placed the institution among the best schools in the Province of Bengal should have attracted their spontaneous and cordial cooperation to ensure freedom from further pecuniary obstacles. Two schemes proposed by Rev. Cohen would provide both self-sufficiency and permanence — an endowment fund and a building owned by the school. It would have been a cause for lasting reproach had the school been allowed to collapse for want of funds to implement these schemes.

The building project was sponsored by almost every guest speaker at annual distribution of prizes.[43] An example of such an appeal is contained in the address of the Hon'ble Sir Sassoon David in 1910. "... the hour has come when a determined, a strenuous and indefatigable effort should be made to raise funds for this proposed new building. I cannot help thinking that the time has arrived when an

earnest appeal should be made to the wealthy members of our community, who, although few in numbers — the majority of them being now settled in England — can well afford to advance the cause of education, in this direction, among the children of their less fortunate co-religionists.

"If proper representations were made to the Ezras, Gubbays, Meyers and others, all of whom have amassed immense wealth in this City, and are still largely interested in the City's welfare as proprietors of extensive estates — I cannot help thinking that a ready response would be the result and that a fine new building, as a home for this useful and deserving institution, would speedily become an established fact. I cannot help feeling, at any rate, that a fair start — and a good start — would be made as the result of such an appeal, a nucleus being thereby formed which, in a short time, would be of sufficient dimensions to evoke a government building grant."

The necessity grew more pressing with the steady rise in the value of land, proportionate increase in rent and the shrinking accommodation for an expanding school. The appeal for funds was launched in March, 1911 in a pamphlet addressed to members of the Jewish community in India and the Far East and sent to Bombay, Rangoon, Penang, Singapore and Hongkong where former pupils or their relatives then resided and did business. In the circular Rev. Cohen contemplated an extension of the school's sphere of usefulness by developing it into a boarding and day school. For this purpose the acquisition of sufficiently extensive premises was necessary to make possible the accommodation of 400 students and 100 boarders. A nucleus of Rs. 10,000.00 was in hand already, thanks to the strict economy practised through the years and to various casual donations. If the communal response was large enough, it would perhaps evoke from Government the bestowal of a building grant. The target of the appeal was Rs. 250,000.00.

Before very much headway could be made, the exigencies created by World War I necessarily shelved the fulfillment of these hopes. Meantime, 8 Pollock Street, which the school had occupied since 1884, was sold to a Marwari merchant who was demanding higher rent.

The maintenance of an adequate and qualified staff was a perennial problem. Not many teachers stayed over a long period as the salaries were low, particularly considering that the load of work was heavy. The two notable constants were the Principal Miss Bryning and the Honorary Secretary, Rev. Cohen. It cannot be gainsaid that the school owed its continued growth and outstanding development

to the cordial teamwork of this dual leadership which ended with the retirement of Miss Bryning in June, 1917. Her mental alacrity and sense of dedication raised the standard of education from humble beginnings. Every year of her incumbancy revealed a fresh claim on the respect and thankfulness of the Jewish community. Throughout the twenty years of service to the school, she displayed a genuine love for her work, a sincere attachment to her pupils and a respect for her staff; and on her departure for England, a unanimous feeling prevailed that all had lost a good friend and an able advisor. Coincidentally, the number of pupils on the rolls diminished from 151 in 1916 to 127 at the end of 1917.

A replacement was difficult to obtain. Mrs. Barker who had officiated for Miss Bryning when she was on furlough from March to December, 1913 took charge but served for only four months. Some degree of permanency was achieved with the appointment of Miss Regina Guha, M.A., B.L., in whom the school obtained an enthusiastic principal; together with two of her sisters she gave the school sound direction and instruction for almost a decade. Miss Guha formed, on her own initiative, a Higher Local Cambridge class, training four candidates for the Teacher's Certificate. She brought together what was probably the most qualified staff the school had yet had; one had a degree in teaching, one a diploma — and one even a law degree; altogether five of the group were Jewish. (Miss Guha herself was appointed lecturer in English at the University of Calcutta.)

Consequent to changes in the School Code, requiring boys to do manual training from Class 5 on and in view of the inability of the school to undertake the additional financial burden involved in setting up the new department, the authorities were obliged to restrict enrollment to girls beyond Class 4. Thus a reduction in the number of boys is noticeable after 1912. A further diminution in numbers was caused by the withdrawal of children who were now often sent to boarding schools away from the city or to day schools in the more fashionable South Calcutta. Sometimes, merely the disappointment at a child not being promoted made parents remove their children, though the most discontented acknowledged the high academic level. This, of course, had a direct effect on the finances — and on the facilities offered.

Religious knowledge was offered for the first time by candidates taking the Cambridge examination in 1914. Students were prepared in that course by Emma Cohen.

The appointment of Hannah Guha as first Assistant teacher in 1914 augured well for the school. An industrious teacher herself, she aided the Principal in her multifarious administrative and educational duties. She was also instrumental in inducing many students to become Girl Guides (Scouts), and a company was inaugurated under the auspices of Mrs. Maurice Bear, Commissioner of the Girl Guides in the city. The school authorities encouraged the functioning of the Guide movement for its cultivation of a high moral sense and a responsibility towards one's fellow beings. The Eighth Calcutta Company sounds a note of pride and loyalty in the hearts of many ex-pupils. For its popularity much is owed to Mrs. Sarah Abraham (nee Einy) and Mrs. Iris Ferris (nee Moses), both alumni of the school. A powerful stimulus was given by Mrs. (later Lady) Rachel Ezra, whose wide influence for good made her for many years the moving spirit in the promotion of youth activities.

It is interesting, en passant, to mention that some former students were among the first King scouts in Calcutta to receive their colors from the hands of Lord Carmichael, Viceroy of India. Also, that most, if not all, of the Jewish volunteers in the Calcutta Volunteer Regiment were "Old Boys" of the school. One of them, Joseph E. M. D. Cohen, who happened to be in London when war broke out, joined the Territorials and his regiment, the 9th Middlesex, trained in India for active service.

In common with other educational institutions, the school participated in the war effort, 1914–1918. The proceeds of the annual entertainment and individual subscriptions were donated to the Bengal Branch of the Imperial Indian Relief Fund, the Belgian Relief Fund and the Calcutta War Relief Fund for a fleet of motor ambulances, sponsored by the daily *Statesman*. However, the war postponed indefinitely the building scheme, for which several thousand rupees had been collected by the time of its outbreak.

With the passing of Joseph Elia Ezra in December, 1914 a valued friend and supporter was lost. A one-time Vice President of the committee and one of its chief benefactors, he endowed many pupils with handsome subventions to enable them to pursue their university education in England.

The Jeshurun Free School was begun as an adjunct of the Jewish Girls' School by sheer stress of circumstances. In 1926 the Government amended its regulation with an order restricting the number of free pupils and those on reduced fees in schools where a majority were paying for their education. The idea presumably hinged

on the principle that children of indigent parents could not produce a standard comparable with the more fortunate and should not be permitted to be a drag on them. A separate primary free school for girls was therefore started in November that year under the same management, at a separate building, 1 Manook Lane, adjacent to the Jewish Girls' School, with 49 children and Miss Kate Mashiah as Principal. Those who completed this course joined the Jewish Girls' School as free pupils, but this did not contravene the Government order as they formed a very small proportion of the total school population. When Miss Mashiah, a painstaking and likeable individual, resigned in October, 1931 on grounds of ill-health, Miss Rahma Moses became honorary principal. The teacher of Hebrew reading and biblical chants was Master Meyer (Meir Barukh), a product of Baghdadi Talmud Torahs, where he learned some rabbinics.

The provision of suitable premises of its own for the school once again came to the fore in the 1920's, partly as a result of an increased Jewish population. Plans were formulated and strenuous efforts were made to raise funds for a new building. Towards this end, the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, the Honorary Secretary, devoted himself in the last few years of his life. The stupendous task entailed the acquisition of the land at 8 Pollock Street and the building that stood on it; demolishing it and putting up another suited to the particular needs of an educational institution. Funds were raised by individual donations and organizing of shows. Alternative accommodation had to be sought through the period of demolition and construction that lasted almost five years.

The foundation stone ceremonies were held on Sunday, June 27, 1926 with Rev. Cohen officiating at what proved to be one of his last public appearances. He offered up a moving prayer and delivered an address which he prefaced by saying it was the happiest day of his life. Displaying two gold, four silver, four nickel and four copper current coins, he concluded that part of the proceedings by reading the inscription on the stone, the writing on a specially prepared parchment with a description of the occasion, and an engraving on the beaten down Jerusalem silver coin.

Mrs. (later Lady) Rachel Ezra, placed them into a vacuum bottle with a copy of each of the addresses, the program and prayer and that day's issue of two English language dailies, the *Englishman* and the *Statesman*. Her husband, Mr. (later Sir) David Ezra, at the time Sheriff of Calcutta, set the corner stone in position while reading the last verse of Psalm 90 while the school choir sang Psalm 118:21-25. The prayer for the royal family, the blessing of the

congregation and the singing of Psalm 150 brought the ceremonies to a close.

Rev. Cohen was not destined to witness the official opening of the school. He died on January 14, 1927. In tribute to his memory the committee passed a resolution "expressing the deep sense of sorrow at the irreparable loss sustained by the school by the passing of the noble and inspiring figure of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, Secretary and Treasurer and chief benefactor." It also resolved that a painted portrait with a fitting memorial be put up in a prominent position in the school and subscribed for by the pupils and ex-pupils. This memorial, together with one of Elia Shalome Gubbay, presented by the latter's son Maurice, another generous benefactor, are still to be seen on either side of the stage in the main auditorium. The successor board comprised the following members: Maurice E. Gubbay, President; Sir David Ezra, Vice President; Joseph S. Duke, Honorary Secretary; Benjamin Nissim Elias, Honorary Treasurer; Maurice Manasseh; Aaron Curlender; Ezekiel Abraham Gubbay; Aslan Manasseh and Lady Rachel Ezra representing the Jeshurun Free School and the Ladies' Committee, a welfare advisory group. The latter helped raise funds for the deficit building account, looked into and tried to assist in the problems of parents of the Jeshurun Free School and their children and shared the burden of offsetting the fees of some of those who transferred from the Jeshurun Free School after Class 5.

The new school building was officially opened by Lady Jackson, wife of the Governor of Bengal, on Tuesday, November 12, 1929. Praising the philanthropy of the local Jewish community, she pointed to the great strides taken by the school in almost a half a century and expressed the hope that many generations of children would learn there to become happy and useful citizens.[44] David Jacob Cohen, who had succeeded Joseph S. Duke as Honorary Secretary in February that year, reviewed the history of the institution which had come to reflect the high sense of moral and religious responsibility of the wealthy Jews of the city.

The new building, a three-story brick structure, was shared by the Jewish Girls' School, which occupied the first two floors, and the Jeshurun Free School, which used the top floor. President and Mrs. Maurice E. Gubbay presided and distributed the prizes at the first prize-giving held there in December, 1929 and they were hosts at the school's Golden Jubilee celebration on Sunday, January 3, 1932 when the first re-union of ex-pupils took place. A separate function was held for the school's students.

The erection of the building was not an unmixed blessing. During

the construction period, classes were disrupted and many parents removed their children. This coincided with constant changes in the principalship, a vacancy in that office for a while and Rev. Cohen's demise. Educational standards were lowered and administration declined. Retrogression was halted, however, in 1929 by the appointment, as principal, of Miss Rahma M. Luddy, a young graduate trained in London. For thirty-five years thereafter she was the mainstay and life of the school, which she transformed through courageous efforts into one of Calcutta's best high schools. She coined the school's motto, "Not failure but low aim is crime," and the high standards she set were reflected in the excellent results her girls produced in Cambridge External Examinations.

Typical of Miss Luddy's zeal for improvement was her attitude to the teaching of the Hebrew language. As in so many centers in the East half a century ago, the language was "learned" by rote as it were — the main objective being limited to the unintelligent recitation of prayers. This Miss Luddy struggled to change, having herself first acquired the basics of modern Hebrew and its teaching. There was no teacher sufficiently qualified to teach high school classes. The Education Department was approached, apparently unsuccessfully, for a grant to enable a local Jewish girl to be sent abroad to train for a lectureship in Hebrew. Mrs. Sally Rodda (nee Joshua), a local girl with no specialized training as a teacher of Hebrew, aided by her principal, filled the role quite creditably for many years.

Miss Luddy's relentless efforts, however, brought Mrs. Tehilla Krieger from Palestine in 1939 to teach Hebrew as a living language. Possessed of a congenial personality and fine ability, she made her subject so attractive that several adults also became interested. High school classes studying for Cambridge University External Examinations began taking Hebrew. Mrs. Krieger resigned after two and a half years on grounds of health, leaving an encouraging testimonial to Sally Rodda. Hebrew for Cambridge External Examinations continued for a few more years, the high standard of the successful candidates a pride and pleasure to the entire community and a triumph for Miss Luddy.

Another project instituted as a result of Miss Luddy's efforts was the extension of the girls' studies for a year beyond the then School Certificate Examination referred to above, for what is equivalent to the sophomore year at American universities. Instituted in 1934, the course prepared students for the Intermediate Arts Examination of the Calcutta University.

Also typical of Miss Luddy's innovations, commercial courses were

introduced for those who were not academically inclined and wished, after middle school (equivalent to junior high), to augment the family income. But a sufficient number of parents did not realize its value and it had to be given up. Courses in Needlework and Home Science continued as part of the curriculum.

For Miss Luddy, however, academic distinction was not sufficient. A school magazine *Excelsior* catered for several years to those with literary interests. In the field of sports the girls participated in hockey, badminton, basketball and other games and acquitted themselves admirably, while the annual sports meets instilled healthy competiveness. The school's choir performed commendably at school and communal functions. Miss Luddy believed that education is an all-embracing process and so, therefore, is teaching. She subscribed to the opinion that teaching involves life in all its phases — in the school room, on the school grounds and off the school grounds. The children of her school knew that what she said was the truth and that how she lived was in conformity with what she said. This she was able to achieve because the lines of communication between principal and students were ever open. Beneath the stern disciplinarian was revealed a soft-hearted lover of children, and it was to these that Miss Luddy dedicated her life.

A lifelong fighter for causes she held dear and just, she joined issue with her administrative officers and others, even if it meant leaving the post which was her livelihood. She resigned in 1963. Her successor was Dr. Subha Mitter, an educationist, scholar and former professor of a leading Calcutta college.

Thus did one more Jewish community set up in a thriving center of Britain's Empire facilities attuned to the educational needs of its daughters. The curriculum was that of any other school in the city; but Bible and Hebrew studies together with the overall spirit of Jewishness pervaded the work and helped the girls of the community to obtain a glimpse of their heritage which they might not otherwise have obtained.

### *II. The Jewish Free School*

On the death of David Joseph Ezra in February, 1882, his mantle of generosity fell upon the broad shoulders of his son Elia. One of the first manifestations of this was the founding of a school, styled the "Ezra's Benevolent Institution," whose primary purpose was the provision for sons of indigent parents of a religio-secular education. Breakfast and a hot lunch were also supplied daily. In addition,

once a year the students received a set of clothes and a pair of shoes each. The maintenance of the school cost Ezra about Rs. 600.00 per month.[45] Hakham Abraham Shalome Hye Hamoi presided over the dedicatory exercises on November 1, 1882[46] at the school which he named "Tehilla Le-David."

In February, 1884, there were eighty boys on the rolls. They were directed by Hakham Solomon Abid Twena, a recent immigrant from Baghdad, steeped in Torah learning. The staff included two assistant teachers who taught Hebrew and Bible with its traditional translation into Arabic (Sharh) and three teachers responsible for secular subjects. The pedagogic levels were not remarkable by any standard. However, the school did excel in Hebraica. By April, 1884 the senior students had completed the study of the Talmudic tractate Taanit and the Siyum or traditional celebration in honor of it was held at the home of the school's sole benefactor.[47] Moses Abeasis held examinations for the Hebrew department in May, 1885 in the presence of distinguished members of the Jewish community including Mozelle Ezra, and was well-rewarded by excellent results in Gemara, Sharh and fluency in Hebrew reading.[48]

Ezra's magnanimous efforts were short-lived. On his death less than a year later, his sons, not being particularly interested, relinquished charge of the school. The administration was taken over by an elected triumvirate of the Jewish community — Moses Abeasis, Aaron N. E. Judah and Abraham E. Gubbay to whose enthusiastic devotion and unsparing efforts is owed its survival.

The title to the property passed from the Ezras to the community, and a change in ownership necessitated a mutation in its designation; for a period of two decades the school came to be known as "Talmud Torah Institution."

The financial stability Ezra gave the school was sorely missed. So difficult was it to meet commitments that the institution evidently had to close down for a while but re-opened on January 1, 1891 with sixty pupils in six classes.[49] Pledges for recurring donations ensured part of the budget — the teachers' salaries; e.g. Mozelle Ezra paid Rs. 100.00 and one Adolf Grossman Rs. 20.00 monthly.[50] A new arrangement to feed the impoverished pupils was instituted: lunches were under-written by relatives in memory of their loved ones or in honor of happy occasions; numerous gifts of text books and prayer books were made;[53] offerings for the school were made in Synagogue by a few called to the Torah.[52] On Purim that year Mozelle Ezra donated Rs. 50.00 toward the distribution of clothes amounting to over Rs. 200.00.[53] Each student received the full complement of

Arabic garb — a Dagla (long coat), four Kamsan (long shift), four Labsan (undershirt), four Sadaria (outer vests).[54]

To muster greater communal interest a larger committee was appointed in March.[55] At the annual meeting of 1892 Lady Rachel Sassoon, wife of Sir Albert Sassoon and mother of Mozelle Ezra, donated Rs. 150.00.[56] A distinct weakening is apparent in the further response; the next meeting had to be called three different times before it got a quorum.[57] The triumvirate again found themselves alone! Judah and Gubbay assumed responsibility of administration and Abeasis of the curriculum. The latter conducted the first examination in the new set-up in January, 1892 and presided over the first distribution of prizes when he counselled the boys on the importance of moral behavior in addition to the study of books. Joseph David, son of Principal Twena, received a prize for Ma-amar, Debar Torah, exposition of a rabbinic text.[58]

The death, in October, 1906, of Abraham E. Gubbay, the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, necessitated the appointment of a successor. With a view to making over charge to a properly constituted body, a public meeting was convened at Maghen David Synagogue by his son Ezekiel A. Gubbay on February 3, 1907 and turned out to be both representative and well-attended. A commitee of twelve was chosen to run the affairs of the Institution comprising Moise A. Sassoon, E. M. D. Cohen, Ezra S. Levy, A. N. Sassoon, Aaron Abraham Cohen, J. S. Ezra, Ezra A. Arakie, E. A. Nassim, Ezekiel Abraham Gubbay, D. M. David, Immanuel Raphael Belilios and William Grossman. Ezra A. Arakie and M.A. Sassoon were elected Joint Honorary Secretaries and A. N. Sassoon, Honorary Treasurer. The last five in the list of committee members refused to hold office and A. N. Sassoon declined the post of Honorary Treasurer. At a further meeting on the following Sunday, March 10, the number on the Committee was reduced to seven; M. A. Sassoon was appointed Honorary Treasurer and Ezra A. Arakie, Honorary Secretary. Thus commenced an association between the last named person and this school that spread over almost half a century. It may be said truly that the indefatigable energy and tenacious determination of Arakie were solely responsible for the continued existence of the school and to whatever success it achieved.[59]

The third change in the name of the school was brought about by a misunderstanding of the term "Talmud Torah" by a British Director of Public Instruction, who was, of course, unfamiliar with both Hebrew and the native Indian languages and mistook it to indicate one of the over three hundred dialects of India! To make the appellation more intelligible to the non-Jewish public generally, the Institution was now

called more fully, "Jewish Free School, Talmud Torah." A staff of four teachers for general subjects and three for Jewish subjects taught an increased enrollment, from sixty in 1906 to one hundred in 1907. It was gratifying to the new administrators that the majority of the new students were drawn from the Old Church Hebrew Mission School, which poured ever-available funds and a lively interest into the poverty-stricken Jewish youngsters and their parents.

The school had only a primary department catering for fifty-five boys and forty-five girls, ranging in age from four to twelve years in respect of girls and to seventeen of boys. The medium of instruction in the Hebrew department was largely Arabic since both teachers as well as most of the pupils or their parents hailed from Baghdad. The language spoken at recreation time was also Arabic. In a socially backward setting, it was a source of great surprise that the girls, being diligent and intelligent, almost always outstripped the boys in their academic results. The latitude given to boys by their parents or guardians made them freer to spend their leisure outside home, while the strictly closeted atmosphere of girls made them more amenable to study.

A sample of the time-table and holiday list would help formulate an idea of the hard uphill grind the school had to face. Working five days a week in the general department and an extra half day (Sunday) in the Hebrew department for a total of 210 weeks, the following daily schedule was adhered to: a six hour day with an hour's recess for lunch and recreation, each department having seven classes up to the primary level.

At his first annual commencement[60] when the benefactor and philanthropist Elias Meyer presided, Arakie was convinced that, to make the school really effective, it would require creating an atmosphere conducive to study for children whose homes were a shade better than hovels, whose parents were for the most part illiterate, and whose afternoons were spent in undesirable company. He dwelt at length on the value of what he termed a "Boarding Industrial School" for two reasons: firstly, to continue outside school hours the discipline which parents were incapable of maintaining, thus undoing the benecial influence of the school and next, to provide shelter for a large number of orphans bereft of the loving care of parents or guardians.

Arakie appealed, at every opportunity, and especially at prize distribution functions, for support of the school's development needs. With larger and ever expanding enrollment, a more spacious building became a necessity. In the first three years of its existence, its student body increased from 60 to 160. Many had to be turned

away or be removed from the rolls because funds did not allow classes beyond the primary grades. Serving a community with such widespread poverty, the school had to have technical instruction in shorthand and typewriting, carpentry and commercial practice, thus enabling the graduates to help their indigent parents eke a livelihood. What was required therefore was an ORT-type school catering to the needs of a rising generation on whom their parents depended to mitigate some of the stringency of their families who were otherwise drifting to vice and degradation.

Pending the setting up of an Industrial School, there were requests for a boarding department to save the children from the unwholesome physical facilities available in their homes. A school building would be a fitting answer to all these problems. The Jewish community, largely stricken with poverty, nevertheless included many on whom fortune smiled and who could afford an estimated three hundred thousand rupees to acquire a new building and to provide for educational and boarding equipment.

A drawback in Calcutta was the fragmentization of activities in the same cause. Two schools operated, when with combined efforts one could have been run more efficiently with joint fund-raising labors. In Bombay, with a larger Jewish community, one school catering for 250 pupils prepared students for matriculation (high school) and provided technical classes from an endowment fund of three hundred thousand rupees. In Calcutta, in the early twentieth century, both schools had co-education, and separate managements caused a waste of effort and duplication the community could ill-afford. That this was so might have been unavoidable since the Jewish Girls' School was not a free school, and an attempt to combine the schools could very well have produced more problems than it solved.

The inner weakness brought about by the Jewish inter-school competition which became keener and more vigorous during the inter-synagogue strife in the second decade of the twentieth century put the Jewish community at a disadvantage in its battle against the influential missionary movement. Judging from the number of transfers from the Mission School, there was in fact a need for a free Jewish school. Eighty of the ninety-three new admissions in the first three years of the Talmud Torah's existence were from the Mission School. In 1909 forty Jewish children were still to be reclaimed. Having a reputation of being one of the largest day schools in Calcutta, the seductive attempts made persistently by the Christian institution frittered away much energy in the constant

and sometimes bitter tug-o'-war. Soul-snatching took precedence over the educational requirements of the Jewish students. The latter were unhappy because of a compulsory conformity to religious doctrines which were opposed to the fundamental principles of Judaism. Though the number proselytized was negligible, it was painful to see so many Jewish children being submitted to a severe testing of their spiritual steadfastness.

To prepare the Jewish Free School for an advantage in this ding-dong duel in terms of more facilities and improved accommodation, a fund-raising instrument was set up in the form of a Ladies' Committee whose task was to mobilize Jewish communal support and provide the money so urgently needed. Fortified by the consciousness of a cohesive force and united action, the ladies invited and received generous contributions. A sum of Rs.10,000.00 was converted into a Trust called "The Talmud Torah Endowment Fund" with Messrs. Nissim I. Sassoon, Rahamim M. Cohen and E. Eliot as Trustees. Afterward the Trusteeship was dissolved and a sum of Rs. 33,000.00 turned over to the Official Trustee of Bengal in June, 1916.

With the conscientious devotion of the Hebrew and general staff and the active assistance of noble volunteers, the school made swift progress, overcoming obstacles that at different stages menaced its healthy growth and stability. One of these handicaps was the inadequate remuneration paid to the staff. Good instruction can only be imparted by better teachers; to elevate the mental and moral standard of the children it was indispensable to improve the terms and conditions of these teachers. It is significant that most of the latter in the general department were non-Jews.

The Rev. E.M.D. Cohen, as a Municipal Councillor, exerted his influence in the teens of the twentieth century to secure a grant from civic funds from Rs.150.00 to Rs.500.00 in stages. After Indian Independence, when, as a pre-requisite of receiving a grant, it was ruled that a sitting councillor must be represented on institutional committees, the school managed, as an exceptional case, to have the requirement waived in its case, but the grant was reduced, probably to accommodate the enhanced demand on the municipality's limited educational budget caused by the growth of additional schools.

Extra curricular activities included a Drilling Corps three times a week (1909), teaching of Needlework on Sundays by Miss Rahma Moses (1914) and Scouting (1914).

In May, 1909 the school moved to larger premises at 45 Bowbazar Street on a rental of Rs.226.00 per month on a ten-year lease.

It is interesting to follow what may be termed "pupil traffic" in

1914 which may be considered representative of other years in the teens of the twentieth century. The school opened with 146 children (eighty-two boys and sixty-four girls) and closed with 145 (eighty boys and sixty-five girls). Thirty-seven names were removed and thirty-six added during the year. Of the thirty-seven children, five girls were transferred to the sister institution in the secondary department not available in the Jewish Free School, Talmud Torah; four boys left to earn a livelihood (shedding light on the extent of parental need); twelve joined the Hebrew Mission School (against twenty-four who left that institution to obtain a Jewish education, showing the losing battle the missionaries were waging; this is noteworthy when it is considered that the twelve who transferred from the Jewish to the Christian school were delinquents and left in defiance of the Jewish authorities); two were admitted to a Christian Orphanage, Haddow's Home, but returned after two weeks; one girl joined another Christian Day School (there were many such private schools that were not as enterprising as the Mission School). One girl left to get married (child marriages were not uncommon) and one poor girl died in a hospital (child mortality was high).

Of those enrolled in the Jeshurun Free School (besides those accounted for above) one came from the Calcutta Girls' School — a Christian non-missionary institution), one from Sir Jacob Sassoon School in Bombay and two from Baghdad (indicating the population flux between Calcutta, Bombay and Baghdad).

World War I retarded the progress of the school financially and educationally. The numerical growth was restricted in 1914 owing to a fall in income, depriving those who were excluded from availing themselves of the facilities of the school. To aid the war effort, however, the prize winners at the end of the year subscribed the value of their prizes to the Imperial Indian Relief Fund and accepted cards of merit instead.

During the first ten years of the third phase of the school's existence, several changes took place in the personnel of the committee. Elias Meyer became President in 1908 and in 1910 Hony. President with B. Meyer as President. Elias Meyer was a rock of strength and dependability to Arakie. He gave liberally of his counsel, influence and money towards the maintenance of the school; but these were dwarfed by the magnanimous gift in October, 1920 of the school buildings named for him, costing Rs.234,000.00. The first distribution of prizes to be held in its own building took place in December that year. At that time Arakie announced that the school's Trust Fund amounted to Rs.80,000.00. However, because of the unfortun-

ate developments elsewhere in the community involving him, the school forfeited the support of the Ezras, and the majority of the community was alienated. J. S. Duke, E. A. Gubbay and Rachel Ezra, wife of David Ezra (later Sir David Ezra) of the Ladies' Committee withdrew from the committee. Arakie did not seem to be affected till the resignation of M.A. Sassoon as Honorary Treasurer in 1916. It placed an increased burden on Arakie who assumed the dual role of Secretary and Treasurer, but not for long. By 1922 Ezra Solomon Gubbay was appointed Honorary Treasurer and later Eric Ellis occupied that office.

In 1916 a gift of No. 22 Khairu Lane, Calcutta, was made by a Mrs. Silver. The building later was sold and the proceeds added to the Trust Fund of the school. By 1922 the school counted the following legacies — Rebecca Belilios, Elia Shalome Gubbay, Judah Ezekiel, S. D. S. Levy, J. A. Solomon and S. J. Solomon.

In that year, the labors and determined efforts of the school's managing committee and indeed of the Jewish community as a whole had been rewarded by the closing of the Calcutta Hebrew Mission School, after an up-and-down existence of over forty years. The impediment with which the advancement of the Jewish schools in Calcutta was plagued was removed and the stage set for the school's unfettered progress. Twenty-five boys transferred from the Christian institution; the enrollment would have increased several fold had the admission of girls not been stopped. From this time on, the two communal schools which started as co-ed institutions began to limit their students to particular sexes — the Jewish Free School & Talmud Torah to boys and from January, 1926 the Jewish Girls' School to girls except in the lower grades. Thirty girls of the Hebrew Mission School were admitted to the Jewish Girls' School.

In 1919 the school hired premises at 46 Bowbazar Street on a ten-year lease, but Arakie aimed at having the school own its property. Elias Meyer's gift came as a fulfillment of that aim. It consisted of old buildings, however; after these were demolished, Arakie's first most vital goal was accomplished — a three storied building was erected at 50 Bowbazar, which houses the school to this day.

Elias Meyer died in London in 1925. In recognition of the part played by him towards the consolidation and equipment of the school, the name of the institution was changed for the fourth and last time, after his death. His widow, Flora Meyer, was eager to perpetuate in a tangible manner the memory of her late husband, and, simultaneously, put the school on solid foundations for all time. She decided to create a Trust Fund of Rs. 576,500.00, only the income of which would be utilized for the benefit of the school.

The Trust is an extraordinary document. It not only outlined clauses ordinarily included in such deeds, but incorporated for the school a constitution which it hitherto did not have. It determined the size, functions and powers of the Commitee of Management or Managers. Besides appointing the Director of Public Instruction and the Official Trustee of Bengal as ex-officio members, Mrs. Meyer reserved the right to nominate two persons of the Jewish faith to serve on the committee. The other six persons were to be elected at annual general meetings of subscribers to its funds. Upon the death of the testator the system of nomination was to cease and yield to the election of the two more members at a general meeting.

Some of the significant provisions were:

1. The name of the School as the Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah shall not be changed.
2. Free education including Hebrew and traditional Judaism to poor Jewish boys shall continue.
3. Prominent display of names of donors of Rs.5000.00 and above together with the sums donated.

In accordance with these provisions, a marble plaque had been placed on the eastern wall on the first (ground) floor of the school building with these inscriptions:

This Tablet is erected to commemorate the following facts:

In accordance with the direction in MRS. FLORA MEYER'S DEEDS of TRUST dated 11.10.1930.

1. MR. ELIAS MEYER presented the school with this site at a cost of Rs.225,000.00 and paid a further sum of Rs.78,000.00 towards the costs of these buildings.
2. These buildings were erected in 1925 at a cost of Rs.165,000.00 plus old building materials, and the Talmud Torah Trust Fund paid the balance of costs, Rs.87,000.00.
3. On 11th October, 1930 MRS. FLORA MEYER created an ENDOWMENT TRUST for the maintenance of the school, towards which she and her daughters and sons-in-law paid as follows:

Mrs. Flora Meyer ..... Rs.315,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. E. Nissim ..... Rs. 20,000.00
Major & Mrs. A.M. Sassoon . Rs. 20,000.00
Dr. & Mrs. N.J. Judah ..... Rs. 20,000.00

4. The following Ladies & Gentlemen bequeathed Legacies in Trust to the School:

| | |
|---|---|
| Mrs. Rebecca Belilios | Mrs. Shinney D. Levy |
| Mr. Judah Ezekiel | Mrs. Mulca K. Meyer |
| Mrs. Dinah R. Gubbay | Mr. Joseph A. Solomon |
| Mr. Elias S. Gubbay | Mr. Solomon J. Solomon |

5. The following sums were bequeathed by the undermentioned deceased persons:

Mrs. R.E. Belilios
of Hongkong ..... Rs.25,000.00
Mr. D.A. Gubbay ..... Rs.20,000.00
Mr. A.R. Gubbay ..... Rs.36,000.00
Mrs. A.N.E. Judah paid
in her lifetime ..... Rs. 6,000.00

6. Amongst the living Donors, the School received from
Mr. Aaron S. Abraham ..... Rs.10,000.00
Mr. N. Perry ..... Rs. 5,000.00

Calcutta,
1st December, 1937.

E.A. ARAKIE
Honorary Secretary since Jan., 1907.

*Ezra Arakie Park:*

Having consolidated the school in its own building, thus allowing the rent paid hitherto to be diverted directly to raising the educational level, Ezra Arakie set about to attain the final goal of his enterprising career — the creation of a boarding school. The Talmud Torah Endowment Fund was flourishing with monetary gifts and legacies. When in 1938 Ben Arakie, a real estate broker, and Ezra Arakie's half brother, made an offer of a measure of land with a strong recommendation, Ezra took advantage of the bargain and laid out about Rs.115,000.00 towards the purchase price and demarcation. A grateful committee named the Park for its indefatigable Honorary Secretary who had dedicated his life for the welfare and education of the poorer boys of the community, and for whom this was a fitting culmination of his life's work. In February, 1939 the school's annual sports were held on its own ground for the first time. The Park was used also for week-end camps by the school's Scouts and Cubs (junior scouts) and by the boys for picnics during the summer months.

Ezra Arakie's vision of a boarding school, so close to fruition, never did come about because of international and local factors. World War II in September, 1939 made fund-raising very difficult and with the Japanese hostilities in 1941, the Park was requisitioned by the military authorities. Writing in 1940, he had hoped that

the war would soon be over and the proper climate set for the liberal opening of purse strings. Arakie's untimely death, however, in May, 1942 set at rest all hope of having his dream come true. One would expect that his demise might have acted as a spur for its fulfillment. But the exodus from Calcutta of Jews, whose forebodings became evident soon after Indian Independence and the establishment of Israel, started in 1949 with a large group of would-be boarders. With the steady thinning of Jewish population and depletion in the school's enrollment, no serious attempt was made to press on with the extended plans for a boarding school at the Park.

The need for a boarding school for the boys who remained, however, was felt, and Ezra Arakie's scheme was put into operation on a miniature scale. In June, 1949, a part of the third floor of the Elias Meyer Building was converted into a dormitory for fifteen boarders of the school. These facilities could have been extended but were restricted for lack of funds.[61]

Arakie labored unflaggingly to improve educational standards. He assumed the Principalship for which he received a token honorarium, some of which he would joyously spend on making his students happier. The school and community could not adequately repay his industry and self-dedication. Under his able guidance the institution gained recognition as a high school in 1930 and two years later candidates took the Cambridge Junior Certificate examination. The latter was made possible by the hiring of Peter Krieger, M.A. of Jerusalem, as teacher of Modern Hebrew. Two events in December, 1940 terminated this happy arrangement — Cambridge discontinued the Hebrew paper because of the war and Krieger returned home after sowing the seeds of a love for Hebrew, which unfortunately did not have sufficient time to take root. His pleasant manner and more than casual interest in his students won for him their deep respect and gratitude.

Arakie's devotion to work gave him little time to relax. He did, however, go on a well-earned holiday to England and Palestine from which he returned physically invigorated and with new ideas he tried to apply to his school.

Arakie's interest in the total life of his students was remarkable. He did not forego an opportunity to fill in some of the many gaps in their unhappy existence. They visited places of interest, saw movies, sometimes at Arakie's expense, and enjoyed the amenities of the Scout movement which, at the same time, provided the required discipline not available in their homes.

Perhaps the last thrill for Arakie came with the donation of

Rs. 119,000.00 from the estate of Aaron Raphael Gubbay which the Managing Committee decided to convert into "The A. R. Gubbay Food & Clothing Trust" and Rs. 50,000.00 under the will of Raphael Aaron Gubbay of Hongkong who bequeathed a sum of Rs. 374,000.00 for Jewish Charitable Institutions in Calcutta.

A bachelor, Ezra Aaron Arakie passed away after a short illness on May 1, 1942 at the age of 66. An eventful and sometimes controversial life thus came to an end. His extreme determination, which earned for him an unenviably small circle of friends and supporters, also helped to achieve what few in 150 years of Jewish community life had done. He emerged triumphant in the building-up of a school he adopted from infancy, and brought up from "foster" status to one of a favorite child. But some have felt how much more effective his exertions would have been had they been wrought in harmony with the rest of the community. Competition in the realm of the spirit, however, is also contributory to communal progress and judged in that light Ezra Arakie's contribution is significant. His account on easing the burden of poverty, the teaching of Hebrew, promoting synagogue attendance and other aspects of piety made the children to whom he dedicated his life in a true sense his own. In that sense it was eminently appropriate for these children to have recited the Kaddish for him on every anniversary of his death. A rabbinic comment mentions that the institution for which a man works may be called after him. The school was popularly differentiated as "Arakie's School" and nothing could be a better tribute. To commemorate Arakie's leading role in the advancement of the school for thirty-five years, his portrait adorns the main hall on the first floor of the building together with a tablet bearing the following inscription:

THIS TABLET IS A MEMORIAL
TO
EZRA AARON ARAKIE

The Honorary Secretary of this School for over 35 years.
He took up this office in 1907 when the School then known as The Talmud Torah Institution was a small and struggling place for the teaching of Hebrew only.
Through his untiring Perseverance and Dauntless courage, the School obtained Magnificent Endowments —
A Building of its own, a constantly improving staff and finally recognition as a higher grade Institution.

His preparations for converting it to a Boarding School, in furtherance of which the EZRA ARAKIE PARK at KAMARHATTY was acquired, were interrupted by his untimely death—

He gave up a promising career to devote himself completely to the cause of the boys he loved so dearly —

Single handed he worked; Great was the sacrifice, Noble the Achievement —

His personality shall not die but live on in this school, His Foster Child, a shining example to his boys.

After Ezra Arakie, the school was managed in increasingly difficult circumstances by a committee headed consecutively by his brothers, Ralph and Ben Arakie, Bernard V. Jacob and Moses S. Elias. The latter became principal in addition to the honorary secretary's office upon the emigration of Raphael H. Isaac, who was principal for about a decade and a half from 1947. The Jewish authorities were, however, fighting a losing battle. For almost two decades after Indian Independence was achieved they were able to limit enrollment to the Jewish community and insure Jewish education. Thereafter, pressure was brought to bear by the local educational Inspectorate for the school to open its doors to children of all faiths. By then, merely a handful of Jewish boys attended the school — the majority had already left the country with their families.

*Chapter 16*

## SOCIAL WELFARE

The Jewish community of Calcutta, since its inception at the turn of the nineteenth century, had more than its fair share of poverty: about a quarter required the helpful hand of their co-religionists. Why such a large proportion penniless? What were the causes of Jewish destitution in India?

Most of the Jewish inhabitants of Calcutta were emigrants from Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo and other cities in the Middle East. Migration does not usually attract the most settled and established families in a country unless political or economic circumstances are particularly oppressive; that is, except for individuals who are particularly adventurous and aggressive in their outlook. So too, it may be assumed that a proportion of the arrivals were among the more backward elements in their countries of origin, conceivably succored even there from public funds or private philanthropy. Be that as it may, a proportion of the migrants were content to carry on the meager existence they might have known in their birthplace and, what is worse, tended to hand down to their children the passive acceptance of a livelihood whose central pillar was a kind of perpetual dole.

Let it be said, at least in partial explanation, that conditions were not easy. Most of them were not literate in English — and sometimes not in *any* language; what is more, no public facilities existed of which they could avail themselves to learn the language of the country of adoption or to improve their education. The milieu in India classed them as "non-Indians"; which meant they *could* not become tradesmen or engage in "menial" work — which is about the same as manual work. In any case, training for such employment was just not available, nor for that matter was any guidance either within the community or outside as to how the newcomer should adapt himself. Well-placed relatives in the country of adoption might be the best asset for such families; failing this, some form of petty trade or hawking were the only fields where they could hope to make a start and in fact, many of them did so; but without a

little capital and a flair for business the openings were sternly limited. Nevertheless, indolence can become a habit and years of inertia must have made scores of possible bread-winners resigned to receiving their food at the hands of others.

As regards their children, the reader will have seen from earlier chapters that the only doors open during the earlier decades to impecunious parents led to missionary institutions and possible conversion. Faced with such a choice, were the parents justified in not sending them to school *at all?* In any case they must have beguiled themselves with the hope that some avenue of employment might help the younger ones — who at least spoke the language — to bring succor to their families. If some of these children did roam the streets and solicit the casual aid of the charitable — this was not, in India, a remarkable phenomenon.

Thus the conclusion is inescapable that a larger share of responsibilities rested with the community as a whole than with the individual; and, paradoxically, it was the generous, though often shortsighted, benevolence that tended to foster it. References to the distribution of "charity" are common not only at regular intervals (for example, every Rosh Hodesh) but also in answer to special pleas by the extraordinary Ezras and Gubbays as well as by a large number of other individuals. To cite a concrete and perhaps unusual example: the mother of Sir David Ezra, Mozelle Ezra, would hand out Rs. 5,000.00 every month to various individual families. In the mid-twentieth century, the heirs of Benjamin Nissim Elias and his wife, Rahma, would dole out thousands of rupees every month from a trust fund created to perpetuate the name of the founder of the family's fortune. Thus to some extent, the wealthy perpetuated a class of paupers who were often remembered even in their wills, whose wish to be self-supporting become atrophied with the passage of the years.

### *I. The Jewish Women's League*

Social welfare was always a prime consideration in Jewish life. "It is a general virtue of all the congregations of Israel in all the places where they dwell, to establish and form a Hebra (association), which shall practise the meritorious and urgent charity which is due to the sick and dead." Thus declared the leaders of the Jewish community of London in 1678.[1] In the best of times Calcutta lacked a talent for organization which was, however, amply compensated for by the philanthropy of a small number of individuals acting singly for, and on behalf of, the group. A corporate attempt

was initiated as late as 1913 by a group of Jewish ladies of Calcutta led by Kate Judah, an outstanding social worker in the community, which assumed the name — Jewish Women's League.[2]

The original objects were broad-based enough to cover almost every aspect of succor to the indigent, "to promote their social, civil, moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare."

All Jewish ladies over eighteen years of age were eligible for the five categories of membership. A "life member" made a single outright payment of Rs.200.00. Ordinary members were elected at a general or committee meeting and paid a subscription of at least eight annas (half a rupee) per month. Non-residents paying Rs.6.00 a year could be members but were debarred from holding office. Ladies who were unable to subscribe could become free members if their services could be utilized to further the aims and functions of the League. Occasionally, ladies of distinction and influence were invited to become honorary members. Sixty names appear as founding members; the administration was vested in a committee.[3]

With a working plan before them, the ladies set about to earnest effort. A very successful scheme to bring more light into the closeted lives of the poor was the innovation of what they called "Happy Evenings." Entertainment was provided either to celebrate a joyous festival like Purim or a cordial get-together arranged at the home of one of the organizers.

An impressive program of visiting the sick in hospitals and homes was drawn up and followed. Those in distress were encouraged to feel that they were not neglected. First-hand information of cases deserving attention ensured the proper use of hard-gotten funds. Though a select number of individuals was large-hearted and philanthropic, fund-raising on a communal basis was and always has been a trying and slow-moving task. In the first few years a little over Rs.2,500.00 was collected from raffles, fancy fairs and other entertainment meticulously and diligently organized.

To add to the League's birth-pangs came World War I and took its toll in the form of depleted membership and deflated resources. The ladies' interests were understandably deflected to the war effort and the early shock of hostilities put a damper on the zeal of the organizers. Not failing in their duty to the Forces, the Soldiers' Comfort Fund Sub-Committee contributed sterling services by the regular despatch of "comfort parcels" to Jewish soldiers stationed in Mesopotamia. The storm, however, was weathered energetically and enough strength was generated to survive the stress of this cruel period. The joint secretaryship was taken over efficiently by Sara

E.M.D. Cohen (later Mrs. Aaron Curlender) and Mrs. Joseph S. Duke. Under their able guidance donations were doubled and the League's activities diversified.

Apart from the monthly allowances to the indigent, free lunches which started with twenty-five contributors, under the supervision of Emma (Mrs. S.J.) Cohen, were supplied to over thirty children attending the Jewish school, some of whom could barely expect a cup of milk at home. Twice yearly, before Pesah and Rosh Hashana, meat, rice and clothes were distributed. This latter function was given over in 1916 to a specialized agency called the Jewish Charitable Fund inaugurated in 1910 and reorganized in 1912, whose trustees were Sir David Ezra, Rahamim Moosa Cohen and Nissim I. Sassoon with an opening capital account of about Rs.17,000.0 invested with Messrs. E.D. Sassoon & Co., Calcutta. When the assets reached Rs.27,700.00 in 1937 Sir David Ezra, as the surviving Trustee of the Fund, transferred them to the Treasurer, Charitable Endowments, Bengal, with authority to have their income administered by the Matsa Board, Calcutta, whose objects were somewhat similar to those of the Fund.

*Education:*

To ensure a generation of respectable men and women, the education of indigent children was sponsored. While the Jewish Girls' School possessed a fairly high educational standard, Jewish boys were less fortunate in the absence of a competent institution of learning. Ezra A. Arakie's sterling labors in their behalf were still to bear fruit. Many who could ill-afford school fees were constrained to attend Christian Mission Schools where conversion to Christianity was made the chief motive for their enthusiastic reception.

The League used its limited resources to stem this movement. For instance, in 1922, fifteen girls were rescued from the Hebrew Mission School because they were compelled to attend school on Jewish holy days. The girls were withdrawn and admitted into the Jewish Girls' School, the League guaranteeing their fees. Three years later twenty-two girls' school fees were being paid by the League.

In keeping with its accent on education, the League in the 1930's, offered scholarships, sponsored by eight ladies, for training toward a degree in medicine or art. Surprisingly, there were no applicants! The funds were utilized for the teaching of needlework and dressmaking to the children of the Talmud Torah School qualified to pursue these courses.

*Medical Scheme:*

Medical aid in proportion to the League's limited resources was given to indigent patients with the praiseworthy assistance of honorary physicians. A Jewish doctor, Hannah David Duke Sassoon, gave free medical advice to the sick and needy at the Jewish Girls' School every Sunday morning. Yet another Jewish physician, Dr. Rachel Cohen, was ever ready to give of her voluntary services in the cause of charity while two non-Jewish doctors, Sen and Maitra, completed the medical panel.

A few cases of hospitalization helped relieve acute suffering and perhaps avert death. It may be mentioned en passant that the Ezra Hospital, built and endowed for the Jewish community in 1887,[4] reportedly suffered from neglect for lack of funds. Remedial measures were attempted by the League's President, Mrs. (later Lady) David E. D. Ezra, but the effects were short-lived. Thus the facilities of the one and only Jewish hospital geared for comfort with nursing home conveniences, were denied for many years to the intended beneficiaries until the administration was almost wholly taken over by the Medical College Hospital in 1926.

But deterioration set in again. In 1937 a visiting committee was formed to investigate the sub-standard conditions of the hospital and a report outlining the unhygienic state of the kitchen and inadequacy of the staff was presented to David Jacob Cohen, a member of the governing body of the hospital. From time to time, allegations were made regarding insufficient accommodation and inadequate facilities for Jewish patients as well as a lack of proper supervision of Kashrut (dietary laws).

By the time of this writing noticeable improvements were in evidence, but conditions still were a far cry from the ideals of the gracious founder.

*Trustees of the Poor:*

A far-sighted plan that proved too advanced for the conservatism of Calcutta Jewry was the appeal to its leaders to make the League "Trustees of the Poor" of the city. On the plea that parallel almsgiving and individual soliciting of pecuniary assistance was duplicating and marring the effectiveness of the League's organized efforts, a central charitable bureau was proposed. According to this plan, along with his contribution to the League, a donor would name his specific beneficiary who would then stop house-to-house dole hunting and devote his mis-spent energy in more constructive ways. This scheme was only partially successful. There seemed to be a basic mis-

trust in what was considered a vast and unwieldy undertaking and a natural but shortsighted pride to be master of one's own philanthropy. In 1923, Rs. 276.00 and in 1930 almost Rs. 5,000.00 was paid in to the coffers of the League to be disbursed to specific individuals or causes. The scheme all but faded out gradually.

*Home for the Destitute:*

One lone voice responded substantially to the long-term plans of the League. Nathan Perry, a European Jew, made the almost unbelievable proposal that he would furnish completely a Home for thirty poor and destitute people and pay its rent for twenty years in advance provided funds for its maintenance would be forthcoming from other sources. Few more far-sighted and long-term schemes were envisaged for the aged, infirm, and the blind and possibly for orphans as well. A part of the Home could have been set aside for technical classes for younger people, for the more gainful spending of the leisure time of boys whose delight was to roam the streets, or for a club providing wholesome recreation for the young.

Not only did this worthy proposal not materialize at the time, the wills of rich landowners did not make provision for it either. While trusts of several hundreds of thousands of rupees[5] were created for the distribution of funds every six months before Passover and New Year, and for general maintenance, the crying need of Calcutta Jewry went unheard — a home for the aged and a communal center.

An invaluable opportunity was thus lost, never to return! Here the Jews of Calcutta showed lack of cohesion as much as absence of foresight. Perry had to rest contented with a cash donation of Rs. 5,000.00.

*Rahma Moses:*

A noteworthy addition on the committee in 1920, when a major change in its composition occurred,[6] was Miss Alton whose stewardship of the League's finances did much to stabilize its assets. A solid and indefatigable worker proved to be Miss Rahma Moses, for two generations a popular teacher of the Jewish Girls' School, whose affability placated the most irate individual and whose kindliness helped ease many a potentially explosive situation. She mothered orphan girls and entertained them in her own home during festivals and holidays. She was the public relations officer of the League, who performed the unenviable task of interviewing its beneficiaries and hearing tales of woe that could fill a volume. Her unswerving

devotion to the service of suffering humanity became exemplary.

In celebration of her seventieth birthday in 1946 and in appreciation of the sterling services in the cause of humanity, a purse containing Rs. 5,000.00 and two gifts collected from friends and well-wishers were handed over to Miss Moses at a special function held in her honor. The kind lady later earmarked the money for a "Holiday Fund" to be utilized every year for one child who was in urgent need of a holiday.

*Games Afternoon:*

Being unable to participate in the Fancy Fair of 1926–27, because of the intervention of the Sabbath, Mrs. Edward (Bob) Judah organized on behalf of the League a most enjoyable games afternoon, netting over Rs. 1,000.00 to compensate for the loss of revenue thereby incurred. The departure for England in 1934 of this valuable friend and staunch supporter had created a void difficult to fill. The organization of the games afternoon was taken over by a committee under the able chairmanship of Mrs. (Sara) Aaron Curlender. This function became a popular annual feature held at the home of Sir David and Lady Ezra till the latter's death in January, 1952.

There were only two noteworthy exceptions — the year 1947 when Sir David died and 1942 when panic over Japanese bombing gripped Calcutta. In each case a successful individual collection was made in lieu of the function.

The purpose for which funds were being invested was an "industrial institution," probably the equivalent today of what is called in India a multi-purpose school, that would provide Jewish boys and girls with a means of earning their livelihood and becoming self-supporting. Gradually, however, the ideal was blurred. Perhaps if this project of the League had functioned in cooperation with one or both of the two Jewish schools, the scheme might have borne fruit and given permanence. At a much later date (1937) a Jewish girls' hostel was in fact set up through the endeavors of the League and was linked in its working with the Jeshurun Free School.[7]

*Link With Girls' School:*

The harmonious cooperation between the Jeshurun Free School and the League was established by the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. The year before his death he harnessed a committee of ladies to watch over the interests of the Jewish Girls' School and its new extension, the Jeshurun Free School. As this committee consisted of some

members of the League, there grew up a natural affinity between the two institutions, culminating in the founding of a hostel for the poorer element in the student body whose homes were not conducive to study or a satisfactory upbringing.

Imagine a widow with three young sons and three growing daughters sharing a dirty, congested room with another family of four! Try to conceive of a man with three motherless children applying to the League to relieve him of the care of his children to enable him to earn a livelihood. The former circumstance was at best relieved but never eradicated; the latter children were put in the care of a Jewish woman whose services were paid for by a special collection from subscribers, and they were admitted into the Jeshurun Free School. An increasing number of similar cases provided the background of and pointed up the necessity for a hostel for Jewish girls. The scheme was, however, still to pass the incubation stage.

The Ladies' Committee, assisting the Jeshurun Free School to stand on its feet, was extremely active. The League, through its Ladies' Committee, became a partner in the education and upkeep of poor children.

*A Registered Body:*

After sixteen years of service to the Jewish community of Calcutta, the League attained a new phase in February, 1929. It was registered as a Society with an impressive Memorandum of Association, some of whose clauses are reproduced:

> 1. To take all measures expedient or necessary to help the Jewish poor and depressed classes.
> 2. To act as guardian for unprotected Jewish children or Jewish children needing to have a guardian or guardians appointed of the persons or property or both of such children and to act as such guardian in case of need and to make all applications to Court necessary or expedient in the premises.
> 3. To promote the social, civil, moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the Jewish poor.
> 4. To establish, conduct and carry on houses, clubs and hostels for the Jewish Poor and generally to relieve their distress.
> 5. To place poor Jewish children in schools and to pay school fees and other charges on their behalf.

6. To take all steps to rescue Jewish children from surroundings which may be considered dangerous or undesirable to them physically or morally.

7. To take such steps by oral or written appeals both private and public as may from time to time be deemed expedient or necessary for the purpose of procuring contributions to the funds of the League in the shape of donations or subscriptions or otherwise.

8. To acquire by purchase, lease, gift or otherwise, property moveable or immoveable and whether subject to any special trust or not for any one or more of the objects of the League.

Such a wide range of objectives, formulated by Miss Alton, reflected the generous public spirit of the members of the League whose institution now enjoyed the confidence of a wider circle. Zealous and looking forward to the future with hope, their new status proved invigorating. In the teeth of the economic depression of the early thirties which thinned its membership and reduced its donations, the League stood its ground steadfastly at the cost of some withdrawals from capital.

*Synopsis of Objects:*

In 1932 the following practical digest of the objectives was published with the annual report:

1. To render relief to persons in distress.

2. To provide for children, especially orphans, by sending them as boarders, paying their fees and supplying them with clothes, books, etc.

3. To pay fees for public examinations in the case of very poor children.

4. To pay motor license fees, etc. in the case of those who cannot afford to pay.

5. To relieve the sick by supplying them with injections and medicines according to the instruction of the doctor in charge and if necessary to supply them with nurses.

6. To pay tuition fees to schools for teaching poor girls and boys typewriting and shorthand.

7. To advance small sums of money to especially deserv-

ing cases to help them to start business in a very small way and endeavor to recover the entire part from the parties as may be possible.

8. To act as guardians of orphans left destitute.
9. To try and save the young from going astray.

Two years later item 7 was omitted when the scheme of advances proved uneconomical, and the following was substituted as item 9 — "To pay passages when absolutely necessary."

*Encouraging Self-Respect:*

Jewish tradition recognizes the ethical superiority of making the poor economically independent over the recurring dispensation to them of dole. To have them earn an independent and honest living was considered highly meritorious.

In the spirit of this tradition, a quote of Henry Ford, one of the world's kindliest employers, is very apt. "The care of poverty is not charity. Nothing that you can give a man will do him much good. You may relieve him for a moment from his temporary care, but he will drift back again. What is best for the man who needs help is to give him a chance to help himself. If you can make him self-supporting, you will also make him self-respecting. A chance to work his way is much better than a chance to shirk his way."[8]

Fortunately for Calcutta Jewry, Providence sent a benevolent industrialist, in the person of Benjamin Nissim Elias, whose policy of employment of needy Jewish boys and girls did much to breed a generation of self-respecting people. Close liaison between the League and the offices of B. N. Elias was maintained to achieve this common object.

A unique scheme, enjoying great initial success, was the system of loans given to the poor to invest in small trades, thereby assisting them to earn an honest living. Most of the loans were paid up gradually, but public criticism pointed to the risk involved in the possible non-refund of the communal funds. The intention was clearly laudable but, despite criticism, the comparatively small sums were not adequate to fulfill the original purpose of the League's social workers, and the plan was dropped.

*Jewish Baby Welcome:*

A major project was launched in the middle of 1929 in the worthy assistance to expectant mothers and their new-born babies. These

unfortunates were wont to seek the aid of the St. John's Ambulance Clinic. The vigilant ladies of the League, headed by the zealous and large-hearted Lady Rachel Ezra, made life-President in 1934, felt that such assistance could be replaced by a community venture as an extension of the League's already multifarious activities. Thus was born the "Jewish Women's League Baby Clinic" later known as the "Jewish Baby Welcome." Subsidized by the League, the Clinic was run by independent public subscriptions with a separate secretary and treasurer. The labors of the zealous Sally Gubbay in this sphere will tell a magnificent tale of uphill struggle frequently punctuated with disappointment and frustration. But the experience was rewarding in the worthiness of the scheme, despite its shortcomings and limitations.

Inaugurated with ten babies who received nourishment twice daily and regular medical attention — and a small budget, the staff consisted of a Jewish doctor, Dr. Rachel Cohen, and a matron, Hannah Ephraim, functioning in the premises of the Jewish Girls' School. Dr. Ena Mitra made valuable professional contributions as well as occasional gifts of medicines.

The need for this institution can well be imagined. The claims of motherhood taxed the already overburdened women whose lot was relentless and unredeemed misery. In most cases married in their teens, these girls became mothers when they were little more than children themselves and lived amidst want and squalor in crowded tenements. The inevitable neglect of children in the absence of any semblance of planned parenthood resulted in the affliction of ailments such as itch, rickets, consumption, worms and a host of other diseases. The iniquity of having a family of eight or ten when one was not able to provide for a single child was not understood or appreciated.

Reaching maturity in 1936, the Baby Welcome became a registered body with the following aims and objects:

1. To provide for the babies free milk and fruit juices daily, and tonics whenever necessary.
2. To provide free medical advice to mothers and babies once a week; also all kinds of medicines including tonics and other body-building foods.
3. To impart free instructions about the best modern methods of bringing up babies.
4. To impart free hygienic instruction with particular reference to proper ventilation, sanitation, consistent clean-

liness in body and clothes, scrupulous avoidance of dust, regular baths, plenty of fresh air and the value of vitamins in food.

5. To take such steps by oral or written appeals both private and public as may from time to time be deemed expedient or necessary for the purpose of procuring contributions to the funds of the Clinic in the shape of donations or subscriptions or otherwise.

6. To erect or purchase a small building, funds allowing, for the use of the Clinic.

*Public Recognition and Cooperation:*

Cooperation with educational and social organizations was instrumental in implementing the League's many-faced activities. In the absence of Jewish boarding schools, St. James' School, a Protestant institution, and the Roman Catholic Entally Convent, admitted Jewish boarders who had no homes or exceptionally poor ones. A few orphans were sent to the Christian Kalimpong Homes on the League's account. Consumptive cases recuperated at the Pendra Road Sanatorium and others were inmates of Meath's Home, Shillong, for a change of climate. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children afforded many Jewish boys the opportunity to learn a trade at out-of-town centers.

To demonstrate that the League did not work in a vacuum, it became affiliated with the Bengal Presidency Council of Women in December, 1937, Rahma Moses being its representative. The organization thus became a part of a larger assembly of women engaged in various branches of social work for mutual help and discussions of questions of broader interest. With the declaration of World War II, for example, woollies were prepared by committee members and sent to the Red Cross Society, another affiliate of the Council of Women. The ceaseless efforts of Seemah (Mrs. Nissim E.) Luddy in this connection have to be commended.

The League joined with other women's organizations in addresses of welcome to the successive Governors of West Bengal, C. Rajagopalachari and Sarojini Naidu and in the memorial meeting for the latter.

*Jewish Girls' Hostel:*

However grateful the Jewish community was to receive boarding facilities readily offered by gentile schools, it could not rest contented

with this inherently disadvantageous set-up. As far back as 1929 the need for hostels for Jewish boys and girls was expressed, in order to save many from their uncongenial environment and sordid surroundings, and the ever-present danger of straying from their faith. Thanks to the organizing ability of Rahma M. Luddy and the untiring zeal of Lily (Mrs. J. R.) Jacob, Minnie (Mrs. Joseph) Curlender, Robin E. Gubbay, Rahma Moses and others, the Jewish Girls' Hostel became a home providing a conducive atmosphere for study for girls attending the Jewish Girls' School or Jeshurun Free School and requiring a shelter other than what their parents or guardians could afford. The Hostel was opened officially on December 26, 1937. For several years, the services of Anne Othoneos as superintendent were invaluable.

With the inception of the Hostel, financial assistance for education at non-Jewish institutions was discouraged. The Hostel gradually became independent of its parent body while the ladies of the League still guided its destinies. This "baby" was to ultimately become the foster child of the Jeshurun Free School, developing into its boarding department and fed by generous endowments.

In the field of education, then, the League excelled in the firm conviction that the young people thus constructively assisted would build a finer self-respecting society capable of greater responsibility and a higher standard of living. The fruits of these endeavors fully justified this far-sighted policy. It afforded a deep and abiding satisfaction to later members of the Committee to witness the success of their erstwhile protégés who gained an equal start in life in highly competitive spheres both in India and abroad. In many instances, grateful beneficiaries, on finding their feet, repaid all that had been spent on them by becoming monthly contributors.

*Technical Training:*

True to its basic policy of helping the poor to attain economic independence, the League formulated a scheme in 1940, in conjunction with the Director of Industries, Bengal, for imparting technical knowledge such as weaving, bee-keeping and pottery work to those who would want to avail themselves of it. While this plan dove-tailed into an earlier aim on the lines of an industrial institution for which funds were being built up, the paucity of applications and inadequate funds retarded its implementation, and finally it had to be abandoned.

This development was an eye-opener, indicating that mass indigence

and laziness had inculcated in large sections of the poor a lack of self-respect and a mental apathy. The League was one institution that continued good-naturedly to encourage this dependence on communal subsidy instead of sternly having the beneficiaries seek gainful occupation.

*Feeding the Hungry:*

Most of the illnesses suffered by the poor were diagnosed as the concomitant of malnutrition. An attempt was made to obviate the necessity of supplementing diet with expensive tonics by supplying sixty families with rice, lentils, vegetables, bread and tea. Though this meager sustenance had to be discontinued within three months for lack of funds and increased demand, it was revived in 1941 in view of rising costs and inevitable shortages. Thus the League rendered exemplary service to tide over the privation suffered as a result of the Bengal Famine of 1943. Individual members of the Committee contributed to B.P.C.W., a provincial institution of Bengal, for the feeding of destitutes in general.

As the Jewish Burial Board was eking out a precarious existence, the League paid the funeral expenses of many of their former wards.

*World War II:*

Among the new commitments brought about by World War II was the relief extended to the distressed Jewish evacuees from Burma, many of whom became permanent recipients of assistance. By the influx of Burmese Jews, the Jewish population of Calcutta was augmented by 25% to about 4,500 souls, and the burden of the League proportionately increased. The League cooperated with the Rangoon Evacuees Relief Association Fund. Further, it assumed responsibility for initiating a joint meeting with representatives of sister Jewish organizations in the city in order to deal satisfactorily with tragic homelessness of Jews rendered so by the December, 1942 Japanese air raids on Calcutta. As the raids fortunately were not prolonged, the funds so collected were utilized for affording additional relief to the needy of the Rangoon Jewish community in Calcutta.

*Legacies:*

The turn of the third decade of the century witnessed the League's involvement in varied social causes — education of the poor, pro-

vision of technical training, aid to the indigent, sick, infirm and disabled, and through its plan of limited loans, the establishment in business of the more enterprising amongst the poor. Destitute refugees from Europe throughout the thirties made uncharted demands on the League's meager resources which were gradually being built up by contributions and legacies and municipal grants.

In the face of an unprecedented enlargement in the claims upon its resources and the financial stringency generally prevailing, economies were considered unwise. Misery and suffering being so widespread, capital diminished from year to year. A deficit budget of Rs. 6,000.00 a year had to be balanced and no relief was in sight. In the darkest days of the war and some of the bleakest in the annals of the League, two windfalls provided a badly needed respite. The generous benefactors, Aaron Raphael Gubbay and Raphael Aaron Gubbay bequeathed Rs. 134,000.00 and over Rs. 84,000.00 respectively. A. R. Gubbay was a philanthropist with a difference. Whereas other benefactors created endowment funds of which only interest could be utilized, he left the expenditure of the entire corpus to the discretion of the Committee.

*The Clinic:*

In 1947 the Oseh Haised, Calcutta, true to its name, undertook a humanitarian medical scheme, including hospitalization and the supply of nourishment and medicines to the impoverished Jewish sick and aged. A part of the League's activities were thus being duplicated and an overlapping of functions resulted. With a cooperation and understanding rarely witnessed in institutional relationship, a common plan of action was forged in the opening of a center for the sick at the Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah after school hours, with a Jewish doctor, Jackie Jacob, in attendance. The contribution of Tabby Solomon in the implementation of this scheme on behalf of the League was of very great value.

The Oseh Haised managed the day-to-day administration. The Clinic was later shifted to ante-rooms in the courtyard of the Maghen David Synagogue, where an average of fifteen to twenty patients attended daily Monday to Friday.

*Sponsoring Family Purity:*

Encouraged by the presence in Calcutta in 1950 of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon of England, a nephew of Lady Ezra, the League sponsored

a meeting at which the Rabbi recommended, in the name of family purity, the remodeling of the "Mikvah" in the Bethel Synagogue grounds. The proposal was implemented at his own expense to popularize the ritual bath. The renovation focussed attention for a time but the "Mikvah" did not attract more adherents, inter alia, as its approach and set-up were not congenial to the privacy of its would-be users.

Soon afterward, three of its veteran workers were removed from the scene of its activities. Solomon (Sunny) E. Ezra, Honorary Treasurer for about ten years, Lady Rachel Ezra, Life President and founding member and Sally Gubbay, Committee member from 1926 and Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Baby Welcome since its inception, all died within a few months of each other. Moreover, many departures from India brought about a depleted roster of social workers. At such a time, the unstinting service of Tabby (Mrs. E.) Solomon, the surveillance of Hannah (Mrs. Meyer I.) Meyer and the diligence of the zealous Kate and Violet Mashiah contributed in no small measure to the effectiveness of the League's performance. The Misses Mashiah visited the homes of the sick and poor and tenderly administered to their needs for which they became endeared to beneficiaries and colleagues alike.

*Lady Ezra and Sara Curlender:*

The inspiration and leadership given the League by Lady Rachel Ezra was of the highest. Her noble bearing and overwhelming sense of humanity made her its guiding star and the object of most distress signals. A scion of the illustrious Sassoons, and joined by marriage to the famed Ezras, she was an accomplished woman, a communal worker and a leader to whom the rank and file could well look up.

On her demise, the mantle passed on to Sara Curlender, unassuming and kindly, worthy in her own right, as wife of the late Aaron Curlender, benefactor and well-wisher of the institution, and as daughter of the late E. M. D. Cohen, whose contribution to the success of the League in its formative years has been described above.

Though the number of recipients of communal assistance dwindled after 1950 as a result of a steady emigration, allowances and other benefits had to keep pace with the soaring cost of living; the fiscal position tightened, bringing each economic class a peg lower. While death and departures from India after Indian Independence brought about a depleted roster of social workers, the need for them, however, never abated. In this lean period, the services as Honorary Sec-

retary of Miss Ramah Musleah, loyal teacher and later, head of the Kindergarten of the Jewish Girls' School for over fifty years, were a boon.

The struggle to keep up with the want and suffering of the less fortunate has continued now for more than six decades, waged on several fronts, ending sometimes in success and others in disappointment. And while several hard-core cases persist where the old and outworn method of direct aid is the *only* assistance given to a family, the League has added to more enlightened means of help and has seen some excellent results.

## *II. The Ezra Hospital*

A few months after the announcement, toward the end of 1882, of his intention to provide the community with a synagogue, Elia Ezra was pained at the difficulties experienced by the poverty stricken, who suffered at home rather than be exposed to neglect in the public hospital. He was also concerned about the absence of Jewish dietary facilities at the hospitals in the city, and set his heart upon erecting one exclusively for his co-religionists.[9] Even the middle class, that could not afford the luxury of private doctors, would stand to benefit. Five weeks earlier, a correspondent in *Paerah*[10] had commended him on his extraordinary generosity in the matter of a synagogue, but pointed out the need in the social set-up of the community. His suggestion, he said, was in good talmudic tradition, backed up by medieval rabbis, which stated that "a gift or legacy destined for the building of a synagogue could be diverted to the erection of a hospital or any other form of aid to the sick."[11]

Elia Ezra, however, was generous enough and sufficiently affluent to be able to furnish both. The hospital was planned to go up in a Jewish neighborhood on the site of three buildings, 34 to 36 Ezra Street, which belonged to the Ezras and whose occupants were Jacob Sultoon, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay and Saleh Ezekiel Joseph Ezra; a sizeable endowment was to pay for its maintenance. Had he survived the fatal illness that plagued him throughout the summer of 1885 till his death in February, 1886, Ezra might have fulfilled his intention to add a hospital to his munificent contributions to the Calcutta Jewish community.

Barely four months after his demise his widow, the gracious Mozelle Ezra, set about to comply with her late husband's wish.[12] Mackintosh Burn, a British firm of architects which had designed and built the Maghen David Synagogue, was entrusted with the construc-

tion, completing it in approximately seven months, before the first death anniversary of the late Elia Ezra in whose memory it was fittingly named "Ezra Hospital."

The original location was changed to a more appropriate neighborhood not far away, in a part of the city where most of the hospitals in Calcutta were situated at the time. In fact, by special arrangement with the parent hospital, the Medical College, this home for the Jewish sick was erected on its grounds and facing Colootola Street, but some distance away so as to minimize the disturbance from the street noises. Incidentally, up until that time this street was on the course taken to the cemetery from the Jewish section of the city, and out of consideration for the feelings of Jewish patients in the new hospital it became an accepted custom to divert funeral processions with their easily heard dirges through another road.

It is not out of place then, that the Italian style architecture was fashioned after the Maghen David Synagogue in externals and the Medical College Hospital internally. In length 170 feet by 40 feet wide, Ezra Hospital has two floors, the upper floor for women and children and the lower one, four feet from ground level, for men. The foundation is strong enough to bear another floor. Each floor has ten rooms fourteen feet by twelve feet divided into two unequal cubicles, the inner used as a bedroom and the outer leading to a bathroom and a toilet room. The flooring of rooms, washrooms, verandahs and terrace are of white and grey marble done by Jewish contractors, Gareh & Co. At both ends are "wards" twenty-four feet by sixteen feet. Large covered balconies, twelve feet wide floored with marble, flank the rooms which lead into them from the north and south. In Calcutta, a pleasant south breeze blows during nine hot months and for the three cooler months the warm sun is welcome from the direction of the south. An unobstructed south is therefore always desirable. There is a staircase six feet wide in the middle hollow of the building for doctors, visitors and patients and two spiral stairways for servants and other employees. The kitchen was intended to supply Kosher meals for Jewish patients. An endowment fund was set up, whose income of Rs. 100.00 paid for the Shohet, cook, servants and attendants. The maintenance of doctors and nurses and supply of medicines and food for non-Jewish patients became the responsibility of the Medical College Hospital.[13]

Over the door on the first floor hung the portraits, painted on porcelain to last longer, of Mrs. Mozelle Ezra on the right side and her deceased husband, Elia.

The hospital was provided with a mortuary to facilitate the per-

formance of the last rites for poor persons who died in the hospital and whose homes were inadequate for the purpose.

A portico, sixty feet in length on the north side and eighteen feet in breadth was an imposing addition to the original plans. Two large gates on either side of the portico form the entrance from Colootola Street. The other sides of the hospital face the lawn of Medical College Hospital and is easily accessible therefrom. The hospital certainly outstripped others in accommodation, comfort to patients and Jewish facilities.[14] It was to be favorably compared with a later innovation in India, the nursing home, which, at least in its early stages, was a reaction to the poor standard of medical treatment available at hospitals and a distinct improvement thereon.

In appreciation for Mozelle Ezra's munificence, the Jewish community of Calcutta subscribed for two marble tablets and had them affixed on two sides of the staircase door, on the right in Hebrew and on the left in English, as follows:

This Hospital
has been built at the sole expense
of the philanthropic
MRS. MOZELLE EZRA
in fond remembrance
of her benevolent and kind hearted husband
Mr. E. D. J. Ezra
Independently of the many acts of charity by this
renowned benefactress of humanity,
This munificent
one fills with gratitude
her co-religionists and admirers of her noble deeds
who in token of respect have placed this tablet
This building
was begun on the 19th day of July 1886
and completed in the 31st day of January 1887
Such alacrity joined with
precision commends itself to all
The foundation stone was laid by the
Hon'ble Sir Rivers Thompson
Lieutenant Governor of Bengal
and was opened
by Her Excellency
The Countess of Dufferin

Both the laying of the foundation stone[15] and the opening[16] of the Ezra Hospital were matters of public importance, with duly imposing ceremonies, when the presence of a large concourse of public figures acknowledged the Ezras' gesture in adding to the facilities available to the community in general. At the first ceremony the Governor of Bengal, Sir Rivers Thompson, briefly reiterated the merits of the hospital and its benefits to the Jewish community and underscored its advantages to the people at large. Though many new hospitals like the Mayo, Eden and Campbell had sprung up not long previously, the need for more accommodation was ever being felt because of increased conversion of existing space to specialized treatment. The General Hospital set aside a section for Pediatrics, and space was being sought for gynecology and optholmology. The Ezra Hospital, essentially for Jewish poor, admitted non-Jewish patients, thus minimizing the demands for beds in other hospitals. Jewish cohesiveness, he said, was a trait of its peoplehood, born of centuries of oppression and discrimination, and the hospital was a fitting mark of that characteristic.[17]

A prayer in English[18] composed and read by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen was included among various items placed in the cornerstone.

The ceremony for the opening of the hospital was even more impressive as Lady Dufferin, wife of the Viceroy, was the guest of honor. She performed the symbolic opening of the institution with a magnificent gold key studded with gems which was presented to her as a memento. The hospital was opened for admissions on March 1, 1888.[19]

For about forty years the property of the hospital belonged to the Ezras, the income from a capital fund of Rs. 22,000.00 being utilized for a Shohet (ritual slaughterer), a cook and other members of the sub-staff and for the maintenance of a Kosher kitchen. There was a tacit understanding between the Ezras and the Government-sponsored Medical College Hospital that if the beds were not occupied by Jewish patients, they could be used by non-Jews for whom the Government agreed to provide food. Medical supplies and care for the entire hospital were the undertaking of the Medical College Hospital. The capital fund, administered at the discretion of Government, grew to over Rs. 30,000.00 three and a half decades later. The ownership of the hospital was given over to the Government around 1926; the other arrangements remained largely the same.

In 1931, the Government bore the cost of gas, electricity, municipal taxes, bedding and clothing, medical staff and supplies and repairs to the building. A staff of five nurses was provided by the

Calcutta Hospital Nurses' Institution at its own cost. At that time the Hospital could accommodate fifty-four patients.

About 1930, Rs. 10,000.00 was willed by Ezekiel Saleh Moses, the income of which alone (about Rs. 500.00 a year) could be utilized by the hospital generally.

Because of the increased cost of living, and the larger demands made by non-Jewish admissions keeping the hospital virtually full at all times, the staff of the hospital had to be augmented from time to time. The Nurses' Institution could not afford to provide more nurses, the responsibility for which was assumed by the Medical College Hospital. In the 1930's there was an annual Rs. 5,000.00 deficit in operational costs. Government appealed to the Jewish community for additional funds, but nothing was forthcoming.

The response did come from Sir David Ezra, Mozelle Ezra's son, in 1941. He created an endowment fund in the amount of Rs. 81,300.00 with a view to provide additional nurses, sub-staff, more expensive medicines and surgical appliances not normally supplied by the Medical College Hospital as well as surgical appliances for discharged patients. Because of the paucity of Jewish patients, however, especially in the wake of steady emigration after 1948, the Fund's corpus increased to Rs. 112,000.00 in the early '60s. A surplus of about Rs. 3,000.00 annually was being re-invested.

Under the will of Sir David Ezra, who died on August 23, 1947, "The Rachel & David Ezra Dietary Trust Fund," with a corpus of Rs. 50,000.00, was started. The interest of this Fund was never utilized and the corpus expands steadily. It was Rs. 65,000.00 in the early '60s. The two-fold purpose of this Fund is defined as follows: "For the observance and performance of the Jewish ceremonial and dietary Laws by the Jewish patients of the Ezra Hospital" and for any other use and benefit of Jewish patients at the Ezra Hospital. Both the latter Funds are administered by a committee under the chairmanship ex-officio of the Superintendent, Medical College Hospital and three nominees of the Ezra family. The committee has no powers over the internal management of the Ezra Hospital.

As accommodation in hospitals in Calcutta became more difficult, Jewish patients lost their priority by default, there being no responsible person to press their claims. The beneficiaries had to assert their rights. At the instance of Isaac Sassoon Musleah as secretary of Oseh Haised which ran a clinic for impoverished Jews and with the cooperation of the Ezra Hospital Endowment Fund Committee, certain concessions for Jewish patients were gained, chiefly that a minimum of two beds each for men and women were reserved for Jews irres-

pective of other demands or requirements; *and,* additional sub-staff was to be employed for Jewish patients on the prior recommendation of the Medical Officer in attendance. On this account, a paltry Rs. 20.00 was expended in the fiscal year 1960–61. It was also agreed that no Jewish patient would be refused admission if his condition warranted it.

According to the terms of the Ezra Hospital Endowment deed, dated January 2, 1941, if the Ezra Hospital ceased to exist, the Fund would reimburse expenses incurred by Jewish patients in other "Government sponsored" hospitals, *provided* prior sanction was obtained from the Medical College Hospital authorities. In consideration of the dwindling numbers of the Jewish community, however, the machinery for reimbursement was belatedly but wisely set in motion and this represented yet another achievement of the committee at Musleah's instance.

By the same token, however, the concessions did not go far enough. The total capital of the Ezra Hospital earmarked for Jewish patients is in the neighborhood of Rs. 225,000.00 and its income about Rs. 6,500.00 This revenue could have aided the Oseh Haised's clinic to a much greater extent. Apart from the cases treated at its Outdoor Department at 109 Canning Street, where two rooms loaned by the Maghen David Synagogue were converted into a dispensary and consulting room, cases of hospitalization other than at the Ezra Hospital cost the Clinic in 1961 about Rs. 2,000.00. The Clinic should have been housed at and maintained by the Ezra Hospital as was originally done in the Hospital's early days. With the Clinic even partially financed out of Ezra Hospital Endowment Funds, the anomalous position of these moneys would have been eradicated and a great humanitarian cause helped in keeping with the spirit of the testators. It would also have saved the recurring annual struggle to save the Clinic from shutting down.

The Ezra Hospital stands and will continue to stand, a memorial to the benevolence and generosity of a family that through three generations showed its concern for the less fortunate members of their community. That the munificent endowments they made cannot invariably be used to alleviate the sufferings of a different generation of their co-religionists in a city — and for that matter in a world — so different from the Calcutta the Ezras knew, is just an unfortunate concomitant of those changes.

*Chapter 17*

# POLITICAL AFFINITY

## *The British Period*

For administrative purposes and in order to protect British vital interests, the British Government in India made a sharp dichotomy between European and non-European sections of the population. Up until 1885, "Sephardic" Jews, which excludes the Bene Israel[1] and Cochin Jews,[2] were classified as "European." This was dictated by historical and sociological factors. The Bene Israel and Cochin Jews preceded the British in India by centuries, the others came to the sub-continent about a hundred years after the British. Therefore there was a tendency for the rulers to treat the Bene Israel and Cochin Jews as native, while the lighter complexion of the Jews who hailed from the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East facilitated their own acceptance as "British." In addition, there was more of a social cleavage in respect to the indigenous Jews. The more recent Jewish arrivals showed greater ease in integrating and had little difficulty in conforming in their dress, language, education and social habits with European standards.

Benefits soon became apparent. Trade and commerce were controlled largely by British vested interests and Jews took full advantage of their close ties with the white rulers. As has already been shown, many Jews became extremely wealthy. After all, the British and the majority of Arabic-speaking Jews, many of whom spoke English well, seemed to have one common object — business; and they got along well with each other. The Jewish school, opened in 1881, was placed under the European Inspectorate, which maintained a higher academic standard than its native counterpart. An obvious and significant criterion for eligibility for "European" classification was the adoption of English as a medium of instruction, and the school of the Jewish community naturally followed this course. Even in the Defence Association, which was organized in the days of the "Albert Bill" purely in the interest of Europeans in India, Jews figured as "British."

In this climate it is understandable that the leaders of the Jewish

community should seek "European" classification for political purposes. This they did with energy and determination, by persistently displaying their loyalty to Britain and identifying their interests with those of the rulers. The desire on the part of Jews did not arise because they considered themselves non-Indian (they had, in fact, adopted many Indian social habits and the Indian language and had developed very friendly relationships with the natives), but rather, they regarded their way of life closer to British conventions. The Jewish community believed also that the prosperity of many of its members was a direct result of the beneficient British regime.

For one thing there was an immediate warm response to personal events in the British royal family. For instance, on her escape from an assassination attempt, a letter of congratulations was sent to Queen Victoria in March, 1882 by the mercantile community represented by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the British Indian Association in which Jews were very active. The Jewish community held prayer meetings in two synagogues. In Bethel, Elia D. J. Ezra recited a prayer of thanksgiving.[3] When Prince Albert Victor, son of Edward, Prince of Wales, died of influenza on January 14, 1892, a report in black border appeared on the front page of the Arabic-Hebrew weekly *Maggid Mesharim*.[4] It reported a condolence meeting held on Monday, January 18, 1892. Also, translated into Arabic were the contents of a letter written by Queen Victoria in reply to world messages of condolence on the death of her grandson.[5]

The Jewish community prided itself on its loyalty to the British Government. The Indian Mutiny is a case in point. It was a bloody revolt of the Bengal Native army in 1857, which led to the loss of Delhi and Lucknow and to widespread civil rebellion from Bihar to Delhi and gravely threatened British rule in India.

Discontent among the Indian people, especially in military circles, was rampant toward the middle of the nineteenth century. The British masters of India had lost their respect for Indian institutions and sympathy for its people had waned. Conscious of western superiority, they tried to impose its culture on the subject Indians with evangelical zeal. The reaction on the part of Moslem and Hindu alike was bound to be violent.

The immediate cause of the rebellion was a religious one. The Enfield rifle, used for years before 1857, had to be provided with cartridges which were heavily greased. Rumor circulated in the ammunitions factory near Calcutta that the grease contained the fat of both cows and pigs, thus injuring the religious sensitivities of both Hindu and Moslem. That was enough to set afire a highly ex-

plosive situation. Some infantry units refused to use the cartridges. The one at Lucknow was compelled to do so. A part of a disbanded regiment marched on Delhi in May that year but encountered little British opposition. There were no European troops at Delhi except a few gallant artillery officers.

The Jewish community took only a passive interest in these happenings. Moses Dwek did not mention it in his diary. Eleazar Arakie has two entries, one of which says, "There was a rebellion against the English; they (the Indians) captured Delhi from them and killed many British people there and the Bank there was looted."[6]

There is no indication of any disruption of Jewish communal life in Calcutta, so close to the source of the mutiny. But there is no doubt where Jewish sympathies lay. A service was held in Bethel Synagogue for the success of the British and the continued rule of the Queen's forces.[7]

Victoria's birthday was always on a red-letter day for her Jewish Indian subjects. Eleazar Arakie mentions it on two occasions, 1844 and 1857. Also, he takes note of the departure of Lord Canning, Viceroy of India from 1856, on March 18, 1862.

On the occasion of Victoria being designated "Empress of India" in addition to "Queen of the United Kingdom and Ireland," the Government held a Durbar (Exposition) in Calcutta (then the capital of India) on January 1, 1877 to mark the event. Admission was by recommendation of the leaders of the individual communities and Elia Shalome Gubbay was authorized to issue admissions to Jews.[8]

The fiftieth anniversary of Victoria's ascending the throne of England was an occasion of country-wide celebrations.[9] (Queen Victoria had ascended the throne June 28, 1838 when Sir Moses Montifiore was Sheriff of London. At the time of Victoria's golden jubilee celebration, Sir Henry Aaron Isaac was Sheriff and he received a recognition.) The Viceroy and Governor General in Council, Lord Dufferin, issued a proclamation declaring February 16, 1887 the day for public celebrations throughout India. Each province planned its own functions. In Bengal, the Governor, Sir Rivers Thompson, presided early in January at a public meeting in Calcutta which recommended that the celebrations be extended by a day to include February 17. Eighty-six prominent citizens and leaders including Rajas, judges and Government officers were appointed to a committee to work out the details of the plans decided upon. Among them were four Jews — Elia Shalome Gubbay, Joseph Elia Ezra, Howard S. Howard and Rahamim Moosa Cohen.

The Queen was eager to have her jubilee, the second jubilee of a reigning monarch in 800 years, (the other being Akbar's) utilized for constructive purposes. In India the theme adopted was the uplift of women. A fund was started by the Countess of Dufferin to train women doctors and found a women's hospital which ultimately was named for her. The response was readily available — large contributions were received from princes and others. A Jubilee Fund was inaugurated to subsidize perpetual endowments for educational requirements such as a college for science and technology. Calcutta Jews, including the pupils of the school, gave their share. Special jubilee contribution cards were issued on which donations of from Rs. 100.00 to one anna (1/16 of a rupee) were entered. In all of India Rs. 500,000.00 was obtained in this way.[10]

The Jewish community set out its plans on January 30 at a special meeting under chairmanship of Elia Shalome Gubbay at Bethel Synagogue and appointed an executive committee comprising Aaron Shalome Abraham Cohen, Aaron N. E. Judah, Aaron Ezra Arakie and E. M. D. Cohen, Honorary Secretary, to implement them. Moses Abeasis and David Aaron Gubbay were co-opted later. Towards the Rs. 5,000.00 estimated to cover expenses, Elia S. Gubbay and Joseph Elia Ezra each contributed Rs. 1,000.00, and the balance was collected by public subscription, especially from offerings made in two synagogues, Maghen David and Bethel.

The appointed day arrived with unusual anticipation both by the general and Jewish communities. At sunrise a 101-gun salute was fired from the old Fort William at Calcutta.

The Viceroy held a military parade at the Fort and attended a special church service thereafter. The service over, the Chief Executive took his stand in a brightly decorated pavilion where he received, in behalf of the Queen, the congratulatory addresses of the communities, institutions and dignitaries. A commercial exhibition and entertainment center was featured near the pavilion. Concession fares were charged on the East Indian Railway from Burdwan, about 60 miles away, and on the East Bengal Railway from slightly beyond Barrackpore, to Calcutta, a distance of 15 miles.

For the Jewish community the two days of celebration were nothing short of a festival. Early Wednesday morning February 16, men, women and children attended services in Maghen David and Bethel, when the supplicatory prayers (Tahanun) were omitted in honor of the joyous occasion. Following services, the children assembled at the Jewish school situated opposite Bethel Synagogue and in two columns led by flags, entered the Synagogue to martial strains of a

hired band and took their position on both sides of the Ark and on the Tebah (Bimah). After the singing of a Pizmon (hymn of thanksgiving), the first verse of the national anthem was sung to the accompaniment of music from the band which remained on the stairway outside the Synagogue. The second and third verses were interspersed between a special prayer composed by Moses Abeasis and recited by the Bethel minister, Saul Lanyado, and the *Hanothen,* the regular prayer for the monarch and royal family found in all Sephardi prayerbooks, and the prayer for the congregation. The service concluded with the Yigdal.

The worshippers, including the school children, marched in procession to Maghen David Synagogue and the service was repeated there. The Viceroy was invited to attend this one but understandably had to decline. The congregation then ceremoniously filed back to school. Women and children dispersed. The men remained behind to elect five representatives (the maximum allowed a delegation) to present an address to the Viceroy in behalf of the Jewish community later that day. Joseph Elia Ezra was chosen leader of the group. The other four were Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Howard S. Howard, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac and E. M. D. Cohen. Elia Shalome Gubbay was included in the delegation of the city. All present signed the address inscribed in gold letters on parchment — a beautiful document composed by Moses Abeasis, Moses Mayohas, E. M. D. Cohen and Saul Lanyado. The document contained the biblical verse "You shall hallow the fiftieth year . . . it shall be a jubilee unto you" in English, the figure of tablets of the law and a Sepher Torah, and the image of a man blowing the ram's horn proclaiming the freedom of the jubilee and a crown. The address written in English was as follows:

> "To Her Majesty, gracious Queen Victoria, by the grace of God, of the noble Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India. May it please your Majesty: The Jews of Calcutta, Children of Israel, offer your Majesty our heartfelt congratulations that it has pleased the Almighty to prolong your reign to a length that few monarchs have attained. We pray that your reign may continue for many more years.
>
> "We particularly recall some of the great benefits that were bestowed in Great Britain to our People during the course of your Majesty's reign. In the eighth and ninth years, 1846, of your reign we were accepted with complete freedom to be ministers in the Cabinet. In the ninth and

tenth years, 1847, we were accepted in a special category as other non-conformists in connection with our schools, religious institutions, education, charities, and properties and assets of the community. In the 21st and 22nd years, 1859, we were accepted with equality in Parliament. In the 34th and 35th years, 1872, we were accepted with complete freedom in Oxford and Cambridge when the highest degrees were open to us.

"In mentioning the great blessings that our People and other races under your beneficient rule have reaped, we hope that, through the grace of the Almighty, Your Majesty might reign many more gracious years, ruling over your loyal and faithful subjects. We will do our utmost for your sake that the Chosen People will not be found wanting in their love or in their loyalty to Your Majesty.

"The Jewish residents of Calcutta,
signed, the loyal and loving people of Your Majesty:

Joseph Elia David Ezra

| | |
|---|---|
| Elia Shalome Gubbay | Aaron Raphael Belilios |
| H. S. Howard | Elias Meyer |
| Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac | Ezekiel Elia David Ezra |
| Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay | A. N. E. Judah |
| R. M. Cohen | Aaron Abraham Cohen |
| Moses Abeasis | Saleh Manasseh |
| Aaron Ezra Arakie | Raphael Sassoon |
| Elias Hyeem Hilalee Solomon | Sassoon Benjamin Elia |
| Samuel Ezra Arakie | David Hai Solomon |
| Aaron Raphael Joshua | Moses Saleh Hakham Moses |

E. M. D. Cohen, Hony. Secretary,
dated, Calcutta 16th February 1887 —
22nd Shebath 5647."

Many Jews looked on at the presentation ceremonies that afternoon and attended the exhibition in the evening.

On the night of the 17th, the second day of the celebration, almost the whole city went gay with lights. The age of electricity had not arrived in India but gas lights costing Rs. 700.00 provided illumination for the two synagogues Maghen David and Bethel. In the former, flickering gas tapers extended along the south side and two large stars over each end of the roof of the ladies' gallery with the letters V. R. (Victoria Regina). On the spire above the clock was a replica of the royal crown and superscribed with the word *"Jubilee."*

Another star stood prominently on the east side of the spire. On the portico were the words "Long Live Our Empress" and over it a lit-up picture of the Queen and the words "Hail Victoria" and "God Bless the Queen." Bethel was more simply illustrated. Four hundred lights were used for the school building. Many prominent Jewish families lit up their homes to honor the occasion. Some lit their Tiryas (Sabbath candles).

In honor of the Jubilee, the Government of India granted an amnesty to 24,000 prisoners and released those imprisoned for debts of Rs. 100.00 and below. The amnesty aided the cause of one Jew, Aaron N. E. Judah, grandson of Ezekiel Judah, co-builder of Bethel Synagogue, arrested three years earlier in default of settling a claim of Rs. 214,500.00 on a transaction involving 715 chests of opium.[11] The net loss to the government amounted to Rs. 102,075.00. He was acquitted by Sir William Kumar Peters, Chief Justice of Bengal, in a judgement that caused deep dissatisfaction in the Bar. The Government solicitor informed Judah later that though he would not be rearrested, the debt against him would not be cancelled and he would be expected to pay it when he could.

However, in the wake of the Jubilee festivities, Aaron Judah sent a plea to the Government explaining his position and praying for cancellation of his debt as he did not have the means to pay, was unable to engage in business and provide support for his family. This plea was ultimately granted: settlement upon payment of at least a part of the debt. This also having received a negative reply from the debtor, the government cancelled the debt.

The Jubilee was celebrated in Britain on June 19, 1887. A letter dated June 11, 1888 containing the formal acknowledgment of the Queen through the Viceroy was received by Joseph Elia Ezra in behalf of the Jewish community of Calcutta.

The Jubilee was, of course, a unique occasion. On other occasions, more common though not less grand, the government showed by its favor to the community by an invitation to a "Levee," which was a high honor. This was a colorful ceremony to which were invited statesmen, prominent civic officers, judges and leading commercial personalities. The viceregal residence in the maidahn (later occupied by Governors of Bengal) was the venue. The earliest recorded "Levee" at which fourteen Jews were invited was that of Lord Lytton (1876–1880) 19th April 1876[12] at which the following were present:

> Elia Shalome Gubbay, David Aaron Shalome Gubbay, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac, Joseph Hyeem Simon Isaac, Aaron N. E. Judah, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Aaron Abra-

ham Cohen, Elia D. J. Ezra, Howard S. Howard, Nissim Hai Nissim Joseph Ezra, Joseph Elia Ezra, Saleh Elia Ezekiel Gubbay, N. N. Adas, Joseph Hye Sir Albert Sassoon.

A similar function for women was held too on an annual basis. On January 26, 1877 the following Jewish ladies attended the Viceroy's Levee: Mozelle (Mrs. Elia D. J.) Ezra, Farha (Mrs. Elia Shalome) Gubbay,[13] and on December 6, 1881: in addition to the latter, Rahma (Mrs. H. S.) Howard and Rebecca (Mrs. Ezekiel A.) Hardun. Among those invited and could not attend were Mozelle Ezra and Simha (Mrs. Yahya) Saul.[14]

Until 1912 when it was moved to Delhi, the capital city of India was Calcutta and here Viceroys would arrive with great fanfare and pomp. The harbor was decorated with flags and buntings, a band struck up military airs and a military guard of honor was in readiness all along the route to Government House. The Viceregal coach drawn by sturdy steeds was preceded and followed by mounted policemen as artillery men fired the shots of welcome.

These occasions drew vast crowds with the local Jewish community always well represented; hundreds, for example, turned out to see the Marquis of Landsdowne arrive in Calcutta in December, 1888. As it was a Saturday afternoon services commenced at 2 o'clock instead of at 4, to give people a chance to witness the proceedings. On the following Monday, when the "firman" (royal authority) of the Queen Empress was read, even more people attended.[15] At Lord Landsdowne's Levee, nineteen Jews were invited of a total of 1672.

Jews also took part in meetings to plan civic receptions. At one such meeting, called to consider how to felicitate and honor Lord Dufferin (1884–1888), the Board of Administration, the central body of Calcutta Jewry at that time, was represented by its president, Joseph Elia Ezra. Besides him, two Jews, Elia Shalome Gubbay and Howard S. Howard were chosen with 160 people to serve on a committee to implement the resolutions adopted.[16]

Occasionally members of the royal family toured India. When the Prince of Wales' (later King Edward VII) visit for December, 1875 was announced, a committee of the general public was appointed to welcome him. There was to be an exhibition at the maidahn, a display of fireworks, a visit to the Museum and New Market. The Jewish contribution to public subscriptions amounted to Rs. 1500.00. A Levee was held Wednesday, December 29, to which many Jews

were invited, several sponsored by Hindu Rajas and Armenians. For instance, R. M. Cohen was introduced by A. G. Apcar and Aaron Raphael Belilios by Raja Satyanand Ghosal while Elia D. J. Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay sponsored H. S. Howard and Aaron N. E. Judah respectievly. Others present were David Aaron Gubbay, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac, Joseph Ezekiel Judah, Joseph Simon Isaac, Aaron Abraham Cohen. Nissim Nissim Joseph Ezra, Joseph Elia Ezra, Saleh Elia Ezekiel Ezra, Nissim Nissim Adas, Joseph Albert Sassoon.[17]

At the Levee connected with the Prince's subsequent visit in 1886, Immanuel Raphael Belilios, a prominent Jewish philanthropist of Hongkong, was introduced by Lord Granville, the Colonial Secretary.[18]

When the Duke of Connaught, third and favorite son of Queen Victoria, accompanied by the Duchess, arrived in Calcutta in December, 1883, Elia Shalome Gubbay was one of twelve persons nominated to the steering committee to welcome the royal couple. When it was decided to enlarge the committee, the Jewish community was represented, in addition, by Elia D. J. Ezra and Howard S. Howard. Further, the commitee took a step of far-reaching significance — it nominated two other Jews, R. M. Cohen and A. N. E. Judah, to represent the newly-constituted Calcutta branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association, thus giving the Jews far greater proportionate representation. Of the estimated expenditure of 30-40 thousand rupees, 910.00 was collected from the Jewish community for the presentation of an address of welcome in a silver casket, illumination of Calcutta's main street and a display of fireworks and as was to be expected, the Ezras, Sassoons and Gubbays were all present at the banquet of welcome.

In honor of the royal visit many residences, especially those on Chowringhee, the fashionable main street of the city, were decorated. Particularly impressive were the illumination and ornamentation of the homes of the Ezras and Gubbays. In the magnificent grounds of his home, Elia Shalome Gubbay threw a party at which many Jews were present and western music played. (At Jewish functions it was normal to hear Arabic or oriental music.) As the royal carriage passed his house, the band struck up the British national anthem and Mrs. Gubbay presented the Duchess with a bouquet of flowers bound with a gold ring. The procession then re-routed specially in order to pass the Ezras' residence, glittering with lights and ornate with flags.[19]

*Governors of Bengal:*

The Governors of Bengal were popular with the local community and many presided over the commencement exercises of the Jewish community. Sir Rivers Thompson did so on two occasions, the second time only two months prior to the end of his state service in April, 1887.[20] A committee of the Chamber of Commerce, on which there were two Jews, Joseph Elia Ezra and Elia S. Gubbay, prepared a fitting farewell.[21]

On occasion, the Governor of Bengal personally bid farewell to the Jewish community. Mr. Casey wrote the following letter on February 11, 1946:

> "In leaving Bengal I would like to send my best wishes through the Eastern Hebrew & Annual to the Jewish Community of Bengal.
>
> "I know how much this community has contributed in charity, in direction and in practical service, particularly in Calcutta. It has also contributed, as it does in all countries, to the many graces that go to make up what we call civilization. There is a great deal for all communities to do in the future in the advance of all of us together towards the common purpose of man's betterment."

The relationship between Jews and British state officers was so close that on one occasion (1887) the secretary of the Legislative Council, Bengal, Mr. Robert Turbull, made a donation of Rs. 100.00 toward the relief of Jerusalem Jews.[22]

And so, the loyalty of the Jews of Calcutta and of India was never left in any doubt; for that matter, one particularly contented and fervent correspondent in *Paerah* went so far as to suggest (in 1886) that, in interpreting a line in the Pirke Aboth, India should be substituted for Jerusalem: "Never did serpent or scorpion injure anyone in Jerusalem, nor did any man say to his fellow, 'The place is too narrow for me to lodge overnight in Jerusalem.' "[23]

Though Jews were not involved in politics, some were active in public, civic and judicial spheres. In 1883, there were four honorary magistrates: Elia D. J. Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay, Howard S. Howard and Rahamim Moosa Cohen. Four years later, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay was added.[24] In the present century, Ezra Aaron Arakie, David Jacob Cohen and two of his brothers joined the magisterial ranks.[25] The names of two Jews appeared on the common jury list, David Hye Moses Mordecai and his brother Solomon.[26]

Jews voted in municipal elections at least since 1882. The Jewish district No. 7G (Burrabazar) was to elect three members. Of 1192 registered eligible voters, 25 were Jews: Elia D. J. Ezra, Aaron Shalome Gubbay, Aaron Raphael Belilios, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay, Aaron Ezra Arakie, Aaron Shalome Joseph Elias, Elias Joseph Musleah, Elias Abraham Cohen, E. M. D. Cohen, Abraham Ezekiel Hyeem Gubbay, David Hye Solomon Moosa, David Hye Moses Mordecai, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Ezekiel Joshua Gubbay, Isaac Saul Hakham Saul, Yahya Saleh Saul Hakham Saul, Joseph Sillman Joseph, Siman Tob Obadiah Cohen, Howard S. Howard, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Raphael Elias Sassoon, Raphael Isaac Joseph, Simon Raphael Hyeem Isaac, Simon Hyeem Dwek, Sassoon Benjamin Elia.[27]

The following served as municipal councillors: The Rev. E. M. D. Cohen till 1918, David Jacob Cohen from 1906 till well after Indian Independence and Immanuel Jacob Cohen from 1903–1924 and 1930–1949. In 1944 Jacob B. N. Elias also was a councillor.[28]

At a time when passports were not widely issued, Ezra Ezekiel Klaif applied for and received one issued by the Town Police Court of Madras and the Secretary to the Government of Madras, September 25, 1866,[29] as Calcutta was then governed from Madras.

[Two prominent Jews from Bombay, Sir Albert Sassoon and Solomon David Sassoon achieved the distinction of serving on the Indian Legislative Council, while in Hongkong, Immanuel R. Belilios and Frederick Sassoon gained similar status.] The highest political office Calcutta Jews attained was a seat in the Bengal Legislative Council to which David Jacob Cohen was elected between 1921–23; he was later nominated to the same body by the Governor and was awarded the Order of the British Empire, a citation for meritorious service.[30]

Under the British regime, as under Indian sovereignty, Jews enjoyed complete freedom of religion. Jewish personnel serving in the Indian army in the 1880's were granted leave for Passover in any part of India.[31] When Elia D. J. Ezra was Sheriff of Calcutta, and the deputy sheriff was not available, a British judge postponed a case which would have required Ezra's presence in court on the Jewish Sabbath.[32] [In Bombay, a Jew appointed foreman of a jury requested leave of absence on a Saturday and his request was acceeded to.[33]]

In 1839 Aden, on the southeastern tip of the Arabian peninsula, was taken over by the British East India Company and annexed to British India.[34] In the early '80's of the nineteenth century the Jews of Aden numbering about 1000 petitioned the Government of India

for exemption from the Indian Succession Act of 1865. They claimed that the Act was based on English law whereby wives and daughters inherit with the sons, that is, when a man dies intestate his property and assets are divided between his wife and children. Jews of Aden, they explained, were not in the habit of drawing up wills and preferred in the matter of succession to be governed by Jewish law.[35]

The Indian Government evidently was prepared to grant the petition provided the Indian Jewish communities did not claim a similar exemption. When Moses Mayohas was in Aden on his way home to India from his European and Palestinean visit in 1885, Moses Hanoch Halevi, the leader of Aden Jewry solicited his assistance to intercede on their behalf with Bombay and Calcutta to agree to the provision. Having no legal problems of succession, the local leaders went along with Aden's desire for guarantees to the Government. Twenty-one prominent Jews of Bombay attested their agreement on July 5, 1886 and twenty-seven from Calcutta signified their approval on August 16. The undertaking was based on Aden's internal religious preferences and its distinct geographical position vis-a-vis the Indian mainland. The granting of the privilege to Aden would not constitute a precedent for the Jews of India proper. At the end of November that year, the Jews of Aden had won the right to follow Jewish law in regard to succession.[36]

Since it was reasonably believed that the Jews in Aden were victims of social and civil discrimination at the hands of their predominantly Moslem co-citizens, they were advised by the editor of *Paerah* to air their grievances to the British Resident for resolution. There was every reason to believe that their conditions would improve "as the Queen does not oppress the smallest of her subjects."[37]

Calcutta Jewry served the British nation well in both World Wars, losing one of its sons in each. David Ezra, son of Ezekiel D. J. and Ramah Ezra, a Captain in the Royal Garrison Artillery, who was born in Calcutta, October 1, 1884 and educated at Cheltenham College and Cambridge, England, was killed in action in France on August 6, 1918, aged 34. Killed in air operations also over France was Flying Officer (Navigator) in the Royal Air Force, Sonny Solomon, on September 11, 1944 aged 25; plaques commemorating these losses are to be seen at the Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta. At a special memorial service held in that synagogue, the plaque for Solomon was unveiled August 26, 1945 by Squadron Leader (Chaplain) S. C. Bloch of the Royal Air Force stationed in Calcutta.[38]

As pointed out already, being classed politically as "European"

was a matter of importance for the Jews of India. Consequently in 1885, the Jewish community of Calcutta was disturbed when they were declared non-European, though two other non-Indian communities of settlers, the Armenians and Portuguese, continued to enjoy European status. The reason for this is not clear. The determination could have resulted from the fact that the majority of Indian Jews, comprising Bene Israel and Cochinis and having been domiciled in India for centuries, were mostly undistinguished in their physiognomy from the non-Jewish compatriots. At no time, however, did the Jews of Arabic extraction ever consider themselves anything but British-oriented, and hence "European."

The immediate impact of the new rules was felt by the Jewish Boys' and Girls' School, as the Inspector for European Schools ceased his annual visits. Redress was sought at first for an omission which was thought to be unintentional. The local coordinating organization Hebrath Ozer Dallim, at a general meeting, aired the grievance in the presence of its constituents and a committee of five was formed to investigate the impact of the new regulations on the Jewish community. Those chosen to serve were: Moses Abeasis, E. M. D. Cohen, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Howard S. Howard and Elias Meyer.[39] A petition signed by sixty-three prominent members of the community was submitted to Sir Rivers Thompson, Governor of Bengal in February, 1886.[40]

In about two months, the British government in India returned a reply riddled with paradoxes. The application of the new discriminatory measure was removed from the Jewish school only, though Jewish students attending other schools were not exempted from its purview. That is to say, a Jewish child attending the Jewish school was considered European while one going to any other, even a European institution like St. Xaviers or Doveton College, were to be treated as non-European.

Practically speaking, the real problem was left unsolved; was the Jewish community of Bengal European or not? By implication the answer was a negative one. Only one Jewish educational institution had been favored, not the community in general. While this might speak well for the school, it was indeed distressing for the community in general.

Why, we may ask, was the governor so considerate of the school? He happened to have presided over its prize distribution in December, 1884 and complimented the management on the high standard of English education. A copy of his speech accompanied the petition to serve as a reminder. While he could not change the regula-

tions which were authorized by the central (federal) administration, he had apparently gone to the limits of his powers in exempting that institution.[41]

The school continued to enjoy a favored place, though its status was subject to periodic reviews. Recognition for the quality of its work reached a high point when, in 1908, it was recognized as a "secondary" school under the new code of education. The Jewish community, however, came to accept its politically nebulous position and lived with it primarily because, for the most part, the discriminatory measure existed on paper only. There existed no bar to free and unlimited *social* intercourse between statutory Europeans and Jews who were admitted to membership of the exclusive European institutions such as the fashionable clubs, a privilege to which prominent Indians could not aspire.

The matter lay dormant till the passing of the Government of India Act by the British Parliament under the Montague-Chelmsford Report in 1919. This was an Act designed to give the Indian people a nominal measure of representation, with a hint that self-government might be the sequel. One of the main features of the Act was to introduce legislation by communal groupings. The Bengal Electoral Rules, as regards general constituencies for elected members, established four such groupings: European, Anglo-Indian, Mohammedan and non-Mohammedan. The European group was not confined to pure Britons but embraced all white races domiciled in British India. The Anglo-Indian comprised the descendants of mixed unions of European and native Indian peoples; the Mohammedan represented a religio-racial group of Islamic believers and the non-Mohammedan included the major part of the population, the Hindus. The Jews could not be classified with any of the first three "positive" groups and by implication were either to fall into the last or Hindu category or be deprived of effective franchise.

The Act of 1919 provided for an inquiry into the new constitution after a period of ten years. In response to Indian wishes, this inquiry was expedited by two years. A commission, under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon, was appointed in late 1927. It had two sessions in India, which ended in April, 1929. In the interim, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was to become free India's first prime minister, demanded a constitution with the immediate grant of full responsible government on the model of the constitutions of the self-governing dominions." The provisions of the Nehru Constitution were reiterated at a congress of Indian leaders held in Calcutta in December, 1928, which gave the British until the end of 1929 to accept them.

The Jewish Community of Calcutta became aroused. In August, 1929, it submitted through its leader, Sir David Ezra, a petition or "memorial" as it was officially called, to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in-Council, petitioning that the definition of the term "European" in the Bengal Electoral Rules be extended in scope to embrace "the British section of the Jewish community of Bengal." This implied, of course, that the "Sephardic" Jews of Bengal of Middle Eastern origin, were distinct from the two indigenous Indian communities, the Bene Israel of Bombay and the colored Jews of Cochin. Morever, it was claimed in common with "pure" Europeans, the Jews of Bengal were foreigners in India and consquently not permanently domiciled in the country. It was asserted in addition that though they were not of European origin, they belonged ethnologically to a white race and that they were not discriminated against in Britain and her colonies.[42] It might have been interesting, incidentally, to extract the petitioners' opinion as to the category they would assign the other Jews of India.

The petition was submitted to Lord Irwin (1926-31) who had succeeded the only Jew to occupy the viceregal office, Lording Reading (1921-26). It is conceivable that oral discussions did take place between the latter and the Jewish community over its political aspirations but no move was made by Lord Reading, perhaps because he was reluctant to seem partial to his co-religionists in a land where they were an infinitesmal minority. It would appear, however, that he was sympathetic to their claims, for a copy of the "memorial" was sent to him, though then not in office, with a plea to use his obviously valuable influence in getting the scheme passed.

Lord Irwin was too preoccupied with the civil disobedience movement led by Mohandas K. Gandhi and Nehru to pay any attention to the grievance of a community whose size and importance were of little consequence considering the major problems facing his administration at the time. He passed on the matter to his superiors at the India Office in London and there it lay for four years, despite a nudge to the Secretary of State for India by Sir David Ezra in April, 1932.

Meantime, discernable progress was being made on the national level. Between 1930 and 1932, the so-called "Round Table Conferences" were held in London to enable representatives of the various Indian communities and of the British government to consider proposals for the future constitution of India. The third and last conference completed its work at the end of 1932. From these discussions were to emerge at least a major British concession to India. Calcutta's Jewish leaders became uneasy. They had to acknowledge that

the memorial itself was vague and impractical inasmuch as it did not define what would constitute Jews "living in European style." They tried to circumvent this difficulty by proposing, in July, 1933, at the suggestion of D. J. Cohen, to include "all natural-born British subjects of the Jewish community speaking the English language and dressed in European style." A point in their favor was the fact that the three Jewish schools in Calcutta, The Jewish Girls' School, The Elias Meyer Free School and the Jeshurun Free School were included in the scheme of European schools in Bengal and received from the Government the prescribed "European" grant. These regulations, it was suggested, would foster the growth of a European-oriented generation.

The proposal was channelled through Edward Judah, the author and one of the signatories of the original memorial, who was to endeavor "to obtain a definite assurance from the India Office that the required legislation will be embodied in the Government of India act, if it cannot be introduced at an earlier date." Now living in London, he continued undaunted his efforts to muster assistance from men and institutions of prominence in England including that of Lord Reading who did communicate with the Secretary of State on this subject but without any tangible result.

Judah was promised the aid of three members of Parliament including the Liberal member, Barnett Janner. Sir Herbert Samuel, the first British High Commissioner in Palestine, recommended that the support of the Jewish Board of Deputies in London should be sought while Sir Philip Sassoon declined any possible help on the grounds that he was a member of the Government. The case was represented to the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association in London. Both these organizations lent their support by addressing letters to the Under-Secretary of State for India. Edward Eliot, Sir David's brother, had an interview with Sir Samuel Hoare who suggested that papers pertinent to the case be placed before the Secretary to the Indian Constitution sitting in the House of Lords; but Edward Judah, who sought a hearing, was not granted one by the Joint Select Committee on the Constitution.

The discussions in London bogged down on the absence of a suitable formula for the definition of the term "Sephardic Jewish Community." The easiest solution obviously was to include the whole community, but its practical implementation posed some insurmountable obstacles. Many Jews belonging to the "'Sephardic Jewish Community" did not speak English nor dress in English style. And, in doubtful cases, there was no local determining authority comparable

to the Chief Rabbi in England to certify their eligibility. Convinced that the issues involved too many local overtones, the Secretary of State recommended reference to the Government of Bengal.

The main object of negotiations in India was to convince the Government to accept the principle of a non-European community joining a European group. With this in view, Edward Judah held an interview with the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson, on December 2, 1933, but was able to achieve only an expression of sympathy and a promise that the question would not be lost sight of.

Edward Judah followed up this interview by a letter for the record, addressed to the Governor. In it he explained why the local Jewish leaders did not approach the European community for official assistance, a course possibly proposed by the Governor. "As none of the component units forming the 'European' group were required to obtain permission in order to be linked to the other units, and as our case is based on our racial rights rather than on favors, it is not possible for the community to place its case for approval before the European community, nor indeed is it possible to accept any principle which involves recognition of a tribunal in India other than the Government to whom alone the community can appeal for relief."

He further recommended a way out of the dilemma of certification which gives some idea of British procedure involving Jews. "In view of the fact that it is the established custom of the British Law Courts in Calcutta to accept as evidence the decisions of Jewish authorities in Jewish matters, all doubtful cases in Bengal could be referred for investigation and verification to the Boards of Control of the principal synagogues in Calcutta, or, if preferred, to a special committee to be appointed for this purpose by such synagogues. . . ."

The letter concluded with a plea for a recommendation to the Secretary of State for India "for the adoption in Bengal of a scheme regarded as involving certain principles of political justice which have been a characteristic feature of British administration for centuries."

The Government of Bengal in February, 1934 instituted inquiries addressed to the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and to the European Association to ascertain their views on the question. The European Association's Executive Committee discussed the possibility of formulating a concise and exclusive definition of Jewish eligibility for European classification and adopted the following at the suggestion of Edward Judah: "British subjects of the Sephardic Jewish community including British subjects of mixed European and Sephardic Jewish descent but excluding Ben-Israelites (sic) Black Cochin Jews and

persons of Indian or mixed Jewish and non-European descent." The Bengal Chamber of Commerce also supported this interpretation and both bodies wrote in to the Government of Bengal accordingly.

In subsequent negotiations with the Bengal Government, Edward Judah proposed that the clauses embracing the reviewed political status of Jews in India be incorporated in the forthcoming India Act as an All-India measure with a provision that it would apply at the outset in the Province of Bengal alone, the Government of India reserving the right of applying it to any other province in India by special ordinance if and when deemed necessary.

In January, 1935 a bill with the latest British proposals for Indian self-government was introduced in Parliament but, to the dismay of the local Jewish community, contained no mention of its recommendation for European classification. It appeared that six years of effort, in which Edward Judah had been involved, had been spent in vain. As a final resort, a brochure was issued in February, 1935, describing briefly the highlights of discussions and negotiations over six years and once more setting forth claim to inclusion in the European constituency. Inter alia, there was a reminder that Jewish political disabilities had been removed in British colonies as far back as 1773 under statute of George III. This move did not bear any fruit either and theoretically the political disability of the Jewish community was never removed by the British.

Evidently the British Government of India could not resolve the dilemma of affording political justice to Jews extracted from Near Eastern countries without offending the Bene-Israel and Cochin Jews who were numerically more than double their co-religionists in India. If the Jews of Bengal did not achieve European status on the statute book and their franchise rights were never clearly defined, local British organs of Government in Bengal were often prepared to interpret the law in a more realistic and generous manner.

An example of this relates to the enlistment in the Indian Auxiliary Force[44] of persons with British status. After World War II had commenced, "Indian-born Jews" from Calcutta were not permitted to enlist on this basis. Upon representation by the Jewish community of Calcutta, the recruiting authorities maintained that only those who could establish European descent on the male side would be eligible.

A request made to the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, by Sir David Ezra, and subsequent negotiations between D. J. Cohen, Sir Victor Sassoon and army officers in Simla brought about an agreement whereby the Auxilliary Force would accept individuals certified by synagogue officers as being of Jewish descent though the source

of their knowledge could not be documented. This was precisely the procedure Edward Judah had endeavored unsuccessfully to have the British Government introduce on an all-India basis. Thus, something which could not be achieved on the federal level was actually being implemented on a local level.

In fact, it was the army that first accepted on a federal basis Sephardic Jews of India as British. In 1942, the following communication was received from the Government of India, in which an apparent distinction was made between "Indian Jews," a term which may be regarded as referring to Bene-Israel, and "Anglo Indian Jews," who are the British-oriented Jews that emigrated in the nineteenth century to India from Arabic-speaking countries of the Near East:

> "At present Indian Jews and Anglo-Indian Jews must be enrolled under the Indian Army Act as Indian soldiers. If, after enrollment, they are considered by their local military commanders to be habituated to a European or similar style of life and food, they may be granted British scales of rations. Anglo-Indian Jews, but not Indian Jews, get British courtesy ranks in certain units and in all cases, accommodation, clothing and medical treatment as for British soldiers. Indian Jews get these services as for Indian soldiers.
>
> "Anglo-Indian Jews who are suitable may be commissioned in His Majesty's Indian Land Forces as Indian commissioned officers with emergency commissions.
>
> "Anglo-Indians receive the same pay as Indians unless they are enlisted into British units when they receive British scales of pay."[45]

The struggle for recognition of the desired status was thus never brought to a conclusion. It lost its significance when Britain's Indian Empire itself faded into history shortly after the end of World War II. This occurred because the people of India won their independence. Many of the intended beneficiaries themselves emigrated to Britain where they got the much-sought-after status. There, in addition to achieving the higher goals they had set themselves, they came to enjoy directly the spiritual guidance of the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate, whose distinguished incumbent, Dr. Solomon Gaon gave his utmost to the welfare and religious needs of a steady influx of Jews from the Orient. With his active assistance, they struck roots in the same land from which four or five previous generations of Jews in India derived their social and economic standards.

*Chapter 18*

## SIR DAVID AND LADY RACHEL EZRA

It is plain by now that the family name of Ezra is so bound up with Calcutta Jews that one might almost regard the two as synonymous. Like the Sassoons of Bombay, the Ezras took a leading part in Jewish and general causes. It was their initiative and substance that provided the Jewish community with synagogues and schools, a hospital and other forms of social welfare, and crowned them with the distinction of being the first family. With personal charm and boundless generosity did each succeeding member of this family preside over the affairs of the community.

The major portion of the Ezra's commercial empire was built up in the nineteenth century.[1] The gains of a brisk trade found their way into landed investments comprising some of the most magnificent buildings in Calcutta. Unfortunately, all but one of the sons of Elia D. J. Ezra made their homes in Europe. David (born 1871) alone continued the family's mercantile interests in India. He did not, however, have enough of a flair for this. He was not one who could sway his listeners or lay down the line of action in a complicated situation. He was tenacious and conventional — a great conservative. Albeit a man of the world, he possessed an all-pervading sense of humility and simplicity which made him shrink from allowing his other virtues to be recognized, not the least of which was his respect for tradition. It is said that he would don the Tephillin of three generations of his forbears, one on each day of the week. He refused invitations to civic functions on the Jewish sabbath. And, according to a custom cherished by a very few, he had his shroud prepared during his lifetime.

His basic reticence was well-balanced by the practical, spirited imagination of his wife, Rachel, whose rich personality reached out to others. Born in Bombay on Shabouth 1877, a daughter of the famed house of Sassoon, she was equipped to be an active partner with her husband in the works of charity which became their daily vocation. Her father, Solomon Sassoon, died at an early age. She, her brother David and her sister, Mozelle, were brought up with the singular tal-

ents of her pious and scholarly mother, Flora. Baghdadi tutors, Hakham Isaac Agacee and Hakham Shua Elia Abraham were brought out for the children. In 1902, Flora Sassoon set up residence in London. There, a decade later, Rachel and David Ezra were married at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue "Shaar Hashamayim" on November 5, 1912, and soon arrived in Calcutta.

The Ezras' home at 3 Kyd Street in Calcutta was the pivotal point around which the community moved and developed. It was more like a communal center than a residence; here, British dignitaries and Indian princes as well as missionaries, social workers and charity seekers were welcomed. Whether the occasion was a fund drive or a public celebration or wedding reception, the hospitality seemed inexhaustible. When they were home they would hardly ever throw off their community obligations — receiving callers, writing letters or telephoning and finding time for numerous other activities.

Their most passionate pre-occupation was to ameliorate the life of the people not only by the immediate succor they gave but by the social conscience they helped to foster. Never did they allow their zeal to flag. It would be impossible to mention, let alone examine, the many ramifications of their involvement in the Jewish and general community.

The presidencies David Ezra acquired included that of the Executive Committees of the Maghen David Synagogue, built by his father in memory of his namesake grandfather, and the Ezra hospital erected by his mother to perpetuate the memory of his father. He held various civic offices, the most coveted of which was that of Sheriff of Calcutta, a position held earlier by his brother Joseph and his father. In addition, he served on the boards of several large companies and was a director of the Reserve Bank of India. In acknowledgement of his contribution to the British cause in India, he was knighted in June, 1927 by King George V at Buckingham Palace. On his return to Calcutta, the Jewish community assembled at a colorful garden party to offer felicitations.[2]

Among the many community institutions Lady Rachel Ezra headed were: The committees of the Jewish Girls' School and Hostel, and the Jewish Women's League. Also, she was president of the Bengal Presidency Council of Women, Bengal Girl Guides Association and the Lady Dufferin Hospital. She too received recognition by the British government which awarded her the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in 1947 at the last investiture held in British India.

The great work of rescue and rehabilitation of European refugees is a proud chapter in local Jewish history and in this, Sir David and

Lady Rachel Ezra were prime movers. In 1939, when the first stream of refugees began arriving in Calcutta, they all settled down via the Ezras' home. Sir David founded a committee which helped rehabilitating the unfortunate newcomers; in his house they discovered warmth and understanding.

An objective account is given by a Hindu priest:[3] "A few months ago, I visited with Sir David Ezra on a Jewish festival on which Jews dine only in the Sukkah. I was invited to a beautiful Sukkah and met about forty refugees from Poland. Although several Indian domestic servants served the guests, Lady Ezra went from table to table, made sure they partook of all the delicacies and spoke words of encouragement. Sir David and the refugees had on beautiful caps and recited various prayers during their meal.

"On one occasion I came to the Ezras' home with a personal message from Gandhi and was received in the company of a group of Jewish refugees who were dinner guests. Suddenly I saw an Indian servant leading a cow by its horns through the beautiful hall. Sir David explained smilingly at my request that some of the refugees were observant of the Jewish dietary laws and hesitated to eat the cheese placed before them. When Lady Ezra came to learn of their doubts, she had the cow brought in to prove that the cheese was not bought from the market but was home-made."

An activity that made the Ezras famed in many homes the world over was their "open house" approach to servicemen from many countries. Thousands of men and women in uniform were beneficiaries in both world wars and in peace time of an extraordinary hospitality so vividly described by the most popular Jewish chaplain of the American Forces in the China-Burma-India sector, Rabbi David J. Seligson:

> "I was assisted from my perch on the tonga (taxi of the East) and escorted through a high, arched doorway in the stone wall. The inner court had the appearance of a botanical garden. Flowering herbaceous borders completed with exotic plants in a riot of colours and scent. The high-columned porch, lined with cages containing all manner of beast and bird, gave way to a large entrance hall and huge spiral staircase leading to the upper floor. A number of guests had preceded me into the comfortable, book-lined salon. Among them were British soldiers, civilians, Jews from Iraq, Indian Jews (of the Bene-Israel). I was the only American and something of a curiosity because of my Jewish Chaplain's insignia which none had seen before. Sir

David and Lady Ezra came in to greet their guests, and it was good to hear their Shabbat Shalom. After many months of travel in strange places, I was among my own.

"It was a goodly company that sat down to the Sabbath dinner. Sir David recited the Kiddush in the Sephardi Nigun, so strange to Ashkenazi ears, followed by that beautiful custom, preserved by our Eastern brethren of wishing guests and family well. The hosts greeted each of us in turn and embraced the members of the family with the traditional words of blessing. The meal that followed, served by what seemed an endless procession of bearers, was like a page out of the Arabian Nights. The spices and condiments of the East, strange fruits never seen before, relishes prepared in the manner of the Orient, combined to produce a bewildering dietetic array to satisfy the palate of the most discriminating gourmet. Zemirot and Grace followed. All in the company were invited to produce their own favourite melodies. The songs of the new Palestine, the Indian melodies reminiscent of the Gitas sung in Hindu temples, the chassidic Tsur Mishelo and the stately hymns of the English Synagogue merged into a singular unity, despite their diversity, by the common faith and hope that animated them.

"I was invited to come again on the morning of the Sabbath after the Synagogue service, and was afforded an opportunity to speak to my hosts. Sir David is the ideal prototype of the *nadiv* of Israel's tradition. Young in appearance and spirit, despite his more than three-score and ten, he is a bonvivant, literateur and sportsman. Specimens of his hunting prowess adorn the walls and fill the cages and pools of the private zoo in the rear garden. He speaks enthusiastically of the outdoor life and the brisk daily walk with his dogs at dawn. [It was on one of these walks that he suffered a fatal fall in 1947.] Yet he is thoroughly at home in the problems of world Jewry. Nothing that is Jewish is alien to him. The beautiful Maghen David Synagogue in Calcutta is a monument to his deep faith. The Ezra Free Hospital, built by his mother and maintained by him, is open to all. A host of the Jewish poor are supported by his generosity and help, to establish themselves in some useful trade or occupation. In the general life of the larger community his name is associated with all efforts to ameliorate the lot of the unfortunate of every faith and creed.

"Lady Ezra, tall, statuesque and radiating a rare spiritual beauty, reminds one of the great Jewish women of the past."[4]

In the very full and active life, Sir David and Lady Rachel Ezra's love of Zion was always one of the predominating interests. This is not surprising for a couple whose parents were the backbone of local philanthropic endeavor for the Holy Land. Their personal interest was stirred in 1920, when on their first visit to Palestine to spend Passover in Jerusalem. Five years later they visited again, this time in company of her mother and family. They came away with indelible impressions which they recounted at appropriate occasions. They were hosts to every Zionist envoy to whose cause theirs was the topmost contribution. Towards the cost of the War of Independence in 1948 they sent a substantial contribution. The third anniversary of Israel's Independence was held at 3 Kyd Street in the presence of a Hindu professor, M. L. Roy Chowdhury, an abiding friend of Israel. Lady Ezra herself headed the Calcutta Zionist Association for many years. "She is a firm believer in the programme of the World Jewish Congress and is convinced that it can make a vital contribution to the solution of Jewish problems in the post-war world. She speaks hopefully of the awakening interest in Jewish life and in Zionism that is taking place in India. However, she looks to America and to the instrumentalities which the Congress, in particular, has created, to align the united energies of the Jewish people. We of the East look to our fellow Jews of America to take the lead for our people in the post-war world. The future of Israel, its inalienable rights in Palestine and its position in the world depend upon united democratic strength of American Jewry."[5]

With a working day that might exhaust the most industrious, the Ezras yet found time for relaxation; perhaps that was the spring from which they drew renewed energy. The grounds of their palatial home comprised a zoo with a wide variety of birds and animals such as zebras, monkeys, deer and leopards. Baby bears would gambol on the lawn not far from an ancient turtle whose back was mounted by hundreds of eager visitors. The collection was donated by Lady Ezra to the Tel Aviv Zoo on the death of her husband on August 23, 1947.[6]

The Ezras were widely traveled. The 1925 trip to Palestine was part of a wider tour through Iraq, the birth place of their forebears, and other Asian and European countries. (Lady Ezra had been in Iraq with her family in 1910.) Adventure was represented in a trip across the Syrian desert from Damascus to Baghdad, which Lady

Ezra described in an expressive statement as a "wonderful experience."[7] In 1928 the couple visited South Africa. Throughout their travels they were accompanied by domestic servants, a Shohet and a cook.

Sir David and Lady Ezra loved children but were themselves childless. With the death of Lady Ezra in January, 1952,[8] there was no Ezra to assume the mantle of responsibility. By that time, though, the community's disintegration had already set in. There was nothing even an Ezra could do to hold off the breakers. A nephew of Lady Ezra, Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon, prominent son of an illustrious father, David S. Sassoon, lived in Letchworth, England and was therefore too far away to oversee Indian Jewish affairs, though he did evince as active an interest as possible. It was all to the good, however, Indian Jews were flocking to London where they came under the spiritual and administrative wings of the Rabbi. The heritage of Ezra-Sassoon was an inspiration in India; it continued to be a blessing in England.[9]

*Chapter 19*

## INDIAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES

The development of the Jewish settlement in India, its nature and organization, were governed by a series of complex factors. The main centers were only three in number — the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta and the much older Cochin. The former were at either end of the width of India — 1200 miles apart, while Cochin, on the south-west of the Indian peninsula, was about 1600 miles removed from Calcutta and 600 miles south of Bombay. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, communications were slow, travel tedious and possibly hazardous.

The Bene-Israel and Baghdadis were represented in Bombay and Calcutta in inverse proportion — in Bombay, the Bene-Israel out-numbered the Baghdadies by three to one, and in Calcutta, the vast majority were Mid-Easterners among whom lived a few Bene-Israel. In each of these two centers, the Mid-Eastern group soon came to predominate in wealth and influence. The third center was almost exclusively Cochini.

Language-wise, while English came more and more to form a common basis, the mass of the communities had different back-grounds: Arabic for the Baghdadis, Marathi for the Bene-Israel and Malayalam for the Cochinis. It is understandable, therefore, that no tradition or organization developed for the exchange of views or the sharing of experience on political, economic, religious or cultural issues. The three centers developed disparate ways of life based on varied historical and local circumstances, with little affinity for each other. For a more complete perspective, we outline here the origin and characteristics of the Cochin and Bene-Israel communities.

### *I. Cochin*

The story of the Jews of Cochin is a fascinating chapter in Jewish history. How and when they arrived are largely unsolved questions. But one thing seems clear. For some hundreds of years after the fourth century C.E. there existed in Cranganore a virtually independent "state" over which a Jewish prince held sway. This twenty-seven

square mile territory was perhaps the only sovereign Jewish principality in almost two thousand years of diaspora. The community's history is divided into four periods.

*The Early Settlement*

Cranganore, the city at which the earliest settlers are said to have lived, was an important port on the west coast of India twenty miles north of Cochin. It was to this place that Jews turned as a haven of refuge and a trading center. Over a thousand years separates the dates of earliest and latest conjectures.

One source theorizes that the original immigrants to arrive on the west coast of India came in King Solomon's fleet[1], since there is a philological similarity between the Hebrew names of the traded articles and their Dravidian equivalents. Another identifies the early Cochinis with the Ten Tribes taken into captivity by Shalmenezer, the Assyrian. An old Dutch document of 1695 claims that the local Jews declared themselves descended from the tribe of Manasseh, a part of whom were taken captive by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar to the eastern-most parts of his empire. We know, however, that the Babylonian empire did not extend so far east.[2] Local tradition relates that soon after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., 10,000 Jews were allowed to settle in different parts of India, the vast majority preferring Cranganore, known by the Jews as Shingly.[3]

The earliest documentary evidence of the settlement is found in a set of copper plates whose date is variously indicated as 379 C.E.[4] and 750 C.E.[5] The ancient rulers of India were accustomed to bestow grants of land and other privileges on those they favored. The deed engraved on copper, was executed by Rajah Bhaskira Ravivarman and conferred in perpetuity upon Joseph Rabban, the leader of the Jews, and his heirs, the freehold of a parcel of land called Anjuvannam.[6] In addition, certain privileges of nobility were granted to Rabban including "the right to ride an elephant, to be carried in a litter, to have a state umbrella, to be preceded by drums and trumpets, to call out so that lower castes might withdraw from the streets at his approach. It is also specified that the recipient shall not have to pay taxes and shall enjoy all the benefits of the Rajah's administration."[7] The Jews became well established and very influential. They made many converts from among the natives and generally from their slaves. One may only compare the misery, hardship and anxiety endured by co-religionists at the time in Europe to appreciate the blessed position of the Cochin colonists.

Two other local traditions from this period are available. Yehuda

Halevi, the poet-philosopher of Spain, is supposed to have settled in Cochin and brought with him the Temple trumpets.[7] Also, the rapport between Christians and Jews was so good, they held joint protectorate of part of the land on the Malabar coast and when a church was to be built, the Jewish and Christian protectors had to concur.[8]

In the fourteenth century, Marco Polo and the Moorish voyager, Ibn Batuta, found a settlement of Jews in Malabar.[9]

The city of Cochin, as it subsequently became known, came into existence in 1341, when a great flood formed the harbor and silted up the entrance to the port of Cranganore. The increasing importance of Cochin and the diminishing fortunes of Cranganore sent some Jews to Cochin where they built their first synagogue in 1344 and another in 1489.[10] The former called the "Angadi Synagogue" fell into disuse in 1804.

Nature was not their only foe. Internal strife undermined the solidarity of the Jewish principality at Cranganore. Converts, made from among the natives, demanded equality with born Jews and the right of intermarriage. Agitation became so intense that the native Rajah had to bring rebellious converts to submission. But unrest continued to simmer. At the same time rivalry between two descendants of Joseph Rabban ended in bloodshed, reminiscent of the inter-Hasmonean conflict in Palestine. The Rajah took the side of the son of the murdered prince, wreaking much havoc among the Jews. This gave further impetus to emigration from Cranganore to Cochin.

*The Portuguese Period*

The arrival of the Portuguese at the beginning of the sixteenth century put the finishing touches to the destruction of Cranganore. Jews, as on previous occasions, found themselves living in a battleground between two opposing powers — the Portuguese invaders and the defending Moors who fought for the King of Calicut. They were ravaged by both sides and fled to Cochin.

The Portuguese got word of the flight of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula to India. St. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary to India, requested the King of Portugal, in 1545, to stamp out "Jewish wickedness" from his Indian possessions.[11] The Inquisition was set up in Goa in 1560 and plundered and killed Jews, the majority of whom fled to Cochin in 1565 where the Rajah was a constant friend and extended his generous hospitality to them. The wrecking of Cranganore was compared by the Jews to the destruction of Jerusalem.[12] So great was the attachment of erstwhile settlers to it that they and their descendants placed a handful of Cranganore earth to-

gether with that of Jerusalem in every coffin. It is of utmost significance to the history of the Jews of India that Hindu rulers and military forces never participated in any persecution of Jews or Christians.

In Cochin, the Rajah, "with a liberality that can hardly be understood"[13] granted the Jews a large parcel of land adjoining his palace tax-free, which became the Jewish quarter. A place of worship called the Paradesi synagogue,[14] was completed in 1568 and is still used by Jews of Cochin. It was built by Samuel Castiel, David Beliliah, Ephraim Sala and Joseph Levi. Destroyed by the Portuguese in 1660, it was rebuilt after four years when the Dutch established themselves in Cochin. Remarkable for its old Dutch tiles, it contained the famous copper plates. The quatercentennial celebrations in 1968 were attended by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and a special Indian Postal stamp was issued to mark the occasion not only of the rebuilding of the synagogue but also of the goodwill of local authorities.

"This grant is eloquent testimony to the esteem in which the native ruler held the Jews. Not only did he give them a site as close as possible to his own residence and deeded the land tax-free in perpetuity, but he permitted the synagogue to be built at the head of the street, not 30 yards from his private temple, so that the adoration of Siva is heard in the Synagogue and prayer to the God of Israel echo through the palace compound."[15] The Jews became so numerous that the Portuguese historian, De Barros, (1496-1570) called the King of Cochin, the "'King of the Jews."[16]

At the end of the sixteenth century the Dutch traveler, Van Linschoten[17] described political and social life in Malabar thus: Three peoples live in the realm of the native rulers –Mohammedans, Hindus and Jews — and maintain friendly relations, enjoy freedom of religion and participate in good government. "Jews have built very fair stone houses and are rich merchants and are of the King of Cochin's closest counsellors. There they have a synagogue, Hebrew bible and Mosaic laws which I have held in my hands. The Jewish people are white complected like men of Europe and have many fair women. Many come from Palestine and speak Spanish very well." In territories governed by the Portuguese, however, harmonious living was stifled by a ban on all religions but Catholicism. Since this stricture was forcibly executed, for members of other faiths it was conversation or death."

Another traveler in the early seventeenth century[18] contrasts the Hindu spirit of toleration with the oppressiveness of the Portuguese Catholics. "There is a vast number of Jews there (Cochin) that are very rich. All the other nations live in perfect liberty of religion, each

having his own place of worship except in the Portuguese towns which are reserved for their nation alone . . . as a result of establishing the inquisition at Goa, they often burn Jews whom they call 'Christianos Noenos' or New Christians."

*The Dutch Period*

After one hundred and sixty years in India, the Portuguese were driven out by the Dutch. In their first attempt in 1663 the attackers were repulsed before they could gain a foothold on the Indian mainland. During the sorties, however, the Jews, looking forward to civil and religious liberty, threw their support behind the Dutch. But they paid dearly for it. For, when the Dutch were forced to withdraw, the Portuguese wreaked vengeance on the Jews, pillaging the Jewish quarter and setting it ablaze. The Jews went into hiding but returned the following year when the Dutch finally overthrew Portuguese supremacy.

With the Dutch in power, the Jews regained their lost prestige. The new masters met with the leading Jews, among whom was David Levi, grandson of a German immigrant,[19] and honored by the Rajah of Cochin with the title of Mudaliar or Colonel. He was presented with an official staff mounted with gold, on which was engraved the motto of the Dutch East India Company.[20] The hereditary office of Mudaliar was later given to Shemtob Castilien. "The Mudaliar exercised criminal and civil jurisdiction over the white Jews and sat in judgment in the synagogue. Only in capital cases could the Rajah interfere. The day-to-day government of the community was entirely in the hands of its own chief."[21]

The Dutch held sway over Cochin for 132 years, i.e., from 1663 to 1795. "During these years, the Jews prospered mightily. Just as the Portuguese had carried with them to India their national traits of intolerance and persecution, so did the Dutch bring with them their pattern of religious freedom and civil tolerance. The Dutch, who were essentially traders, had need of agents who knew the country and native methods of trade. The Jews, long in the land and accustomed to its ways, were just the commercial intermediaries they required. The esteem which the Cochin Rajahs had always accorded to the Jews was enhanced by their close cooperation with the Holland merchants and administrators."[22]

One of the Cochin Jews who enjoyed the confidence of the Dutch was Ezekiel Rahabi (born 1693), the son of David Rahabi who was responsible for orienting the Bene-Israel in rabbinic Judaism.

The prosperity and loyalty of the local Jews became so well-known

that when Manasseh ben Israel wished to strengthen his petition to Cromwell in 1655 for the re-entry of the Jews to England, he did so by making mention of the Jews of Cochin who were "most favored" loyal citizens on whom untarnished freedom was bestowed by gracious Indian rulers.

Exciting reports about the Jews of Malabar reached Amsterdam and many Dutch Jews visited Cochin to see for themselves. An official investigation was undertaken by the Amsterdam Jewish community in 1685 under the leadership of Moses Pereira de Paiva. His report, published two years later, is an excellent source for the condition of the Cochin Jews at that time. It is the oldest record written at that time; it is also the oldest record written in a foreign tongue by a Jew about his co-religionists in Cochin.

Of the twenty-five white families mentioned by Paiva only two, Zakkai and Aaron, are listed as having come to Cochin from Cranganore and, therefore, were of the oldest indigenous settlers. The others had immigrated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Palestine, Spain, North Africa, Syria, Persia, Germany and Iraq. (A few of the latter in the nineteenth century joined the Cochin community after settling for a while in other Indian Jewish centers like Bombay and Calcutta.) The first Spanish Jews migrated in 1511.

De Paiva describes the Jews of Cochin as "very well disposed and of a gentle character, very prominent, *Baalé Torah,* and not less famous merchants." They observed virtually the same Judaism as was practised in Amsterdam and were visited by itinerant Talmudic scholars from the Holy Land.[23]

By that time, caste stratification had developed among the Jews of Cochin that was to be the subject of much controversy and unrest thenceforth. Three castes were discernable — the white, brown and black Jews, called by the local Jewish community Meyuhasim, Meyshuhrarim and the Malabar Jews respectively. "The white Jews who are at the head of the Jewish caste hierarchy, range in skin color from a pale white to a medium brown; in general their pigmentation is about the same as that of the south Italians. The skin color of the other two castes is like that of the natives of Cochin ranging from a light brown to a deep brownish-black. The white Jews have their own synagogue where the brown Jews are also allowed to worship. The black Jews, who are by far the most numerous, have seven synagogues."[24]

It may be mentioned here incidentally that the natives of India are not negroid, though they are dark complected. According to De Paiva, the brown Jews were lighter-skinned originally but the hot climate

baked them several shades darker. Like the Hindu castes, there was social and religious cleavage among the Jewish castes. They did not intermarry. "They do not eat of what the Malabari Jews kill nor do they celebrate Minyan in their company. They allege that the Malabari Jews are sons of slaves and are mixed with Guerim, Kenahanitas (?) and Ismaelim. But in all things, the two observe the same rites and ceremonies."[25]

More is heard about the Cochin Jews in the eighteenth century. In 1723, Jacob Canter Visscher, a Protestant chaplain in Cochin, wrote a letter[26] in which he elaborates on the caste system among the Jews. The white Jews, he reported, were more affluent and powerful than the black and "intermarriage" was strictly forbidden "although it sometimes takes place." White Hazans or Readers visiting the synagogue of the blacks had to be invited to lead the services but black Jews who visited the white synagogue were not given the same courtesy.

Visscher further mentioned the incidence of a dispute between the two factions over covering the heads of the women. It had been a longstanding custom for women of the white community only to cover their heads, which was considered a privilege. The black Jews objected to this discrimination and referred their dispute to the binding arbitration of the Rajah who astutely ruled that each should wear what they pleased.

Visscher remarked that the black Jews were descended from slaves. Slaves of both communities wore skull caps but those sold to non-Jews had to abandon the practice. Slaves admitted to Judaism were not to be sold to "strangers" (non-Jews).

Memoirs of Dutch governors bore testimony to the toleration enjoyed by the Cochin Jews and their high social and political status. A Dutch commander Van Rheede in 1677[27] wrote: "The Jews of Cochin are quite free in the exercise of their religion and have in different places beautiful synagogues. They do not carry firearms but are protected by the king and country." It is said that in 1550, when the Rajah of Cochin was attacked, he would not fight on the Jewish Sabbath since the Jews in his army, considered the best warriors, refused to do so.

Most famous of such memoirs was *Memorandum* by Adriaan Moens in 1781 in which he sets forth the history of the community and the great influence which Ezekiel Rahabi and Daniel Cohen exerted among the native princes. The black Jews were occupied in agriculture, cattle rearing and trade in dairy products, more particularly, butter and poultry. The white Jews traded with the Dutch East India Company in more valuable commodities.

The Dutch period for Cochin Jews was the "Golden Age." Apart from political and commercial ascendancy, it witnessed literary and liturgical originality. Both black as well as white Jews participated in these cultural efforts. Prayer books were printed for them in Amsterdam in 1757 and 1769.

*The British Period — and After*

In 1795, the British captured Cochin but continued friendly relations with the Jews. With the impetus given to free trade by the British, however, Jewish prosperity, dependent much on monopolies granted by native rulers, declined. Political and religious privileges were sustained. Saturdays and Jewish holy days were holidays for Jews throughout the States of Cochin and Travancore. No public examinations were held on the Sabbath if Jews were candidates. In due course, Jews were nominated to the Cochin Legislature and municipal councils and to the Madras State Senate. Jews in military services were exempted from working on Jewish holy days and Saturdays.

Jews' Town, the heart of the Jewish neighborhood, was two miles south of what was called British Cochin. A narrow straight street about a third of a mile long, it was lined by quaint looking solid houses reminiscent of Dutch and Portuguese style. The white Jews mainly occupied the northern and the black the southern portion of this street. The latter were, since Dutch times, more numerous than their black counterparts. In 1771[28] there were 412 Jewish families in Cochin, only 40 of which were white. In about a century and a half according to the 1901 census, on the other hand, the blacks numbered 1137 souls and whites only 200. In 1932, there were 1451 Jews in Cochin State, the whites numbered less than one hundred; there were also 300 Jews in Travancore State of Cochin stock. The steady decrease until then was attributable to extensive emigration to the thriving centers of Bombay, Calcutta and Rangoon in search of a livelihood. No fresh immigration reinforced and offset the low birth rate resulting from fewer marriages.

The site of a synagogue built by Ezekiel Rahabi in 1750 for black Jews is found on the island of Thirthoor, off the Malabar coast. It was closed in 1790.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century when the old families of Kohens or priests were becoming extinct and the community was in urgent need of a Kohen, "one Jacob David Cohen of Baghdad visited Cochin for some commercial purpose. The Baghdad visitor, as his name indicates, was a Kohen. The Cochin Jews prevailed upon

him to stay with them and married him to the daughter of a priestly family. Jacob David Cohen had left a wife and family in Baghdad, and before many years had passed his son, Daniel, came to Cochin in search of his father. The elders saw in the son an opportunity to insure the presence of Kohens in the congregation, and they impressed the son also into their community. Their farsightedness was justified, because the descendants of Jacob David Cohen and his wife, Rachel have all died out, while the family of Daniel and his wife Esther Moses Sarphati now provide the lay priests for the synagogue."[29]

An appraisal of the modern Jews of Cochin is given by the Hindu anthropologist L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, who concludes his chapter on them with the following paragraph:

"The social conditions of the Jews are very much governed by their religion, the Sabbath, and the dietary laws. Very seldom can they eat with their Hindu and Mohammedan neighbors nor can they share their joys and sorrows. They rest when others are working, and work when others enjoy rest. They are rich in all the virtues, devout yet tolerant and strong in their reliance on Faith, Hope, and more especially Charity. The cause of their social separation can be sought in the centuries of their oppression in Europe and other countries. Isolation, which has been called by Darwin the corner stone of breeders, is more operative in moulding the Jews as we meet them today. They still look forward to the Messiah, the heaven-sent leader, under whose guidance they are to attain splendour and the supremacy which they claim to be theirs."[30]

David Mandelbaum, *The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin,*[31] summarizes his own study of the historical and anthropological questions which we quote in extenso:

> "The historical narrative which emerges when these various considerations are put together is fairly complete. The earliest Jewish settlers in Malabar, who came well before the eleventh century, made a number of converts to Judaism from among their slaves and servants. There probably were no formalized caste distinctions (the earliest documents mention none), because the original settlers were very few. It is difficult to envisage a mass migration with the precarious means of travel and the paucity of geographical knowledge of the time. The colony was probably founded by stranded merchants and a few stray families who filtered through the barriers in the way of a passage to India. The descendants of the immigrants may well have become the 'first families' of the community, but it is likely that with the

passage of centuries, and with rare recruits from outside Jewry, the original Jewish stock became thoroughly mixed with that of the native converts.

"After Vasco da Gama's armada of exploration opened the sea route to India, Portuguese ships made regular voyages from Lisbon to the Malabar coast. A spate of Spanish refugees came to Cochin via this route in the sixteenth century. They readily associated with the 'first families' of the ancient community, but with the mass of Malabar Jews they refused to have anything to do. This is not an unusual phenomenon in Jewish history; the Dutch Jews in Java do not mingle with the Baghdadi Jews there; German Jews in America kept apart from the East European Jews who came later.

"In a land where social perspective is fixed by caste distinctions, no compromise with the societal dichotomy was possible. The distinctions deepened until one group would not count a member of the other in their minyan as a Jewish worshipper. Conversions were going on all the time among the black Jews, as the older inhabitants came to be called, and the converts became a part of that community, albeit even with them the recent converts were looked down upon by the families older in Judaism. The converts made by the white Jews from among their slaves and servants did not amalgamate with the black Jews, but formed a third caste, the m'shuhararim.

"This caste structure is as inviolate now as it ever has been. Despite the shoulder-to-shoulder proximity of the three classes in Jews' Street, there is almost no social intercourse among them. At large marriage feasts of the white Jews, selected members of the black community will be invited and a separate table reserved for them; and when the black Jews are celebrating a similar event some of the white Jews may attend. Occasionally some of the black Jews would come to the leaders of the white Jews for advice and aid, since the white Jews were better versed in English. This was the sum total of the social contacts between these castes.

"Very recently a new factor, Zionism, has furnished a common field of interest on which the castes can meet. Zionist representatives have visited Cochin and readily implanted their idea and ideal there. Several young men, from all three castes, are enthusiastic Zionists and work in co-

operation to raise funds for Palestine. Some subscribe to Jewish periodicals and keenly follow the course of Jewish affairs in the world. An Arab uprising in Haifa or a fresh outrage in Germany causes consternation in Cochin as it does in Manchester or Chicago."

Correspondence between Calcutta and Cochin, on two occasions almost forty years apart, throws some light on the inter-community strife in Cochin from the point of view of the white Jews.

The first letter[32] emanated from Calcutta in October, 1843 posing queries over the status of a black Jewish lad, Joseph, born in Cochin and living in Calcutta and intending to marry a Jewish girl of the Baghdadi community.

> Who is his father? Who is his mother and her mother? Is she now a slave or had been one and was manumitted Is she the issue of the black Jews? What is the status of the black Jews? Are they of the aforementioned categories or the type of Bene-Israel who live in Bombay and its environs?
>
> "We have a report that their ancestory were slaves of Joseph Rabban who had three Jerusalem Jews with him, that he was of pure Jewish stock, and that his descendants wield the right to manumit such as these blacks as they chance upon. In other words, no other Jew may have authority over these slaves save the descendants of Rabban.
>
> "If so, why do you not intermarry with them? Doubtless, you have good grounds for this rule and we must abide by it, for we are one people, and a legitimate doubt for you must constitute one for us too.
>
> "We believe further that you have in your synagogue ancient copper plates inscribed with matters relating to these black Jews as well as other documents. In our desire to conform with the custom prevalent among you regarding these Jews, we would like to make a copy of these documents. If you send them to us we shall pay mailing charges.
>
> "If you consider that the abovementioned lad needs a formal manumission from the descendants of Rabban or from any other person, let us know the amount usually charged.
>
> "We wish to be excused for the trouble we have caused you but had to do so in view of the common responsibility of Jews."[33]

The Cochin community replied in November, 1834[34] (the communication took three weeks to reach) regarding the status of the lad Joseph, from which we deduce the extent of authority of the whites over the blacks, and the social standing of some of the latter. His grandmother was a slave at the home of the famous Hallegua family. She begat his mother in harlotry and he was brought up at the home of Salim Lassar as a slave. According to custom, a slave did not don Tallit and Tephillin in public but in open defiance he did so at Bombay where he migrated. The community there did not restrain him, though he apprised them of his status. Worse still, when his fault was pointed out to him, he claimed that it was done inadvertently. He disregarded several subsequent warnings and continued to put on those religious articles.

On his way to Calcutta from Bombay, he stopped off at Cochin where he was stripped of his Tallit and fined.

The letter traced the background of the black Jews as slaves of Joseph Rabban and the seventy-two families of his day whose ancestors arrived at Cranganore, a day's journey from Cochin, after the destruction of the second Temple. The King Shiran Perumal gave them the authority to acquire non-Jewish slaves in the King's realm and proselytize them to Judaism. Rabban was prince over his community. Some slaves were manumitted and embraced Judaism and some were not. When the latter received their freedom, they intermarried with the former.

When the ancestors of the whites witnessed this confusion, [apparently the difficulty to determine who of them was Jewish], they prevented them from entering white synagogues, praying in their company, or being counted in the Minyan. "They thereupon built their own synagogues, so we found in our records," continues the letter.

It then addressed itself to the most sensitive of the queries asked by Calcutta. "If the certification of manumission declares the freed slave eligible to marry a Jew or a Jewess, why is the system of separation still maintained"? The answer: "It is an old custom. In theory they may show evidence of manumission, but in practice, because of the above-mentioned circumstances, they are excluded from the congregation of whites."

The communication describes a history of black rebellion, challenging the authority of the whites to discriminate and threatening to build a common house of worship for both communities. "But God defeated their plan and brought them under our control as heretofore. We then fined them and imposed monetary and other penalties upon them."

There may have been quite a few such rebellions. One is mentioned as having taken place in 1848,[35] five years after the correspondence with Calcutta. "The freed slaves asked permission of the white Jews to use the benches in the synagogue (they were permitted to sit on the floor of the white synagogue); being refused, they moved within the boundary of the British territory where no distinction is made between masters and slaves. Led by Ava, a wealthy emancipated slave who acted as Sofer and Shohet, they built a synagogue; but their numbers were soon diminished by the plague and after Ava's death, they were obliged to return to the white Jews and to resume their old position in the synagogue."

The letter went on to explain that the custom of segregation as it developed in Cochin was more liberal than rabbinic law permitted. Local custom required each social group to be limited in marriage to its species, viz. pure Jews, emancipated slaves, children born to a slave during the parent's slavery (Yeleed Bayit), "so that the pure would not be mixed with the impure and there would be a distinction between cursed and blessed." The emancipated slaves in Cochin were responsible to observe the Jewish observances, whereas Jewish law did not require them to.

Besides, the letter continued, the rabbis frowned upon marriage with an ignoramus; how much more stringently did the Law apply to marriage with an "ignorant Canaanite." One would not find one percent of black Jews learned in the Torah with the fear of God and love of the Torah. Most of them did not embrace Judaism out of love for it but for economic reasons.

Regarding the copper plates granted to Joseph Rabban and the seventy-two families in 4139 (= 379 C.E.) the letter mentioned that nothing was written therein about the black Jews. Rather it was a record of the excellency of Rabban and his community, their rights and privileges and their elevation above all the other races in the kingdom in respect to their acquisition and conversion.[36]

As has been mentioned heretofore, one of the reasons for diminishing numbers of Jewry in Cochin was emigration to other parts of India. Calcutta received its share of both black and white stock. The black Jews were employed by the local Jewish residents as domestic servants. One Abraham, son of Joseph, Yeleed Bayit from Cochin, was circumcized in 1836.[37] But they were not recognized as Jews without a formal conversion. When Isaachar the Cochini got married in November, 1842[38] his marriage document shows him to be a Ger or Proselyte.[39] Evidently, the Cochin customs of segregation were well-known in Calcutta. Sillman, the Cochini, worked

at the printing press of Eleazar Arakie in December, 1845.[40]

About a dozen black families were living there by the beginning of the eighth decade of the nineteenth century. They did not sit on the floor in the Calcutta synagogues; but they were not called to the Torah.

Hakham Joseph Mayohas, Shaliah from Jerusalem in the fall of 1880 was approached by the Cochin Jews living in Calcutta to look into their grievances. He sent a copy of the correspondence between Calcutta and Cochin[41] to the Rishon Le Sion in Jerusalem for an opinion. Just at that time the Sephardi Chief Rabbi died and the matter was shelved till Mayohas returned home and took it up personally with the Jerusalem rabbinate. Nothing came of it.

Led by Elia David Joseph Ezra, the Calcutta community sent a letter in January, 1881 to the white Cochin Jews in a fresh attempt to clarify the status of the blacks.[42] It stated that the Cochinis wanted to be called to the Torah, they observed Jewish traditional practices including the Sabbath and dietary laws and claimed to have been emancipated in Cochin. The Calcutta communication made it clear that the Cochin reply would be submitted to the Jerusalem rabbinate for its binding opinion.[43]

Along with an explanatory statement dated March, 1881 of the status of its native Jews resident at Calcutta, the Cochin community appended an historical excursus. At one time, it pointed out, the population of slaves born in the houses of white Jews increased inordinately and the climate of opinion favored their emancipation. The following episode brought about its fulfillment.

In the days when marauders were rampant, an attempt was made to pillage a synagogue. Some of these "home born" black Jews fearlessly apprehended the attackers and at the risk of their lives secured and bound them and handed them over to the king. Thereupon, the whole community requested their emancipation which was done out of goodwill. But the freed slaves "returned to their old ways" and the community decided to cease granting manumissions.

After some time the home-born slaves again tearfully beseeched their masters to emancipate them, pledging not to degenerate. The community decided to do so provided that the freed slaves would not be called to the Torah except on Simhat Torah and they would sit on the floor of the synagogue. "We confirmed these conditions even at the time of the giving of the certification of emancipation as is written in the Book of Chronicles." Ever since, such certification had been issued and accepted subject to those conditions.

The white community claimed at that time that the emancipated

could not trace more than two or three generations in freedom, and that their numbers did not exceed one-tenth of the whole community. This meant that the process began slowly not more than seventy-five years previously and had become more common since the rebellion under Ava. The ultimate paragraph of the Cochin letter reminded the Calcutta community that Moses Dwek, their leader a generation before, was persuaded to refrain from calling to the Torah freed slaves who had settled in Calcutta; Bombay Jewry had done likewise.

The intent of the letter, therefore, was: Whatever the status of these Jews, the disabilities they were accustomed to in Cochin should be continued in Calcutta.

The next month, reference to Jerusalem was made as stipulated. The letter was written by Moses Mayohas, who had settled in Calcutta after completing his mission from the Holy Land in 1871.[44] Judging from the lenient epithets used to describe the Cochinis, there was no doubt as to where the writer's sympathies lay. His attitude may be summarized by this statement: "There is no difference between us and these Jews save the dark skin that covers their bodies."

Raphael Meir Panigel who had but a year before assumed the office of Chief Rabbi, replied at length in June, but inconclusively. His response was fraught with doubts which he desired to be resolved before passing final judgment.

> 1. The exact circumstances of their incipient slavery: Were they forcibly enslaved or sold into slavery for a livelihood? The law varies in each case.
>
> 2. The apprehension of the white Jews was at least partially justified. They did not have sufficient guarantees that, should the blacks gain equality, they would not degenerate, and thus "promote blemish in Israel." The blacks were therefore advised "to accept into their congregations" only those about whom there was no semblance of doubt as to their integrity. Further, they should institute an annual "renewal of faith" to impress not only the local white Jews but also later rabbinic authorities who might be confronted with a decision in this matter.
>
> 3. The inscription of the copper plates bearing on the subject of slavery and conversion of non-Jews has been rendered differently. In some versions[45] the original authorization of the Cochin Rajah does not contain any reference to slavery. The discrepancies require to be investigated by linguistic experts "for if the foundation falls, the rest of the structure collapses too."

4. Of the several incongruities with reference to the slaves, the most glaring seems to be the application of one law to all of them — the recognized free slave with no "points against him," the rebellious slave, the slave intermarried with gentiles, etc. Individual status should be determined and those in the class mentioned first should be relieved of discriminatory customs.

5. The above sifting could be facilitated by the testimony of erstwhile masters and slaves, or their descendants.

If the answers to these questions are given early enough, concluded the responsum, the Rabbinate would have a chance to deliberate its contents and issue directions to Hakham Asher Halevi who was to be the emissary to India from the Holy Land in the late summer.

As the editor of *Paerah* observed,[46] here was an opportunity for the Cochin Jews to take joint action to clarify the reservations of the Chief Rabbinate and resolve an age-old inequality at least for some of the blacks.

Whether or not the white Jews responded to this appeal, the emissary Hakham Asher Abraham Halevi, with the blessing of Chief Rabbi Panigel, took practical steps to formalize the initiation of the blacks into the Jewish fold.[47] He conducted a detailed investigation of the problems on his arrival in Cochin and mailed his findings to Panigel. The Chief Rabbi was impressed. All that the black Jews required to be admitted wholly into Judaism was ritual immersion or Tebila.[48] Arrangements were made for a Beth Din of three — Asher Halevi, Moses Mayohas (of Calcutta) and one other, probably Abraham Shraga Ashkenazi, Shaliah of Hebron, who wrote a book "Maghen Abraham" in support of the contention of the black Jews[49] — to give effect to the decision which demanded universal conformance. A copy of the decree was sent to Calcutta.[50]

But the white Jews did not conform. Over the signatures of Meir Sillman Kandil and David Judah Ashkenazi, they wrote to Bombay and Calcutta protesting the rabbinical decision and soliciting their support. The reaction to the Cochin communication in Calcutta was one of outrage at the audacity of the white Jews in defying rabbinical ordinance.[51]

After this time the black Cochin Jews in Calcutta were called to the Torah and some even married girls of the Baghdad community.

Three years later, the peace-loving and fair-minded Elia D. J. Ezra inquired of the Cochin white Jews if it were true that "you do not allow the blacks to worship with you in synagogue and to buy a

house for the purpose of worship for themselves. Is there a distinction before God of black and white? Has not one God created us? Do we not have one Father? Why do you discriminate, seeing that all of them possess a certificate of emancipation?"

The white reply denied the allegation of black exclusion from (the white) synagogue. "What do we lose by admitting them to synagogue?" A number of black Jews who did attend synagogue daily and on other occasions were mentioned by name. Besides, said the whites, their co-religionists received whole-hearted cooperation at funerals even to the extent of being buried at the white cemetery.

The second allegation the white Jews answered as follows: "On the eve of Rosh Hashana 5642 (= Sept. 1881) Hakham Asher Halevi and two emancipated blacks applied to the 'Chief Officer' or 'Vice-Regent' for permission to use a portion of the market-place as a place of worship. In rejecting their plea, he reiterated the sequence of events that occurred in 1848: 'A similar petition was submitted then to my father and the British Resident-General Collin. After using the market-place for some time, open rowing broke out on Purim that year between blacks and whites, each community hurling allegations at the other. The privilege of worshipping in the market-place was then forfeited.' The blacks who had three other synagogues, built yet another synagogue 'a short distance from the market-place outside the walls. This fact was recorded in our archives.' Do you not remember this? All this because of the reviling and abuse in the presence of the judges." In other words, the whites contended, it was not they who were responsible for withholding permission to build black synagogues; it was the latter's contentiousness that was the cause. The letter was signed by Samuel Hyeem Rahabi, Moses Elia Rahabi, Barookh David Ashkenazi, Ezekiel Rahabi, Obadiah Zakkai, David Hye Rahabi.

Elia Ezra could hardly have been persuaded, and publicized the correspondence by releasing it to the *Paerah*.[52]

In September, 1884, a correspondent of that paper found the age-old differences still in existence. He did not favor the drastic measures undertaken by Hakham Asher Halevi saying, Rome was not built in a day. He recommended that a resident rabbi sent from the Holy Land should try to bring about a rapprochment gradually.[53]

That is, in fact, what actually happened, but without rabbinic supervision. Friction ceased but despite white statements to the contrary, discrimination continued. Till the third decade of the twentieth century, the blacks attended the white synagogues, were counted in the Minyan but were not given seats in the synagogue and were

called to the Torah only on Simhath Torah. Their marriages were not solemnized in synagogue but at home. The whites, however, participated in their celebrations. A further barrier was removed as a result of the efforts of the first black Jewish graduate of Madras University. After pleading vainly with the white community to redress the grievances of his fellows, he threatened to fast unto death in the synagogue. In vogue at the time, following Gandhi's footsteps, the fast induced the whites to grant "special" seats in the synagogue to their dark-complexioned co-religionists, call them to the Torah on Monday and Thursday and bury them in the white cemetery. The two communities never intermarried.[54]

The Cochin Jews were imbued with the spirit of Zionism. They demonstrated their Zionist aspirations by writing a letter to Theodore Herzl in 1901 wishing his efforts success on behalf of the movement. In 1923, the first Zionist organization was founded in Cochin, and a representative was sent to the Zionist Federation in London, England. On another occasion, they appointed Israel Zangwill as their representative, being themselves unable to send one.

The creation of the modern state of Israel brought to a virtual end the age-old Cochin community and its racial problems. The black Jews were liquidated voluntarily — they mustered their communal assets and moved bodily to Israel. There they settled in the Negeb (Nevatim), Galil (Kfar Ofer) and the Jerusalem corridor (Mesillat Sion). They are scattered in Moshavs and cities. In Cochin only a few worked on the land; in Israel an overwhelming majority work in agricultural settlements. Some white Jews were left in 1970.

The Cochin Aliya was very different from the other Aliyas. A strong Zionist urge made them uproot themselves from a self-supporting environment, though riddled with discrimination. They were not forced to emigrate. Moreover, in transmitting their communal assets to Israel, they became one of the most provided for groups of immigrants. They wished to build new synagogues in Israel, dedicated to the perpetuation of their religious way of life.[55]

In 1957, they intended to form a Builder's Cooperative of Cochin Jews, the occupation so common to their kind in their native land. Their assets also paid for scholarships.

Though social prejudices cannot be eradicated in a predominantly white country like Israel, the black Cochin Jews are at least no longer victims of discriminatory religious practices. They have struck roots in a land — their land — in which they had to adjust in many ways and not one of them has returned to India. They are determined

to preserve their unique culture; but how they and their new environment interact will be the subject of another fascinating story for the future historian.

## *II. Bene Israel*

About six hundred miles to the north of Cochin, along the sandy sea-coast of Western India, called the Konkan in times past, lived another indigenous Jewish community. The Bene Israel (or Children of Israel), by which name they are known, claim to have been in India for centuries, but have no tangible evidence of the precise period of their arrival there or the country of their origin. Speculation has been rife but no conclusive proof adduced.

Theories abound. Some fix the Bene Israel arrival before the Christian Era,[56] others prefer a date after its beginning.[57] Some advocate a Palestinean origin,[58] even descent from the so-called Lost Ten Tribes;[59] others favor a Persian, Yemenite[60] or Egyptian source. Some argue for a business and commercial objective in the immigrants, others attribute their migration to flight from persecution. Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century and Marco Polo, a century later, seem to have heard of them. In the absence of clear cut and unequivocal determination of origins and sources, however, it is best to describe the traditions of the Bene Israel themselves and to accept them for what they are worth.

According to their own traditions, the Bene Israel are descendants of oil pressers from the Galilee, the northern sector of the Holy Land, who came to India more than two thousand years ago, or prior to the Christian era. The ship carrying their ancestors appears to have been wrecked off the Konkan coast of India, off the Henery and Kenery Islands in the Indian Ocean. Only seven couples, male and female, survived. Many of the bodies of the drowned were washed onto the shores of Navgaw village, twenty miles south of Bombay, where the survivors finally settled. The bodies are believed to have been buried in two mounds still visible there.

Whatever religious documents and appurtenances they may have brought with them, were lost at sea. Deprived of such conventional direction, and preoccupied in making a living in a new country, the immigrants gradually became oblivious of a large part of their heritage. Nevertheless, its basic tenets were generally retained. They recited the Shema at every ritualistic occasion, preserving intact a monotheistic faith in surroundings, to all intents and purposes, polytheistic. The Israelite Sabbath was scrupulously observed, but cer-

tainly not with all its rabbinic nuances, earning them the name of Shanvar Telis (= Saturday Oilmen).

The dietary laws in accordance with biblical legislation governed their eating habits. While the cow and ox were taboo in deference to the religious propensity of the Hindus, the killing of goats and sheep and birds, predominantly chicken, was permitted.

It is interesting to note that some of them, till very recent times, did not extend the prohibition of the admixture of meat and milk to poultry.[61] The laws of slaughter and related ritualistic prescriptions had scant adherence.[62] They did practice circumcision. It is not clear to what extent the traditional Jewish feasts and fasts were followed by the earliest Bene Israel.

This community has always insisted on the appellation Bene Israel in contradistinction to the term Yehudi (= Jew). Some see in this a possible connection with the Ten Tribes of whom, it is believed, the Bene Israel are descendants.

One theory, and a very plausible one, associates the name with local political motives.

> "The Israelites of the Bombay Presidency are led to believe from traditional accounts and from corroborating facts that the name Bene-Israel was adopted by their ancestors during the time when the Mohammedan power prevailed in India, and Islam was propagated by the sword. The hatred which the Mohammedans bear towards the name 'Yehudi' (Jew) as may be seen from the Koran, is in itself a ground for believing that our ancestors, through fear of being compelled to renounce their religion, or of losing their lives and property, thought it expedient to adopt the name less hated by the followers of Mohammed, viz. 'Bene-Israel' (children of Israel) which served both objects: the retention of their ancient name and faith, and the preservation of their lives and property. One fact may here be prominently brought forward in corroboration of the above statement.
>
> "During the reign of Tippoo Sultan and the prosperity of the East India Company, that is, during the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–84) several Bene-Israel, who had enlisted in the service of the Honourable Company, were taken captives by Tippoo's army, and would have been put to the sword had they declared themselves 'Yehudim.' They were released in consequence of Tippoo's mother having begged of her son to spare the lives of the 'Bene-Israel' so much

> talked of in the Koran, and whom she had never had the opportunity of seeing in India. In course of time their descendants made it a point to deny that they were "Yehudim" or Jews and felt insulted if any one called them by that name, for a reproachful rejoinder, such as the word Kufree (heretic) was sure to follow the use of that word."[63]

Even in the adoption of names the early Bene Israel divested themselves of overt indications that might underscore the differences between their neighbors and themselves. They adopted Hindu names.[64] There is also little unlikeness in skin complexion and physiognomy. A case has been made out ascribing the metamorphosis to the olive-complexioned Palestinean to the excessive Indian heat, transition from a comparatively easy life in Galilee to the tensions of a search for a peaceful living in India.[65] There seems to be small doubt, however, that the Palestinean immigrants to India, like so many of their European counterparts centuries later, intermarried with the native peoples.[66] They adopted their dress, language and many of their social customs. Marathi, the language native to that part of India, is their mother tongue.

A tradition among Bene Israel partially confirms this theory. They recognize two strata of their kind. *Gora Israel* or fair-complexioned Israel, believed to be descended from pure unmixed Israelite ancestors, and *Kala Israel* or black Israel understood to be the issue of Bene Israel and heathen or converted women. The men among the latter were at first not allowed to wear prayer shawls. But as a result of several thrusts on this distinction, the privilege of donning Tsitsith was conferred upon them. Attempts at unification have had a long history but never met with complete success.[67] The two sects have the same religious customs but they do not intermarry nor dine together. When Dada Cammadan, a wealthy elder, tried to seat his own son born of a heathen woman, at a public feast together with other Bene Israel, they walked out in a body.

For centuries, this amazingly tenacious group lived in peace in the land of their adoption. So peaceful was their existence that they sank into obscurity. "Mighty empires rose and fell, great civilizations flowered and faded, new religions took birth, grew into maturity and declined, but the peace of the Bene Israel remained ever undisturbed."[68] They imbibed the unproductive intellectual climate and fell in line with the social backwardness of the neighboring peoples. But in the strength for survival they clung zealously though unobtrusively to the faith of their fathers handed down from generation to generation.

*The Religious Revival*

It would then hardly seem possible that a cursory traveler would stumble on this inconspicuous people. But an old Bene Israel tradition claims that, "about the year 1000," a Jew called David Rahabi "discovered" them and returned them to the mainstream of Jewish life. There is no unanimity on the time of his revival. He may have been an Egyptian Jew[69] or he may have hailed from Cochin where the name is found. However romantic or dramatic this may seem, the existence of David Rahabi so early cannot be documented. Suffice it to say that the revival is attributed to him and its beneficent effects contributed to a lease on Jewish life for this outlying community gradually losing hold on its ancient way of life.

Rahabi, it is believed, identified some of the rites and manners of the Bene Israel with those prevalent among Jews. This convinced him that they were of Jewish stock. He tested them particularly with various species of fish, both those with fins and scales permitted to Jews as well as the non-Kosher variety. Their women promptly rejected the latter on the grounds that they were not used to eating them. Then he began his instruction. He taught them Hebrew and brought them in line with rabbinic Judaism. He introduced the Ketubah, the Cochin liturgy and taught the Bible. He prepared three young men from the Jhiratkar, Shapurkar and Rajpurkar families for leadership. These families later became authorities in religious rites and ceremonies and assumed the title of Kajis, the Islamic name for a chief priest.[70] The Bene Israel, like the rest of India, came under Moslem political and cultural domination.

The ministry of Rahabi among the Bene Israel was not of long duration. It lasted but two or three years. It is said that he was killed by a local chief and buried in the village of Sarul near Alibag. Neither the cause of his murder nor the site of his tomb can be substantiated.[71]

The Kajis received emoluments for their services. At first they were not recognized by the native rulers, but recognition was extended by the Moguls and later by local chieftians. The Kajis held both religious and juridical authority over their co-religionists, equal perhaps to that of a chief rabbi and were aided by four or five councillors. Subsequent occupants of the highest ecclesiastical office, which was hereditary, did not measure up to requirements. When synagogues were established at the end of the nineteenth century and the twentieth, the Kaji was replaced by the Hazan or Reader. The secular leader was called Mucuddum.

Probably as a result of Rahabi's spiritual influence, a change in names came about. Biblical and other Hebrew names superseded the purely Indian or Mohammedan ones, but most of them were Indianized. For instance, Abraham became Abaji, Joseph, Essobje, Moses, Mussaji, "Ji" being the polite Indian designation of a man. Later, with the arrival of the Arabic speaking Jews of the Middle East in the second half of the eighteenth century, the names they brought with them were given an Indo-Jewish shade of pronunciation, such as Rahamim into Ramaji. This, incidentally, could not have been derived in the post-revival era from Rama, the Hindu deistic nomen, considering how the Bene Israel shunned idolatrous practices. The Bene Israel gradually spread throughout what was later to be known as Bombay Presidency and assumed names of the villages and towns of their residence. Thus, Kehim residents were called Kehimkar, those of Penn, Penkar.[72]

To determine the precise period of the inception of the customs and ceremonies of the Bene Israel would be futile. The Sanskrit form of most of them tend to point to their usage in ancient times before Rahabi. Others called by Hindustani names may be attributed to the reforms of Rahabi (who did not know Marathi and in all probability conversed with fellow Jews of India in Hindustani) and a few to more modern innovations in the nineteenth century. We will account for them in chronological order according to the Jewish calendar.[73]

*Naviacha San* or New Year Holiday (the word "san" being the Sanskrit for holiday) on the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishri. The holiday was celebrated for one day only.

*Naviacha Roja* or a fast connected (only in time) with the New Year, on the third day of Tishri corresponding with the Fast of Gedaliah in observance of the assassination of Gedaliah, the Judean governor, after the Babylonian destruction of the Jewish State. 'Roja' is the Hindustani term for a fast.

*Sababi Roja:* The fast of Tebeth and the fast of Tammuz, on the tenth and seventeenth respectively of those Jewish months. The etymology is somewhat doubtful. Kehimkar suggests that it might be a corruption of the Hebrew root meaning "to surround or encompass, i.e., to besiege" referring, of course, to the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The pre-exilic date of the Bene Israel in India precludes the possibility of their bringing the observance with them. If Rahabi introduced them, a non-Hebrew designation would hardly be appropriate. More probable is Kehimkar's other suggestion that the word is a derivative of the Hindustani word

Sabab or a meritorious act, "as though the observance of these new fasts hitherto unknown to them had been regarded as an additional act of piety." The Fast of Tisha b'Ab was called *Birdiacha Roja* because they broke the fast by eating rice with a curry of Birda made of Wal (a pulse sprinkled with water day and night till it sprouted.) It was then husked and cooked with spice.[74]

*Khiricha San* or Pudding Festival observed as a harvest ingathering holiday on the evening of the fourth of Tishri. Its name is derived from the distinctive dish "Khir" or rice pudding mixed with coconut juice and sweets. Before it was eaten, a censer with burning frankincense was placed alongside and the Shema recited. At the insistence of the Cochin Jews the frankincense was removed from the ceremony in the mid-nineteenth century.

Sukkoth was not observed on the fifteenth of Tishri so it can be assumed that this one-day festival substituted for it, though it is surprising that the erroneous date persisted despite David Rahabi. In the late nineteenth century, however, presumably at the persuasion of reformers, the week-long Sukkoth holiday was introduced on the right date. But the earlier festival on the fourth of Tishri was not supplanted.

*Darfalnicha San* or "Closing-of-the-Doors holiday" on the tenth of Tishri which is, of course, Kippur. From the previous evening to the next they fasted and did not venture out of doors which were secured the whole day. On the eve of the fast, called Malma, they performed the ritual immersion, first with hot water, then cold, dressed in white, and refrained from conversing with people of other faiths. They believed the day was devoted to forgiveness of sins. The day was named for the traditional closing Kippur service which, as their memory served them, was the most outstanding ceremony on the holiest of days.

The next day Shila San or Stale Holiday, so-called probably because it came as an anti-climax to the great preceding day and was limited to the Bene Israel residing in the old Bombay Presidency area, is equivalent today to the Indian State of Maharashthra. We may assume that this being a latter-day observance introduced by comparatively recent reformers, it did not spread to the outlying villages.[75] The day was given to visiting with and entertaining relatives and friends and almsgiving in gratitude for life despite sin. It is reminiscent of "Simhath Cohen" from Temple times and observed symbolically by some Kohens today. The Arabic speaking Jews from Iraq in the nineteenth century taught the Bene Israel that the souls of departed relatives visit the living on Kippur. Hence the

custom among the former to have lighted oil wicks in their memory in synagogues throughout Kippur.

Another very late innovation is the pious custom of fasting on Monday, Thursday and the following Monday in the latter half of the month of Heshwan for which the Bene Israel have no name.

*Eliyahu Hanabicha Oorus* or "the Fair of Elijah the Prophet," who is believed to have appeared to the Bene Israel at Khandala, a village near Alibag, in the Konkan and ascended to heaven on that day. In celebration, they offer all kinds of fruit, bread made of rice flour, sweets called Malida and incense and invoke the Prophet by chanting the readings of the conclusion of the Sabbath, extolling Elijah. The fruits and bread are eaten by the worshippers. The practice has an affinity to Rosh Hashana Le-ilanoth or New Year of the Trees on fifteenth Shebath on which day, in fact, it is observed. Oorus is an Islamic word and its use is probably a reflection of the dominant religious regime. It is probably a Rahabi development.

*Holicha San* named for the Hindu festival Holi which almost consistently falls with Purim. The thirteenth Adar is a fast (Fast of Esther) and the fourteenth is a festival. They exchanged gifts of home-made sweets but seem to have been oblivious of the story of Purim and, of course, did not possess Megilloth. Accordingly, they did not observe Purim Shushan. Coincidence of Jewish and Hindu festivals is possible because both use intercalated lunar calendars while the Islamic calendar is purely lunar with no intercalation.

*Anasi Dhakacha San* or the holiday of the Closing of the Anas, an earthen vessel containing sour liquid used as a sauce. They abstained from using the liquid as well as all leaven for eight days from the fourteenth of Nisan. On the twenty-third of Nisan (i.e., the traditional eighth day of Pesah) they uncovered the vessel and ate leaven again. This was more biblical than rabbinical but they had forgotten the observance of Pesah in memory of the Exodus from Egypt.

The pious fasted during the month of Elul.[76] The custom was a little more widespread among the Bene Israel who emulated the Moslem custom of the fast of twenty-nine days during the fifth month of the Islamic calendar Ramadan (called in India, Ramzan), a period of Atonement. The fast has no specific name in the vernacular and is known by its Moslem name.

Notable omissions from the list of festivals are Hanukka and Shabuoth. The absence of Hanukka supports the contention that the Bene Israel arrival in India preceded the beginning of the Christian

era; conceivably Shabuoth might have been lost for the scant ritual associated with the festival. Shabuoth was interpolated with the second revival and Hanukka much later.

*Sacrifices*

As part of their arguments in favor of a pre-exilic origin, they point to the sacrificial system prevalent among them as late as the twentieth century. It may be assumed that those who went into exile *after* the Second Destruction would not be using sacrificial worship in any form; this would also apply to a community that left the Land after the First Temple was destroyed and never returned. Hence, the fact that during their long sojourn in India they did use this kind of worship, could very well indicate a departure from Palestine *during* the existence of the Second Temple and *before* its destruction. The fact that they continued an old form of worship does not militate against the assumption derived from the procedure *before* they were enlightened by Rahabi.

Having been removed from their homeland without the Temple and Altar, and restricted by religious attitudes of their neighbors, the Bene Israel were constrained to make some changes in the sacrificial system.

The cow or bullock was replaced by a sheep or goat, thus respecting the religious sensitivities of the Hindus to whom the cow was sacred. At times they had to defend themselves against charges of desecrating the holy animal. At Alibag in December, 1884, it was alleged that a member of the Bene Israel had slaughtered a cow. Local market supplies to the community were stopped and for two weeks they had to obtain them from other sources. Finally, a declaration of innocence by the Bene Israel had to be issued and apparently was found satisfactory.

Besides, the Bene Israel were scrupulous about taking out Hallah and burning it. Shekalim are exacted in the biblical fashion. A rupee is collected from each adult male on the eve of Kippur.

*The Second Religious Renewal*

In the mid-eighteenth century, many of the Bene Israel left their abode on the Konkan and arrived in Bombay. There they were to come under the diligent attention of a Cochin Jew, David Rahabi who was instrumental in gaining the release of the Bene Israel officer, Samuel Ezekiel Divekar, a prisoner of Tippoo Sultan during the Anglo-Mysore War. As a token of thanksgiving, Divekar had a

synagogue built in Bombay in 1796. Designated originally "Maghen David," it was re-named Shaar ha-Rahamim. The synagogue did for the Bene Israel what the Temple had done for the early Israelites. It was the first time in many a century that the indigenous Jewish community had a central place of worship which united them as never before. Their religious life, now revolved around the synagogue, was consolidated and given roots. (The sanctuary was rebuilt and enlarged in 1848.) And David Rahabi inspired the movement. So once again, he is credited with an advance in the religious development of the Bene Israel.

Was this, then, a second revival or was there just one religious resurgence? The latter was the most likely, as Walter Fischel has pointed out.[78] The eighteenth century contact with Rahabi made so great an impact on the Bene Israel that it became "transposed in the Bene Israel legendary tradition," revolving around a "pious Jew who taught the community Jewish ways," many years ago.

The Bene Israel subsequently leaned heavily on their Middle-Eastern and Cochin co-religionists. Soon after the synagogue was consecrated, it was considered appropriate to transfer the venue of the Fair of Elijah the Prophet, held annually at Khandala in the Konkan coast, to the grounds opposite the synagogue. But its celebration there was short-lived. A Cochin Jew, Jacob Kindil, Hazan of the Bene Israel synagogue, influenced the community to cease holding the Fairs which could have been interpreted as a worship of the prophet.

At this time, moreover, the immigration of Jewish businessmen from the Middle East began to gain momentum. They attended Bene Israel synagogues and used Bene Israel cemeteries. But then, the newcomers became cautious about religious connections with their hosts. They wanted to know more about them and when definitive knowledge was not forthcoming either from the Bene Israel themselves or from rabbinic sources, they preferred to remain religiously and socially aloof. Each community maintained its own synagogues, schools and cemeteries.

Most of the Bene Israel lived on the west coast of India. In 1891, there were about 13,500 of them but their numbers had increased to 24,000 by the mid-twentieth century. A very few moved East to Calcutta, for the most part manual laborers. The Jews of this city, faced with the question of the religious status of the Bene Israel, in 1843 addressed a written inquiry to the Cochin Jews asking for guidance.[79]

They cited a case of a Bene Israel couple who had settled in Cal-

cutta several years previously. They were observant, the communication stated, of the laws of Judaism; their children had grown up and wanted to "intermarry" with other Jews. The response is unfortunately lost. Many years later, however, some "intermarriage" did take place and the Bene Israel were admitted into synagogues but in the Calcutta cemetery a portion was set aside for their burial, as for that of other non-Middle-Eastern Jews. Integration in Calcutta came much faster than in the Bombay area, perhaps because there weren't too many Bene Israel in eastern India.

That acceptance was achieved more readily with the passage of time can be attributed to the gradual enlightenment of the Bene Israel at the hand, ironically, of the Christian missionaries and the Cochin Jews. Soon after the turn of the nineteenth century, a Marathi translation of the biblical Book of Genesis made by American missionaries came into their hands. Thereafter, Michael Sargon, an apostate Jew was sent by the Church in Cochin to educate the Bene Israel of Bombay in the religion of the Jewish Bible. Mention was made of the Christian faith "only when he was forced to." Schools were inaugurated in various Bene Israel centers in 1826 and lasted until 1832 but the Bombay school continued until Sargon retired in 1859. Though his dedicated services were undermined by one or another of petty factions among his followers, he preached and taught regularly every Sabbath from 11 a.m. until 3 in the afternoon. He died in Surat in 1870 aged eighty.

The man who had the most profound and lasting influence on the Bene Israel was Hakham Shelomo Salem Shar'abi a Yemenite Jew from Cochin. By trade he was a bookbinder, which enabled him to gain a livelihood; he was also Hazan, Preacher, Mohel and Shohet. He had a much larger following than Sargon though he too was not immune to the intercommunity squabbles. When a second synagogue was built, the community was split over which section should claim him as Hazan, but he was resolute in insisting to serve in the older one. It was he who convinced his people to increase the number of synagogues. "His mode of reciting prayers was so persuasive and his delivery of sermons so impressive that men flocked to hear him." He died on April 17, 1856.

The lasting results of the Shar'abi ministry were shown in the deeper awareness of the Bene Israel of their religious heritage. Local leaders assumed the helm and expressed their interest in fostering the spiritual welfare of the community by translating the prayer book and other religious treatises into Marathi, which they did. The first Bene Israel paper was called *Or Emeth* or *Satya Prakash* (Light of

Truth), and was published in September, 1877 by Reuben Abraham Korlekar. Like its rival, *Israel Ashram* (The Shelter of Israel) and its successors, *Israel, Ner Israel* (Lamp of Israel) and *Bene Israelite, Satya Prakash* did not meet with much success because of the minimal demand for reading among Bene Israel and the contentious spirit that divided the community. It ceased publication in January, 1881.

Some other aspects in the history of the community stand out. Military careers would hardly be expected of a group of ill-conditioned and under-privileged people. Though impoverished and unenlightened, their spirits soared to heights of nobility and valor. "The recollection of the heroic deeds of their ancestors . . . constituted a potent cause to which is to be ascribed the production of many gallant soldiers in the ranks of the sons of Israel . . . shown themselves by their firmness, resolution and other martial qualities to be descendants of a mighty race of warriors, famous in times of remote antiquity. . . .[80]

Beginning in the seventeenth century, when Samuel (Samaji) and Abraham (Abaji) Churrikar were given command of the navy of the local ruler, the Bene Israel rose to high military rank, including that of Sirdar Bahadur, the equivalent, perhaps, of major or colonel. As army men they journeyed for the first time along the length and breadth of India, and fought wars overseas, especially in the British expedition against Abyssinia in 1867–68 and Afghanistan in 1880. They were recipients of awards for gallantry and citations of merit. These military careers opened new vistas and facilitated the process of enlightenment and cultural advancement.

Many took to engineering and law and medicine. From carpentry, masonry and other forms of manual labor, more recent generations have become white collar workers, especially in the employ of government departments. Instead of the privations of poverty, they now had the essentials of life enjoyed by middle-class families. The Bene-Israel, however, were seldom attracted to commerce, because of an aversion to the art of social and economic climbing. "He prices basic virtues above worldly acquirements, and would rather lose a fortune than risk his soul. His way of life is typically India, he is too conscious of the transitoriness of the world to sacrifice for it the fundamentals of life."[81]

The Bene Israel have adjusted themselves to changed conditions several times in their checkered history. While they enjoyed comparatively harmonious neighborliness, they were subjected to at least one libelous attack. On May 19, 1882 *The Bombay Cassid,* a Gujerati paper published for the Mohammedan community, printed the following remarks:

"An evil custom among the Jews and their fondness of the blood of the Mohammedans.

"Our readers will be struck with horror at the above heading. There is an evil custom prevalent amongst the Jews which is likely to provoke the bitterest animosity of the Mohamedans. On a certain holiday of this people, which falls in the month of April, it is not only considered as a meritorious deed, but it is one which is supposed to have a religious sanction to see amongst the Jews bread prepared of the flour mixed with the flesh and blood of a Mohamedan who is killed on that day.

"In ancient time this custom was much in vogue and there was a great agitation about it. But in course of time this custom was left unobserved, and now the Jews have adopted a curious practice instead. A red fruit is placed in a dish which is fictitiously supposed to be 'Mohamed'; it is then pierced with a fork or a knife and the juice trickling out of it, is considered 'Mohamed's blood,' and is tested by one and all the members present. That fruit is then cut into pieces and boiled.

"We give below what we have heard about this custom in Bassorah (Basra). This holiday of the Jews fell on the 6th of April last. In the evening a Mohamedan boy about thirteen years old — one of the subjects of the Shah of Persia — entered, on some business, the house of a Jew named Nahamin; but he never returned. The Jew slaughtered him and distributed his blood amongst the members of his community the next day. The chief officer would have been informed of this, had he not been away from the city. Yet Mussabeg and Syed Hadi, the subordinate officers arrested the Jew, and put him into prison; but as he offered large bribes, he was set at liberty."[82]

The followers of Islam were in uproar and did not resort to violence partly because of a doubt about the story and partly because of the Bene Israel efforts to refute the charge. Inspired by Solomon David Sassoon, Joseph Ezekiel Rajpurkar served notice on the editor of the paper to prove his contention. Samuel Kehimkar, editor of the Bene Israel paper, *Israel*, repudiated the allegations in print and in an interview with the Kaji or Molvi (priest) of the Jumma Mosjid (Mosque) convinced the functionary that Jewish aversion to blood of animals and birds precluded the possibility of

resorting to human blood. *The Bombay Cassid* thereupon published an apology addressed to the Jewish community.

The Bene Israel imbibed a love for the Holy Land but, except for two or three of them in the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were no pilgrims. Their Zionist aspirations were summed up admirably by Haeem Samuel Kehimkar.[83]

> "The Bene-Israel, and the Jews in general have no ambition to gain even an inch of ground anywhere except in Palestine, the possession of which they expect to acquire by some miraculous agency. Their predilection therefore, lies in the direction of that country, and the dream of their life is the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the country of which it forms the natural Capital. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to roof of my mouth if I remember thee not, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.'[84]
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> "This animating principle exercises a great influence on all his dealings in life in whatever sphere he may move, whether he be a lord or beggar; and if he thinks it a sure mark of ardent love for Jerusalem to have a pinch or two of Palestine sand placed on the eyes of his deceased co-religionist, a fortiori the reconstruction of the whole country of which Jerusalem is the centre, where he might 'crown a youth of labour with an age of ease,' would certainly satisfy all his aspirations in life, and he would think he had reached the ultimate goal of his worldly ambition. This sentiment however does not lessen their patriotism for the country where they live at present, for they have been distinctly commanded by God through the Prophet Jeremiah to look to the country of their residence and naturalization with feelings of great love and true patriotism.[85]
>
> "Happy, therefore, shall be the day for the Jews and the Bene Israel when the proud dream of theirs is realised, and glorious will be the condition of Palestine when Jerusalem is re-built by the chosen people of God. But until this desired event is brought to pass, the Bene Israel, as well as all the Jews on the face of the Earth, loyally regard the country in which they are living as their fatherland, and consequently they are entitled to have every disability under which they labour entirely removed."

These words were written at the end of the nineteenth century. This

community continued to be loyal citizens of India under British and Indian sovereignty. Modern Zionism came their way when Theodore Herzl invited them to the First Zionist Congress in 1897. They declined on the ground that the Bene Israel were awaiting "the Divine Hand" to bring them to Zion. Innately theirs was a religious proclivity towards Zion which necessitated no stirring. Only a miraculous opportunity was awaited.

It came with the State of Israel. Like the Cochin Jews, they were inspired to leave en masse and in two decades, in addition to departures to England, their population in India had been reduced by half. They continue their emigration at a fast pace and have made a great success of life in their new homeland despite problems arising from their long historical isolation from the main centers of Jewry. They settled for the most part in Beersheba, Dimonah, Ashdod and Eilat. Some preferred the Kibbutz and Moshav.

Their problems in Israel still center around their family status. Until as late as the eighteenth century, they were obviously not aware of normative Jewish law. Baghdadi Jewish immigrants did not intermarry with them, as much for halachic considerations as the peculiar Baghdadi exclusiveness displayed wherever they lived.

We have referred to the communication concerning the status of the Bene Israel by the Calcutta Jewish community in 1843.[86] It is noteworthy that it emanated not from Bombay, where the Bene Israel outnumbered by far the Baghdadi element, but from Calcutta where only a handful of Bene Israel chose to dwell among several hundred Baghdadis. Rabbinical ambivalence was evident in subsequent decisions. In 1870 the rabbis of Safed looked favorably upon the Bene Israel, while in 1904 the Jerusalem and Baghdad rabbinates expressed reservations, perhaps because, for Jewish jurists far removed from Indian centers of Jewry, the question never assumed practical significance.

Only after several thousand Bene Israel began settling in Israel did it develop an urgency. Their personal status became the center of controversy. Though it was generally understood that the Bene Israel were of the House of Israel, some rabbis in Israel refused to marry them to other Jews. This bias was a carry-over from issues raised by the Baghdadi Jews in India who faulted the Bene Israel on grounds of mamzeruth (illegitimacy), that is, the Bene Israel were unfamiliar with the Jewish laws of divorce, levirate marriage and Halitsah.

Individual cases involving Bene Israel in personal law were decided by opinions handed down by the Chief Rabbis of the Holy

Land, Herzog and Uziel, who engaged in halachic correspondence on the subject. Uziel's successor in the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate, Rabbi Isaac Nissim, who hailed from Baghdad, leaned toward the verdicts handed down previously by the Baghdad Beth Din. But further study convinced him that a more lenient view could be justified in Jewish law.

He began preparing a compendium of historical records and rulings of earlier authorities on the touchy subject and appointed a body of legalists to weigh the issues and report their findings to him. Part of the investigative process involved representatives of the Bene Israel who were examined at length and in depth. As a result, in October 1961, the Chief Rabbinate made an historic pronouncement: "The Bene Israel were Jews and there was no evidence that could cast doubts on their family status and divorce procedures (most probably because the Bene Israel had adopted the Hindu pattern of not divorcing at all; and the question of levirate marriage did not arise, as the Bene Israel, like other Indian women, did not permit widows to remarry). The local registrants, however, were instructed to make inquiries regarding every individual applicant of the Bene Israel, whether any evidence of intermixture of non-Jews or proselytes existed, and if there was divorce in the family, it should be established that neither the parents of the applicant nor his grandparents had remarried, and that they were not within the prohibited degrees of kinship. Doubts were to be referred to the District Beth Din."[87]

There were thunderings in the Ashkenazi Orthodox camp especially in the United States.[88] The Bene Israel too resented the directives and staged a strike in 1964. Not until the prime minister, Levi Eshkol, intervened did they relent. He issued the following statement: "The Government of Israel reiterates that it regards the Bene Israel from India as Jews in every respect without any restriction or distinction, equal in their rights to all other Jews in every matter, including matters of matrimony." The matter had been largely resolved by that significant avowal.

Here was a community of Jews almost strangled by adverse outward forces but inwardly resourceful enough to be fortified against them. The circumstances of an alien environment were not allowed to confuse the fundamentals that governed their lives. The Jewish way of life was never lost sight of. They lived through all those years and found life with hope too real to be daunted, its purposes too exciting to be abandoned, until they were called back to that home from which they believed they came — the home of their fathers, the Land of Israel.

*Chapter 20*

## JEWS FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES

Few Jews from Europe were attracted to India before 1833 because the voyage via the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa took about six months and involved a variety of perils. Many sailors and travelers lost their lives in hazardous storms in the eastern Atlantic Ocean. Several were stripped of their belongings and captured by pirates on the high seas. Moreover, the East India Company had the monopoly of trade in India and jealously guarded their prescriptive right.

By an Act of Parliament in 1833, that British company had thenceforth to confine its activities solely to governing India, "the superintendence, direction and control of the civil and military government being vested in the Governor-General-in-Council." The company ceased to be a commercial body and trade between England and the Far East was thrown open to every British subject.

Passages to India, though, were still prohibitive. Through the enlightened efforts of Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India (1828–1835), the route to India by way of the Red Sea, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea was opened in 1835. This facilitated freer European trade with India. Many intelligent and adventurous Europeans came to carry on a very prosperous trade in the East. Many English Christians settled in India, some of whom married native Indians; the issue of such unions came to be known as Anglo-Indians.

Several Jews were among the newcomers. They were shrewd businessmen, acutely sensitive to trade bargains and adroit in their commercial ventures. By the local Arabic-speaking Jews, they were designated by the distinctive appellation, Ashkenazi, to differentiate them from their Sephardi co-religionists. The first mention of an Ashkenazi Jew is that of Judah Greenberg to whom a son, Solomon, was born in November, 1812.[1] The earliest European Jewish tomb in Calcutta is that of Moses Lieb b. Yehiel Zev dated 9th Tammuz 5623 (= June 23, 1863).[2]

The majority of those who settled in India until the third quarter

of the nineteenth century came to do business; most of them took an active part in the small local Jewish community. Thus, Michael Moses Wolfe, second generation in Calcutta, showed great interest in the Oseh Haised and the cemetery and participated in its administration.[3] Many married local Sephardi girls, such as second generation James Grossman who married Rachel, daughter of Howard S. Howard, July 15, 1894. Their children availed themselves of the same Jewish education. David Sassoon, son of Moses Hirsh in January, 1857, like any other Jewish boy, received instruction at the home of Eleazer Arakie.[4]

One of the most notable families of western settlers was that of Curlender, originally from the Latvian town of Kurland. The primogenitor Jacob Halevy, learned and cultured enough to be designated "Hakham" by the local Jews, died in Calcutta on 15th Tishri 5626 (= October 5, 1865). His son, Solomon Eliezer, was born in Calcutta, 21st Nisan 5609 (= April 13, 1849) married an Arabic-speaking Jewess, Khazna Mitana, and flourished in business. At their hands the poor were wisely and sympathetically dealt with, no plea for help being turned down. Solomon Curlender died on 8th Tammuz 5666 (= July 1, 1906). Their children, Hyeem, Aaron, Joseph and Meyer continued the family business and expanded it. Soon they were to become one of Calcutta Jewry's leading members and philanthropists.

Western Jews were not accustomed to living in a community without the traditional "Rav" of the European Kehillah. There was not even a school for Jewish children. At the three-quarter mark of the nineteenth century Ephraim Judah Levensohn, of distinguished rabbinic antecedents, expressed gratification at the proposal to start one in 1873.[5] He later wrote a poem upbraiding the leadership for being sluggish in response to the proposal.[6] He became embroiled in a bitter controversy which deteriorated into an acrimonious feud between Ashkenazi and Sephardi, though he claimed to be descended from Sephardim.[7] He died on January 1, 1882.[8]

In 1874, a Rumanian Jew took up the cudgels for adult education. Asher Isaiah Halevy fumed at the community for neglecting it and derided self-appointed religious leaders. "There is no one to give decisions on laws that require only a Beth Din of laymen. Laxity is apparent in the laws of Kashrut, Niddah and Mikvah, and in this city the Torah is almost forgotten. If some one should challenge me saying, Who appointed you ruler and judge over us? I answer: In matters of profanation, one respects no persons, however great. 'In the place where there is no man, try to be manly.' "[9] An account

of his journeys and writings is the subject of the latter section of this chapter.

In the wake of Russian pogroms of the 1880s, letters were addressed by individual Russian Jews to the Jewish community of Calcutta soliciting financial aid. One such letter[10] was sent to E. M. D. Cohen, who was appointed treasurer of the appeal. It described the individual and communal tribulations, the impoverishment and affliction suffered by the Jewish community of Russia and the ruthless terror and wanton destruction carried out by the Czarist regime.

Jewish refugees swelled Ashkenazi ranks in Calcutta. Some came via other countries like Palestine and Syria where the poor economic standard impelled the travelers to move further east. Some made their presence known if they wanted the sponsorship of the Jewish community in opening a store or selling wine,[11] or promoting a medical practice.[12]

Others continued the steady trickle of western immigration. The following is an advertisement that appeared in the Hebrew-Arabic paper, *Maggid Mesharim* in 1891:[13] "I am an Ashkenazi born in Damascus and have lived in Jerusalem thirty years. Because of economic pressures, I uprooted myself therefrom and now reside at Ajmeer, an important business center. Here I have entered into a partnership with a God-fearing and pious Jewish merchant for the sale of raisins for the manufacture of wine. The Rabbis of Jerusalem vouch for my integrity. Those who want wine without any doubt about its Kashrut may get it from me. — J. H. Blank."

So many Ashkenazim came that the local Jewish community apportioned a part of the cemetery for the newcomer's exclusive use. At the turn of the century there were about 150 of them in Calcutta.

Besides refugees and businessmen, Jews from western countries were in Government service. In the earlier days Edward Goldsmith entered the service of the East India Co. in 1832. His system of revenue and assessment was adopted by several Indian provincial governments and native states.[14]

Though not directly related to Calcutta Jews, it is worth noting that the Marquis of Reading, whose first visit to India was as an apprentice on a trading vessel, returned as Viceroy in 1921. His term of office witnessed the ascendancy of Gandhi as the leader of the Swaraj (or freedom) party within the Indian Congress that ultimately won independence for India. It also marked the beginning of the Indian civil disobedience movement, passive resistance so effective in getting the British to quit. Lord Reading retired as Viceroy in 1926. He is remembered as one of the greatest Chief Executives of Britain in India.

The Kisch family had a distinguished record in India. Descended from a Moravian family, Hermann (Naphtali Joseph) Kisch was Post-Master-General of Bengal at least between 1886–1888.[15] In 1888, a son was born to him in Darjeeling, the summer center of the Bengal Government. A Mohel, Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay, was dispatched from Calcutta to perform the circumcision which took place in Government House, Darjeeling on August 30, 1888. The child was named Jacob Frederick.[16] Upon retiring from the Indian Civil Service, he interested himself in public social work as a member of the executive committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association.[17]

Frederick Kisch was educated in England, returned to India and served in the Department of Public Works. On the outbreak of World War I, he was sent to France with the Indian Corps. Later he served in Mesopotamia where he was wounded, threatened with blindness and retired from active service. After the war, he spent nine years as head of the Political Department of the British Government in Jerusalem. From 1923–31, he was a member of the Zionist Executive there. Kisch saw action in the Second World War, too, with the rank of Brigadier, the highest rank held by a Jew in the British Forces and Chief Engineer to the British Eighth Army. He met his death in Tunisia toward the close of the war when his car hit a land mine.[18]

Sir Cecil Kisch, a brother, was Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the India Office and also Secretary to the Finance Department of that office for twelve years from 1921–1933.

A. L. Blank was Justice of the Calcutta High Court in the war years. Previously he was Additional Judge of the same court.[19] He attended Maghen David Synagogue on festivals and anniversaries.

Among the medical men of repute who stand out was Professor W. M. Haffkine, founder of the Haffkine Institute in Bombay in 1896. When cholera in epidemic form broke out in India, Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, (1884–1888) invited Haffkine to help combat it. Fear, born of simplicity, made native Indians at first shy away from the comparatively primitive immunization. Later they hailed him as "the white magician." Many more people who failed to take the injection died than those who did.

For twenty years he headed the Government Plague Research Institute (later named for him). Haffkine showed that heroism in the laboratory was as meritorious as heroism on the battlefield. Lord Lister had this to say about him: "The good done by Haffkine reached beyond the saving of thousands of lives, for it convinced the people of India that the Government was trying its best for them. Thus his

work tended to break down the barrier that existed between the British and the people of India."[20] In 1960, the Institute was the largest antibacterial vaccine manufacturing concern in Asia with a potential capacity of more than five to six million milligrams of vaccine per month.[21]

An observant Jew, Haffkine bequeathed his entire fortune to the teaching of Jewish religious tradition. While in Calcutta in 1910, he participated in the historic meeting called to decide the future of Neveh Shalome Synagogue.[22]

Pious and well-versed in religious ceremonial and law, Mordecai S. Toster was in Calcutta from 1923. Born in Melbourne, Australia, he migrated at an early age to Palestine and worked there as a farmer in Mishmar Hayarden near Safed. On his settlement in Calcutta, he solicited funds for Old Age Homes in the Holy Land. The Homes instituted a project under which memorial prayers were recited through the first year after the death of the donor or his nominee and subsequently every year on his anniversary. A genial and likeable person and the son of a rabbi, he scorned pomp and the parading of piety, loved simplicity and genuine religious observance. He died in Calcutta in 1950.

One of the rare examples of a Western Jew who devoted extraordinary sympathy and philanthropy on the local community was Oscar Josephson, originally from Russia. He married a lady from the Eastern community with exceptional business acumen, who guided her husband from small beginnings. E. Meyer originally held the bulk of the shares in one of Calcutta's leading hotels, The Great Eastern. These were unloaded gradually onto the open market and Josephson, guided by his wife, picked them up. He became Managing Director and gradually the Hotel became an extremely prosperous concern.

A very staunch Zionist, he was a regular worshipper at Bethel Synagogue. When his wife died in 1941, he decided to retire after the war and live in Palestine. He foresaw economic restrictions following the imminent independence of India. He recommended that the Jewish community look for its future in the direction of Palestine. But he died in Calcutta in December, 1953. It was believed that the bulk of his estate was willed to Israel.[23]

Occasionally there were instances of local men marrying Ashkenazi women. Edward Judah was one. His wife was a dynamic personality, full of enthusiasm for social service. Educated at St. Paul's school, London, Hiedelburg and Frankfurt, she was an accomplished intellectual. Vice-President of several organizations, she was awarded

the Red Cross Medal in 1918 and the Order of Mercy in 1922.

European refugees from Hitler's onslaught made their way to every previously-founded Jewish community they could reach. Thousands settled in remote parts of the world — India, Afghanistan, Iran, Kenya, Rhodesia, North Africa and China. Most of them were specialists in varied professions and found no difficulty earning a very decent living. They contributed chiefly to the medical and commercial fields. About two hundred settled in Calcutta.

While most of these were professed Jews, a small number were what may be termed "Jewish Christians." One of these, in a job application, identified himself as follows: Origin — Jewish, Religion — Christianity. The local Jewish community did not leave a stone unturned to succor the newcomers, sometimes despite their affiliations, though it had a formidable task, dealing with indigenous poverty.[24]

Hans Glas, an architect from Vienna, was among the refugees. Years previously he was offered a lucrative post by the Calcutta municipality but turned it down. Fate, however, played queer tricks. Bearing the offer in mind at the inception of the Nazi brutality, he made his way to Calcutta where he became an architect of distinction.[25]

Dr. L. J. Tajkef, an eminent opthalmic surgeon, became a major force in the local Zionist movement. Imbued with a dynamic and attractive personality he guided the destinies of Zionism in Calcutta and inspired support for the newly-found State of Israel.

A discerning businessman was Max Friedlander, one of the few of the immigrants who was an observant Jew. His office was closed on the Jewish Sabbath and festivals though most other commercial concerns transacted business. He served on the Boards of several communal institutions.

We might include here mention of an institution — the Anglo-Jewish Association — branches of which were formed in Indian cities at the behest of the Jews of London. Two British Jews conceived the idea of starting an organization on lines similar to those of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris, but an opportunity did not present itself till after the Franco-German War of 1870–71. "It was time that a body so prosperous, influential and sympathetic as the English Jews should take its stand by the side of the other sections of Jewry, and share in a movement full of promise for the welfare of the Jewish race. Its objects were the promotion of social, moral and intellectual progress among Jews and the obtaining of protection for those who may suffer in consequence of being Jews."[26] While it worked in harmony with the Alliance, it maintained its independence.

The Anglo-Jewish Association was instituted formally on July 2, 1871. Immediate efforts were made to obtain members from the United Kingdom and the British colonies. Even before a branch was established in Calcutta, Moses Mayohas appealed for funds on its behalf in July, 1877.[27] In October of the same year its aims and objects were published in the local Jewish press. Mayohas became the Association's local correspondent and treasurer.[28]

When the persecution of Jews in Russia in the 1880's put great pressure on the organization, fund-raising was stepped up. David F. Schloss, a well-known British lawyer and member of the central committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association, arrived in India to found branches at the Jewish centers of Bombay, Cochin and Calcutta. Coming to Calcutta after successful efforts in Bombay in December, 1882,[29] he addressed a public meeting of Calcutta Jewry on February 22, 1883 at Bethel Synagogue chaired by Elia D. J. Ezra at which he outlined the objects and achievements of the Association. A member paid five shillings or three rupees or multiples thereof. The following were the officers on the first committee[30]:

Elia D. J. Ezra, President
Elia S. Gubbay, Herman Kisch } Vice Presidents
(Assistant Secretary of the Government of Bengal)
Joseph Elia Ezra, Treasurer
Rahamim M. Cohen, Hony. Secretary.

The first list of fifty-nine members with a total contribution of Rs. 424.00 was published after a month.[33] At the first annual meeting it was announced that Rs.936.00 (£75.18sh. 2d.) was collected from 119 subscribers including some in Rangoon, Mandalay, Toungoo (in Burma), Singapore and Hongkong. Joseph Ezra resigned the treasureship as he intended leaving for London. David Aaron Gubbay was elected in his place. At the proposal of R. M. Cohen to have a different secretary every year, Aaron Abraham Cohen was elected.

The local branch acted on information to alleviate the oppression against a Jew. E. M. D. Cohen brought up in *Paerah* the matter of an Iraqi Jew, Mordecai Nissim, in the city of Hasa, near Baghdad.[32] It appeared that as a result of the accidental death of a Moslem in Nissim's store during his absence from the store, which he had left in the care of his eldest son, the Moslem populace plundered it and almost killed the boy, who was arrested and languished in prison. His younger brother died of shock and his parents and sisters were closeted indoors for fear of their lives. An appeal for Indian Jewry's

intervention was launched. The local branch wrote to the British Consul in Baghdad to take steps to end the suffering of that family. The attention of the British headquarters in London and that of the Bombay branch were called to move in the matter.[33]

In 1885, a case of practical import was discussed. Moses Abeasis presented the case printed in the *Times* of London of the ill-treatment of a British Jew from Calcutta, imprisoned in Mandalay by the Burmese Government. The Secretary was authorized to investigate the matter and report to the Committee.[34] A favorable reference to Calcutta was made in the annual central report. After Leeds, England, Calcutta's contribution was highest.[35]

But interest waned subsequently. There was no quorum for the third annual meeting in February, 1886. Moses Abeasis was appointed Secretary in the postponed meeting in June.[36] Less than half of the previous year's sum total was sent to London (= £ 44.1 sh. 8d.). Many Ashkenazim were included in the list — Grossman, Feinberg, Abramovitz, Holzman, Shragar.[37]

No further reports were published as no meetings were called. The organization slowly tapered off. In 1900, the Bombay branch represented India.[38]

With fading European popularity consequent upon Indian Independence and the failure of self-perpetuation, Western Jewish numbers dwindled and were all but extinct in 1970. Besides, in a community which was itself numerically fast reducing, the European element could hardly be expected to stay on.

It remains to deal with an extraordinary Jew from the West whose qualities, varied experiences and exotic place of settlement makes him the subject of an exclusive treatment.

## *II. From Galicia to the Himalayas*

For most people there is a place they can call home. It varies in size according to their requirements and means, and affords the maximum comfort. Some have two locales and migrate between them seasonally but seldom stray far from the route.

Among the more interesting persons that make the exceptions are inveterate travelers. Their proclivity for wandering takes them far afield. Their restless hearts and inquiring minds made a challenging adventure out of life. For such people, one irresistable objective is the romance of the Orient. Thus, Jews like Benjamin of Tudela and Petachiah of Regensberg were colorful personalities to whom we owe much of our scant knowledge of the conditions of Jewish life in the East in their days.

A vast majority of these wayfarers return, even after a prolonged sojourn abroad. But there is the occasional traveler who will never again see his native habitation. He might have been enchanted by the beauty of a country or fascinated by the traditions of its people. Or, like Asher Isaiah Halevy,[39] might have found a locale best suited for withdrawal within himself. The Jew from Galicia chose the town of Darjeeling, about seven thousand feet up in the Himalayas, the imposing chain of mountains on the northern borders of India.

Who was this Ashkenazi Jew who meandered into the uttermost parts of the Sephardi world? It whets our appetite to know that he was a Hebrew poet and philosopher, historian and liturgist, essayist and scientist. Let us unfold his dramatic story.

His father was indolent and poor and lived largely on the earnings of his wife. Dogged by poverty and insecurity, Asher was handed over to people who proved very unkind and would have curtailed his freedom and influenced his religious beliefs had he, then only seven years old, not miraculously escaped. The family moved southeast to Wishnitz in the district of Bukovina, on the outskirts of the little town of Kuty, the birthplace of the famed Baal Shem Tov. Asher was left in Gorlice in the care of his teacher, who, unfortunately, lived only a short while. The boy was obliged to join his family and once again was subject to the severe ill-treatment of his father. His sad predicament was relieved temporarily by a sympathetic man who took him over to his home, but Asher's parents would not permit his living there long. He was put to work collecting wood chips from the streets and dumps, till in the middle of winter he was ordered out of his father's home and took refuge in the Beth Midrash. A widow felt sorry for him and gave him refuge in her home, but she lived only three months and thereafter Asher went back to the Beth Midrash and "God provided me every morning with bread and fruits to eat."

One cold morning, at the age of eleven, hungry and tired, he made one last attempt to seek his family, but his father refused to recognize him, his grandfather and other relatives closed their door to him. A stranger provided him with food and drink, clothes and lodging overnight at a hotel. His host took him the following day to a Sopher (scribe) who was asked to keep the boy with him and teach him his trade. But there was more bitterness in store for young Asher till illness overtook him and he was taken to a hospital.

From clues in his writings, we deduce he was in the Rumanian army for a while.

Despite these unusually luckless experiences, he received an ex-

ceptionally good Talmudic education. At the same time, he absorbed all the secular knowledge that came his way. But he was apparently dissatisfied with the intellectual climate of his environment and craved for the centers of learning in Salonica, Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey), Aleppo in Syria and Baghdad in Iraq. From what we gather in his writings, he was disillusioned at these places too.

He left Wishnitz for good at the age of seventeen and traversed many countries, making a living by writing Torah scrolls. An account of his travels is preserved in his autobiographical *Toledoth Asher Halevy*. Unfortunately, only seven chapters are extant. Missing is the description of his initial wanderings in Europe and the later, perhaps more interesting, stages of his long and wearisome journey which ultimately brought him to Calcutta. There is, therefore, no knowing why he terminated his itinerary in eastern India and did not proceed further. We may presume that, having visited Darjeeling, not far from Calcutta, he was enraptured by its natural beauty and made up his mind to settle there to fulfill his literary ambitions.

In Iasi, Moldavia, we pick up the available thread of our traveler's course which abruptly stops at Smyrna, including en route a few cities on the east coast of the Black Sea and the northern and eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea. Let us sample a few of his experiences which span about seven years and, like almost all of his literary works, were reported in Hebrew.

Our author was accomplished enough in rabbinics to have been offered at the age of eighteen the office of rabbi of the town of Tulcea, Rumania, in 1867. His free spirit and the annoyance with the community forced him to relinquish his post after serving briefly, in favor of an old man who was on his way to the Holy Land. The man paid Halevy ten liras in consideration.

In the worthy tradition of previous Jewish travelers, Halevy depicts and evaluates conditions of Jewish life in the cities he visited, describes economic and social peculiarities and furnishes some statistics. Here are a few illustrations.

In Kamenitz, Podolia, Halevy ran into a man discharged from the Russian army. He was a victim of child-lifters in the days of Czar Nicholas I (1825–55) and had lost all recollection of his relatives over a period of thirty years. Halevy helped him to locate his father.

Our traveler speaks of a Hungarian Jew with the Turkish name of Suleiman Pasha, who occupied the post of Governor of Varna on the Black Sea, now in Bulgaria but then under Turkish rule. There are references to people of Jewish descent holding responsible, high offices in the Rumanian army and Jews disguised as Rumanian peasants throughout the country of Moldavia.

This is what he says about the Jewish community of Galatz (modern Galati), a border town between Rumania and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. "There are many Jews in this place, about 400 families. The Jews are divided in their religious views and are hostile to one another, as in all the other cities of Moldavia. This enmity is caused by the Tsaddikim, who increase and multiply in this country like fish, so that almost every set of ten Jews has one Tsaddik, who presses out their blood and fat, leading them to confusion. Consequently, a city with thirty Jewish families has three Rabbis and ten Shohatim, who hate each other and lead a life of strife. In addition to these, there are certain elements who are styled Maskilim, fools who are considered sages, heaping coals on the fire, making a laughingstock of the people of Israel in the eyes of the nations. This city, Galatz, has Shohatim as many as the sand of the sea and Rabbis as many as the stars of heaven. I endeavored to make peace between them so that they should not disgrace God's Name with their follies. For this city is full to overflowing with wicked Greeks, Armenians, Bulgars, Gipsies, all of them outcasts of the human race, united to rise against the Jews who dwell among them. Some Jews try with all their power and might to assimilate with them by aping their behavior and conduct, but without success, for the cruel leopard rises against his fellow leopard. Even if the Jew is proud like a Pole, impious like a Rumanian, foolish like an Armenian, cruel like a Bulgarian, plundering like a Serbian, thieving like a Gipsy, lazy like a Turk, and a swindler like a Greek, all the same they hate him with the utmost hatred, for every artist hates his rival. In this city of Galatz all these are united. Not one of these vices is missing, therefore is the Jew-hatred here greater than in all the other cities."

The next extract depicts Jewish life in Adrianople (modern Edirne, Turkey): ". . . one of the largest cities in the land. There are two thousand Jewish families in her midst. Some of the Jews are following the paths of Torah and commandments, but there is no knowledge of the Torah among them. There I saw the remnants of Sabbethai Zvi's sect who hate the Jews with all their heart, believe more in the Zohar than in the Law of Moses; they differ in their conduct from us and are very little in faith. For any slight reason, for instance, as a result of a quarrel with a friend or relative, they change their religion and adopt Islam, like the founder of their sect. Further, I saw that even Turks adhere to this false prophet and make a deity of him. Finally, there are twenty Karaite families in Adrianople. Their religion and conduct are more Turkish than Jewish; nevertheless they pride themselves on being better, more faithful and true

Jews than we are." He promises to give a fuller account of the dissension between the Rabbanites and Karaites after arriving at Smyrna but that portion of his biography is lost.

In a place called Shumla, most of the two hundred Jewish families were Sephardim, economically well-off but ignorant of secular studies. Striking is his account of a boy "who is wise, a Maskil, and a philosopher. Day and night he studies philosophy, so that his father and mother are afraid lest their boy will become mentally unbalanced owing to his industry and the great strain of his wisdom. I went to see this boyish philosopher, Maskil and awe-inspiring sage. I recognized at once that his arrogance is much greater than his wisdom. He had revealed to me that he was an atheist and will be called a second Spinoza, and boasted of being able to write Hebrew and Spanish. He sent some articles, he claimed, to the editors of the *Maggid* and the *Lebanon,* who, however, were not clever enough to recognize the charm of his style and the splendor of his wisdom. The parents asked me what I thought of the greatness of their son. I told them the best thing for them to do is to call in a good medical practitioner, who could heal him of his follies and stupidity." Halevy finds fault with both Hassidim and Maskilim.

The autobiography stops at a point so close to the Holy Land that the reader eagerly awaits a report on his possible visit there. But his writings have no specific reference to it. They are, however, full of the author's fervent hope of a pilgrimage.

Asher Halevy's itinerary could not have lasted more than seven years. In 1873, when he was twenty-four, he owned a small shop in Burma. (Today Burma is an independent country; from 1862, however, a major part, and in 1886 the whole, of it was included in the Indian Empire under British rule.) Soon thereafter, he moved to Calcutta, then the capital of that sub-continent. In the epigraph to his philosophical essays, completed in August, 1888, he mentions that he labored in a tannery in Calcutta "for dry bread as my daily sustenance."

He stayed aloof from the internal strife then initiated between two local synagogues and made no attempt to reconcile their differences as he had done on his journey through Europe. He recoiled from taking sides, as his goals were then far removed from the exigencies of the daily life of the community. On one occasion he refers to the Calcutta community with disdain. He was wary of those "who knew what was in my heart more than I did." He recalled with regret the disappointing response he had gotten to his spirited support for the start of a Jewish school.[40]

He was interested in the Jewish Community of Calcutta only to the extent that it expanded his already phenomenal knowledge. He learned about their countries of origin, their customs and rites. He remarks for instance, that when he arrived in Calcutta he noticed on Purim every man, woman and child played cards and participated in other games of chance. He inquired if it was customary for them to have a sumptuous meal and exchange gifts as was done in the West. That was not their custom per se they replied, but "if one wanted to send gifts to the poor, he could." He then referred with nostaglia, to the religious customs and habits of Jewish communities of European extraction.

During his sojourn in India he must have toured the length and breadth of the country, presumably with the intention of gaining more information not only about the geography of the country but also about its religions, peoples and customs. A summary of his findings is given in a book called *The Himalaya Mountains* which is much more than a dissertation on physical features. He was intrigued by the religious distinctions between Buddhists and Moslems, primitive and more cultured Hindus. He compared rites and usages of the natives with those of Judaism and wrote a separate book entitled *The Religions of India,* but only a few fragments are still extant.

Our author finally settled in the town of Darjeeling, one of the gateways to the Himalayas. Only a few hundred miles from Calcutta and in the same province as that capital city, it was a summer resort of well-to-do Europeans and affluent local Jews who wished to escape the oppressive heat of the low lying areas of the province of Bengal. Three or four Jewish families owned houses there. The temperature ranges in summer from a low of 40°F at night to a high of about 65°F in the day, slightly cooler than Calcutta's winter. It was the summer headquarters of the Government of Bengal under the British who developed it from an isolated village to a prosperous town. Before the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, it was the center of a rich and evergrowing trade between India and the inland mountainous States of Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet. The scenery and landscape make Darjeeling perhaps one of the most beautiful spots in the world. A neighborhood hill called Tiger Hill (not derived from the incidence of tigers!), an hour's drive away, is the favorite haunt of tourists who hail from all over the world to witness a perfect sunrise when the dawn is clear.

Asher Halevy, however, chose Darjeeling as a permanent home after thousands of miles of travel, not for its material fascinations and enticements but for its serenity and beauty. In Calcutta, he was for-

tunate enough to have won favor with his employer, Moses Abeasis, a cultured Tunisian Jew, who found in Halevy a congenial conversationalist and learned scholar. Abeasis once took his employee as a companion to Darjeeling. Our author was intrigued by that place and decided to set up residence there. Still pursuing the petty wage-earning activity of a cobbler, his impecuniosity was a proof of the biblical truism, "man lives not by bread alone." In this outlying district, at the fringe of civilization, and a neat distance from even the nearest Jewish community, he wrote on philosophy and religion, poetry and biblical commentary, biography and personal reminiscences. All of his writings display wonderful evidence of deep learning in secular and Jewish subjects, meticulous perseverence and great industry, accomplishment in style and enthusiasm in permanent values. Even for a man with his background and education, the prolific product of his pen is delightful. When we consider, however, his rare literary achievements, many of which were completed in this isolated outpost, against a background of the complete absence of reference works and weighed down by abject poverty and frequent illness, Asher Halevy's genius becomes obvious.

At the age of sixty, Halevy was a tired and sick man. He had then just completed his commentary to the Books of Psalms and Esther and perhaps to the undated one on the Song of Songs. The enormity of his physical aliments overpowered the gifted mind and determined soul. A kind-hearted Jew chanced upon him, ill and emaciated, took him to Calcutta and admitted him into the Ezra Hospital where he died on January 3, 1912. He was buried at the Jewish Cemetery in Calcutta. The following is inscribed in Hebrew on his tombstone[41]: "Here lies the humble, honored and learned scholar Asher Isaiah the son of Moses Isaac the son of Hyeem Ze-eb Halevy, born in Small Gorlice, Austria, and passed away on 13th Tebeth 5672, aged about 63 years."

Much of Asher Halevy's manuscripts have been preserved. In Darjeeling lived a Yemenite Jew who had come to love the hill town as much as Halevy. He was Mari Yahya b. Abraham Hyeem known as "Hakim" (doctor) by the Jews of Calcutta and the natives of Darjeeling. He "specialized" in the treatment of rheumatism by administering the fat of snakes and leopards. He had come to Darjeeling the same way Halevy did. The wealthy and charitable Mozelle Ezra would visit Darjeeling in the summer and bring the "Hakim" as her Shohet. Following one of these visits, he did not return to Calcutta but took a wife from among the natives, after having her con-

verted to Judaism. A part of his manuscripts Halevy handed over to this Yemenite Jew. A second portion he gave to a widow in Calcutta who had attended on him during his fatal illness in Calcutta. Both portions found their way to the Sassoon Library at Letchworth, England, through the painstaking efforts of David Solomon Sassoon, of blessed memory.[42]

It is but fitting that this very unusual Jew should be remembered in a chronicle of the Calcutta Jewish community, close to which he produced the fruit of a lifetime's wandering and observation.

*Chapter 21*

# TIES WITH THE HOLY LAND

## *I. The Emissary Movement*

The most effective architects and builders of spiritual bridges between the Land of Israel and the Dispersion were the hundreds of men called *Shaliah* (messenger, envoy) who left their homes in Palestine "to seek their brethren" outside the Land, and, notwithstanding hardships of travel, danger to life and death itself, instilled a deeper faith and higher morale in their co-religionists. At the same time, they fulfilled their own purposes and that of the communities they represented. In this two-way process, when communications were so very different from what they were to become, they learned about the manners, culture and institutions of Jews far distant from Palestine. Many set down their experiences in writing, thus providing one of the main sources for the Jewish historian.

The envoy had a responsible mission; he represented his country and community and therefore had to exemplify the best in Jewish learning and scholarship, for his prospective listeners and supporters were aware that "out of Zion shall come forth the Law." Preference was for older men who often knuckled under the rigors of travel, the varying climatic conditions prevailing in the countries they visited and even encounters with highway robbers. Of some 850 envoys sent out of the Holy Land in more than three hundred years, no less than eighty-five died in the course of their sacred mission.[1] At least six are known to have been buried in Calcutta.[2]

A resident of Palestine would undertake the strains and stresses of long and enervating assignments for one of two reasons or both: an urgent need of his local community which could be brought about by a variety of circumstances — political unrest, famine, epidemic — all resulting in an economic stress, a rise in the cost of living or high rents charged by Arab landlords, or prohibitive interest rates. Alternatively, he may have been prompted by prospects of an improvement in his own impoverished state, for the Shaliah received, in most cases, a third of the amount raised by him. Some of them had no other

means of subsistence. Shneor Zalman b. Menahem Mendele of Hebron, for instance, who was a Shaliah to India in 1858, received a letter from his wife in which she chides him for allegedly wanting to return with his mission of three and one-half years incomplete — for they had counted on it to repay a loan of 3500 grush they owed the community for their daughter's dowry.[3]

Often a Shaliah was sent to his native country or city because of his knowledge of the local language, mentality of the people and their cultural preferences. This, however, could not be uniformly practised. Some of those who were sent to India were Arabic-speaking, but the majority were of European stock and conversed only in Hebrew, as the local people knew no Yiddish or Ladino. *Paerah*[4] related a case of a pair — father and son who arrived in Calcutta together on the same mission. Moses Israel Melamed, at the age of eighty-eight, and his son Meir, claimed to be descended from King David and, representing Hebron in 1887, explained the exigencies of their hometown. The older man had twenty dependents including eight of Meir's children.

A serious but unavoidable contingency was the coincident presence in the same host city of two Shaliahs representing different Palestine communities. Thus a Shaliah of Safed might have to compete with one from Hebron with unfortunate results for both. The total amount garnered was necessarily reduced. Whether or not there was an unseemly clash between the individuals concerned, demands, within a short period of at first three or four communities in the Holy Land, on the heels of other requests on behalf of institutions like the local school and welfare projects, could put a severe strain on the generosity of donors in the diaspora.

To overcome this problem somewhat, the Four Cities (Arba Aratsoth) with religio-historical associations for which Jews outside the Holy Land felt a particular emotional attachment, received fixed allocations. These were: *Jerusalem,* for the grave of Simon the Just and the Matriarch Rachel buried near the holy city; *Safed,* for the tomb of Rabbi Simon b. Yohai buried in nearby Meron; *Hebron,* for the graves of the Patriarchs; and *Tiberias,* for the grave of Rabbi Meir Baal Haness. The latter was most popular with Jews in the Orient for the mystical associations surrounding the person of Rabbi Meir, often receiving special contributions from people believing in his miraculous efficacy.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most commonly accepted pattern of apportionment divided funds into twenty-eight parts: Jerusalem 11, Safed 7, Hebron 6, Tiberias 4. Each city or com-

munity, however, compiled its own ratio. Calcutta adopted a percentage basis for the distribution of the equivalent of the half-shekel: Jerusalem 28%, Safed 68% Hebron 4%, Tiberias, nil. Tiberias was, however not left out, as the tomb of Rabbi Meir was well patronized throughout the year, and funds for it were collected by a Gabai chosen from amongst the community.

The "four cities" were not the only bodies whose needs had to be met. Private institutions too appealed for generosity. A mystical group of Hassidim, called "Bethel" formed in 1637 by Rabbi Gedaliah Hayun in Jerusalem, raised funds for a Yeshiba and synagogue which used the ritual of Isaac Luria. Also in Jerusalem was instituted an organization for medical care, Hebrath Bikkur Holim, which assigned its first Shaliah in 1819.[5]

Apart from requests from local communities, emergencies or other special circumstances demanded special relief. The Ashkenazi communities launched a drive called "Bathay Mayhaysah" (Houses of Refuge) for erecting dwelling places in the vicinity of the Temple in Jerusalem, or synagogues at the grave site of Simon the Righteous or Rabbi Meir Baal Haness. So, Shaliahs went on their way to all parts of the world from all parts of the Holy Land. The usually clannish distinctions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi was not maintained when an Ashkenazi Shaliah, for example, was sent to, and well-received by, a Sephardi community; and Calcutta was no exception though occasional instances of discrimination did occur.

One very significant reason for the dispersion of Shaliahs far and wide was not contingent on monetary considerations. It was the search for the so-called "Ten Tribes" who got "lost" when the Kingdom of Assyria, way back in the eighth century B.C.E., overran the Israelite Kingdom (then comprised of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel) and took its people captive, fanning them out to the length and breadth of the then vast Assyrian Empire.

These tribes, however, did not fade out of the minds and hearts of the Jewish people. A tradition kept alive the possibility that the captive tribes were somewhere living as a unit and that at sometime, probably as a harbinger of the messianic era, they would emerge from their habitat. The exact locale of their reclusion has been the subject of much conjecture and controversy involving the River Sambation, believed to have been crossed by exiled tribes.[6]

Eldad Ha-Dani, a ninth century traveler, was the first to popularize that tradition. According to his thesis, the Sambation surrounds the land not of the ten tribes but of the Children of Moses who have there a powerful kingdom. Basing his legend on a Midrashic pas-

sage[7] he avowed that the River consists entirely of sand and stones which keep adrift. Here is his idea in his own words:

> "The Bene Moshe are surrounded by a river like a fortress which, without water, rolls sand and stones. . . . On Friday at sunset a cloud envelops the river (in another version, the river is surrounded by fire) so that no man is able to cross it. At the close of the Sabbath the river resumes its torrent of stones and sand. . . . We (on this side of the river) may talk to them (on the other side) but neither can they come to us nor can we go to them."[8]

Many possible locations have been assigned Sambation. One that is most intriguing for us is suggested by Abraham Farisol, 15th/16th century Italian scholar and geographer, who says that the River is in Upper India, higher up than the city of Calcutta.[9] It is not surprising then that the Calcutta Hebrew printer, Eleazar Arakie, printed the above-quoted account of Eldad Ha-Dani in 1856.[10]

A Shaliah, called "Hakham" in countries of Arabic influence and received the title שד"ר (שלוחא דרבנן), arrived in the city usually unannounced. Occasionally, advance notice was received from his previous "port of call." His arrival made a great impact upon local residents, some of whom looked forward to his visit for an answer to questions on Jewish law or the performance of a religious ceremony like a divorce or the issuance of authorization for Shehitah. Diarists made a note of his arrival and departure and his activities in the city. Eleazar Arakie made mention of no fewer than twenty Shaliahs in as many years (1843–1863).

The Palestinean envoy usually was lodged at the home of a wealthy resident or the Gabai (treasurer) of his appeal. Calcutta was not as fortunate as Bombay which boasted a specially-erected dwelling-place for visitors, built by the Sassoons alongside the Synagogue, but homes seemed to be wide open. These facilities made it possible for the distinguished guests to prolong their stay for the attainment of maximal response to their campaign.

In at least a couple of instances, however, the Calcutta community was reportedly remiss in its characteristic hospitality. When Jacob Sapir, Shaliah of Jerusalem, arrived in Calcutta in August, 1860 he found there another Shaliah, from Jerusalem, Rabbi Ephraim, who occupied a room, presumably in a small hotel. Sapir moved into an adjoining room, to which he was evidently directed by a member of the community, "For," says Sapir, "it has not been long since the dissuetude of the beautiful custom practised by them hitherto

of taking a Shaliah or reputed Hakham to one of the houses of the rich, where he found comfort, respect and honor and where, during his stay in the city till the culmination of his blessed mission, he would enjoy the abundance of his host. The responsibility for such liberality would rotate among the rich. But now that practice has been abandoned — no one takes you into his house and visitors are expected to fend for themselves."[11]

Jacob Sapir's disillusionment did not last too long. During the festival of Sukkoth, Eleazar Arakie extended his generous hospitality to him. At his home "I found both physical comfort and spiritual refreshment for I relished talking with him after his daily labors on matters of Torah and wisdom of which he had a double portion."[12]

On his sojourn, the Shaliah was ambassador of his country and his cause, and carried with him suitable credentials. A letter addressed to all the communities on his itinerary introduced his mission, the reasons for it and the aims he wished to attain. It dealt with the excellence of the Land of Israel, the virtues of charity, the eminence of the host city, its rabbis and leaders upon whom blessings were lavished. Finally came an importunate plea for generosity.

A second communication was directed specifically to the elders and wealthy on whom the success or failure of the mission depended. An important detail here was the amounts donated individually on the previous Shaliah's visit.

His official position was further reinforced by a legal document which would remove the last vestige of doubt about the genuineness of the visitor from the minds of the intending donors. Some communities would have such implicit faith in the Shaliahs that they would not demand or scrutinize their credentials.[13] This indifference sometimes led to fraud.

From the point of view of the senders, the Shaliah was on a commercial venture and carried with him portable ledgers and official receipts. On his return home he would render an account, hand over his collections from which expenses en route were deducted and draw his dues, if his contract required it. Many were honorary Shaliahs.

The initial public viewing of the Shaliah was in the synagogue on the Sabbath following his arrival in the city, when he would address the congregation. If there were two synagogues in a city, as in Calcutta for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, he worshipped in the second synagogue and preached there the following Sabbath. It was customary for the visitor to deliver the initial sermon at Bethel (inaugurated 1856) and the second at Neveh Shalome (the older synagogue). Hakham Abraham Hyeem Shababo, Shaliah of

Safed, Lehem Lar-e-bim ("Bread for the Hungry") in 1880, however, did not follow the accepted practice, perhaps because he was under the erroneous impression that appearance at one synagogue was sufficient to present his case. His premise was not wholly unjustifiable as the Neveh Shalome Synagogue building was not too attractive. But it is more probable that he was misled by opposing synagogal factions bearing the germs of inter-synagogue strife which split the community wide open within the next few years.[14] Thereafter a note in *Paerah* read, "No Shaliah will be honored by Neveh Shalome if he does not preach in Neveh Shalome."[15]

If an important personage died during the Shaliah's sojourn in the city, the lot of delivering the eulogy fell upon him. Several Shaliahs would address the congregations that gathered at the home of the mourners on the 7th, 22nd and 30th days after burial, as was customary among Arabic-speaking Jews.[16]

We mentioned above that the medium used by the visiting preachers was Hebrew, the language common to both Palestine and the diaspora with its babel of tongues. Had it not been for the Jewish people preserving Hebrew through devotion to the prayer book, the Bible and rabbinic literature, the emissary movement would have hardly been possible. Doubtless the service of an interpreter was required from time to time. But these were rare occasions and the Hebrew diction of Ashkenazi and Sephardi presented but a minor problem. When one considers, however, the vast differences in pronunciation of Hebrew from Europe to the Far East, and the varied backgrounds of preachers and listeners, it is astonishing how the Shaliahs ever succeeded. They presented Hebrew as a living language to people who were accustomed to using it only in study and prayer.

Having made his presence felt, the Shaliah set about trying to achieve the object of his mission — fund-raising. He garnered the communal monies earmarked for the Holy Land and accumulated since his predecessor's visit, appointed a new Gabai (treasurer) or confirmed the incumbent in office, went on a house-to-house drive with the Gabai or some influential member of the community. At times he might engage in arguments with local persons opposed in principle, to the emissary movement and to collections for the Holy Land. There was always the feeling that fund-raising on behalf of Palestine must reduce the available resources for the local poor — the old question of "the poor of your city takes preference."

Besides his usually benign personality, the Shaliah had to throw out incentives to enhance the chances of his success. He distributed attractive pictures of the "holy ones" buried in the Land, made

presentations of holy earth from the Mount of Olives, awarded amulets and talismans and books about the glory of the Holy Land.

He frequently engaged in activities which would accrue to his benefit personally. He might promote the sale of books, particularly if he happened to be the author; or he might even publish a book, either the product of his own pen or a manuscript in his possession.[17]

It might be mentioned that individual residents of Palestine would make trips to other lands not because they were habituated beggars but rather that they had become impecunious for political or economic reasons. Many of these were scholars who were associated with a Yeshiba sponsored by a rich philanthropist. If the latter died or lost his wealth, the dependents had to find other avenues of earning a living. One of the ways was to become an emissary in his own behalf. Meir Franks went out of Jerusalem for both official and personal reasons. He had been one of the leading merchants in his city but had a turn of fortune. With a grown-up son he wanted to have married, he was bashful and reticent to speak about himself. He himself was the son-in-law of Abdullah, son of Moses Hyeem, Ab Beth Din of Baghdad. He was highly recommended by Rishon Le-Sion and by Jacob Meir, Chief Rabbi of Hebron.[18] He subsequently thanked Joseph Elia Ezra, Elia Shalome Gubbay and others for the fine reception and gracious help.[19] He brought with him from Rishon Le-Sion for the Maghen David Synagogue a message in memory of Elia D. J. Ezra.

The emissary movement had its share of antagonism from the Diaspora. It was argued that much of what the Shaliah collected was spent in fares, upkeep and hotel charges (in cities whose communities failed to act as hosts).[21] Many, therefore, suggested that the Jewish communities outside the Land of Israel send their contributions directly to the holy cities, and institutions, or for particular emergencies as they arose. Further, we can find some evidence of communal annoyance, though not always explicit, at being burdened by the maintenance of the perennial stream of Palestinean visitors and their appeals.

By persisting, the senders made it clear that the personal touch was necessary to ensure maximal success of fund-raising. The expenditure of fares, moreover, was unavoidable and so was the inconvenience the visitors caused. In exchange, though, the communities received spiritual direction, legal guidance and edification.

One objection, however, that could not be countered successfully was the rise of bogus Shaliahs, using fraudulent means to serve their own personal ends. They adversely affected the position of the rab-

bis and the Holy Land in the estimation of Diaspora communities, and the authorities in Palestine tried to put communities on their guard. A forewarning was issued by the Hebron rabbinate in January, 1891 to Indian Jewry not to entertain the appeal of a certain "Joseph Hyeem" holding false testimonials.[22] A case of irregular raising of money was reported in 1885.[23] A fraudulent attempt was uncovered by I. S. Musleah in the 1940s, when a "representative" of Tiberias was detected canvassing for funds in the offices of B. N. Elias and Company.

Opposition of a different variety was injected by a correspondent in July, 1887 in *Paerah*[24] based on Ashkenazi and Sephardi preferences and rights. Shaliahs had increased; most of them were Ashkenazim, who should not have been sent to Sephardi communities. In Asia and Africa, that is, Aden, India, Burma, Singapore, Hongkong, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and some places in European Turkey, Ashkenazim had no right to canvass. In Italy, France, Britain, America and Australia, however, they did have a right to share with Sephardim.

Criticism of such discrimination was levelled by Hakham Hyeem Jacob Cohen Feinstein on his third visit to India.[25] "I have seen leaders fight and introduce many strictures against the poor of the land of Israel and do not show a merciful spirit toward their people who are in great distress. Because of the cruelty of the oppressor, Shaliahs go to the four corners of the earth for food . . . perforce they come here (India) and . . . they are told, 'you came on your own responsibility, go away by yourself',[26] because they say he is an Ashkenazi. He is truly his brother, for both have one faith and one Torah . . . both are Jews." He ends with a blessing: "May God restore the Temple and the High Priest who will pray for us that Jew may not depend on Jew and that there be no more discrimination between Sephardi and Ashkenazi, for one God created us and we have one Father."

Protests from the Far East against the profusion of Shaliahs were received in Calcutta from time to time. In May, 1881, Rangoon Jewry decided to discourage Shaliahs by limiting total donations to Rs.25.00 for a Shaliah representing an institution and Rs.15.00 for a private one, provided they were recommended by Calcutta. Their allotment would be sent to Calcutta and they should not attempt to travel to Rangoon because of prohibitive fares and danger of storms.[27] In 1894, the limit for a representative of an institution was raised to Rs.30.00.[28]

An announcement from Hongkong in 1881, read that Jewish mendicants would not receive even their return fares. Only the blind would be given the customary consideration.[29]

Singapore was disenchanted with visitors parading as rabbis and collecting funds almost by force. The practice, they claimed, was stopped in China. The Jewish community of Calcutta in 1879 was advised not to recommend Shaliahs because they would not receive assistance.[30]

In spite of unsavory experiences with deceptors and mounting antipathy for rabbinical visitors, Indian Jewry continued its commendable support of the Holy Land, especially the Four Cities with sacred historic associations. Moses Abeasis and Moses Mayohas were their treasurers in Calcutta. Elias Joseph Musleah (died 1895), his son Meyer Ezra (died 1941), and grandsons Isaac Sassoon (died 1955) and Elias Hyeem have together represented the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness fund in Tiberias for three generations. Charity boxes were installed in synagogues for each of the institutions that made past requests for help and these were remitted periodically. The equivalent of half-shekels contributed on Purim were distributed among the Four Cities. The wealthy mentioned some of the Palestinean institutions in their wills as an everlasting sign of their religious zeal for the Land of their fathers.

Rabbinical visits became less frequent with the turn of the century. As the Zionist movement gained in strength, as Jewish settlement increased and economic well-being became more widespread, the need for outside aid grew less urgent. After World War I, a different type of envoy began making an appearance — representatives of the Keren Kayemeth (Jewish National Fund) and Keren Hayesod. After the State of Israel was established, large sums of money were donated annually to the upbuilding of the Land through the Jewish Agency. Shaliahs were no longer necessary in India, for a large proportion of its Jewish citizens had returned to Zion.

## *II. Zionism*

The Jews of India trace their Zionist tendencies to their love of Judaism; to be religious was to crave for Zion. Many of them took quite seriously the liturgical aspirations pertaining to a return to Zion. That is why the Palestinean Shaliahs generally were received well and so much sentiment was felt for the ailing Jewish community there. So long as Britain ruled India, some just visited Palestine, while a very few immigrated to the Holy Land.

The fascinating fact to record is that, except for a brief period in the early seventeenth century in Cochin, Jews in India suffered no anti-Semitism or anti-Jewishness: among a variety of races and re-

ligions they were just one. Hindus and Moslems were cordial and Christians too few for official international church policy to be reflected in their relations with their Jewish neighbors. When the third Jewish Commonwealth came into being, therefore, Indian Jews *volunteered* to settle there, translating their age-old dreams into reality. No political or social overtones spurred their leaving. It is true, however, that political and economic uncertainty following the handling of reins of government by the British to India contributed to an accelerated program of departures. The standard of living deteriorated and fiscal stringencies born of foreign exchange shortages frightened many Jewish citizens into speeding up their departure. And Israel itself provided a substantial part of the attraction.

Modern political Zionism in the Herzl era played a significant role in the life of Indian Jews.[31] The Cochin community was particularly active in response to Herzl's call. A white Cochin Jew, N. E. Roby, wrote to Herzl on October 15, 1901 in Vienna assuring him of "enormous" financial aid of Indian Jews, who were "put into great excitement specially after your interview with the Sultan of Turkey." He gave Herzl seven names and addresses, three each in Cochin and Bombay and one in Calcutta, of Jewish leaders who could influence their co-religionists in their respective cities. Calcutta was represented by Messrs. David Joseph Ezra and Co., at that time directed by Sir David Ezra, grandson and namesake of the founder of the firm and for almost half a century the leading Jew in social and political circles in Calcutta.

There is no knowing whether the assent of Ezra or the other leaders mentioned was gotten prior to submitting their names. While the impact of Herzlian Zionism was felt in Cochin and to a less extent in Bombay, the rank and file of the Jewish community of Calcutta in the east were well nigh unaffected. Solomon Twena made no mention of the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897 or the subsequent ones, though his local Judeo-Arabic paper, *Maggid Mesharim,* was published until 1900.[32] This may be attributed more to a vague awareness of the new political Zionism than an indifference to it. Or is it possible that the echoes made by Herzl's work just did not reach as far as Calcutta, or were not quite understood? Even if there was a dim awareness, it showed up perhaps an inherent shyness of the Calcutta Jews in the face of political issues, local and international. The Balfour Declaration went almost unnoticed in Calcutta. Its Jewish community, however, was not remiss in its duty, for example, to support the Keren Kayemet when it was established and received its agents with honor and liberality.

Israel Cohen describes a little facetiously, a little complainingly, his experiences in Calcutta on a mission on behalf of the Palestine Restoration Fund in the 1920's. He was followed regularly by representatives from the Keren Kayemet and Keren Hayesod who sustained local interest in Zionist activities in Palestine by personally reporting on conditions there. The ubiquitous Blue Boxes told eloquently the story of local identifications with Zionist aspirations.

Habonim, the first and only Zionist youth movement, made its appearance in the mid-thirties. Inspired directly by the newly formed branch in Bombay, which in turn was influenced by South African Habonim, the movement moved slowly at first, breaking conventional barriers against co-ed youth activity. Once in momentum, it became popular through its appeal to Hebrew as a spoken language, folk music, songs and dances, and of course, as a replacement for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Untrained in leadership and youth organization, a small group of pioneers led by Sally Meyer (later Mrs. Lewis), Meyer E. Musleah and others formed themselves into a study circle which constituted the first officers of the movement. At its zenith it counted one hundred members in a community of about five thousand. At times difficulties mounted but the movement flourished until Israel's creation. During one of the "rusty" periods, British and American armed forces helped to set the organization on oiled wheels again. A *halutz* group comprising mostly Habonim officers, was started. Up to this point, the movement functioned sans the ideological overtones of international Habonim. Labor and Jewish nationalistic ideas gradually percolated the movement and the Halutzim adopted them as their philosophy. The first Aliyah from Calcutta arrived in Kfar Blum in 1945. A second followed two years later. But then the third Jewish Commonwealth in 1948, arising only shortly after India's own Independence, broke down the distinction between active Zionists and passive Zionists (rather than Zionists and non-Zionists) and immigration became the privilege of all Jews.

Indian and Israel independence brought into sharp focus the preconceived opposition of Indian leaders to a Jewish state in Palestine. It originated with the father of Indian Independence, Mohandas K. Gandhi, who developed his negative attitude to Zionism with what was probably an expedient eye on the effect it might have had on his Moslem neighbors. As a young lawyer in South Africa, however, where Gandhi sharpened his antagonism against discrimination, and his friends and private secretary were Jews, he openly declared, "The

Jews had a good case." This is what he told Sidney Silverman, a member of the British Parliament: "If the Arabs have a claim to Palestine, the Jews have a prior claim because they were there first. Jesus was a Jew. He was the finest flower of Judaism . . . Paul was not a Jew, he was a Greek; he had an oratorical mind, a dialectical mind, and he distorted Jesus. Jesus possessed a great force, the love force, but Christianity became disfigured when it went to the West. It became the religion of Kings."[33]

But at the helm of the national struggle in India, Gandhi's words were those of the political tactician, camouflaged by spiritual appeal: "The cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me. . . . The sanction for it is sought in the Bible. . . . A word to the Jews of Palestine. I have no doubt they are going about it the wrong way. The Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their hearts. But if they must look to the Palestine of geography as their National Home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of the British gun. A religious act cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonet or the bomb. They can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs. They should seek to convert the Arab heart. . . .

"The same God rules the Arab heart who rules the Jewish heart. They can offer satyagraha (non-violent opposition) in front of the Arabs and offer themselves to be shot or thrown into the Dead Sea (sic) without raising a little finger against them. They will find world opinion in their favor in their religious aspiration. There are hundreds of ways of reasoning with the Arabs if they will only discard the help of the British bayonet. As it is, they are co-sharers with the British in despoiling a people who have done no wrong to them."[34]

As an Asian, Gandhi feared, at least ostensibly, that the Jews who come from the West would exploit the local population in the same manner as other Europeans did in Asia, meaning primarily, the British in his country. He might have been apprehensive of the Jews becoming persecutors as reprisal against their usual position of underdog. Conceivably, Gandhi might have given his approval of a bi-national state with the Arabs as, for instance, was advocated by Judah Magnus. But the question was being pursued by a small group and never came to the official attention of the Indian leader.

Gandhi, however, maintained a rapport with Jews as Jews. In Johannesburg, he visited a synagogue during Passover and told a correspondent of the London *Jewish Chronicle,* "You can almost say I was keeping the Passover with my Jewish friends because I went to

their house every night and I heartily enjoyed Matzos. I think Matzos are very nice and crisp." He went on to say the Jewish synagogue services were impressive but "the heart is lacking, that is to say, the spirit was lacking. They were too ceremonial. . . . The Rabbi was a celebrated scholar and delivered a learned discourse but it did not touch my heart."[35]

In a subsequent interview with the South African *Zionist Record* he said, "My attitude towards Jews is one of great sympathy . . . firstly because of selfish motives, since I have very many Jewish friends. Secondly, for a far deeper one — they have got a wonderful spirit of cohesion . . . that is to say, a spirit of comradship. . . . Moreover, they are a people with a vision, the implication and full meaning of that vision, if I may put it without impertinence, they do not themselves realize."[36]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Jewish communities of India enjoyed full religious freedom under the British and the Indian governments. When an individual or family demonstrated ill-will against the Jew it was, in the main, on a personal level, not racial or religious. And this genial attitude continued under Gandhi's successors.

Palestine, the Jewish homeland, remained a blind spot. When the State of Israel was voted upon at the United Nations General Assembly, India, then independent of Britain and under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, voted against the Jewish State and withheld any kind of recognition for over two years.

Rightist Hindu parties in India welcomed Israel from the outset as a bulwark of democracy in the Middle East, and as a possible future ally against Moslem aggression. India's Socialist groups too recognized Israel's strength as a valuable force in an Asia menaced by Communism. The National Congress Party and the government remained under the spell of a series of resolutions passed by the Party between 1928 and 1939. They showed little understanding for the national aspirations and actions leading to the establishment of Israel. At last, the following messages were exchanged between India and Israel in September 1950:

> "In conveying to Your Excellency the decision of the Government of India to accord recognition to the Government of Israel, as from the 18th of September this year, I send the greetings of the Government and people of India to the Government and people of Israel." — PANDIT [Jawaharlal] NEHRU, Prime Minister of India.

"I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency's message of 16th September advising me of the decision of the Government of India to accord recognition to the Government of Israel as from the 18th September this year. On behalf of my Government I wish to express my deep and sincere satisfaction at this decision. I am happy to reciprocate on behalf of the Government and people of Israel the greetings conveyed by Your Excellency of the Government and people of India." — MOSHE SHARETT, Foreign Minister of Israel.

"On the occasion of India's formal recognition of Israel, which marks a new era in the fraternal relations between our two countries, I am happy to extend my sincere good wishes to the people of India. Marching together in friendship and cooperation, the largest and smallest of the free Asian nations, with their great spiritual traditions of humanism and tolerance, can make their contribution to the satisfaction of man's eternal quest for freedom, progress and peace." — DAVID BEN-GURION, Prime Minister of Israel.

Press comments in India[37] expressed satisfaction and underscored the realism that prompted India's action. The *Times of India* and *Statesman,* Calcutta, respectively declared as follows:[38]

"There will be satisfaction in both the countries at Delhi's announcement regarding the recognition of Israel. Though economic stringency will postpone the sending of a diplomatic mission, the decision by itself should go a long way in building up close and cordial relations with the infant State.

"Two years is perhaps a long time for making up one's mind, but India did well to wait for Turkey and Persia to make a decision and to let public opinion at home and in the Middle East appreciate the fact of Israel's emergence even though it may not approve of all her past actions or present policies."

"India's recognition of Israel is correctly described as that of 'an established fact', comparable to the case of Communist China, though the External Affairs Ministry's communique does not necessarily thereby draw any formal distinction between 'de facto' and 'de jure' recognition. New Delhi has hitherto sensibly given weight to the feelings of the Islamic nations, and not made up its mind in a hurry; equally sensibly it realizes that other points of view exist, and that

their susceptibilities cannot be allowed to freeze the situation indefinitely."

A few days before India extended its recognition, Israel appointed on September 1, as Trade Commissioner for South East Asia with headquarters in Bombay, in the person of F. W. Pollack, editor of the magazine, *India & Israel*.[39] Diplomatic exchanges were withheld, presumably in deference to Arab feelings, despite a resolution of the Indian National Congress in December, 1950 expressing the hope that diplomatic representatives would be exchanged soon. The office of Trade Commissioner was later changed to Consul and that's the way relations are.

*Chapter 22*

## HEBREW PRINTING AND PRINTERS

Though there were less than five hundred Jews in Calcutta in the beginning of the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, a need for Hebrew printing developed for a constantly increasing community.[1] It was difficult to obtain manuals of prayer and biblical and rabbinic texts for study by persons steeped in the knowledge of traditional sources and craving to widen it. Bombay, about 1200 miles to the west, could not satisfy that desire, for Hebrew typography there had not then started. Importing books moreover, from Livorno, Italy, Baghdad or Jerusalem, three foreign imporia patronized by Indian Jews, was an expensive, slow and tedious process.

It further became necessary to meet the challenge of the activities of the missionary movement, a world-wide and powerful force, which published in Madras Hebrew books in support of Christianity. Even in Jerusalem, where the inception of Jewish printing was co-eval with that in Calcutta and Bombay, it seemed imperative to meet the situation by publishing in 1845 a book called *Hizzuk Emunah,* meant, as the name suggests, to enforce Jewish belief and curb the influences of the missionaries. The Calcutta edition of the book appeared a year later with financial assistance from Nissim Joseph Ezra, one of the wealthy residents of Calcutta[2] who donated Rs.45.00 for its printing.[3]

Both these reasons for the inauguration of Hebrew printing do not compare with the most significant one — the dedicated attachment to the Hebrew book by a Yemenite settler in Calcutta, Eleazar Aaron Se'adyah Arakie.[4] Born in Cochin about 1802,[5] he was the son of Mari Aaron Se'adyah, a native of San'a, capital of Yemen, where one of four large synagogues out of a total of twenty was named for him.[6] Because of persecution[7] Arakie fled to Cochin about the year 1800, then moving with his family to Calcutta where, at the age of over sixty years, he died on 11th Heshwan 5576 (= November 14, 1815).[8]

Eleazar married in Calcutta, Simha, daughter of Abraham David on 3rd Kislev 5586 (= November 13, 1825).[9] A scholar and teacher, he had a large following, many of whom had been former pupils and on whom the teachings of "Istad" (Arabic for teacher) Eleazar made

a lasting impression.[10] In the field of scholarship, Eleazar Arakie's foremost contribution consisted in his printing endeavors which bore fruit in the shape of twenty-five to twenty-eight books of Yemenite and Baghdad origin.[11] His press was established in 1841 and continued till 1856; his work stands out for its beautiful clear type which is superior to its European counterpart of that period, a consequence of the keen personal interest he took in it. He himself chose the books to be printed, carefully edited them, read the proofs and used paper of a superior quality. The material printed was characteristic of an isolated Jewish community, far from the main centers of Jewry. The Arabic translation of the Haggadah, used by Jews in India, is his translation; he corrected Arabic commentaries and both collected and arranged stories culled from the folkloristic traditions of his people. Highly dedicated, he was at the same time extremely modest about his publication record.

A liturgical poet, he edited a book of hymns (Pizmons), twenty-two of which were his own composition.[12] At the end of the work *Zebah Todah* by the Yemenite rabbi and Shohet, Yahya b. Saleh, Eleazar inserted in the edition he printed in Calcutta a poem to the acrostic of his name in Hebrew. The poem is significant for its references to the many places where the master's book was used — "Pas, Tunis, Persia, Yemen and the land of the Amalekites and Arabs." Many of his own compositions he set to tunes that became beloved of the local Jewish community; some of the melodies were borrowed from popular Indian songs of his time.

He was aware of the current events in the world; for example, he distinguished the year of European upheaval, 1848, by referring to it at the end of one of his books, Kotnote Ore.

The chief proofreader in the press was the printer's elder brother, Shalome,[13] who shared Eleazar's teaching labors in 1843-44.[14] Shalome, aged over 70, died in Calcutta 10th Sivan 5628 (= May 31, 1868),[15] four years after his brother. Ten young men were employed in his press from time to time, including Jacob Jonah Jacob (1841), Jacob's son, Ezra (1841-48), Simon, son of Asher Eliezer Musleah (1841-48), Joseph David Hallegua (1842), Saleh Abraham Elias Musleah and Jacob, son of Hakham Saleh Nissim Musleah (1841).

His printing labors ceased principally because of an insufficient market for his books among the small Baghdad community in India, as Jacob Sapir, a traveler from the Holy Land in the middle of the nineteenth century, reported.[16] It may have been caused also by the printer's old age.

Besides being a teacher and a printer, Eleazar was also a Hazan, Shohet and a communal worker. He left a detailed diary written in Arabic extending from September 16, 1841, to June 3, 1864 — the day of his death! This diary is one of the main sources for the history of Calcutta Jewry for about a quarter of a century. Some of the various subjects reported are the granting of licenses (*Semikha,* Hebrew, or *Simakha,* Arabic) for ritual slaughtering, two of the recipients being Jacob Jonah Jacob and Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay,[17] facts about the origin and running of the Neveh Shalome Synagogue, record of births, marriages and deaths, visits of important personages such as Jacob Sapir (mentioned above), Abraham Salim Mori Kati'i and Rabbi Solomon Zalman of Jerusalem.

A detailed account of our printer by Sapir is contained in a letter dated 16th Shebath 5621 ( = January 29, 1861) addressed to his son in Jerusalem. There he extols Arakie's extensive knowledge of the Bible and early commentators, the law and homiletical literature, and his many-faceted career.[18] The inscription of Eleazar Arakie's tombstone in the Calcutta Jewish cemetery testifies to the esteem with which he was held by his contemporaries.[19]

Hebrew printing lay dormant thereafter till 1871 when "The Jewish Press" was started by a Baghdad emigrant, Ezekiel b. Sillman Hanin who mentions in his early books that he was also a bookseller. Ten works were printed at this press between 1871 and 1893,[20] two of them written by the Shaliah from Safed, Hyeem Jacob Cohen Feinstein who had, apparently, close relations with the printer. Two more were wedding songs compiled by the printer. His brother Elia[21] collected Arabic proverbs and printed them at the press.

The chief labors of Hanin was the institution of the Arabic-Hebrew newspaper *Mebasser* published once a week under his editorship. This was the first Hebrew newspaper in Calcutta and the first *printed* Hebrew newspaper in all of India. Hitherto there was a newspaper in Hebrew characters lithographed in Bombay from 1856-1866 called *Doresh Tob Le'Ammo. Mebasser* was operated for a little over four years, from 13th Elul 5633 (= September 5, 1873) to 15th Tebeth 5638 (= December 21, 1877).

After *Mebasser* ceased publication, a portion of the Jewish Press was acquired by Hanin's brother Elia and Moses Mayohas, the Shaliah from Jerusalem, who settled in Calcutta in 1871. They edited jointly the newspaper *Paerah* whose first issue saw the light on 20th Sivan 5638 (= June 21, 1878) and was printed for the editors at the Eastern Press belonging to E. M. D. Cohen. The partnership lasted for nineteen issues till November 1, 1878 when the ownership was

acquired by Moses Mayohas & Co. and extended to the thirtieth issue of the third year. From that issue, dated January 21, 1881, the editorship passed entirely into the hands of E. M. D. Cohen.[22] The Eastern Press made a lasting contribution to Jewish-Arabic journalism and to the history of the Jews of Calcutta, through the publication of the weekly Jewish Gazette, *Paerah*. It appeared in eleven volumes from 21st June 1878 to 29th March 1889, comprising fifty issues each year and forty-two issues in the concluding year. The publication of *Paerah* ceased when Cohen was away in Europe for a period of nine months from April, 1889. He preferred to stop its publication rather than leave it in hands that might injure its reputation. He intended to continue its issue on his return but his plan did not materialize. The last issue was dated 26th Adar 5649 (= February 27, 1889). Being a Kohen he tried to carry on the printing tradition of the first Calcutta printer Eleazar Arakie and adopted his adorned trade-mark found only in one book.[23]

*Paerah* was a very popular organ of Calcutta Jewry. The four page paper contained a calendar for the week, announcements of births, circumcisions and marriages, trade advertisements of Jewish merchants, information on arrivals and departures between Calcutta and Rangoon, Hongkong, Gorakhpur, Dinapur, Ghazipur, Bombay, Monghyr, Bhagalpur, and rarely, England. The editorials dealt with the subjects of purely local interest like an evaluation of the Jewish School or of the Maghen David Synagogue, as well as international topics, such as the position of the Jews in Russia and the situation in Kabul. The response to these comments may be judged from the many letters to the editor. Besides the above, news items from all over the world, particularly Baghdad, literary contributions and selections from the Midrash and other stories made the reading of the paper a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

While the "Eastern Press" was in the main devoted to printing *Paerah,* six other publications passed through that press,[24] two being ethical and homiletical writings of Jews who visited in India.

Barely had the press of E. M. D. Cohen ceased functioning than another press owned by Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena[25] was established in 1889. There seem to have been three reasons for his journalistic efforts, which culminated in the publication of the weekly paper, *Maggid Mesharim* for eleven years, from 13th Heshwan 5650 (= November 7, 1889) till 9th Tishri 5661 (= October 2, 1900): To foster the cause of the local poor and provide a platform for their grievances, to bring to public attention the needs of Jewry in the Holy Land and Iraq and uphold the authority of the rabbinate there

and to open up an avenue of expression for his own creative writings.[26]

Hakham Shelomo's contribution to scholarship was enormous. Regularly, till late hours every night, while his family was asleep, he wrote by candle light in a script straight and flawless which now requires a magnifying glass to decipher. While visiting a friend or in the middle of a conversation he would get an inspired thought and reach out for the nearest article to set it down in writing — the table cloth, a handkerchief, and even the palms of his hands. His learned contributions in the field of homiletics and law, Aggada and Halakha, have given Calcutta a distinguished place on the map of Jewish scholars. The journal contained news items as well as topical articles and produced ethical and Midrashic epistles, stories and legal discussions of a very high literary and contextual standard.

In eleven years at his press he printed seventy-one books, most of which were his own composition.[27] The subject matter covered included ethical topics, explanations of Biblical passages, sermons, legal treatises, prayers and even translations into Arabic of modern Hebrew literature like Ahavat Zion of Mapu. His books were printed in Bombay,[28] Livorno[29] and Jerusalem[30] — at times over the pseudonym ה שע"פ — auspicious hour — the second word being an abbreviation of his name "Shelomo, servant of God." Some of his compositions were published first in his magazine, *Maggid Mesharim* in serial form. His most outstanding literary and scholarly work was his commentary on the first verse of the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" which ran into one thousand and five explanations and interpretations. Parts of this gigantic work, called *Hamisha Wa-Alef,* have been published, but the major portion has not passed the manuscript stage. Like the rest of his manuscripts, they await the miserable fate of being consumed by weevils before being disposed of in the Genizah.[31]

More than any other, Hakham Shelomo excelled as author, translator and printer for the preservation of the Arabic language spoken by the Jews of Baghdad in India. However, in 1901, having found a ready buyer, he sold his press, which had been running at a loss,[32] to Sillman Joshua Ezra Judah and his partners who started a newspaper *Shoshanna* that lasted less than six months, from 15th Tammuz 5661 (= July 2, 1901) till 14th Tebeth 5662 (= December 24, 1901). Hakham Shelomo thought of reviving *Maggid Mesharim* as a purely Hebrew paper but his efforts were not blessed, though he lived about twelve years thereafter. Thus ended Jewish newspapers in Hebrew characters in India. It also meant the close of sixty years of almost continuous Hebrew typographical activity in Calcutta.

It is worth mentioning, in passing, that two works in Urdu (the langauge of the Koran) with Hebrew transliteration were published in lithography, one in Calcutta in 1880, and the other in Bombay a few years later. The Calcutta Urdu piece represents an Indian drama, Indar Sabha, composed with illustrations in the middle of the nineteenth century, which became most popular on the Indian stage. Considered of great entertainment value, this drama was deemed worthy enough to be transliterated into Hebrew. The Bombay piece in Hebrew characters was entitled, Laila Majnu, also a popular play.

With the increased use of English as a medium of instruction and speech, the Judeo-Arabic dialect lost its appeal and gradually came to be less known and even forgotten by the generation that grew up from the 20s of this century. Hardly any Judeo-Arabic books have since appeared, but limited Hebrew printing facilities were provided by Ephraim David Hye Einy. The periodicals of the nineteenth century were replaced by journals in English.

An amateurish attempt was made in war time by Herbert Loewe, a Jew in the British Armed Forces attached to the Jewish War Services Committee. Just seven issues appeared from 1917 to 1919. In respect to the Anglo-Jewish press, Calcutta had to depend on Bombay, and then, not until 1931, when *The Jewish Advocate* was published there and enjoyed wide readership in Calcutta until it ceased publication in 1940. Competition was offered by *The Jewish Tribune* inaugurated in Bombay in 1933, and it soon gained popularity also in Calcutta until it too shut down in 1951. Toward the end of its existence, *The Jewish Tribune* had to compete with an increasingly well-received journal, *India & Israel,* 1948–1953. For a short while, 1941–1945, Calcutta took advantage of the writing and scholarly skills of David Hye Shalome Arakie who put out *The Eastern Hebrew and Annual.* The inception of the Jewish Association of Calcutta saw the publication of its own organ in the *Shema,* 1946–1960, but the latter issues show the strains of a shrinking Jewish community — borrowed articles and little of local interest. The news makers were evidently fast transferring elsewhere.

*Chapter 23*

## THE CEMETERY

The cemetery was situated in an outlying area called Narkeldanga, northeast of the city, about three miles from the original Jewish neighborhood. Until the first quarter of the twentieth century its approaches were through unpaved, badly lit roads that made access difficult. During the monsoons, people accompanying funerals had to wade through knee-deep water and when the motor hearse was introduced it would stall frequently in flooded streets. Conditions improved as the limits of the city were extended; tarred roads, better communications, transport and lighting developed this section into a residential area.

It is the oldest Jewish institution in Calcutta. None of the early settlers supplies any information about its inception. The earliest recognizable grave is that of Sassoon, son of Hakham Abraham and bears the date of 15 Tammuz 5573 ( = July 13, 1813). In 1953, many inscriptions could not be deciphered in the oldest part of the cemetery, so that there surely were a few earlier burials. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were less than fifty Jews in the city, mostly comparatively young, many of whom were still plying between their birth places and India.

According to a tradition, the necessity for a place of burial became urgent upon the first death in the tiny community in the initial years of the nineteenth century of a Shaliah (emissary) from Palestine or Baghdad. That belief is confirmed by an entry in the diary of Moses Dwek who mentions the death on January 1, 1812 of Hakham Moses de Pas, Shaliah of Safed. It is the earliest recorded death in Calcutta, though his tomb cannot be located. The tradition further maintained that at the instance of Shalome Cohen, a local prince presented a parcel of land (marked A in our diagram on page 532) to the community to be used as a cemetery. When Cohen insisted that in accordance with Jewish practice at least a token payment be made for it, the ruler settled for the gold ring on the finger of the Jew. This gift to the community remained anonymous; perhaps at Cohen's request it was not perpetuated in a tangible way.

About 1953, there were over 3000 graves, including those of about 300 unnamed infants. Of these some 150 inscriptions could not be deciphered, while a further 200 tombs, recognizable from slab material used and location as dating from the nineteenth century, never had distinguishing markers. Sam E. Arakie testifies[1] that these tombs were raised by exertions of his assistant, Ezra S. Gubbay, from ground level, by a special collection of funds supplemented by some members of the Hebrew Burial Board (Oseh Haised). These were graves of the indigent whose relatives could not afford the cost of raising them above ground level or even paying for distinguishing slabs. An earlier Board, organized by Moses Mayohas and Aaron Joshua Gubbay in 1877[2] had previously supplied headstones for a number of graves in this category.

The earliest graves are to be found in the eastern part of the cemetery. Until the end of the nineteenth, or the early twentieth century, certain locations were reserved for individual families, with the result that members of a family separated in death by as much as seventy-five to eighty years were interred alongside each other. It also accounts for the absence of clearly demarcated rows between tombs in this section.

Commencing from the middle of Section A in our diagram, burials followed a pattern spreading northward and southward simultaneously. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century it was found necessary to enlarge the cemetery. In 1879, Elia Shalome Gubbay donated a parcel of land 14,400 sq. ft. in area to the southwest[3] (marked B) but burials were preferred in the older section, especially by families of native third and fourth generations. The newer locale was utilized increasingly and unavoidably after about 1890.

In 1899, a parcel of land measuring 4 bighas 8 cottahs and 14 chuttacks on the west (marked C) adjoining the available grounds was offered for sale. The transaction was completed on May 25 that year through the broker Samuel Shalome M. Dwek, Hazan of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, for a consideration of Rs. 6,500.00 in the names of Sam E. Arakie and Abraham E. Gubbay, Honorary Secretary of the Oseh Haised at the time, who jointly collected the entire amount from contributions. Soon thereafter, the land was sold by the Collectorate for arrears in Imperial rents without prior knowledge or consent of the purchasers. The land would have been lost to the community had it not been for the exertions of Gubbay and Arakie. They buried secretly two corpses of children who died at night and then persuaded the new buyer to relinquish possession on payment to him of an additional Rs. 600.00. The land was then made a freehold

by a payment to the Collectorate of thirty years rent in advance.

Gubbay's tenure of office, followed by that of Arakie, lasted twenty years from 1896, and saw many improvements. Until they began directing the affairs of the cemetery, it was a mass of wooded land, with an overgrowth of trees and grass, and unprotected from stray cattle and dogs. Two Ashkenazi Jews, William Grossman, a financier, and Moses M. Wolff, an engineer, took it on themselves to erect walls around the cemetery. About twenty years earlier, in 1883, a notice in *Paerah* mentions the intention of Moses Mayohas to build a boundary wall around the cemetery, a project that was to have been underwritten by Joseph Elia Ezra in his father's lifetime.[5] That intention was either not fulfilled or carried out only partially.

Grossman announced further that if the community raised the balance, he and his sister, Mrs. Adolf Shrager would head the list of subscribers with a donation of Rs. 2,000.00. An appeal was launched in the joint names of Grossman and Arakie, to which the community responded to the extent of Rs. 8,940.00. This sum formed the nucleus of a capital fund which, augmented by legacies, first gave a measure of financial stability to the Board.

However, Grossman fell out with Ezra Arakie and Moses M. Wolff (both members of the Board of Oseh Haised), and the work on the walls was stopped. Consequently, of the Rs. 2,000.00 pledged by Grossman toward this project only a sum of Rs. 1,200.00 that had actually been advanced was ever paid and the building of the walls was completed on the initiative of Moses M. Wolff. The entire construction cost Rs. 2,500.00 together with the partial filling of a tank or jheel, as it was called, with earth; the latter project was halted when it was realized that the task was financially prohibitive.[6] Not until the year 1924 was this filling in carried out and then only in respect of one small tank — with the help of a group of persons who raised about Rs. 4,000.00 among themselves.[7] Arakie was fortunate to have had the active services of Ezra S. Gubbay who later succeeded him as Honorary Secretary.

Till the first decade of the twentieth century the gate marked 1 was the entrance to the cemetery. It bears the inscription בית החיים. However consequent to the acquisition of the area marked C and its improvement by the filling in of three circular tanks — in stages over a period of thirty years — that entrance was closed about 1928[8] and a new gate installed at location marked 2. It has no crosspiece, thus permitting Kohens to enter without becoming ritually unclean. Such entry was considered essential to permit their participation in congregational worship in the prayer hall (marked 3)

following funeral services in the late afternoon as well as for devotions on the eves of Rosh Hashana and Kippur.

The prayer hall was erected in May, 1921 by Gala (Mrs. David A.) Gubbay in memory of her father, Saul David Lanyado, who died at Mazaffapur December 17, 1917, and was buried at the Calcutta cemetery two days later, as commemorated by an inscription on an outer wall of the pavilion.

Another facility of note was the Genizah (marked 6) — the last resting place of religious articles and Hebrew books that were no longer usable. Below the level of the ground was a well of water, and rising about ten feet above the ground, a circular enclosure with a rectangular slot for the discarded objects. An older pit was closed in the first decade of the twentieth century and another constructed in memory of Joseph Rahamim Judah Leveroy, who died in Bombay on 2nd Iyar 5671 (= April 30, 1911) aged about seventy-six years, and was erected by his widow and sons through the instrumentality of Ezra S. Gubbay during the tenure of office of Sam E. Arakie.

An interesting but by no means novel devise was the Kuppah (marked 5) designed and constructed by Michael M. Wolff, who utilized his talents to present this charity box, subsequent to the death of his father in 1903. The money slot is enclosed in glass with adjustable two-panelled sliding doors, while a double door arrangement protects the vault. The Kuppah is capped by a hut-like cast-iron structure enclosing a marble slab which contains on both sides the formula for the benediction on entering the grounds.

In Jewish law, the only class of dead that is required to be buried in an exclusive part of the cemetery were those who have taken their own lives; these were interred along the northeastern limits. There is no way of telling the number of suicides with any degree of exactness because, with the passage of time, these tombs have been merged with those of people who died natural deaths. A figure of about 100 may be conjectured.

While the victims of suicide were separated as a mark of disapproval, the Kohens had the *distinction* of an exclusive area. For this unusual practice there is no precedent in Jewish law or custom; not even in Baghdad was it customary to seclude the Kohens. It is fair to assume that the original families from Aleppo being Kohens, they might have preferred to be buried in family proximity and since there were so many of them, the entire last row (and sometimes the ultimate two or three rows) in the cemetery was reserved for them. If this presumption is correct, what was an outcome of family exclusiveness became a matter of religious consideration for the entire community.

Only a Kohen who married an Israelite was buried among the Kohens, her husband among the other Jews; the daughter of a non-Kohen married to a Kohen was likewise segregated from her husband. Occasionally, however, exceptions were made for the influential families so that husband and wife could be buried side by side.

So deeply ingrained was this custom, it assumed the status of law; no traveler or Shaliah, however, makes any mention of it. When the older section could accommodate no more burials, the segregation of Kohens was continued in another area in the northwest corner.

Nor were the Kohens the only "tribe" to be separated in death; distinct spots were set aside for other Jewish communities of India. The centuries-old Bene Israel, of whom only a handful were to be found in Calcutta, and the subsequently settled Cochin Jews were also segregated, the distinctive word "Bene Israel" or "Cochini" occasionally appearing on their tombstones, e.g., Joseph Salim Cochini. About 200 Bene Israel, 100 Cochinis and 300 western Jews are buried in the Calcutta cemetery indicating the proportion of these communities population-wise.

The foreign born Ashkenazim — German, Polish and Russian Jews who had come to India as traders and professionals — also had their own plot and the word "Ashkenazi" usually followed every surname. There is evidence that the early Ashkenazim who died in Calcutta were buried with their Sephardi co-religionists. Later, a distinction was made between Ashkenazim who were well-known to the other Jews or who took an active part in the local community or "intermarried" with Sephardim and those who had kept aloof from the community. The former were buried among the local people. The earliest Ashkenazi tombstone bears the date of 1856. The Arabic-speaking Jews were not familiar with the pronunciation or spelling of western Jewish names, as we have such errors as Dof for Dov. From the inscriptions we gather that many westerners of distinctive Jewish descent settled and died in Calcutta.

Some German Jewesses of questionable morals suffered most discrimination after death. These were interred in the far southern part of the cemetery marked 7, hidden from view by a low wall. It was only in 1953, on the representation of Isaac Sassoon Musleah, Honorary Secretary of the Oseh Haised through his son, Ezekiel N. Musleah (later Rabbi and present author) in New York, that an opinion of Rabbi David de Sola Pool was sought and the demarcation removed.

In the section marked C were three circular tanks acquired with

the rest of the land in 1899. Previous to their being filled, some Bene Israel and Ashkenazim were buried around them, which explains the circular arrangement of those graves.

On the west of the entrance to the cemetery are a Rehitsa room for last rites, storage rooms for building materials, and garages for a bus bought in 1948 and a motor hearse. The bus conveyed mourners to the cemetery on the day of the funeral and whenever else the bereaved family visited the cemetery — on the third day after burial, the seventh, twenty-second and thirtieth days. Thereafter, visits were undertaken on the eve of Rosh Hodesh, the termination of the eleventh month and on the first and every subsequent anniversaries. Previous to the acquisition of the bus, mourners and their relatives and friends would be considerably inconvenienced, especially during the monsoons, for want of a direct route of public transportation. Matters came to a head during Muslim-Hindu riots of 1946–47 when the approach to the cemetery through both Muslim and Hindu neighborhoods made visits to the cemetery dangerous. The Jewish driver of the vehicle was, however, allowed peaceable passage.

There had been some opposition to the introduction of the motor hearse in the first decade of the twentieth century, and from time to time since then, when shoulder-borne funerals were in vogue. The hearse was therefore an intrusion into the sacred domain of accepted custom and a barrier to the income of poverty-stricken pallbearers who boycotted funerals and threatened to burn the hearse. One occasion when the pall-bearers actually refused to assist was the funeral of Rachel, daughter of Sam E. Arakie, Honorary Secretary of the Oseh Haised, apparently in vindictiveness for this innovation. Prior to the motor hearse, which gradually received universal acceptance, a pushcart on rubber wheels was preferred to the older shoulder borne funerals. However, the administration would occasionally accede to the request of relatives of people of great piety to be taken to their last resting place borne on the shoulder.

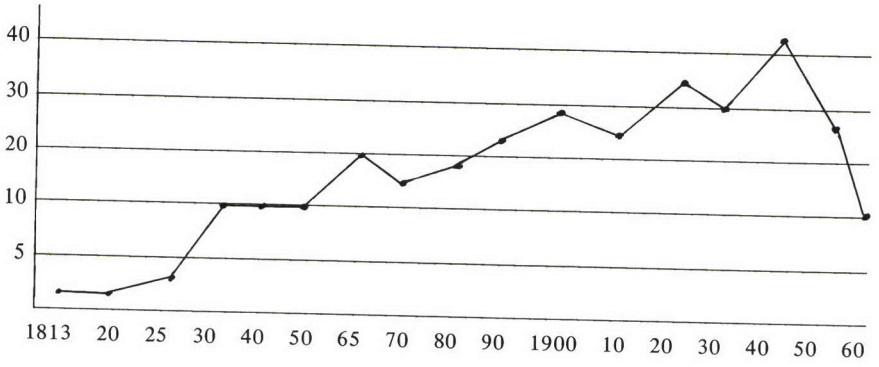
In one and a half centuries it became necessary to add three times to the available grounds. The last was occasioned by the arrival of over 1000 Jews from Rangoon, Burma as a result of the Japanese invasion and occupation of their country. The death rate rose so rapidly that the management had to approach the government to acquire on its behalf land contiguous to the cemetery grounds whose owners were unwilling to participate in a direct private transaction. But by the mid-fifties, political and economic forces had already thinned the Jewish community through emigration by one half. The death rate returned to normal and the acquired land became super-

fluous. Like the other Jewish institutions in the city, there were more facilities here than could be used effectively. Prolonged litigation over a period of fifteen years ended in 1956 when the community assumed ownership, the purchase adding a further 3½ bighas.

Statistics on the death rate are illuminating.

The first recognizable tomb as mentioned above is dated 1813. Two more deaths occurred in 1816, one in 1819, two in 1822, four in 1823 and one each in the following three years, all men. The first woman's tomb is dated 1827, that of Miriam, daughter of Joshua Sarjon, which goes to prove that there were many fewer females among the earliest settlers. Men sent for their womenfolk only after they had been established economically. Until the mid-nineteenth century the number of deaths remained steadily around ten a year. There must have been a larger immigration thereafter, as in 1865 there were twenty deaths, about the same number for each sex.

The average rates are shown in the following graph:




*Administration*

How the cemetery and funerals were administered in the early days of Jewish settlement in Calcutta is unknown. The first reference is found in *Mebasser* when the newly-founded and short-lived Honen Dallim Society in 1877 appointed Hakham Moses Mayohas and Aaron Joshua Gubbay to look after the interests of the cemetery in an honorary capacity.[9] This organization did not last much longer than six months. Mayohas and Gubbay, however, went ahead to form another institution called Oseh Haised, whose aims, as the name suggests, were primarily to ameliorate the conditions of poverty. Sums of money were collected from time to time for the performance of last rites of the indigent. Nissim Nissim Joseph Ezra donated a

large amount to this society specifically to repair deteriorated tombs and erect marble slabs on a number that were without distinguishing inscriptions, though his contribution did not cover too many graves. Some of the other undistinguished tombs were attended to by the Oseh Haised in the next generation. Aaron N. E. Judah contributed a sizeable amount to this organization for a masonry structure to shelter pall-bearers and visitors from the rigors of heat and rain.[10]

In September, 1883, a letter appeared in *Paerah*[11] from "Hebrat Oseh Haised" informing the community that "for several years we had assumed responsibility for the work of the cemetery and funerals" but were giving notice that "for several reasons" they would not be able to do so forthwith. They were probably volunteers who were running a difficult communal undertaking without much cooperation. There was evidently a chief administrator in the person of Moses Mayohas, who headed the society for many years.

The author of a letter in *Paerah,* July, 1884, remonstrates against inadequate arrangements for the last rites. Twenty years previously, (that is, 1864), the society had a roster of names of both well-to-do and poorer people who had volunteered to serve as ritual washers, the order in which they were required being known in advance. The inability of a person to be present when occasion called made it necessary for the society to pay a rupee or two for a substitute.

In subsequent decades, with the community growing larger, it appears that there was a somewhat more restricted number of regular volunteers who felt called upon to fulfill the religious injunction of the performance of last rites. However, as the present century progressed, and with the change of attitudes — perhaps resulting from a decreasing familiarity with religious custom and tradition as well as an improvement in economic status — the panel of volunteers gave way to a much smaller group of paid persons drawn from the poorer members of the community, though well-to-do individuals continued to do what they considered was a communal duty.

Nevertheless, we know that an Oseh Haised Society was in existence in May, 1885. It is mentioned in an account of the tragic death and funeral of a young woman aged 18½ years, Luna wife of Samuel Shalome Dwek, who appears to have collapsed at the funeral of her own grandmother as a result of her clothes catching fire from the candles placed at the head and feet of the deceased person. In the issue of *Paerah* reporting the tragedy, the editor suggests to the secretary of the Oseh Haised that the candles be encased in a glass lamp.[12]

The first evidence of community-wide action taken toward the man-

agement of these affairs was a meeting held on 27 Tammuz 5651 (= 2nd August 1891).[13] It was chaired by Elias Meyer with the following, among others, present: Sam E. Arakie; Rahamim Moosa Cohen; Siman Tob Obadiah Cohen; Joseph Simon Awad Cohen; Ezra Ezekiel Ezra Klaif; Sassoon Benjamin Elia; Ezra Elias Ezra; Abraham Ezekiel Gubbay; Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac; Reuben Jonah Jacob; Aaron N. E. Judah; Saleh Manasseh; Fred (Faraj Hyeem) E. Meyer; D. Solomon (David Hye Shelomo Moosa) and Hakham Shelomo Twena.

The following decisions were taken:

1. A Board was formed and called "The Oseh Haised Board."
2. D. Solomon was appointed Honorary Treasurer, Joseph Simon Awad Cohen, Honorary Secretary and together with Abraham Ezekiel Gubbay they comprised the Executive committee for the day-to-day administration of the Board.
3. Twice a year accounts were to be examined at meetings called for that purpose to attend to other matters.

Up until that time, two men were officiating as warden and assistant warden of Oseh-Haised's affairs — Joshua Simon Gabai at Rs. 20.00 per month and Isaiah Aaron at Rs. 10.00 per month. In addition, a gardener was employed at Rs. 7.00 per month.

That administration started with a credit of Rs. 625.00.

On August 25, 1893, J. S. Cohen resigned as Honorary Secretary and later D. Solomon relinquished his post as Honorary Treasurer. Both posts were assumed by Abraham E. Gubbay in 1896. During his tenure of office, the Board was administering deficit budgets defrayed by private donations from time to time. At times, Gubbay would advance funds from his pocket. On several occasions Hannah D. J. Ezra (Hannah Dawood) would pay the burial expenses of destitute poor. For that matter it is noteworthy that at all times the Jewish Community defrayed the cost of paupers' funerals and of the erection of their tombstones.

Gubbay continued as Honorary Secretary till his death in November, 1906, when his son, Ezekiel, carried on for a short while. At his request to be relieved of his duties, Sam E. Arakie was appointed Honorary Secretary and Nissim I. Sassoon, Honorary Treasurer. The books accordingly were removed to E. D. Sassoon's office.

Apart from the cumulative beneficient effects of the administrations of Abraham E. Gubbay and Sam E. Arakie described above, he stabi-

lized the funds of the institution by soliciting donations and subscriptions from fellow Jews in London and elsewhere and succeeded in enhancing the maintenance account from a deficit to a surplus of over two thousand rupees. He felt that much more could have been done and was disappointed that those who were in a position to help did not do so.

Arakie now wished to consolidate different aspects of his work undertaken so zealously. He called a meeting of the Board on June 1, 1913 to make recommendations for the future administration of the institution. He proposed active workers as Board members, not just figureheads who discuss a matter at a meeting and go home and forget the issue at hand. He recommended further that a capital fund, which should be augmented from time to time, be placed in trust and its income utilized for worthwhile projects. For greater efficiency he proposed a permanent staff of workers and not just per tempore employees at funerals. Finally, he earnestly appealed for the universal use of the motor hearse which, he said, met with legal approval of the Rabbinate of Jerusalem and was universally used by co-religionists in Bombay.

Sam Arakie passed away in February, 1916. Ezra S. Gubbay took over the reigns of administration and seemed to have worked during the next decade toward the fulfillment of his predecessor's recommendations. The unsightly and distressing need to bargain with pallbearers was terminated by providing them with monthly emoluments and uniforms. Two hundred and fifty tombs were renovated, four hundred and sixty older ones restored; the entire cemetery was surveyed and excavated and it is claimed[14] that three hundred and one new tombs were erected where human remains were found. (This might be the same project described above[15] but in the Report for 1925 it is portrayed as one of the achievements after 1916. Since, in the work of the present writer in 1953, only about two hundred inscriptionless tombs were discovered, it is impossible to reconcile this number with that of the statement made in the Report of 1925. It is his opinion that the excavation took place earlier at the instance of Ezra S. Gubbay during the secretaryship of Sam Arakie and the number of tombs mentioned subsequently was exaggerated.)

Further, three quarters of the old cemetery lot was cemented over. While this prevented overgrowth, it failed to make provision for proper drainage and gave rise to frequent flooding in the wake of monsoon torrents. Roadways connecting the north, east and southwest sections of the cemetery were constructed to the relief of mourners and visitors. The entire electric installation was laid in 1927 by the sons

of the late Ezra Elias Ezra (Edward & Co.) in memory of their mother, Flora.

Ironically, Sam Arakie's proposal for capital funds was inaugurated by his will which provided Rs. 7,000.00 in trust for the Oseh Haised. Ezekiel Saleh Moses, a wealthy merchant, who made Gorakhpur on the Ganga his business headquarters, also bequeathed Rs. 5,000.00 in trust. Solomon Joseph Solomon made available a legacy of Rs. 100.00 annually. And finally, the amount of Rs. 1,500.00 was capitalized into trust from the income of the Board. This was the extent of its assets in 1925 when Moses M. Wolff was Joint Honorary Secretary with Ezra S. Gubbay. The other members of the commitee were Oscar Josephson, Honorary Treasurer, Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, Abid Joseph, Solomon Judah, Meyer Ezra Musleah, Nissim E. Nissim and Isaac M. Solomon.

At a general election meeting in 1926, a new administration was appointed under the secretaryship of David Jacob Cohen, who held office for twenty years. A member of the Bengal Legislative Council, Municipal Councillor and Honorary Magistrate, he brought to bear his public position for the service of the community. Almost at the same time he guided the destinies of two other communal institutions, Bethel Synagogue and the Jewish Girls' School and as an active leader he took the place of E. M. D. Cohen, who had died in January, 1927. A wealthy merchant and real estate owner, he could give liberally of his time. For the Oseh Haised, he induced the annual municipal grant, which was one of the financial mainstays for many years and instituted proceedings for the acquisition of the land in 1942. He was instrumental in avoiding the post mortem examination in the case of many victims of accidental deaths. In the first few years of his administration the last of the water tanks was filled, thus affording additional burial space. He is said to have addressed many religious legal questions to the rabbinates of Jerusalem and Baghdad, but unfortunately neither these nor the responses were available to the successor Boards.

Abraham Ezekiel, as superintendent of the Oseh Haised for over three decades in two different administrations, occupied one of the most challenging positions in the community. He was undertaker, on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He had an ad hoc staff that had to be assembled with inducement or cajoling. These pall-bearers, grave-diggers, Tahara-workers and seamstresses could go berserk without notice. They had the crudest mannerisms, and were forever bargaining, forever complaining. Even without the hypercritical community he had to deal with, to be boss of this fas-

tidious group was a formidable task. He was hard to ruffle.

In September, 1946, Cohen was succeeded by Isaac Sassoon Musleah. A man of unusual foresight and talented organizational ability, he infused the Oseh Haised with an unprecedented vitality whose beneficient influences were long felt. It was under his leadership that the Burial Board was put on a democratic footing with a constitution.

He directed his efforts to ensuring that funerals were conducted with dignity and decorum. He made sure always that the last religious rites were properly and regularly performed according to law. The problems were becoming more numerous as more and more responsibility was put upon fewer people. He insisted on a uniform standard of burials for all, irrespective of social standing and disregarding wealth and status. The bier cover was one example. The rich had their biers covered with the embroidered Parochets donated to the synagogues by them. The poor had a plain white cloth. In due course, Parochets were banned.

A meaningful funeral service which all understood was introduced by the present author in his capacity as religious head of the community. Mourners, relatives and friends appreciated the appropriate comforting prayers and biblical recitations, though, as was to be expected, the more conservative opposed them as unnecessary.

The Calcutta cemetery, resting place of seven generations of local Jewry's forbears, became one of the most well-maintained communal properties. The ground was levelled, pathways constructed, graves adequately spaced, the prayer hall repaired and mosaic seating installed, and shrubs and flowering plants put in.

A task of historical significance was undertaken and completed in the division into sections and numbering of the tombs. This well-regulated arrangement made it easier to find one's way through the maze of graves, especially in the older section. A register in alphabetical order was compiled by the author during his ministry in Calcutta. The details were drawn up in 1953.

A few families made advance reservations of their burial sites by a token payment which in western countries could cost hundreds of dollars. Hitherto, no register or record of reservations had been maintained and one had to rely entirely on the memory or goodwill of the Superintendent. Under Musleah, these alleged reservations were reviewed, proper records drawn up and serially numbered tickets issued to the holders incorporating the exact location and boundaries of the plots.

The increasing difficulties involving shoulder-borne funerals and the inserviceability of the old hearse made it desirable and necessary to replace it by one which met with what was thought to be the requirement of the law, of having a Minyan chant the dirges while the body was being conveyed to its last resting place.

Some cemeteries in Bengal, Bihar and the Uttar Pradesh were either taken over completely by, or received periodic attention from, the Board.[16]

His keen desire for alleviating the sufferings of the poor and needy germinated in Musleah the idea of a free clinic with a part-time physician and pharmacist. Malnutrition and diseases ranging from cancer and tuberculosis to common indispositions had been treated with varying degrees of success, including consultations with specialists and hospitalization involving surgical treatment. Many members of the community committed themselves to, and energetically aided in, making these schemes workable. At its peak the Clinic served over thirteen hundred patients annually.

A grateful general meeting of members in 1956 decided to name the Clinic after its originator and prime-mover, the late I. S. Musleah, who died a year earlier.

Among the many helpers, two medical men stood out: Dr. Maurice Shellim was a pillar of strength in rendering free medical advice and in sponsoring the annual appeals; and Dr. Ajit Kumar Ghosh, Honorary Physician since 1952, whose sympathy for the afflicted, patient diagnosis and careful treatment merited the highest praise. He evinced an extraordinary, almost unbelievable, humane spirit.

Our rabbis termed attending to the last rites of the dead, Haised Shel Emet, true, faithful and unrewarded deeds of merit. Such voluntary service has been maintained by the Calcutta community in the best traditions of their people.

*Chapter 24*

## THE FINAL GASP

If census lists of Jews inhabiting the countries of the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were drawn up, the exclusion of all of the few thousands in India would make no appreciable difference. Very few people in the western world would risk a guess about the existence of Jews on that sub-continent. Still fewer could draw valid conclusions from their limited knowledge of conditions of life there. The previous chapters help one understand a segment of Indian Jewry virtually apart from the remainder of their race.

Compared with the teeming millions of Indian peoples, Jewish numbers were dwarfed. The Indians fortunately were tolerant and friendly; Jews always enjoyed rights and privileges as equal citizens, attended educational institutions and worshipped freely. Illustrative of the last point was the fact that at the impressive immersion ceremony of both Gandhi's and Nehru's last remains, Jewish representatives joined other religious sects in prayer.

In a country replete with religious sentiment of all descriptions and manifestations, Jews stood out for most of the period under review in the strict observance of religion. Thousands of miles from other organized centers of Jewry, Indian Jews observed the Sabbath and Kashrut, and their home life breathed a unique warmth. Spiritual life was sustained, however, not by trained clerics, but by a few knowledgeable individuals who advised unofficially on religious matters.

With the gradual spread of education to the university level, secular and materialistic leanings had a devastating effect on Jewish youth as it did on other Indian youth. The stronghold of spirituality was severely shaken, revolutionizing the thought processes of the descendants of the Vedas and Upanishads as well as those of the Tannaim and Amoraim. Few escaped the new upsurge. "Our fathers took Judaism on premise; we must have more logical answers," became a cliche. The days of blind traditionalism had faded away; religion had to grow with life if it was to survive.

This awakening produced a consciousness also of the lack of a

central community organization. Perhaps a growing national awareness among the Hindus and Moslems spurred on a parallel sentiment in the Jewish community. Economic ease combined with secular knowledge to cause a straying from the religious principles according to which previous generations had lived.

D. J. Cohen, the old workhorse, whose devoted but sometimes not wholly unselfish labors for twenty years now showed up deficiencies, relinquished his tight hold on the community after World War II. But he had to be persuaded to relent. Jacob Reuben Jacob ("J. R.," as he was endearingly called), liberal-minded, kind and generous senior partner of B. N. Elias & Co., was prepared to lend the prestige of his nationally reputable firm and the affluence and understanding of his family to a democratic representation of all Jewish institutions in a centrally administered body. Jacob pressed into the achievement of his aims a bright young employee, Meyer E. Musleah, elder brother of the present writer. A genial and dynamic personality and leader of local youth, he had a flair for organization. He negotiated with Cohen and others, promised him the presidency, drew up a constitution with fellow-lawyer Victor E. Moses and, in 1945, there came into being the Jewish Association of Calcutta with offices at B. N. Elias & Co. It included all local Jewish institutions, except Cohen's Bethel Synagogue, and the Neveh Shalome Synagogue, and formed a managing committee called the "Governing Body." Though Bethel was not represented, Cohen assumed the presidency by being elected to the managing committee from the subscribing individual membership of the Association. The other members so elected were: J. R. Jacob, Marie Mordecai, Aaron Morris and Mrs. Silas A. (Gracie) Silas. The objectives of the Association were clarified in the notice calling the Jewish community to the initial meeting:

> "In recent times the members of the community generally, and in particular the respective committees of management of the . . . institutions have deeply felt that in the interests of the . . . institutions themselves, there should be mutual help and collaboration. It is further felt that social welfare and uplift work within the community should be based under a co-ordinated scheme whereby all members of the community would be entitled to participate in a democratic manner and that responsibility should be equally shared by all members. It is further felt that this co-ordinated plan for the benefit of the community should be influenced, as far as possible, culturally and spiritually in a Jewish direction. . . ."

Much spade work had to be done. A knowledge of the number and social and economic characteristics of the Jewish community was a necessary beginning. But the first ever census was only a partial success. Many had religious reservations, apprehensive of the calamity that might overtake the community in the wake of an unorthodox counting.[1]

Those who did submit returns numbered 3344. Between 4500 and 5000 souls would probably be more accurate. These figures represent an increase of about 20% over those of pre-world War II by an immigration of about 1000-1500 Jews from Burma who fled in the face of the Japanese occupation in 1941 and settled in Calcutta and Bombay.[2]

The influx altered, among other things, dietary needs. Kosher meat was in demand and the Association responded by setting up a store in central Calcutta.[3]

The journalistic talents of David H. Cohen, a young, creative writer, made the first year of the Association's paper, *Shema*, from June, 1946, a pleasure to read. It continued as an effective organ upon his departure, when the editorship passed on to Moses S. Elias and Flower Abraham (later, Mrs. David A. Silliman) for another three years. As the community and Association became less vibrant, the issues of *Shema* faithfully reflected the trend.

The Association needled the institutions and aided actively in effecting improvements in areas beyond their financial reach. The Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah for boys, all of whose students came from indigent families, did not have a boarding department whereas its counterpart, the Jeshurun Free School for girls, did. As mentioned above,[4] the need was filled in June, 1949, after protracted fund-raising.[5]

Many a poor graduate from high school could not afford to go to college until scholarships were provided by the Association. A department of ORT (Organized for Rehabilitation through Training) was started in 1949 to make it possible for others to get vocational training but it was short-lived.[6]

The accent of the Association was on youth. In the first five years it inspired an unprecedented spate of organized activity. It encouraged the program of the Calcutta Jewish Youth Council, formed in January, 1946, co-opting its representative onto its own Governing Body. The Council itself aimed at "coordinating the activity of youth organizations and bringing about a strong and organized youth movement in the Calcutta Jewish community to play an important part in the progressive development of the community and the country."[7]

It was comprised of the Schools, the Zionist Habonim movement, Boy Scouts, the Young People's Congregation, Jewish Athletic Club, and the Jewish Dramatic Society.[8] The latter provided entertainment particularly in aid of annual youth camps. Noteworthy were the talents displayed by Jeffrey Isaacs and Alan David.[9] They followed in the footsteps of Gracia Cohane who, a generation previously, was possessed of outstanding dramatic skill that delighted as much as it edified.

Though the Athletic Club, on which Nat Zakariah was a moving force, was not in existence in 1950, the community sent a hockey team, including Zakariah, to the Third Maccabian in Israel that year, in collaboration with the Bombay Jewish community.[10] In April, 1951, a game organization, Maccabee, began providing young people with indoor and outdoor sports.[11]

The Young People's Congregation was conceived by Rabbi David J. Seligson, American Army Chaplain, stationed in the China-Burma-India sector with headquarters in Calcutta, and in civilian life, spiritual leader of the Central Synagogue in New York City. For over two years, in addition to his challenging military duties, he involved himself personally in invigorating religious life in the local Jewish community — another full-time job. To compensate for a total lack of religious leadership, he delivered sermons in the course of Sabbath services at Maghen David Synagogue, then conducted youth services at Bethel, and rounded out the Sabbath with a Torah study circle.[12] A charming and warm person and a gifted rabbi, he ingratiated himself with the community, who will forever be in his debt.

Rabbi Seligson worked the Young People's Congregation in cooperation with Meyer E. Musleah. When the Rabbi left for America at the termination of the War, and Musleah for Palestine in 1945 with the first Calcutta Halutz group, the administration and conduct of services fell upon the shoulders of the present writer in conjunction with Regina Abraham (later Mrs. Jenkins Meyer).[13] Rahma Luddy, the Principal of the Jewish Girls' School, gave lavishly of her time and organizing ability to almost all aspects of youth programming.

One of the main concerns of the Jewish Association was the absence of a rabbi in Calcutta, a gap brought into sharper focus by the activities of Rabbi Seligson. The state of religious attitudes at the time is best described in the following letter to the editor of the *Shema:*[14]

"That there is a deplorable growth of religious apathy

among the Jewish Youth in Calcutta there is no gainsaying. Those that attend Christian schools go through them with a negligible education in Judaism, for Hebrew is not taught in any of these schools. Apart from a disconcerting lack of facilities for teaching Judaism, and of the failure of Hebrew to be included as a general part of the youth's education, there is also the indifference of the young person himself. Besides, the apathetic parent, not possessing the necessary elan towards his faith is not a favorable inspiration for the offspring. Consequently, we find the youths growing up with but a slight acquaintance with their own religious ideals.

"The case of the Iraq-born Jewish youths presents a lamentable situation. Entering India with a generally competent knowledge of his religion and a usually strict adherence to his faith, his ideals are soon swallowed up in the hectic swirl of English life. At first he views his surroundings with some feeling akin to perplexity. The unorthodoxy and apparent indifference towards Judaism of his India-born Jewish companions is primarily a puzzle to him. He strives to maintain his own beliefs and lives in accord with his faith, but finally environment proves stronger than upbringing, and gradually he declines into an abyss of almost complete indifference. And here an element of hypocrisy enters. His parents are usually old-fashioned, orthodox people who hold their religion dear to their hearts. Perhaps, out of respect to his elders, the youngster continues to put up an appearance of religious adherence, though his quondam observance of the principles of the faith may be past history. He attends the Synagogue, observes the Sabbath and studies the Scriptures, though in his heart he is bursting with rebellion against what he comes to believe is a plethora of old-world religious fanaticism. And this comes to be the plight of a great proportion of the Jewish youths. Uninitiated into the beauties of the Hebrew language, the glory of their history and the ideals of their religion, they become Jews in name only. Untutored, they come to regard Judaism as an occupation only for their quasi-serious elders."

Rabbi Seligson succeeded in instilling the compelling need for a rabbi in Calcutta. Inquiries were directed to England and America. Ralph Arakie, another son-in-law of B. N. Elias who lived in Lon-

don, reportedly failed in his search for a suitable candidate.[15] In 1946, there was an application from a Mr. Levinsohn of Tientsin, China. Not an ordained rabbi, he listed among his qualifications, "Shohet, Hebrew teacher, Hazan and preacher" with many years of experience in Germany. The Governing Body recommended his appointment,[16] but the community rejected it because he was not a Sephardi, not thoroughly conversant with English and not at all with Arabic.[17]

When the search for foreign talent was given up, the Association picked in April, 1947 a local resident who was Hazan of Shaare Rasone Synagogue. When he had arrived in Calcutta from Baghdad, as a young man in the 1920's, he was recommended to the community as a Shohet, and had been performing that duty from time to time. He came to be known as Hakham David Girjee Raymond. Besides Shehitah, his functions now included "Mohail, Mackuddesh (Marriage performer), visiting the poor and sick, delivery of sermons, divorce matters and generally as a certified Hakham to advise on all matters of Jewish religious Laws, customs, etc. and to furnish authoritative decisions on all religious questions." The total number of sermons he delivered is not known, but his knowledge of Jewish Law was overly tested in a case where he granted a "Get" to a husband in the absence of his wife who refused to attend but was later informed that she was divorced. The "Get" was subsequently kept with the Hakham's Beth Din. The High Court at Calcutta which later tried the case called him a "butcher and a teacher." When he settled in Israel, he faced a rabbinical court to which the matter was referred, which censured him for his official action in this regard.

Rabbi Seligson had done one more meritorious deed before leaving for America in persuading the present writer to take up the rabbinate. It was not easy, for to be a Halutz in the Holy Land wielded a greater pull. Seligson's earnestness and a sense of duty to his community, however, made the decision in favor of the rabbinate. Protracted negotiations with the Religious Sub-Committee of the Association ended in a stalemate. The members could not believe that a young man would survive the lures America had to offer upon ordination. Undeterred, the writer continued with his plans for the rabbinate and his father bore all expenses. One can imagine his surprise when the fares of another much younger candidate for the rabbinate, Shalome Arakie, were paid by the Association on the proviso he returned to Calcutta to serve as a rabbi. Ironically, Arakie, bound for Chicago's Hebrew Theological College, forsook his rabbinical studies in a short time, while the writer, accepted by the

Jewish Theological Seminary of America, upon graduation in 1952, being a free agent, chose to return to his native Calcutta to serve the purpose for which he took up the rabbinate, despite the pleas of Professor Finkelstein, President (later Chancellor) of the Seminary, to stay in America. Dr. Finkelstein was aware of the fast diminishing numbers of Indian Jews.

Even after the prospective rabbinical student sailed in September, 1947, the search to gain the services of a qualified rabbi continued. The World Jewish Congress, the Federation of Sephardi Synagogues, New York, the British Chief Rabbi's Council, the Jewish Agency and other possible sources including the Seminary were sounded to no avail.[18]

In March, 1949, a Beth Din of laymen was formed with the concurrence of the Baghdad rabbinical authorities, for the purpose of "adding weight and authority to decisions made on matters of Jewish Law." D. J. Cohen, the Association's President, became Chairman, with Rev. David G. Raymond, Sam Rassaby and Sassoon J. Cohen members.[19] An early decision of the Beth Din was to interdict all persons not authorized by it to perform weddings, divorces, conversions or circumcisions. Irresponsibility in the conduct of these rites was apparently becoming common. Since those responsible were from the impoverished class, sanction took the form of suspension of Jewish charity.[20]

At the helm of all the Association's exertions and lending his active support and initiative was its hard-working secretary, Bernard V. Jacob. An Oxford graduate, he joined the family business at B. N. Elias & Co. His main interests lay in alleviating poverty and in tightening overall administrative machinery. He was for a while secretary also of the Elias Meyer Free School and the Jewish Girls' School.

Perhaps his most significant contribution was the efforts he expended on the formation of an All-India Council representing Bombay, Cochin and Calcutta Jewish organizations. The final editorial from the pen of David H. Cohen in May, 1947, only three months prior to Indian Independence, remarked: "Indian Jewry must unite so that it can be represented on the Indian Government, can assure the safeguarding of the rights of Jews in India and help Jews to play the part they should in India, as Indians, and not as foreigners."[21]

Jacob had interviews with representatives of Bombay and Cochin early in 1948 and the points agreed upon were summarized by him as follows:

"The general purpose of the proposed All-India Council should

be the formation of a loose body which will always remain in being, and which will be permanently available for quick consultation and decision on national and international issues affecting us. . . . Distance seems to obviate a close federation and, really speaking, there seems to be no need for such a type of organization." As for practical administrative matters, two delegates from each center would meet at least once a year at each of the centers in rotation. Chairmanship also would rotate. The agenda for the proposed first meeting would deal with the position of Jews vis-a-vis the Constituent Assembly that was drafting the Indian Constitution. While both Cochin and Bombay approved the points in principle, they never committed themselves and the Council never came into being formally. Sluggish response persisted despite proddings from Dr. I. Schwarzbart of the World Jewish Congress both that year and in 1952.[22]

Though Jacob's concept of the Council was highly desirable, its non-existence did not affect Indian Jewry adversely. This was because, as far back as 1931, in its Karachi session, the Indian National Congress framed a constitution for a free and independent India. Inter alia, it stated:

> "Every citizen shall enjoy freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and to practise his religion subject to public order and morality.
>
> "All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.
>
> "No disability attaches to any citizens by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling."[23]

Despite these assurances, however, Association leaders wanted Jewish representation on the Advisory Committee of Minorities of the Constituent Assembly to clarify the position of the Jews of India or merely to make the Jewish presence felt.[24] When the motion was put to the vote at a meeting of the community, it was lost.[25] The long-standing distaste for participation in politics showed itself again.

India became an independent state on August 15, 1947, after sharing the original area of the sub-continent with Moslem Pakistan. On August 10, at a meeting of the community, the Jewish position in the new political context was discussed and messages of congratulations from the Jewish community to the new Indian and Pakistan Governments were adopted:

"To His Excellency Viscount Mountbatten
Governor-General, and to the
Honourable Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister
of the Indian Union:

"On this momentous occasion, inaugurating the rebirth of freedom in India the Jewish Association of Calcutta on behalf of the members of the Jewish faith and the Calcutta section of All-India Jewry offer their loyal greetings and heartfelt prayers for the future peace, progress and prosperity of the independent Indian Union. As a minority community we are heartened by and anchor our trust in the repeated assurances by the country's leaders of proper safeguards for all minorities based on fair treatment, equal rights and opportunities for all citizens of the new Indian Union. May this memorable day usher in a spirit of harmony and brotherhood amongst all India's various communities, which is so essential a pre-requisite for tackling the vast problems of social and economic uplift that lie ahead, and lastly may the Indian Union achieve an honoured seat in the comity of nations."

"To His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Ali Jinnah,
Governor General of Pakistan.

"On this memorable occasion, the Jewish Association of Calcutta on behalf of members of the Jewish faith and the section of Jewry domiciled in the Pakistan area of Bengal offer their sincere congratulations to the new state of Pakistan and wish it peace, prosperity and progress in the future."

Later, the Governing Body sent the following message to His Excellency Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, Governor of West Bengal:

"The Jewish Association of Calcutta, on behalf of West Bengal Jewry offer Your Excellency their sincerest greetings at your accession to the Governorship of this province. They welcome to this honoured position a person of your political eminence and ripe experience and sagacity as an Administrator and are confident that under your wise and able guidance, this province will soon regain its prominence and be on the road to progress and prosperity."[26]

The murder of Gandhi on January 30, 1948 came as a great shock

to all. The feelings of the Jewish community of Calcutta are summed up in these words by Moses S. Elias, editor of *Shema:*

> "Our debt to him is no less unquestionable. Apart from the general principles of morality on which he based his every thought and action and which afforded all communities including ourselves the protection of the rock-like foundations of true freedom and self-expression, he gave concrete expression to his sympathy for our cause and our sufferings on numerous occasions and in no uncertain manner. We are proud and grateful to place on record that he had the greatest respect and admiration for the Jewish people and all they symbolized — for did he not himself stand for what they had stood through centuries of persecution and suffering — the eternal principles of justice and morality against the savage hand of tyranny, the belief that the spirit shall triumph over the sword."[27]

The constitution of India was adopted on January 26, 1950. Calcutta Jews participated happily in ceremonies to celebrate the inauguration of India as a Republic. Rev. David G. Raymond represented the Jewish community in joining other faiths in a prayer meeting at Government House. Congratulatory messages were sent to the Government. A function was held at the Judean Club followed by special prayers at the Maghen David Synagogue. India had severed her connection with the British Crown but opted to remain within the Commonwealth.[28]

The Jewish community was happy for Indian Independence but did not know what to expect. Would the tranquil and fairly prosperous life continue? Would economic problems arise? Would Hindus and Moslems live amicably or would their centuries-old animosities disrupt normal living? How would the Indians be as governors?

Politically, no problems arose. Jews participated in elections in greater numbers than ever and most people accepted Indian citizenship. It was a different story on the economic front. Foreign exchange became the biggest bug-bear for the Indian Government. In order to preserve foreign currency for industrialization, government fiscal policy tightened on the funds that could be removed from India. Imports were restricted to boost indigenous products, throwing out of business the small entrepreneur. Moreover, the days had passed when a white collar worker could get a job on fairly good wages with comparative ease. Now the native, with a lower standard of living, doing the same type of work as the Jew or the westerner,

unconsciously ousted them from work, by accepting a lower salary. This had a social repercussion. Marriages decreased. Indian independence therefore was no unmixed blessing. Jews began moving out of India to England, Australia, the U.S.A. and Canada.

By coincidence, on the heels of the political freedom of India came the creation of the State of Israel in May, 1948. It was greeted with great jubilation. Though India postponed recognition of Israel until 1950, the Jews of India hoped that political expediency prompting an indifferent policy might pass into one of coming to grips with the reality of Israel. But that was not to be.

An Israel consulate and a Jewish Agency department in Bombay were free to work out commercial and Aliyah ventures with the general and Jewish communities. Benny Port, a Shaliah, was deputed to go to Calcutta, where he solicited funds to send a group of children to Israel. Other groups followed the first in quick succession and soon a regular stream of immigrants were arriving in Israel from Calcutta, Bombay and Cochin. A training center for Indian Jewish children was established in Lavee, eight miles from Tiberias, through the efforts of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon of Letchworth, England, and Hapoel Hamizrahi.[29] In the first year 250 people had emigrated and 700 more were registered.[30] That was the general pattern until 1952 when Aliyah slowed down. By that time, the Jewish population of Calcutta numbered about 2500, at least 2000 less than in 1945.

In the summer of 1952, the writer arrived in Calcutta in response only to a pledge of his conscience, aware of diminishing numbers and with no assurance of being hired by the community. It took a high resolve to take up the rabbinate; an equally daring one to choose Calcutta as his first pulpit. For seven years the Association had clamored for a rabbi. The Rishon Le-Sion, Chief Rabbi Ouziel, anxiously urged a rabbinical appointment.[31] When one was among them, they did not know what to do with him. It took four months of wavering and wrangling to evolve a plan to pay the rabbi's salary. In the interim, he delivered sermons, presided over a memorial service for Chaim Weizmann and performed other religious and legal duties unofficially.

Seldom, if ever, do members of the clergy serve in the cities of their birth and the locale of their childhood, for there is an obvious and inherent disadvantage when people tell you, "I saw you when you were that big," hands indicating the height of a three-year old and tone replete with tenderness. This drawback is somewhat offset by the asset of knowing the community instead of having to feel one's way at the beginning.

It was the community that had to be familiarized with and initiated into what a rabbi does. Some asked him for employment, as if jobs could be procured merely at his instance. Some behaved as though all local institutions were in his absolute power. Some made impassioned appeals for financial aid when the funds were, in fact, in someone else's charge. And, as if to add richer variety to his official experience, some made their discourtesy felt by a plethora of abuse, the intensity of which had immunized him.

The really damaging development, however, involved reports, inspired by spheres of influence opposed to the Seminary, which began circulating that he was not, in actuality, a rabbi and that it would take two more years of Yeshiva study to be one. In effect, the report went on, his incomplete status precluded him from officiating at legal ceremonies which demanded a more "learned" functionary. But the proof of the pudding is in its eating. When he did begin performing ceremonies like divorce and Halitza, and reports of their flawless character reverberated in unfriendly camps outside India, unenthusiastic approval was extended.

The native rabbi's chief emphasis was on youth activities. With textbooks supplied by the courtesy and generosity of Professor Simon Greenberg of the Seminary, modern Hebrew, Bible and Jewish history were taught. The proudest achievement in this field was the offering of a course in Biblical Hebrew to high school students and the acceptance at a Jerusalem teachers' training center of a girl who was the product of the local school. She returned to India and taught for two years.

Cultural and social programs involving children and young adults, including Leaders Training Fellowship courses, received enthusiastic support. On one occasion Christopher Fry's drama, "The Firstborn," was presented at Raj Bhavan (Government House). Religious services for young people got full-throated approbation.

To a much lesser degree, there was pastoral counselling to impoverished families. Administrative functions were unwelcome but necessary. No cantorial duties were expected for five years and then — the Hazan of the largest synagogue goes on Aliyah and the rabbi is asked to fill the bill.

By 1962, the Jewish population had dwindled to less than a thousand souls and was decreasing at the rate of a hundred per year. The rabbi was presiding over the disintegration of his own community in his honorary capacity as Jewish Agency Aliyah representative in Calcutta. Religious facilities fell to a low ebb. Only one Shohet for chicken remained. Upon the birth of a male child, a Mohel had to

be summoned from Bombay, a distance of about 1200 miles. The Jewish schools were decimated by emigration, one, and later the other, being forced by new government regulations, to admit non-Jews into its general department. Synagogues employed inept Readers who a generation previously, would appropriately be employed as Minyan men. The exodus had taken its toll on almost the entire community, in personnel, in religion and in Jewish social life.

The writer started becoming uncomfortable. He was on the horns of a dilemma. Should he abandon the sinking ship? There was no alternative if he was still serious about the rabbinate. He could leave with a conscience as clear as could be expected of a man with a family. The purpose for which he became a rabbi was served. The frayed structure of the community, dented already in places at the beginning of his ministry, became dilapidated and precarious. There was no more need for a rabbi — of any sort. Like a patient for whose survival doctors had despaired, no further effective medication would help — only sedatives for relief — until the end came.

It is always sad to witness the breaking up of a Jewish community, especially one as long-standing and romantic as that of Indian Jewry. But this is the refrain of Jewish history. Circumstances of greater moment had uprooted whole Jewish societies including Indian Jewry's mother community of Baghdad whose liquidation brought to a close 2500 years of courageous and fruitful living. The equity of Providence periodically gives other geographical areas a chance to play host to God's witnesses — this century here, the next century there, but ever present.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

*Chapter 1*

1. See his diary called *Nawrooz,* a word used by early settlers of India as a title for their diaries or memoirs. The name really signifies the Persian New Year. For an explanation of its origin, see Appendix 1. David Solomon Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid, Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts,* Oxford University Press, London, 1932, MS. No. 1021, 2, 975. Also typewritten extracts, MS. No. 879, extending from 1789–1834. All dated references are found *loc. cit.* in unabridged diary. David Ezra, "The Earliest Jewish Settler in Calcutta," in South African *Jewish Chronicle,* October, 1929, 13, 15.

2. I. A. Isaac, *A Short History of Calcutta Jews.* Telegraph Association Press, 1917, Calcutta, 2.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Walter Fischel, "The Activities of a Jewish Merchant House in Bengal," 1786–1798, *Revue Des Etudes Juives — Historia Judaica,* Juillet — Decembre, 1964, 434–498.

5. *Ibid.,* 436–437. An Armenian, Petros Arratoon, collaborated with a Jew, Abraham Jacobs, in aiding the survivors of the "Black Hole" tragedy (1756–57) with supplies.

6. *Ibid.,* 490.

7. *Pinkas* (Register) of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, *Ohel Dawid,* MS. No. 897, 2, 971–973. Documents extended from 1815 to 1860.

This sea voyage was long and wearisome. In 1826, Judah Salim Yahya Saleh of Calcutta and Reuben Sassoon Musslawi of Baghdad were on a business trip to Bombay and were returning to Calcutta via Madras. When they reached Madras, Reuben took ill after a two-and-a-half months' stay. With his condition progressively deteriorating, they embarked for Calcutta on the eve of Kippur. Three days after Simhat Torah he died at sea, seven days distance from Calcutta. Judah bound large stones to the feet of the deceased and threw his body into the sea (Bay of Bengal) "in accordance with the procedure concerning those who die at sea."

To complete the story, on the testimony of Judah, Reuben's wife, Salha, daughter of Saddik Hakham Sassoon of Calcutta, was permitted to re-marry. The deceased having been an Iraqi emigrant, the Calcutta Jewish community also informed the Baghdad rabbinate.

Here are some other distances in terms of the time it took to cover them.

Bombay/Surat to Muscat ..... = 3 weeks
Muscat to Basra ..... = 19 days
Surat to Bombay ..... = 3 days
Bombay to Cochin ..... = 8 days
Cochin to Nageor, South India ..... = 5 days
Nageor to Tringebar, South India ..... = 4 days

| | |
|---|---|
| Tringebar to Madras | = 3 days |
| Madras to River Hooghly estuary | = 12 days |
| Ferry up River Hooghly | = 5 days, arriving Calcutta in another three days by small boat |
| Aleppo to Baghdad | = 9 days |
| Baghdad to Hillah | = 3 days |
| Hillah to Basra | = 3 days |

8. *Kaneh Middah* — Diary of Moses Dwek. (MS. No. 961, *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 977. Also typewritten copy MS. No. 878. My references are to the latter.) Also, extracts from diary MS. No. 558, *Ibid.,* 1, 372–373, copied by E. M. D. Cohen.
9. It later became the heart of Dutch trade in that Indian province.
10. Both poems *in extenso* are found in *Kaneh Middah,* 13–17.
11. *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 975.
12. Solomon Reinmann, *Massoth Shelomo,* Vienna, 1884, 192. For a sketch on Reinmann and his book, see page 517.
13. *Paerah,* 7:48, 325. E. M. D. Cohen, editor of *Paerah,* Calcutta Arabic-Hebrew periodical, claims that Shalome Cohen earlier was court jeweler to Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. *Paerah* was published from June, 1878 to March, 1889.
14. *Kaneh Middah,* 19.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Mebasser,* Calcutta Jewish journal, September, 1873 to December, 1877, 1:18.
17. *Encyclopedia Britannica* XVII, 303b, q.v. France-Treaty.
18. *Ibid.,* X, 213, q.v. George III.
19. Jacob Sapir, *Eben Sapir,* Mainz, 1894, Vol. 2, 99. For a sketch of Sapir, see page 511.
20. David Sassoon, "A History of the Jews of Basra," *J. Q. R.,* (N. S.), Vol. 17, No. 4, 422.
21. I. A. Isaac, "A Short Account of Calcutta Jews," *supra,* 2.
22. *Jewish Expositor,* Vol. 2, 1817, 39-40. Quoted by A. Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* Vol. 2, 9. Also, *Eben Sapir,* Vol. 2, 99.
23. *Paper Book of the Inter-Synagogue Case,* 77. Owner, J. M. David.
24. Speech by E. M. D. Cohen recorded in *Paper Book of Synagogue Case,* 515.

*Chapter 2*

1. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 100.
2. *Ibid.,* 99.
3. *Jewish Expositor,* 1823, 8:238. Quoted by A. Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 2, 9.
4. *Kaneh Middah,* 23–24.
5. Judgment of Synagogue Case, Appendix C, 35. See page 254.
6. Diary of Moses Dwek, *loc. cit.; Paper Book of Inter-Synagogue Case,* 331 & 516.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Paerah,* 7:48, 325.
9. Tomb No. EF 191.
10. *A Gazette of the World* or *Dictionary of the Geographical Knowledge,* 2,

edited by the Royal Geographical Society, A. Fullarton & Co. q.v. "Calcutta," subsection "Population." Census taken by Capt. Birch, Supt. of Police, down to 1st January, 1837.

11. *Massoth Shelomo,* 183–184.
12. *Paerah,* 7:48, 235.
13. *Kaneh Middah.*
14. *Ibid.,* 62–63.
15. *Ibid.,* 25–58.
16. *Ibid.,* 62.
17. *Ibid.,* 64.
18. Evidently, the inscription makes him eighty years of age at the time of his death. If he was twenty when he arrived in Calcutta in 1806, he could not have been more than seventy-five when he died. This view is supported by an old sketch of Moses Dwek, found in "The Jews of Calcutta" by Flower Elias and Judith Elias Cooper, Calcutta, 1974. An inscription thereon gives his age at death as seventy-six.
19. Numbers, 9:23. *Paerah,* 7:48, 325.

*Chapter 3*

1. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 99. Translation by Rabbi Philip Alstat, his column, "Strange to Relate," *American Examiner,* New York, June 13, 1952.
2. Ecclesiastes Rabba, 1:10.
3. Documents scattered throughout *Pinkas.*
4. David Sassoon, *History of the Jews of Baghdad,* Letchworth, 1949, 128–131.
5. *Sepher Ha-Pizmonim,* Calcutta. Ed. Eleazar Aaron Arakie, 18.
6. *Massoth Shelomo,* 183.
7. Isaac, *Short History of Calcutta Jews,* 3.
8. Family tree of Musleah, Appendix 2.
9. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 99.
10. *Massoth Shelomo,* 182.
11. Isaac, *Short History of Calcutta Jews,* 3.
12. Israel Benjamin, *Sepher Masei Israel,* Lyck, 1859, 70.
13. Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *Luah Ibbur Ha-Shanim Ve-Yomii* (Diary), 92. *Ohel Dawid,* 373, MS. 618.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Moses Dwek (Diary), *loc. cit.; Ohel Dawid,* 975, MS. 898–899.
16. The event is recorded also in Arakie's diary, 93.
17. *Kaneh Middah,* 61.
18. *Massoth Shelomo,* 183.
19. *Mebasser,* 1:31, 1.
20. *Ibid.,* 1:49.
21. *Paerah,* 4:38.
22. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 99.
23. Partly in *Paerah,* 11:14, 99.
24. Died 27th Elul 5648 (= September 2, 1888); Tomb No. EE136.
25. A further four sons, Judah, Joseph, Abdullah and Jacob and two daughters, Rahel and Simha were born in Calcutta. Abdullah remained a bachelor, and died in Calcutta; Farha married Sassoon David Aaron Gubbay and Rahma, Elia Shalome Gubbay; Judah and Jacob, Rahel and Simha died young. Yet another son, Sassoon is mentioned in our history and was buried in the Calcutta cemetery, as was his wife, Estherulla (Rosa). His name is not in the Meela lists of the community; it is, there-

fore, reasonable to presume that he was born in Baghdad. Nissim's son, Aaron, became involved in an opium case but received an amnesty in Queen Victoria's jubilee celebrations. See below, Ch. 17.

26. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 99.

27. *Ibid.,* 2, 101.

The following is the inscription on Ezekiel Judah's tombstone: (EE 182):

צירן מקום טמונת גבר חכם בעוז: נדיב ושוע יקר רוח
איש תבונות מגזע ישרים מזרע קדושים: גמרן וסברן
איש חי רב פעלים לרעב פרס לחמו ונפש נענה השביע
מעוז ומגדל לתורה ולומדיה ירא ה' צדיק וחסיד ישר
ונאמן כקש"ת מוהר"ר יחזקאל יאודה יעקב סלימאן נ"ע
רה"ת בב"ע הע' ונתבקש בישיבה של מעלה ועלה לשמש במרום
יום ל' לחד' ניסן שנת חתר"ך ליצירה תנצב"ה

28. Shalome Aaron Obadiah Hakohen, *Sepher Ha-Nawrooz,* 12.

*Ohel Dawid,* 975, MS. 879.

Also, Jnanendra Nath Kumar, *The Genealogical History of India,* Part 2, Victoria Press, Calcutta, (Circa 1935).

See Ch. 8 for a biography of David Joseph Ezra's son, Elia and Ch. 18 for that of his grandson, Sir David Ezra.

29. David Sassoon, *Massa Babel,* ed. Meir Benayahu, Jerusalem, 5715 = 1955, p. 72.

David Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Basra," 455, Note 187.

30. *Kaneh Middah,* 29. His name appears also on a copper dish with the inscription JOSEPH EZRA KHALEIF in the year 1212 A.H. (= 1797). In 1855 we find him among the leaders in Baghdad, "History of the Jews of Basra," 455, & Note 187.

31. A third brother, Ezekiel, also lived in Calcutta where he died on 7th Nisan 5623 (= April 1863). Sassoon MS. 211H written by Rephael Elias Kasin, Constantinople 1848, was dedicated to him. *Ohel Dawid,* 388.

32. Isaac, *Short History of Calcutta Jews,* 5.

33. *Massoth Shelomo,* 182.

34. For a fuller account of Elia Shalome Gubbay, see chapter 8.

35. David Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Basra," 422-423.

36. A full account of Daud Pasha's cruel activities and petty tyrannies is given by a Baghdad Jew who migrated to Australia, in a letter dated June 14, 1897 addressed to Hakham Solomon Abid Twena, the editor of the paper *Maggid Mesharim,* Calcutta, 1897, 8:46-48. (Quoted by David Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Basra," 422, Note 29.)

37. "History of the Jews of Basra," 423-425, and quote there from *Paerah,* July 2, 1886.

38. He applied Numbers 18:4 to the Czar.

39. *Paerah,* 9:4, 21.

40. *Ibid.* His son, Ezra, is the author of a register of family events from 1840 to about 1900. *Ohel Dawid,* MS. 886, pp. 976-977. He died on Rosh Hashana, 1907, tomb number, EB 123.

*Chapter 4*

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* Eleventh Edition, 4, 605-606.

2. For all the foregoing on opium, *Paerah* 8, 234; 10:32, 236; 11:9, 59. For

weekly shipping statistics, see *Paerah.* At random, we quote 6:44, 269, April, 1884: Total 3763 chests, 2918 belonging to Jews, David Sassoon 1040, E. S. Gubbay 1293, E. D. J. Ezra 417, Meyer Bros. 168. *Paerah* 11:30, 209: Total 4411 chests, 4146 belonging to Jews, E. S. Gubbay 1935, David Sassoon 1239, E. D. J. Ezra 385, Meyer Bros. 415, S. Manasseh 180; Armenians 80, Parsees, Moslems and Chinese 185. Of these, David Sassoon despatched 4 to London and 5 to Colombo and Paris.

3. *Eastern Hebrew* 1:1, 33.

4. The latter color is mentioned by the Jerusalem traveler, Jacob Sapir, in his *Eben Sapir* 2, 100, as being the color of indigo. See also *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Supra,* 485.

5. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 100. The following are mentioned by Sapir, 1860, as men of substance: David (Joseph) Ezra, recognized as "President" of the community, with a flourishing business, and his son Elia; Reuben Shukur (Isaac). (Died at age over 70 years, 8th Adar 5647 = 1887, tomb No. EG 46); Reuben Sultoon, (tomb undeciphered or not buried in Calcutta); Aaron (Shalome Hakham Aaron) Gubbay, (died 21st Ab 5648 = 1888, over 60 year old, tomb No. EF 136) and Elia (Shalome Hakham Aaron) Gubbay, his brother, (died 2nd Heshwan 5659 = 1898, a few months short of 70 years, tomb No. EG 116); Sassoon David Gubbay, Simon Amber, Jacob Rahamim and others.

6. Solomon Reinmann, *Massoth Shelomo,* 182–183.

7. Wolfe Schur, *Ibid.*

8. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *loc. cit.*

9. *Paerah,* 7:40, 267; Tomb No. EF 90.

10. Elias Meyer was chief donor to the school in Calcutta that came to be known by his name. See Chapter 15.

11. *Paerah,* 10:6, 39; Tomb No. EE 11.

12. Tomb No. EF 93.

13. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:32.

14. *Paerah,* 9:45, 308.

15. *Ibid.,* 9:47, 326. Regarding his visit in Calcutta, see also *Ibid.,* 9:42, 289; 9:46, 317.

16. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:22.

17. *Mebasser,* 1:16; 1:22, 1; *Paerah,* 9:30, 207.

18. *Ibid.,* 2:4.

19. Tomb No. EB 268.

20. For obituary notice of wife Ammam, see *Paerah,* 5:48, 287, tomb No. EB 267.

21. *Paerah,* 11:6, 39.

22. *Ibid.,* 11:25, 176.

23. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:20; 4:19.

24. *Ibid.,* 3:20; 1892.

25. The latter include Elia Ezra [Elia], Isaac Joseph [Saeed], Elias Arzooni David, Saul Moses Lanyado, Solomon Moosa & Co. and Ezekiel Hyeem Abraham Cohen. From a letter file in the possession of the present writer.

26. Vol. 2, running series.

27. See Appendix 3.

28. *Paerah,* 2, 37, 168.

29. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:18.

30. Meela Register of Moses Dwek.

31. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:35.

32. *Ibid.,* 10:45.

33. *Pinkas,* 298, 129.
34. *Ibid.,* 97, 54.
35. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:9.
36. *Paerah,* 11:17, 123.
37. *Mebasser,* 1:14, 1, sold by Joseph Simon Awad Cohen in 1873.
38. *Maggid Mesharim,* 11:30, sold by Rahamim David Hye Einy, 8/2 Cool Para, Entally, in 1900. Also, *ibid.,* 3:9, 4 seers to a rupee, 1892. Joseph Saul Sultoon also sold wine. Many manufactured wine privately; though the community sold wine, it was less expensive to make one's own.
39. *Mebasser,* 1:49, 1. Advertisement in 1873: Cheese sold at one rupee a seer (2 lbs.) was very inferior because milk contained fifty percent water. Ezekiel Mordecai Arzooni intends making cheese at 12 annas (¾ rupee) fresh or dry, plaited or braided 14 annas a seer.
40. *Maggid Mesharim,* 10:45 in 1899. Sold by Ezekiel Hye [Solomon Hyeem] Musleah.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Quality 1..... | 3 baras (strength) | Rs. 1½ per bottle. |
| Quality 2..... | 4 baras | Rs. 2.00 per bottle. |
| Quality 3..... | 6 baras | Rs. 3.00 per bottle. |
| Quality 4.....12 baras | | Rs. 5.00 per bottle. |

He also sold pistachio nuts from Aleppo Rs. 2.00 per seer; from Africa 3 lbs. bottle for Rs. 2.00, from London, Rose Macaba ¼ lb. bottle Rs. 4½.
Tephillin leather straps Rs. 2.00 a pair.
Tsitsith, woollen, from London and Paris and silk for grooms from London, Megilloth Rs. 1.00 each, etc.
41. *Ibid.,* 3:2 in 1892, sold by Moses Agababa, 26 China Bazar Lane.
42. *Ibid.,* 10:30, sold by Isaac Faraj Ezekiel Mordecai, 7 Parsee Church Street, in 1899.
43. *Ibid.,* 2:18, sold by Joshua Simon [Gabbai] in 1875.
44. *Paerah,* 2:35, 160. 6 seers per rupee. Also, Numi Basra 5 annas for 100. Garlic 5 annas per seer in 1880. Dates from Basra and Halek made thereupon were available also at Elias Darzi (Nissim) in 1900, *Maggid Mesharim,* 11:21.
45. *Paerah,* 10:40, 285.
46. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:36.
47. *Ibid.,* 4:37.
48. *Paerah,* 10:28, 201, 1888. Poor Jews were treated free of charge, 130 Radha Bazar Street, 2nd floor.
49. *Ibid.,* 8:23, 156, 1886.
50. *Mebasser,* 1:3, September, 1873.
51. *Ibid.,* 1:4, 1.
52. *Paerah,* 4:19, 95.
53. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1, 18.
54. *Mebasser,* 1:20, 2.
55. *Ibid.,* 4:24, 94.
56. *Paerah,* 1:12.
57. *Pinkas,* throughout the register.
58. *Supra,* chapter 1, pp. 21, 23. See also pp. 55, 56, 65, 203, 454.
59. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *loc. cit.*
60. In 1887 an engagement was announced there — Abraham Berakha Solomon Moosa to his cousin. *Paerah,* 9:23, 150.
61. *Ibid.,* 11:6, 39.

62. *Ibid.,* 11:20, 139. He wrote a series of articles on the geographical and social aspects of Darjeeling in subsequent issues, Nos. 21-25.
63. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, February and December, 1862.
64. Moses Dwek's Meela Book, 201.
65. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *loc. cit.*
66. *Paerah,* 7:48, 333.
67. 1:1, 18.
68. H. G. Reissner, "Indian-Jewish Statistics," *India & Israel,* Bombay, 3:10, 11; April, May, 1951.
69. In the official figures for 1941, the following sources of gainful employment are listed:

| | |
|---|---|
| Transportation, crafts and industry | 150 |
| Commerce | 400 |
| Clerks | 1400 |
| Government service | 100 |
| Religious service (exceeding Bombay with 89. The figure probably includes people employed by the synagogues just to attend services regularly.) | 150 |
| Arts and professions | 150 |
| Pensioners | 261 |
| | 2611 |

70. *Paerah,* 1:11, 12; 8:15, 101; 10:11, 73.
71. *Ibid.,* 11:17, 121; *Eastern Hebrew* 2:4, 5. Obadiah A. Cohen was the first to install electric fans in Bethel Synagogue.
72. *Ibid.,* 2:2, 6-7, 15-16.
73. *Ibid.,* 1:1, 15.
74. *Ibid.,* 1:1, 40.
75. *Ibid.,* 3:3, 6.
76. See chapter 19, p. 138. Also p. 344.
77. Plaques of Commemoration, Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta.
78. *Eastern Hebrew,* 3:1.
79. *Paerah,* 8:35, 239.
80. *Ibid.,* 8:19, 129; 8:20, 135; 8:31, 213.
81. *Ibid.,* 3:36, 249.
82. *Ibid.,* 10:47, 332.

*Chapter 5*

1. Israel Benjamin, *Sepher Masei Israel,* Lyck, 1859, 70.
2. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 99.
3. *Mebasser,* 4:38, 148.
4. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 100.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Pinkas,* 26.
7. *Ibid.,* 6.
8. *Ibid.,* 34.
9. Tomb No. EB 176; died 20th Adar II 5662 = March 29, 1902.
10. *Pinkas,* 86.
11. *Ibid.,* 26.

12. The following numbered items in *Pinkas* are associated with the cities listed beside them. Baghdad, 65, 133, 134, 135, 146, 291. Bombay, 77, 136, 289, 293 and one unnumbered between 322 and 323. Jerusalem, 253. Kashangunj, 196. Mecca, 135. Rangoon, 192. Muscat, 289. Cochin, 139, 154, 160. Occasional requests from Moulmein, Burma for assistance in writing Ketuboth, 297.

13. *Sepher Masei Israel,* 82–84.

14. *Pinkas,* 224, 226, 237, 240.

15. *Ibid.,* 228, 242.

16. *Ibid.,* 233. Also Moulmein, 254.

17. *Ibid.,* 350.

18. *Ibid.,* 304, 310.

19. *Ibid.,* 264.

20. *Paerah,* 2:12, 56.

21. *Maggid Mesharim* 3:11, January, 1892.

22. Two other ventures included Saul Reuben Saleh Shooker and Elias Simon Hakham Moses at 33 Ezra Street in 1888, *Paerah,* 10:21, 146, and Moses Mordecai Moses of Baghdad at 9 Pollock Street, *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:8, December 1892. In the 20th century, Joseph Hye Hallegua and Haskel Pinhas tried their hand for limited periods.

23. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:8, 1892; *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1, 11.

24. *Ibid.,* 2:30, May 1891.

25. *Paerah,* 5:27, 105.

26. *Mebasser,* 5:2, 6, 5:3, 9.

27. *Ibid.,* 1:28, 1, March, 1874.

28. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:7, 8, December, 1891.

29. *Ibid.,* 3:35, July 1892. Panigel was born in Bulgaria in 1804, taken to the Holy Land at age three, and appointed Rishon Le-Sion in 1880. In 1890, the Turkish authorities bestowed on him the additional title of Hakham Bashi, a sign of formal recognition of his acceptance by them. He died in 1893.

30. *Ibid.,* 2:51, October 1891, 5:40, July, 1894.

31. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1.

32. *Mebasser,* 2:19, January, 1874.

33. *Ibid.,* 2:20.

34. *Ibid.,* 2:26, 1875.

35. *Ibid.,* 3:22, 75.

36. *Paerah,* 6:33, 193.

37. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:14, November, 1891.

38. *Paper Book of Synagogue Case,* 141, Deposition of H. E. Solomon.

39. *Ibid.,* 97, Deposition of E. M. D. Cohen.

40. *Ibid.,* 147, Deposition of H. E. Solomon.

41. See chapter 10, p. 175ff.

42. Statement of Accounts 1925. A loan from Maghen David Synagogue was obtained to balance the Matsa budget.

43. See chapter 7, p. 109; and chapter 16, p. 314.

44. See chapter 7, p. 109–110.

45. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1, 39.

46. *Mebasser,* 4:4, 53.

47. *Paerah,* 10:44, 307, 315; 10:46, 329; 10:47, 335; 10:49, 349.

48. *Ibid.,* 8:22, 153.

49. *Ibid.,* 11:1, 2.
50. *Ibid.,* 9:20, 134.
51. *Ibid.,* 9:46, 317.
52. *Ibid.* See also, January, 1883; 11:37, 255.
53. *Ibid.,* 11:24, 167; 11:24, 169; 11:25, 174.
54. *Ibid.,* 11:26, 181.
55. *Ibid.,* 183. See also, *Mebasser* 1:6, 1; *Maggid Mesharim* 6:9.
56. *Paerah,* 4:22, 111.
57. *Mebasser,* 1:16.
58. *Shema,* 6:9, 15; 8:1, 15.
59. *Paerah,* 8:28, 193.
60. *Ibid.,* 5:42, 251.
61. *Mebasser,* 1:6.
62. *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 1965, 12, 148, 110–113; *Paerah,* 9:4, 30.
63. *Paerah,* 9:4, 30; 9:6, 37; 9:8, 49; 9:11, 78; 9:13, 87; 9:16, 106; 9:27, 185.
64. *Ibid.,* 10:45, 311.
65. Dr. H. G. Reissner, "Indian Jewish Statistics," 1837–1941, *India & Israel,* 3:10, 23, April, 1951.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Quoted by *Eastern Hebrew,* 5:2.
68. See chapter 15.
69. *Mebasser,* 3:3, 1.
70. *Paerah,* 3:3, 9.
71. *Ibid.,* 3:4, 10. See also, *ibid.,* for a Parsee girl in similar circumstances.
72. Report of Oseh Haised (Hebrew Burial Board), 1925, 5-6.
73. *Eastern Hebrew,* 4:2, 13.
74. *Ibid.,* 3:1, 10.
75. *Ibid.,* 1:2, 27; Chapter 15, pages 275ff., 279ff.
76. *Mekilta,* ed. Lauterbach Vol. 1, Ch. 5, 34.
77. Page 74. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:31.
78. *Paerah,* 4:4.
79. *Ibid.,* 5:25, 146.
80. *Ibid.,* 8:32, 219.
81. Meela List of Moses Dwek, No. 78.
82. Meela List of Saul Moses Lanyado, page 343, 5th from bottom.
83. Meela List of Sassoon Jacob Cohen, April 7, 1920.
84. Jerusalem 5715 =1955.
85. A branch settled in Calcutta — Judah Moses Hakham Shimon, the family of the present writer's wife.
86. Steinschneider, "Arabic Literature of the Jews," *J. Q. R.* (O. S.) IX–XIII.
87. *Pinkas,* 84, 236.

*Chapter 6*

1. Above, chapter 3.
2. Israel Benjamin, *Sepher Masei Israel,* 70.
3. *Massoth Shelomo,* 182.
4. *Ibid.*

5. *Paerah,* 7:35, 241.
6. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 98.
7. *Paerah,* 11:9, 65; 11:11, 80.
8. *Massoth Shelomo,* 185.
9. *Mebasser,* 1:28. The functions abbreviated in Hebrew, Rahash Tam: Rophay (physician), Hazan, Shohet, Tokeah, Maykaddesh.
10. *Pinkas,* 9.
11. *Sepher Imray Shabbath,* Calcutta, 1874, foreword, 2-3.
12. *Mebasser,* 1:18, 2.
13. *Ibid.,* 1:18.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.,* 1:50, 1.
16. *Hamagid,* 26.
17. *Mebasser,* 4:39, 151.
18. *Paerah,* 4:4.
19. Chapter 20, p. 398ff.
20. *Mebasser,* 2:7, 4.
21. *Ibid.,* 2:14.
22. *Ibid.,* 1:10, 1.
23. *Ibid.,* 1:33, 36, 41, 47.
24. *Ibid.,* 1:47.
25. *Ohel Dawid,* Ms. #828, page 989.
26. *Mebasser,* 2:33.
27. *Paerah,* 6:33, 195. A letter about Ezra's charities urging the setting up of a body to look after the impoverished sick.
28. *Moreh Be-Isba; Paerah,* 7:16, 120.
29. Chapter 9, p. 130-132.
30. *Paerah,* 11:15, 34; 11:8, 57.
31. *Ibid.,* 1:15, 57.
32. *Ibid.,* 8:39, 270.
33. *Ibid.,* 9:9, 57. Rishon Le-Sion is mentioned in Isaiah 41:27. The title was acquired by the office-holders in the seventeenth century. Until 1840, the Turkish Chief Rabbi (Hakham Bashi) also held sway over the Land of Israel. From that year until 1920, the Rishon Le-Sion was granted the additional title of Hakham Bashi of the Land of Israel by the Ottoman government. See also Chapter 13, note 90.
34. *Ibid.,* 9:11, 73.
35. *Ibid.,* 9:45, 311.
36. *Ibid.,* 9:46, 319.
37. *Ibid.,* 7:16, 120.
38. Sassoon, *History of the Jews of Baghdad,* 145–148. Mani (1818–1899) was one of the best known rabbis of Iraq. He studied at the famed Beth Zilkah rabbinical academy. He traveled widely as the representative of Hebron Jewry — in India in 1873. It has been suggested that his last name is an acrostic of three Hebrew words, Migeyza Netser Yishai, of Davidic stock.
39. *Ibid.* See also *Paerah* 2:1 for announcement of the leaders of Calcutta Jews.
40. His tombstone, EH 44, reads:

ציון של המ' איש ירושלים ח' משה שמואל בכה"ר
מורדכי חיים מיוחס נ"ע נלב"ע יום ה' י"ב טבת
הסת"ר בן נ"ב שנה תנצב"ה

41. *Paerah,* 9:11, 73.

42. *Mebasser* Supplement, January 12, 1877. His wife, Mary, son, Nissim and daughters, Portunata and Aligra, joined him a year later, *Mebasser,* 5:4.
43. Chapter 14.
44. *Paerah,* 8:22, 153.
45. Chapter 15.
46. *Paerah,* 8:26, 185.
47. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:39.
48. *Paerah,* 9:32, 221.
49. *Maggid Mesharim,* 10:21.
50. Tomb EF 17. The inscription reads:

זאת מצבת קבורת הישיש הנאמן גבאי ד' ארצות ה"ק
המ' משה אביעזיז נ"ע והיו ימיו קרוב לע' שנה
נלב"ע יום א' פסח התרס"ח תנצב"ה

51. *Paerah,* 4:13, 62.
52. My article, *Shema,* Calcutta, 9:9, April 1955.
53. Shabbat Beshallah. His sermon ran from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m.
54. *Paerah,* 5:31, 181.
55. Chapter 11.
56. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:41.
57. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:13.
58. *Paerah,* 11:6, 42.
59. *Ibid.,* 11:10.
60. *Ibid.,* 10:1, 5.
61. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:38.
62. Chapter 22 (printing), chapter 15 (education).
63. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:50.
64. Tomb EE 49; Hebrew inscription:

דמע פלגי מים תרד עינינו על האי שופרא דבלי בארעא
המורה דרך לעדת אל הוי! אבד חסיד מן הארץ במסתרים
תבכה נפשנו על כבודו כי גלה ממנו אבינו מורנו
ועטרת ראשנו המ' ח"ר שלמה עאבד תווינה זצ"ל נלב"ע
ליל עש"ק כ"ד אלול שנת התרע"ג בן נ"ז שנה מ"מ תנצב"ה

65. The remarks on Rev. E. M. D. Cohen are a somewhat revised version of an article that appeared in a brochure commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta, February 7, 1960.
66. Chapter 2.
67. Chapter 9.
68. Grandfather of the present writer. Cohen's remark is a fitting tribute to one who was the unofficial consultant of the community in religious matters for about twenty-five years, until his death in 1941.
69. This diary was given to the present writer by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen's daughter, Mrs. Sara (Aaron) Curlender and is in his possession.
70. *Jewish Chronicle,* February 11, 1927.
71. The raised portion of his tomb is overlaid with marble, which is itself replete with Hebrew and English inscriptions. Much of it describes Rev. Cohen's religious and civic leadership. On page 508 is a portion of the Hebrew words that characterize him.

*Chapter 7*

1. 2:7, 2.

Accounts of Neveh Shalome for fourteen years from Tishri 5621 (= 1860) to 29th Elul 5634 (= 1874).

| *Expenditure* | *Rs. As.* |
|---|---|
| Discounted bills | 1,088. 9. |
| Bills of deceased persons | 466.12. |
| For the purchase of the house* | 1,650. 2. |
| Taxes, etc. Sept. 1860 to July 21, 1874 | 3,280. 0. |
| Building a godown (storage room) and repairs of workshop building | 618. 0. |
| Monthly disbursements to the poor for 14 years through June 1874 | 36,682. 0. |
| Distribution of cash and Matsa to the poor | 2,899. 0. |
| To Bikkur Holim Organization | 1,099.10. |
| Salaries of Hazan, Shamash, Gabai and servants for 14 years | 32,144. 5. |
| Outstanding bills | 3,559. 9. |
| | 83,487.15. |

*[The house was plot No. 4 acquired by conveyance dated March 29, 1873. David Joseph Ezra paid seven eighths of the cost. The balance paid for from communal funds. According to the Judgement of the Inter-Synagogue case — 1917, P. 6, this amount was reimbursed by Elia D. J. Ezra before the structure was dismantled in preparation for building Maghen David Synagogue (E. N. M.).]

| *Income* | *Rs. As.* |
|---|---|
| Sale of privileges and "Mi Sheberakh" | 33,429.12. |
| Godown rents and other bills carried forward from the tenure in office of Jonah Jacob | 4,619.14. |
| Rents from houses of workshop from September 1, 1860 till July 21, 1874 earmarked for the poor | 37,440. 0. |
| Donations from Bethel members for the poor | 270. 0. |
| Donations from Neveh Shalome | 2,870. 0. |
| Charity boxes for Bikkur Holim | 1,099.10. |
| Contributions for distribution of cash and Matsa to the poor | 2,899. 0. |
| | 82,628.4. |
| Deficit | 859.11. |
| Expected from pending bills | 859.11. |

Particularized account of Synagogue property whose income is applied to the poor.

| *Income* | *Rs.* |
|---|---|
| Rents from Sept. 1, 1860 — July 21, 1874 | 37,440. 0. |
| Donations from Bethel members | 270. 0. |
| Donations from Neveh Shalome members | 2,870. 0. |
| | 40,580. 0. |
| *Expenditure* | |
| Taxes, etc. | 3,280. 0. |
| Repairs | 618. 0. |
| Monthly disbursements to the poor | 36,682. 0. |
| | 40,580. 0. |

The poor were paid for July and August 1874 from rents collected for these months with a deficit. Those who wish to examine the accounts may do so. Calcutta, 18th Heshwan 5635 (= October 29, 1874).

Signed
Joshua Simon Gabbai

2. *Mebasser,* 3:1.
3. *Paerah,* 4:15, 78.
4. *Mebasser,* 3:26. Here are some prices of privileges bought at the auction for the festivals of 1874: A. N. E. Judah bought Hathan Torah for the high price of Rs.202.00 and Nissim Joseph Ezra, Hathan Bereshit for Rs.105.00. Joseph, son of Sir Albert Sassoon of Bombay spent the festivals in Calcutta attending Bethel, in preparation for his marriage to Rebecca Masuda, daughter of Jacob Aaron Faraj Hyeem on June 13, 1875. He spent about Rs.400.00 on privileges.
5. Murgihatta (chicken district), the name of one of the streets on which the synagogue stood, was renamed Canning Street some time after March, 1862, when Lord Canning retired as Viceroy and Governor-General of India.
6. March 3, 1876, 3:21.
7. *Mebasser,* 4:38, 148.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.,* Supplement, January 12, 1877.
11. *Ibid.,* 4:36, 141.
12. *Ibid.* David Joseph Ezra Rs.500.00; Elia Shalome Gubbay Rs.250.00; H. S. Howard Rs.150.00; Aaron A. Cohen Rs.100.00; A. N. E. Judah Rs.150.00; N. N. Joseph Ezra Rs.150.00; Raphael Sassoon Rs.50.00; Aaron Nissim Aaron Rs.32.00; community funds Rs.418.00. Total: Rs.1800.00.
13. *Ibid.,* 4:38, 149.
14. *Ibid.* David Joseph Ezra Rs.1000.00; Elia Shalome Gubbay Rs.500.00; H. S. Howard Rs.150.00; Simon R. Hyeem Isaac Rs.50.00; A. A. Cohen Rs.75.00; A. N. E. Judah Rs.150.00; N. N. Ezra Rs.150.00; Raphael Sassoon Rs.26.00; community funds Rs.399.00. Total: Rs.2500.00.
15. *Ibid.,* 4:32, 125-26.
16. For this development, see chapter 23.
17. 4:15, 74.
18. *Ibid.,* 6:24, 139.
19. For a description of these registers, see Appendix 3.
20. *Ibid.,* 7:24, 170. The total exceeds slightly one hundred percent. To indicate the middle-income bracket in the Jewish community, the half percenters are here mentioned: Aaron Raphael Joshua, Aaron Manasseh Saleh, Elias Abraham Cohen, David Hyeem Abraham Cohen, David Hye Solomon Moosa, Ezekiel Aaron Abraham Hardun, Joseph Rahamim Judah Levi, Isaac Solomon Benjamin, Joseph Ezekiel Judah, Isaac Raphael Belilios, Sassoon Benjamin Elia, N. N. Adas, Ezekiel Moses Moses, Nissim Saleh Musleah, Abraham David Shamen & Bros., Shalome Rahamim Elisha Arakie & Bros., Ezra Rahamim Abraham Luddy, Abraham Elias Khadair, Ezekiel Hye Saleh Ezekiel Hakham Moses, Moses Agababa, David Abraham Rahamim, Hyeem Solomon Hyeem, Solomon Hyeem Moses Mordecai, Raphael Isaac Joseph, Abraham Ezekiel Hyeem Abraham Gubbay.

A list of Calcutta Jewish families — eight pages of them — was compiled by Samuel Ezra Arakie, and is among the manuscripts of the Sassoon collection, no. 829, *Ohel Dawid,* 974.

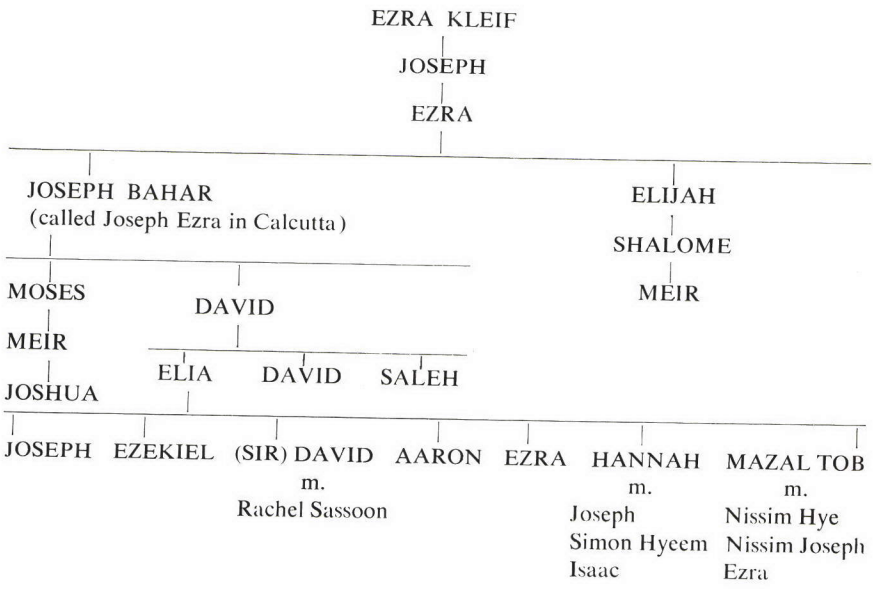
21. Press of E. M. D. Cohen. See Yaari, "Hebrew Printing in the East," 2, 32. See also, *Paerah,* 8:4, 21; 8:12, 79; 6:33, 195; 9:39, 267.
22. Rosh Hodesh Adar 5645 = February 16, 1885.
23. *Paerah,* 9:13, 85.
24. *Ibid.,* 9:48, 334. See also, 10:11, 71.
25. *Ibid.,* 10:35, 252. Also *Paper Book of Synagogue Case,* Deposition of A. N. E. Judah, 301-328.
26. *Paerah,* 11:7, 47.
27. *Ibid.,* 11:33, 230; 11:13, 91.
28. Chapter 10.
29. *Paper Book of Synagogue Case,* Deposition of E. M. D. Cohen, 94 and of Aaron N. E. Judah, 302-306.
30. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:4, 11.
31. *Ibid.,* 1:5, 7-8.
32. *Ibid.,* 1:1, 11.

*Chapter 8*

1. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *loc. cit.*; Tomb No. EG77.
2. Arakie, *loc. cit.*
3. *Paerah,* 3:20, 83.
4. *Ibid.,* 6:44, 269.
5. *Ibid.,* 1:1.
6. *Ibid.,* 1:40.
7. *Ibid.,* 2:4.
8. *Ibid.,* 6:16, 91; 7:15, 105.
9. *Ibid.,* 7:15, 105.
10. *Ibid.,* 1:32.
11. *Ibid.,* 7:27, 191.
12. *Ibid.,* 4:40.
13. *Ibid.,* 4:43.
14. *Ibid.,* 6:24, 141; 6:25, 146; 6:26, 152.
15. *Ibid.,* 4:33, 153.
16. *Ibid.,* 3: , 216.
17. *Ibid.,* 4:22, 111.
18. *Ibid.,* 2:3.
19. *Ibid.,* 4:45, 206.
20. Chapter 7.
21. *Paerah,* 7:33, 223.
22. *Ibid.,* 8:35, 239.
23. *Ibid.,* 6:16, 92; 5:17, 99.
24. *Ibid.,* 7:17, 122.
25. *Ibid.,* 5:18, 104.
26. *Ibid.,* 7:29, 201.
27. Appendix 4, for the details of her charitableness.
28. *Paerah,* 5:18, 104; 7:15, 108; 7:15, 105.
29. See, however, chapter 16, p. 331.
30. *Paerah,* 7:19, 143.

31. The *Englishman,* Calcutta, reporting this, erroneously printed the figure as 1200 pounds per annum. It supported ten rabbis who studied there daily. *Paerah,* 6:33, 195.
32. *Paerah,* 8:36, 249.
33. *Ibid.,* 7:20, 145.
34. 3rd year 5647, 118. Six volumes of the Yearbook were published, 5645–5654 = 1885–1894, covering all types of literature.
35. *Paerah,* 7:27, 188.
36. Four years previously Elia Ezra had suffered indeed a grievous blow and the last years had been bitter ones for him. Barely was the year of mourning for his father completed than he lost his daughter Hannah, wife of Joseph Simon Hyeem Isaac, at the age of twenty-eight. A few months later another tragedy came upon the family in the death of another daughter, Mozelle, in Hongkong.
37. *Paerah,* 8:34, 235.
38. *Ibid.,* 8:35, 239.
39. *Ibid.,* 8:37, 257; 8:38, 263-265.
40. Chapter 20, p. 398ff.
41. *Paerah,* 8:40, 275.
42. *Ibid.,* 8:45, 313.
43. *Paerah,* 9:36, 249.
44. *Ibid.,* 9:27, 185; 9:33, 231.
45. *Ibid.,* 10:34, 245.
46. *Ibid.,* 9:6, 35; 9:17, 113; 10:31, 223, and Ozer Dallim Society Resolution in *Paper Book of Synagogue Case,* 498. For details, see chapter 9.

FAMILY TREE OF ELIA EZRA



47. *Paerah,* 5:18, 104.
48. *Ibid.,* 10:32, 236.
49. *Ibid.,* 7:37, 251.
50. *Ibid.,* 7:47, 321; also, 7:22, 159 and 7:45, 307-308.
51. Tablet of commemoration at the entrance to the synagogue. Rules of Bethel Synagogue, *Ohel Dawid* I, page 407, number 102.
52. *Paerah,* 2:9, 37.
53. *Ibid.,* 5:36, 214.
54. *Ibid.,* 5:45, 271 and 6:16, 92.
55. *Ibid.,* 6:10, 57.
56. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:15.
57. *Paerah,* 6:44, 273.
58. *Mebasser,* 4:19, 75.
59. *Paerah,* 7:15, 105.
60. *Ibid.,* 3:37, 165.
61. *Mebasser,* 2:42.
62. *Ibid.,* 3:4, 14, extracted from *The Statesman,* Calcutta.
63. *Mebasser,* 3:8.
64. *Ibid.,* 4:12, 46.
65. *Paerah,* 6:23, 133; 6:25, 146.
66. *Ibid.,* 9:31, 213.
67. *Ibid.,* 9:33, 229.
68. *Ibid.,* 10:41, 290.
69. *Ibid.,* 1:32; 3:25, 107; 9:31, 215; 11:37, 255.
70. *Ibid.,* 4:33, 153; 10:45, 311.
71. *Ibid.,* 4:22, 111; 5:18, 104.
72. *Ibid.,* 4:37.
73. Father of Raphael of Hongkong and D. A. Gubbay of Calcutta who married Gala Lanyado.
74. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie, *loc. cit.*
75. *Paerah,* 6:44, 269; *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 7.
76. *Paerah,* 10:30, 215; obituary of Aaron Shalome Hakham Aaron Gubbay, *Paerah,* 11:9, 59, died 21st Ab 5648 (= July 29, 1888). Tomb No. EF136.
77. Genealogical table of Elia Shalome Gubbay, see page 537.

*Chapter 9*

1. This chapter is a revised and enlarged version of my article that appeared in the brochure published in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Synagogue, February 7, 1960.
2. Moreh Be-Isba, 2.
3. Chapter 2.
4. *Paerah,* 5:4, 17.
5. *Ibid.,* 11:2, 7.
6. *Ibid.,* 5:17, 99.
7. *Ibid.,* 11:2, 7.
8. *Ibid.,* 7:13 Supplement, 93-94.
9. Psalms 100:4, 118:20, Isaiah 56:7.
10. *Paerah,* 8:6, 35.
11. *Ibid.,* 8:16, 107.
12. *Ibid.,* 8:44, 303.

13. *Ibid.*, 9:17, 113.

14. For a picture, see brochure referred to in Note 1, and a representation on this book's jacket design. Another picture and an account (in which the cost was given as Rs.20,000.00, obviously in error) appeared in *Eastern Hebrew*, 4:2, 12. Also erroneous is the last paragraph of the accompanying article which ridicules descriptions of the "Menorah" including mystical writings.

15. For the story of Elia D. J. Ezra's tablet, see preceding chapter.

16. *Paerah*, 9:13, 87.

17. *Ibid.*, 10:16, 111. Rangoon Jews were mostly Baghdadis who settled in the 1870's. They were prominent in city government. Divisiveness dissipated the community's strength, costing a bitterly-contested court case, a rival synagogue and Rs. 150,000.00. *Shema* 3:8, 1949.

18. *Ibid.*, 5:31, 181; 5:32, 187, 188, 191, 192. For inscription on the stone, see Appendix 5.

19. *Ibid.*, 5:31, 118.

20. Complete text, *Ibid.*, 5:32, 194.

21. The details were never reported.

22. The Hebrew inscription was as follows:

יום ט"ו שבט התרמ"ג הג' סי' אליה דוד יוסף עזרא הי"ו
בהוצאותיו לעלוי נשמת מר אביו ז"ל ירה פנת יסוד בית
הכנסת מגן דוד , פה כלכתה

23. *Paerah*, 5:32, 194 and Appendix 5.

24. Mayohas, Moreh Be-Isba, 2.

25. *Paerah*, 5:19, 111; 5:20, 117.

26. *Ibid.*, 7:13 Supplement, 93-94.

27. *Ibid.*, 7:11, 75.

28. *Ibid.*, 7:13, 89.

29. *Ibid.*, 7:13, 7:14, 7:15.

30. The inscription on the key: "With this key Mrs. E. D. J. Ezra opened the synagogue 'Shield of David,' Calcutta, Thursday 21st Elul 5644-11th September, 1884." On the reverse side there is a shield of David and the words "Maghen David" engraved in Hebrew in the emblem. The key is enclosed in a glass case, outside of which is a brass plaque inscribed thus: "Key with which the synagogue was opened on the 11th September 1884 by Mrs. Mozelle Ezra, kindly presented by Mrs. Rachel Eliot through Mrs. Sara Curlender."

The fact mentioned here that it was the *synagogue* that was opened with the key clearly contradicts the dedicatory proceedings printed in the pamphlet "Tehilla Le-Dawid," as well as those reported in *Paerah* 7:13, 93, according to which the key opened the *Ark* doors. It is doubtful that the original inscription could have contained the name of the synagogue in translation rather than in transliteration. It leads one to suppose that the inscription on the key was done much later, and that the erroneous information was transcribed on to the plaque from that impressed in the key.

31. *Paerah*, 7:20, 145.

32. *Ibid.*, 7:20.

33. *Ibid.*, 8:8, 49.

34. *Ibid.*, 8:9, 59.

35. *Ibid.*, 10:42, 299.

36. *Eastern Hebrew*, 2:1.

37. E. M. D. Cohen's deposition, *Paper Book of Synagogue Case.*

38. For English translation of original Arabic, Appendix 5c.

39. *Paerah*, 7:16, 118.

40. See page 106.
41. See page 120ff.
42. Israel Cohen, "History of the Jews of Vilna," *JPS*, 1943, 116.

*Chapter 10*

1. E. M. D. Cohen's deposition, *Paper Book of Inter-Synagogue Case*, 48; A. N. E. Judah's deposition, *Ibid.*, 313-14.
2. See above, chapter 9.
3. Responsum of Rabbi Jacob Eliashar, Chief Rabbi, Jerusalem.
4. Rahma Aaron's letter dated April 4, 1888.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Paerah*, 10:48, 241.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. See above, chapter 7, p. 108.
10. *Paerah*, 11:2, 7.
11. *Paper Book*, 518.
12. *Moreh Be-Isba*, and *Paper Book*, 479.
13. See above, chapter 9, p. 127.
14. See above, chapter 6, p. 92ff.
15. Judgment of Chowdhury J, 11.
16. *Ibid.*
17. See site plan, p. 538.
18. *Paper Book*, Plaint.
19. Benjamin Abraham Solomon David, see page 30.
20. The same as Ezekiel Judah.

*Chapter 11*

1. Baron, "The Jewish Community," *JPS*, 125.
2. *Jewish Tribune*, Bombay, 6:1, 27.
3. *Maggid Mesharim*, 10:6.
4. *Jewish Tribune*, Bombay, 6:1, 27.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Chapter 18.
7. The source of this section is a set of notes originally in possession of Sassoon Jacob Cohen and now with the present writer.
8. Chapter 10, p. 171ff.

*Chapter 12*

1. "Jewish Communities in Muslim Countries of the Middle East" — A survey by S. Landshut — *The Jewish Chronicle*, London, 1950, 42 ff.
2. *Paerah*, July 2, 1886, Chapter 3, p. 44.
3. Documented in *Maggid Mesharim*, 8:46-48, quoted by Sassoon, *A History of the Jews of Basra*, 422-423, Note 29.

4. Chapter 14.
5. *Maggid Mesharim,* 6:9.
6. *Encyclopedia Britannica,* Edition 1965, 1, 706.
7. *Paerah,* 11:39, 269.
8. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:4.
9. Israel Benjamin, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa,* Hanover, 1863, 167-168, quoted by Sassoon, "The History of the Jews in Basra," *J. Q. R.* (N. S.), 17:4, 421-422.
10. The inscription was as follows:

תכתב זאת לדור אחרון ולבני בנים תהיה לזכרון וכל
המזכיר אותה ירון אשר חכמת לב חבצלת השרון נאה
במעשיה וחסודה הגבירה היקרה והכבודה שמה נאה לה
סיניורה מזל טוב מב"ת גברת הנשים בת גדולים וישישים
בת מלכים ויועצי ארץ אי מזרח אי מפרץ אשת חיל עטרת
בעלה הלא הוא השר הגדול מעוז ומגדל נשיא ישראל
כמהר"ר אליה דוד יוסף עזרא הי"ו מעי"ת כלכתה יע"א
אשר נדב לבה אותה להרים תרומת כסף סך ארבעת אלפים
רופייא לבנין החצר הזה של גדול אדוננו עזרא הסופר
זיע"א אנא ד' הואל נא וברך נא את הבית ישראל הזה
והמשפחה הרמה הזאת במותב תלתא כחדא בני חיי ומוזני והיו
לאגודה בבנים ובני בנים דשנים וראננים לעד לעולם ככוכבים
בהילם ותן את חנם בעיני המלכים והשרים וזכות אדוננו הוא עזרא
הראש יגן בעדם ובעד זרעם ויזכו לראות ביאת הגואל ובנין
אריאל בא סימן כי עת לחננה לפ"ק.

11. *Paerah, ibid.*
12. Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Basra," 427.
13. גינא נערף ק"ק כלכתה יע"א ביום ר"ח כסליו התר"ן
סי' רחמה יעקב אהרן מב"ת אלדי עטת קבאואת מאל
גמיע אל נביאים ע"ה ואלדי יריד במונה לאזם יאכד
מן ח' מרדכי עובדיה הלוי הי"ו ויעטנו רחן יא וורקה
ולאזם אל אנסאן יפתכר עלא הל אשיאה אלדי אל גמיע
מורגוד פי בגדאד ואל אמל כדאלק יציר בטרפנה וכל
מן יסווי תמל הל אשיאה מצוה כבירי

14. Chapter 10, p. 159ff.
15. Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Basra," 430, Note 35.
16. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:33.
17. *Paerah,* 6:32, 189.
18. *Mebasser,* 2:44.
19. Baron, "The Jewish Community," *JPS,* 2, 129.
20. *Ibid.,* 128.
21. *Ibid.,* 32.
22. Chapter 7, p. 102.
23. Chapter 2, p. 30.
23a. Mem-40, Yod-10, Kaf-20, Aleph-1, Lamed-30.
24. *Kaneh Middah,* 59.
25. Mekilta, Ed. Lauterbach, 2, 25.
26. *Jewish Chronicle, loc. cit.,* 5.
27. *Paerah,* 11:15, 106.
28. *Ibid.,* 11:17, 121.
29. Appendix 5c. See especially rules 13, 14, 15, 16.
30. Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Baghdad," 166.

31. *Mebasser,* 1:18.
32. *Paerah,* 11:11, 75.
33. Chapter 4.
34. *Paerah,* 9:9, 65.
35. Diary of Eleazar Aaron Arakie.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, May 28. The announcements later appeared in the local Jewish press.
38. *Paerah,* 10:48, 341.
39. *Paerah,* 10:50, 355; 11:13, 96.
40. *Ibid.*, 7:35, 235.
41. *Kaneh Middah.*
42. *Paerah,* 8:36, 251.
43. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:41.
44. Sassoon, "Baghdad," 182.
45. *Ibid.*, 183.
46. *Eben Sapir,* II, 100.
47. Diary of Arakie, 84, 102.
48. *Paerah,* 11:14, 99. Khatoon wife of Ezekiel Judah was married at age 10.
49. *Pinkas,* No. 111. This one was drawn up at the home of Elias Simon Awad Cohen, 1841.
50. *Pinkas,* No. 107, 1841. Also, No. 185 re: the incident at the marriage of Raphael Moses Zalkind involving Rabbi D'Beth Hillel, 1845, page 509. See also Sassoon, "Basra," 418-419, Note 25.
51. *Pinkas,* No. 152. Also, Ohel Dawid, II, 973.
52. *Pinkas,* No. 81.
53. *Ibid.*, Nos. 97 & 98.
54. *Ibid.*, Nos. 1-5.
55. *Ibid.*, No. 3. Between Kadoon, daughter of Moses Dwek and Raphael Joseph Hyeem, son of Shalome Cohen. The bride was 12 years old.
56. *Pinkas,* No. 14, No. 78 in 1827 and 1840, both between Lag and Rosh Hodesh Sivan; also, before Lag, Nos. 125 & 292, in 1842 and 1854; and one between Rosh Hodesh Sivan and Shabuoth, No. 223 in 1848.
57. *Ketuboth,* 16b, 17a.
58. *Paerah,* 4:4.
59. *Ibid.*, 4:31, 144.
60. *Pinkas,* Nos. 3 (1820), 30 (1832), 129 (1842), 303 (1855).
61. *Ibid.* Scattered references.
62. The editor of the *Eastern Hebrew* objected to morning weddings on the ground that the groom was precluded from a reasonable fast. 1:1, 40.
63. *Paerah,* 8:44, 302.
64. *Mebasser,* 2:35, 2. Each groom was honored by the paper with a poem compiled by the editor in the acrostic of his name. A third marriage of importance took place on February 1, 1876 between Nissim Hye Nissim Joseph Ezra and his second cousin, Mazal Tob, daughter of Elia D. J. Ezra (by his first wife), *Ibid.*, 3:17.
65. *Eben Sapir,* II, 104.
66. Baron, *Jewish Community*, III, 23.
67. Proverbs 31.
68. The manual, "Mishmereth Ha-Hodesh," Baghdad, is used.
69. Israel Cohen, *Journal of a Jewish Traveller.*
70. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:5, 4.

71. Third century inscription in Smyrna. Baron, *Jewish Community*, I, 94.
72. *Paerah,* 7:48, 325.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Eben Sapir,* II, 100-102.
76. Sapir was in Calcutta during the year of mourning for Ezekiel Judah and his comments are based on an extraordinary wealthy family which spared no expenses to observe the customary practices very elaborately. Normally, the outgoings were more reasonable.
77. *Paerah,* 8:50, 346.

*Chapter 13*

1. Menahoth 35b.
2. Sassoon/Benayahu, *Massa Babel,* Jerusalem 5715, 217.
3. Taanit 26b; Orah Hyeem, 129:1.
4. *Massa Babel, Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.,* 218.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ben Ish Hye,* Baghdad 1902, First Cycle, 54:6.
10. *Massa Babel,* 217.
11. *Ibid.,* 218.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.,* 217.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.,* 220.
18. *Ibid.,* 217.
19. Sassoon, "Baghdad," 178-179.
20. 7:16, 118.
21. See Appendix 5; *Paerah* 7:16, 118.
22. Chapter 2.
23. *Massa Babel,* 218.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Paerah,* 11:3, 17.
27. Mentioned by Abdallah Somekh, quoted in Sassoon, "Baghdad," 143. Somekh (1813–1889) was a student of Jacob b. Joseph Ha-Rofeh. A wealthy man, he abandoned business in favor of learning. He founded two rabbinical academies — Abu Menashe and Beth Zilkha. He is the author of *Zibhei Tsedek* (two parts — 1899), decisions on Yoreh Deah, and responsa appended. He died in a plague which ravaged Baghdad. See also concerning his death, burial and disinterment, *Maggid Mesharim* 1:1, 2, 4, 9, 10. Also, David S. Sassoon, "Baghdad," 141-144.
28. *Ibid.,* 179-180.
29. The order used was that of Hakham David Azulai, Rab Hida. Azulai (1738–1803), born in Jerusalem, spent the last twenty-five years of his life in Leghorn,

Italy. His Kabbalistic and legal writings attracted Indian Jewry. He was also famous for his collection of Jewish folk-stories set forth in his *Zikhron Ma-asiyoth Ve-Nissim*. He himself became the subject of stories of the wonders and miracles he performed. In 1960, his remains were re-interred in Jerusalem.

30. The text used is תפלת בית עלמין, שערי תשובה , Livorno, 1880. See the present writer's translation into English, Calcutta, 1953.
31. *Massa Babel,* 219.
32. *Ben Ish Hye,* Ed. Baghdad 1899, Parashat Nitsabim, para 4:116-117.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ohel Dawid,* 228–229, MS. 70.
35. *Ohel Dawid, ibid.,* where the association with Nehemiah 13:16 is pointed out. See also, *Massa Babel,* 222, quoting הרשב"ץ בחדוש על ר"ה דף כ"ה ע"א עיין ברכי יוסף להרב חיד"א אורת חיים סי' תקפ"ג סעיף ה' ובספרו מחזיק ברכ"ה סי' הנז' סעיף ג', ליוורנו, תקמ"ה, דף קי"ג ע"ג וראה שם דף קל"ה ע"ב.
36. *Ben Ish Hye,* 116-117 .
37. Davidson, Vol. 2, p. 86, No. 1912, quoted in *Massa Babel,* 222.
38. *Massa Babel,* 223, quoting ר' יעקב חיים בר ברוך, כף החיים, חלק א', אורח חיים, סי' ס"ח אות א-ד; חלק ב' סי' קי"ב אות ד'.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 153, in the name of Hakham Joseph Hyeem.
41. *Massa Babel,* quoting Davidson, Vol. 3, p. 37, No. 809.
42. See the present writer's translation into English, Calcutta, 1953.
43. *Massa Babel,* 223.
44. *Ibid.,* 234, quoting Davidson, Vol. 3, p. 501, No. 1999.
45. Author unknown, סימן ישראל
46. Three Piyyuts beginning with these words are printed in most editions, the first by Solomon Gabirol, the second by Judah Halevi and the third by Abraham Ibn Ezra. The latter only is chanted in Calcutta so that the Musaph would be curtailed. The long Vidui also is omitted for the same reason — to provide a break of at least two hours beween Musaph and Minha.
47. Author unknown.
48. *Massa Babel,* 224.
49. Bethel, Livorno, 1878, 149b-156a.
50. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1, 41.
51. *Massa Babel,* 227.
52. Mishnah Sukkah, 5:1.
53. *Massa Babel,* 224.
54. The manual used is entitled קריאי מועד , Livorno.
55. *Massa Babel,* 228.
56. See picture, page 145.
57. *Massa Babel,* 227.
58. *Journal of a Jewish Traveller,* 238, New York, 1925.
59. *Massa Babel,* 224.
60. See the present writer's translation into English of the ceremony of seven circuits, "The Voice of Gladness," Calcutta, 1961.
61. *Massa Babel,* quoting Davidson, Vol. 3, p. 324, No. 350.
62. Chapter 34.
63. *Massa Babel,* 225.
64. *Ibid.*

65. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 131.
66. Davidson, אוצר השירה והפיוט, p. 340, No. 1760.
67. For these and other Pizmons, see ספר שיר ושבחות, ed. Solomon Bekhor Hussein and קונטרס שיר רננות ed. *Baghdad,* quoted in Sassoon, *Basra,* 426, Note 30.
68. See picture, p. 149.
69. From "Hamishah Asar Bi-Shevat," National Jewish Welfare Board, 1950, 10.
70. *Massa Babel,* 226.
71. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 105-107.
72. *Massa Babel,* 226.
73. *Ibid.,* 225, quoting Davidson, Vol. 1, p. 27, No. 536.
74. אכלו רעים
75. In accordance with Megillah 1:1, 2, Baghdad being considered a walled city.
76. Reuben Levy, *A Baghdad Chronicle,* Cambridge, 1929.
77. 1, 476-477, Ms. No. 485; also, Sassoon, *Basra,* 432ff.
78. Sassoon, *Basra,* 436-438.
79. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 178.
80. שכיות חמדה והוא פסח מעובין, Livorno, 913.
81. ברכת האילנות, Calcutta. For description, see Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in Eastern Countries,* 2, 46, No. 110. The ritual is found also in סדור תפלת ישרים, Jerusalem, 1938, 531-534.
82. Haggadah, Jerusalem 5659 (= 1899).
83. *Massa Babel,* 219.
84. *Ben Ish Hye,* Parashah Tsav, Section 33.
85. Sassoon, בואי תימן, Hazofeh 5684 (= 1924), 313-314.
86. Davidson, 1, 257, No. 5632.
87. *Ohel Dawid,* MS. No. 200.
88. David Sassoon (*Ohel Dawid,* 1, 225) maintained initially that this introduction could be traced to the rite of Aleppo and that it was introduced into the Baghdad rite by Hakham Sason Mordecai Moses, the Hazan of the צלאת לכבירי (The Great Synagogue). Following his acquisition of another manuscript (No. 1144) representing the Persian rite, of the sixteenth century, he found a similarity between the latter and the old Baghdad rite of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Thus, if the older assumption holds any weight, Hakham Sason may have introduced it into the liturgy of merely the Great Synagogue. For a further discussion, see Sassoon, בואי תימן, Budapest, 1924, 11; Reprint Vol. 5 (1924), 315.
89. *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 964, MS. No. 1151.
90. מהר"ם גלאנטי in the name of Luria. Moses b. Jonathan Galante (1620–1689), the first Sephardi head of the rabbis of Israel to be given the title, Rishon Le-Sion. See also chapter 6, note 33.
91. תפלות ליום תשעה באב, Livorno, 1896.
92. *Massa Babel,* 221.
93. Page 219.
94. Found in a book entitled, שכיות חמדה, Livorno.
95. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 107.
96. *Supra,* 226.
97. *Supra,* Chapter 12.
98. *Ohel Dawid,* 988.
99. *Pinkas,* Nos. 10 and 2.
100. *Supra,* Chapter 12.

101. Yaari, שלוחי ארץ ישראל , 59.
102. *Ben Ish Hye,* Ed. Baghdad, 11.
103. *Jewish Encyclopedia,* New York, 1902, s.v. Cabala, 3, 475.
104. *Massa Babel,* 218, quoting Hakham Joseph Hyeem, Ben Ish Hye, ed. Jerusalem, 1935, First Cycle, Parasha Pikude, Para. 2, p. 52b.
105. Zohar, Parashath Wayakhel.
106. *Massa Babel,* 218.
107. *Maggid Mesharim,* 4:28.
108. *Massa Babel,* 225, quoting *Ben Ish Hye, ibid.*
109. תקון שבעה באדר , Livorno, 1874.
110. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 154.
111. הלולה רבה, Livorno, 1895.
112. An interesting question was asked of Hakham Solomon Twena: Why do we have a "Hillulah" for Bar Yohai and not for Moshe Rabbenu? He gave answer: Moshe had a ready successor but he did not measure up to the master. "If Moses was like the sun, Joshua was like the moon." But Bar Yohai and his son Eleazar were on one spiritual plane, judging from this Zoharistic statement: "I saw the Exalted Ones who were few in number. If that number was a thousand, I and my son are among them, if a hundred, I and my son are among them, if just two, they are me and my son."
113. David Elia D. J. Ezra, Aaron Abraham Cohen, Aaron Ezra Arakie, David Hye Solomon Moosa, Jacob Abraham Taazi, Elias Abraham Cohen, Abraham Ezekiel Gubbay, Ezra Reuben Ezra Barook and Ezra Solomon Yahya Gubbay.
114. Rituals and liturgical compositions utilizing the Bible and rabbinic literature at the tombs of Ezra at El Ozeir and Ezekiel at Kilfil are in ספר ממלכת כהנים , Baghdad 1873 — Sassoon, 428-429. A Pizmon commonly sung in Calcutta is inspired by Ezra the Scribe, *ibid.,* 426.
115. He died six days later. For what it is worth, the family of the present writer could show a striking record of deaths in the month Iyar, which did not go unnoticed. In almost every generation a death occurred in that month. Hakham Elias Musleah (1825), his son Joseph (1840), his grandson Isaac Sassoon (1918), his great-grandson, Meyer Ezra (1941) and the latter's wife Masuda (1958).
116. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 190-194. Those known to the present writer to have been practised in India are set forth.

*Chapter 14*

1. Moshe Davis, מבוא, יהדות אמריקה בהתפתחותה , 7, and Note 13.
2. David Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 136.
3. See Chapter 2, p. 34ff.
4. Hakham Joseph Hyeem, רב ברכות , 178-191. The Hakham served as religious leader of Baghdad for fifty years. See Sassoon, "History of the Jews of Baghdad," 149-156.
5. See Chapter 19, p. 372ff.
6. M. D. Japheth, *Jews of India,* Bombay, 1960. See below, Chapter 19, p. 389.
7. See Chapter 10. Also, Moses Mayohas, Moreh Be-Isba, 1894.
8. *Pinkas,* 45, No. 65; 48, No. 76, 65, No. 133; 66, No. 134; 70, No. 146; 124, No. 288; 126, No. 291.
9. Sassoon, *Baghdad,* 141-144. See also Chapter 13, note 27.
10. *Mebasser,* 4:36.

11. כל שנפסל בבדיקת הריאה נפסל בשחיטה, הרב חקרי לב, ח"ד ח"א סי' קס"ב דף רל"ו ע"ב; התור והש"ע סי' קי"ט סעיף ד'.

12. מר"ן בסי' קי"ט סעיף י"ח
13. *Paerah,* 10:42, 301.
14. *Ibid.,* 10:47, 333.
15. Yoreh Deah, 11:4, Moses Isserles' gloss.
16. 10:47, 333.
17. Calcutta, 1874.
18. שחייב ליתן כל ממונו ולא יעבור ואפילו באיסור דרבנן מצינו כן, באר היטב סי' רמ"ח ס"ק ט"ו פקוח נפשות פן יגזלו ממונו קצר דבריו ולשון מ"א בשם סמ"ג ולא היה לו במה לחיות ומדבר שאני ופשוט

19. Aboth, 5:7.
20. Zibhay Tsedek, Baghdad, 1904, 2, Responsa 23-25, pp. 25-27.
21. Israel Cohen, *Journal of a Jewish Traveller,* New York, 1925, 254–255. A copy of the ticket is there reproduced.
22. *Maggid Mesharim,* 11:48, September, 1900.
23. An extensive critique appeared in *Paerah,* 11:15, 35-36.
24. Habatselet No. 18, 12 Adar 5648 = 1888, containing a copy of a letter by Chief Rabbi Panigel to the editor of *Habatselet,* Frumkin — reproduced in *Paerah,* 10:42, 301.
25. *Paerah,* 10:44, 307; 10:47, 335.
26. *Ibid.,* 11:6, 42.
27. A portion of the controversy including his compositions and their responses from the translator may be found in *Paerah,* 10:42, 301; 10:44, 307, 315; 10:46, 329; 10:47, 335; 10:49, 349; 11:4, 27-28. For more on Mani, see chapter 6, p. 90 and notes 38, 39.
28. *Ibid.,* 11:6, 42.
29. Ed. Jerusalem, עין חיים ; *Paerah,* 10:46, 329. Vital (1542–1620) was one of the most outstanding Kabbalists and Isaac Luria's foremost pupils.
30. ירוח עִנד קוצי בוחדו יתלע מתראצי
31. *Paerah,* 10:44, 307.
32. *Ibid.,* 11:8, 57.
33. *Ibid.,* 11:9, 63.
34. The latter quoted this Kabbalistic source as proof of the correctness of the translator's position. *Paerah,* 11:9, 64.
35. *Ibid.,* 11:16, 115.
36. Arakie's diary, June 20, 1842.
37. *Ibid.,* December 27, 1944.
38. *Mebasser,* 1:49, 1, August 1874.
39. פרי חדש, הלכות ניתין, סי' קכ"ה, עלמה שכתב מורם
40. *Paerah,* 9:11, 73. בהגהו שם ס"ה
41. *Ibid.*
42. Jacob b. Moses Moellin, of Germany, Austria and Bohemia, 1360–1427.
43. *Paerah,* 11:4, 25.
44. Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hyeem, 244:6. Also, Ba-er Hayteb, *loc. cit.,* who quotes רש"ל סי' ק'. Also, שערי תשובה on 244:6, Note 11

45. *Paerah,* 11:5, 33.
לא כן במלאכת הדפוס שכל המלאכות הן מדאוריתא כמו לתקן הטעויות בכלל בונה וסותר וכדומה, ואם יקלקל סדורי האותיות או הדפוס יחיש וימהר לתקן ויעבור על התורה, כי אדם בהול על ממונו... כי חביב אדם בממונו יותר מגופו. ובתקון הדפוס עובר על כמה לאוין שבתורה.

46. *Pinkas,* כתובה דאירכסה, pp. 24, 64; כתובה למחזיר גרושתו, 44. שטר שידוכין, some in Arabic, 49, 64, 87, 145. שטר מזונות לבת או לבן בטול שטר שדוכין, 61; Arabic, 68, 82, 84, 86, 89, 91, 93. ושטר תנאין, 58, 62; שטר צוואה, 51, 81; Arabic, 82. שטר מחילת כתובה, 71, 72. Arabic, 68. כתובה דאישתכח ביה טעותא, 56. קיום השידוכין הראשונים, 69. מודעה רבה, 63; Arabic, 115. מעשה דין, 54. קבלת גיורת, 114. חלוק ירושה, 57.
Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 972-973, Ms. no. 897.

47. Daphthar Ketuboth: חלוקת שותפות, 9, תוספת כתובות, 23 (Arabic). שיור מתנה, 37, שטר מכירה, 22, שטר הרשאה, 25, about property in Baghdad, also referring to Baghdad. (Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid,* II, 989, Ms. No. 828.)

48. See Chapter 4, p. 55ff.

49. *Pinkas,* 81, No. 172; *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 972-973.

50. *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 989, Ms. No. 828.

51. Moses Dwek, Diary, March 2, 1850; also, Sassoon, *Basra,* 425.

52. *Paerah,* 1:45, 178.

53. Reinmann, *Massoth Shelomo,* 182; W. Schur, *ibid.,* 183; Jacob Sapir, *Eben Sapir,* 2, 102.

54. Sapir, *Eben Sapir,* 2, 102.

55. *Ibid.,* 103. The responsum of Rabbi Moses Judah Loeb, Ab Beth Din of Kutna and later of Jerusalem, תשובות זית רענן ותבארת ירושלים על משניות

56. אין דבריו של אחד במקום רבים

57. *Mebasser,* 1:19, 2.

58. *Ibid.,* 1:24, 1.

59. *Ibid.,* 2:7, 3.

60. *Ibid.,* 1:18, 1; 1:19, 2.

61. *Ibid.*

62. 5:5, 26.

63. *Mebasser,* 4:3, 10.

64. *Maggid Mesharim,* 3:14.

65. Arakie's Diary, 25.

66. *Eastern Hebrew,* 3:1, 1-2.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Arakie, Diary, 27.

69. Tomb No. EB 186.

70. Arakie, 19.

71. See Chapter 13, p. 233.

72. Tur Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, 362, 363.

73. Maimonides, Hilchoth Abel, Chapter 4; Keseph Mishnah, in the name of the Talmud, אלו מגלחין, Radbaz, *loc cit.*; Tur Yoreh Deah, Chapter 362; Beth Yoseph in the name of Ramban; Siphtay Kohen; Turey Zahab.

74. Sanhedrin 46b.

*Chapter 15*

1. *Paerah,* 3:11, 47.
2. *Ibid.,* 5:18, 104.
3. *Ibid.,* 1:43.
4. *Diary,* 24, 29.
5. *Ibid.,* 20, 23.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Reinmann, *Massoth Shelomo,* 182.
8. Arakie, *Diary,* 48.
9. That decade was a particularly "dry" period for sources in Calcutta. Moses Dwek, the veteran leader, had died three years previously and Calcutta was groping for new leadership. No traveler of significance visited and no local diarist left reminiscences of those years. The first Jewish newspaper was still ten years away.
10. See Chapter 6, p. 86ff.
11. *Mebasser,* 1:18, 1.
12. Moreh Be-Isba, 1.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Mebasser,* 1:19.
15. Author of *Tebooath Shor.*
16. *Mebasser,* 1:20, 1.
17. Entitled "Hithnatsluth Ha-hochmah."
18. Entitled "Nehamah Le-hochmah."
19. *Mebasser,* 1:22, 23, 24, 25.
20. The list of subscribers: (*Ibid.,* 1:31)

| | *Rs.* |
|---|---|
| David Joseph Ezra | 3,250.00 |
| Elia Shalome H' Aaron Gubbay | 1,625.00 |
| Raphael Joshua & children | 350.00 |
| Abraham [Aaron] Cohen & children | 250.00 |
| Nissim Nissim Joseph Ezra | 150.00 |
| Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah | 125.00 |
| Moses Ephraim Cohen | 125.00 |
| Aaron Raphael Belilios | 110.00 |
| Elias Meyer | 100.00 |
| Howard S. Howard | 100.00 |
| Rahamim Moosa Cohen | 100.00 |
| Aaron Nissim Aaron | 100.00 |
| Joseph Ezekiel Judah | 50.00 |
| Elias Hyeem Hilali [Solomon] | 50.00 |
| Saleh Ezra Jacob | 50.00 |
| David Hai Moses Mordecai | 50.00 |
| Aaron Sh. Yahya Gubbay | 25.00 |
| Nissim Saleh Musleah | 25.00 |
| Joseph Silliman | 25.00 |
| | 6,660.00 |

21. 2:1 and following issues.
22. *Ibid.,* 2:5, 3.
23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 2:6, 1–2.
25. *Ibid.*, 2:48.
26. *Paerah*, 1:42.
27. *Ibid.*, 1:43.
28. *Mebasser*, 4:9, 33.
29. *Ibid.*, 5:3.
30. *Ibid.*, 2:13, 1.
31. *Paerah*, 2:9, 38.
32. *Statesman*, Calcutta, October 16, 1879.
33. *Paerah*, 2:13, 55.
34. *Ibid.*, 2:16, 70.
35. *Ibid.*, 3:29, 120.
36. *Ibid.*, 3:28, 123.
37. *Ibid.*, 3:27, 117.
38. *Ibid.*, 3:32.
39. Supplementary report of Jewish Girls' & Boys' School, dated March 31, 1881, printed with *Paerah*, 3:42.
40. *Paerah*, 5:28, 164.
41. *Ibid.*, 4:49, 224.
42. *Ibid.*, 5:28, 164.
43. The sole source of information of the period 1890 to 1917 is a series of booklets printed for these functions.
44. *Statesman*, November 13, 1929.
45. *Paerah*, 6:33, 195.
46. *Ibid.*, 4:45, 206; 5:20, 115.
47. *Ibid.*, 6:41, 251.
48. *Ibid.*, 7:37, 250.
49. *Maggid Mesharim*, 2:13.
50. *Ibid.*, 2:23.
51. *Ibid.*, 2:13. One, of the Passover Haggadahs from Rangoon, *Ibid.*, 13:24.
52. *Ibid.*, 2:16, 17.
53. *Ibid.*, 2:23, 30.
54. *Ibid.*, 2:30.
55. *Ibid.*, 2:23.
56. *Ibid.*, 3:18.
57. *Ibid.*, 5:13.
58. *Ibid.*, 3:14.
59. Arakie celebrated his Barmitsvah at Maghen David Synagogue on Shabbath Hanukkah 1888 (= 5649).
60. Much of the facts from this point until the end of the chapter is taken from booklets published for prize-givings.
61. *Shema*, Calcutta, 4:2, 1, 12.

*Chapter 16*

1. Baron, "Jewish Community," 1, 327.
2. The main source of information is published annual reports. Mr. J. M. David, originally of Singapore, during his stay in Calcutta as Manager of Ezra Estates, kindly allowed this writer access to his collection, handed over to the League's authorities in Calcutta upon his departure for England.

3.

| | |
|---|---|
| President: | Mrs. D. E. D. Ezra |
| Vice Pres.: | Mrs. S. J. Ezekiel |
| Joint Hony. Secretaries: | Mrs. Zachariah |
| Hony. Treas.: | Mrs. E. S. Mingail |
| | Mrs. Simon J. Cohen |
| Committee Members: | Mrs. E. M. Cohen |
| | Mrs. H. Curlender |
| | Mrs. A. Duke |
| | Mrs. A. Grossman |
| | Mrs. Leveroy |
| | Mrs. Minney |
| | Mrs. M. Sassoon |
| | Miss R. Guha |
| | Miss Mashiah |
| | Miss R. Moses |

4. See section 2 of this chapter.

5. Receipts, 1965

| | |
|---|---|
| A. R. Gubbay Jewish Charitable Fund — | Rs. 4078.74 |
| A. R. Gubbay Sick Fund — | Rs. 1116.26 |
| Lady Rachel Ezra Charitable Trust — | Rs. 5000.00 |
| Stafford Sassoon Memorial Trust Fund — | Rs. 3276.00 |
| J. E. Joseph Charitable Trust Fund — | Rs. 1663.78 |
| Gala Gubbay Fund — | Rs. 918.50 |
| Mrs. M. E. S. Judah Trust — | Rs. 671.26 |
| S. J. Solomon Trust Fund — | Rs. 215.00 |
| Mulca Meyer Trust Fund — | Rs. 176.34 |

6.

| | |
|---|---|
| President: | Lady Ezra |
| Vice President: | Mrs. S. J. Solomon |
| Hon. Treasurer: | Miss K. Judah |
| Asst. Treasurer: | Miss R. Moses |
| Joint Hon. Secretaries: | Miss R. Juda |
| | Miss M. Mordecai |
| Committee Members: | Miss Alton |
| | Mrs. Alec Coyne |
| | Mrs. S. J. Cohen |
| | Mrs. A. Curlender |
| | Mrs. Cutler |
| | Mrs. Elias |
| | Mrs. Ellis |
| | Miss S. Gubbay |
| | Mrs. E. A. Judah |
| | Mrs. Ed. Judah |
| | Mrs. Mingail |
| | Mrs. E. Solomon |

7. See Chapter 15.

8. Quoted by Stella Benjamin, Hony. Secy. J.W.L., 1938-1943. She was also teacher of Social Science at the Jewish Girls' School. The highest degree of charity mentioned by Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Mattenoth Aniyim, 10:7-12.

9. *Paerah,* 5:18, 104.

10. 5:13, 75.
11. *Ibid.*, 328.
12. *Ibid.*, 8:48, 331; 8:49, 341.
13. *Ibid.*, 9:2, 7.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 9:6, 35; 9:7, 45, 47ff.
16. *Ibid.*, 9:34, 237-241.
17. In the accepted custom, the Governor placed a bottle inside the cornerstone. The bottle contained — a copy of *Paerah* of the previous Friday, the local English dailies *Englishman* and *Indian Daily News* of that day, ten Indian coins of golds, silver and copper (one gold mohur of 1885, one rupee, a half and a quarter rupee, silver two-anna piece, all of 1886, one copper pice, half pice and pie, all of 1886; a double pice of 1862 — the last year of the issue of that coin.

A smelted and beaten down silver rupee was inscribed as follows:

פה כלכתה בשבי בשבת יז"ז תמוז התרמ"ו השר סיר ריוורס
מומפסן, מושל בנגאל, הניח אבן היסוד בית החולים זה
שיבנה בהוצאות הגברת היקרה מזל טוב תמ"א לזכרון ולמנוחת
נר"ן אישה הגביר הנכבד המ'אליה דוד יוסף עזרא ז"ל תנצב"ה

18. See Appendix 6.
19. *Paerah,* 11:14, 99

*Chapter 17*

1. See Chapter 19.
2. See Chapter 19.
3. *Paerah,* 4:39.
4. 3:12.
5. *Ibid.*, 3:21.
6. May 8, 1857.
7. Arakie, Diary, May 29, 1857.
8. *Mebasser,* 4:12, 46.
9. *Paerah,* 9:30, 205; 9:31, 213; 9:32, 220; 225; 9:33, 227; 9:34, 234, 237; 9:35, 242, 245; 9:36, 247, 251; 9:37, 254, 10:2, 9; 10:7, 48.
10. *Ibid.*, 10:15, 100; 10:21, 144.
11. *Ibid.*, 8:42.
12. *Mebasser,* 4:15, 62.
13. *Ibid.*, 4:17, 66.
14. *Paerah,* 4:24, 115.
15. *Ibid.*, 11:27, 187.
16. *Ibid.*, 10:41, 290, April 1888; 10:42, 297.
17. *Mebasser,* 3:11, 35.
18. *Ibid.*, 9:4, 25.
19. *Paerah,* 6:23, 133; 6:24, 140, 141, 145–46; 6:26, 152.
20. *Ibid.*, 9:35, 243.
21. *Ibid.*, 9:33, 229.
22. *Ibid.*, 9:9, 57–58.
23. *Ibid.*, 9:5, 34. Pirke Aboth 5:8.
24. *Ibid.*, 9:36, 248.
25. *Eastern Hebrew,* 2:2, 16.

26. *Paerah,* 1:42, 165.
27. *Ibid.,* 5:13, 74.
28. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:4, 7.
29. *Ibid.,* 4:4.
30. *Ibid.,* 2:2, 16.
31. *Paerah,* 2:35, 209.
32. *Ibid.,* 7:27, 188.
33. *Ibid.*
34. It developed enormously after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, becoming an important port of call on the shipping route to the east. As a free port, it attracted people from India and the Near East. It was administered by the Government of Bombay till 1937 when it became a crown colony with its own governor and executive council. The rupee gave way to the East African shilling in 1951. In 1959 a new constitution became effective and the freedom movement has gained momentum steadily. *Encyclopedia Britannica,* I, s. v. Aden, 140-41.
35. *Paerah,* 9:25, 169.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Eastern Hebrew,* 4:1, 13.
39. *Paerah,* 8:26, 185.
40. *Ibid.,* 8:37, 253.
41. *Ibid.,* 8:47, 323.
42. "Political Classification of the Sephardic Jewish Community in Bengal" — Resume of case put up to the Secretary of State for India — 1935. Also, *Eastern Hebrew,* 4:4, 9. Also, correspondence between Calcutta Jewish Community and Govt. of India, 1933–34 (Courtesy, J. M. David). See also, *Paerah,* 7:27 (Dec. 18, 1885); 8:37, 253; 8:47, 323, 327.
43. Born Rufus Daniel Isaacs, he was also Lord Chief Justice of England and British ambassador to the United States.
44. An adjunct of the Indian Army.
45. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:2, 26.

*Chapter 18*

1. Chapters 3 & 8.
2. Address by Calcutta Jewish community to David Ezra on the occasion of receiving a knighthood, and response, 1927. (Obtained from J. M. David.)
3. July 29, 1949. מאיר בניהו, הד המזרח, ירושלים, 3 באב תש"ט
מס. 38, דפים 7, 15: הלוידי רחל דוד עזרא.
4. "The Ezras of Calcutta," *Australian Jewish News,* Melbourne, Friday, Nov. 29, 1946.
5. Seligson, *ibid.*
6. David Hye Shalome Arakie, "Passing of a Potentate," *Liberal Judaism,* February, 1948.
Sir David Ezra, (obituary), *Shema,* Calcutta, 2:4.
7. *From Damascus to Baghdad — A Trip Across the Syrian Desert,* Baghdad, 1925.
8. Iris Ferris, "The Grand Old Lady of Calcutta," *India & Israel,* Bombay, 4:9, pp. 36-37. *Shema, Calcutta,* 5:12, 13.

9. Rabbi Sassoon has since emigrated to Israel where his interest in Jews in other parts of the world is unflagging.

*Chapter 19*

1. I Kings, 10:22.
2. Hamilton, "New Account of the East Indies."
3. S. S. Koder, "The Jews of Cochin," *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:4; David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Jewish Social Studies,* 1:4, October, 1939; *Jewish Encyclopedia,* 4, q.v. Cochin, by Joseph Ezekiel, 135–138.
4. Traditional.
5. Joseph Ezekiel, *Supra.*
6. "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Supra,* 425.
7. *Madras Mail,* July 18, 1911.
8. Rev. Gundert, *Madras Journal of Literature & Science,* April, 1844.
9. "Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Supra,* 427.
10. *Ibid.,* 427–428.
11. *Ibid.,* 430.
12. Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia.*
13. Charles Lawson, *British and Native Cochin,* London, 1861.
14. Paradesi, meaning foreigner, was applied to the white Jews of Cochin in the later stratification of the community. See below, page 363. Picture, p. 246.
15. "Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Supra,* 430.
16. Buchanan, *Asia,* 3, ii, 234.
17. *Itinerarium,* published, 1596, translated into English, 1598. He visited Cochin, 1584.
18. Francis Pyrard, *Voyage to the East Indies, etc.,* published about the year 1608.
19. *Notisias dos Judeos Cochin Mandados por Mosseh Pereyra De Paiva,* Amsterdam, 1686.
20. Rev. Whitehouse, *Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land.*
21. C. V. Subramanya Aiyar, *The Jews of Cochin,* in *Malabar Quarterly Review,* 1, (1902), 130, quoted in "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin (JWLC)," *Supra,* 433.
22. *JWLC,* 433.
23. Yaari, "Sheluhei Erets Israel."
24. *JWLC,* 424.
25. *Ibid.,* 434.
26. J. C. Visscher, "Letters from Malabar," in K. P. P. Menon, *History of Kerala,* Ernakulam, 1929.
27. *Memoirs,* printed and published by the Government of Madras.
28. Menon, *supra.*
29. 1939. JWLC, 436–437.
30. *Ibid.,* 438, quoting, L. K. A. Iyer, "The Cochin Castes and Tribes," Madras, 1912, 2, 434.
31. *Ibid.,* 446–447.
32. *Pinkas,* No. 154.
33. The letter was signed by Moses Dwek, Isaac Solomon [Benjamin], Ezekiel Ezra Khleif, David Joseph Ezra, Reuben Shukur Isaac, Ezekiel Judah [Jacob],

Yahya Solomon Gubbay, Faraj Hyeem Abdullah Joseph, Moses Moses [Hakham Ezekiel] Simon Ellis Isaac.

34. *Pinkas,* No. 16.

35. *Jewish Encyclopedia,* q.v. "Cochin," by Joseph Ezekiel, 4, 136.

36. The letter was signed by Jacob Daniel Cohen, Isaac Hyeem Gubbay, David Rahabi, Isaac Rahabi, Isaac Judah Mizrahi, Samuel Habiosh, Meir Ezekiel Rahabi, Judah David Ashkenazi (Sephardi Tahore) (sic!), Yom Tob Hallegua.

37. Moses Dwek, Meela Register, No. 87.

38. Arakie, Diary, *loc. cit.*

39. *Pinkas,* No. 68.

40. Arakie, Diary, *loc. cit.*

41. *Supra,* 368.

42. *Paerah,* 4:5, 25.

43. *Ibid.,* 24–26, in which are included: The correspondence, *supra, Pinkas,* Nos. 154, 160; *Paerah,* 3:9, 35, as well as a letter signed by Elia D. J. Ezra.

44. See ch. 6.

45. *Eben Sapir,* 1, 64.

46. 5:5, 25.

47. *Ibid.*

48. In accordance with מהר"ק"ש in יעקב אהלי הבהיר ספר

49. Yaari, "Sheluhei Erets Israel Be-Hodu," 28.

50. *Paerah,* 5:5, 25.

51. *Ibid.;* also, 5:14, 80.

52. *Ibid,* 7:12, 85.

53. *Ibid.,* 7:14, 104.

54. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:4.

55. "Sheluhoth," Yarhone Le-Noar Hadati, No. 53, 1957.

56. Dr. John Wilson, "Lands of the Bible," 2, 667-679.

57. *Eben Sapir,* 2.

58. Haim S. Kehimkar, "The History of the Bene Israel in India," (HBII) Tel Aviv, 1937, 7–16 and other sporadic references.

59. Benjamin II, "Masei Israel," 61. Recently also, Shellim Samuel, a member of the Bene Israel community and an advocate of the Supreme Court of India, in his *Treatise on the Origin and Early History of the Bene Israel of Maharashtra State,* Bombay, 1963.

60. Dr. Wilson, "Appeal for Christian Education of the Bene Israel," 1866. Here Wilson dates the Bene Israel arrival in India, the sixth century C. E. Also, "Indian Antiquary," 321–323. The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 18, part 1, 566, subscribes to the same view, suggesting the Persian Gulf as the source of emigration, as does J. H. Lord, *Church and Synagogue Magazine,* edited by Oesterley & Box.

See also, *Jewish Encyclopedia,* New York, 1902, for an uncommitted account by Joseph Ezekiel/Joseph Jacobs, 3, 17–21.

61. Immanual Olsvanger, in a footnote on page 95, *HBII,* of which he is editor, calls attention to Yebamoth 14a: In the place of R. Yose the Galilean meat of fowls was served with milk. This passage, he says, might be an additional argument in support of the author's theory of the Galilean origin of the Bene Israel. Olsvanger was an emissary of the Zionist movement on three occasions.

62. Bedikah and Shehitah were not observed. However the sciatic nerve and blood were removed from animals and birds used for food.

63. *HBII,* 74–75.

64. *Ibid.*, 37.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Jewish Chronicle,* London, 7th February and 11th May, 1883.
67. *Satya Prakasha,* Marathi Journal, (= The Light of Truth), 2, Nos. 16 & 17, 29–36 and 87–88, (1878–79). Also, pamphlet published in 1880 entitled, "Reflections on the Caste distinctions among the Bene Israel" by Solomon Daniel Nowgowkar. The good offices of the headman of the community, David Samuel Divekar, also known as Dada Cammadan, were borrowed but to no avail.
68. I. A. Ezekiel, "A Miracle of Survival," *India and Israel,* Bombay, 1:5, November, 1948.
69. Rahab being poetically used to designate that country, Psalms 87:4, 89:10, Isaiah 51:9. However, Schifra Strizower, *The Bene Israel of Bombay,* Schocken Books, 1971, pages 48–49: "The Rahabi family came to Cochin from Aleppo in the middle of the seventeenth century and soon played an important part in Cochin Jewry. . . . For many years the Rahabi family acted as agents of the Dutch East India Company." See my review of her book in *Judaism,* vol. 21 no. 82 (Spring 1972) pp. 244–247.
70. *HBII,* 41.
71. Olsvanger, in *HBII,* 42.
72. *Ibid.*, 39.
73. *Ibid.*, 18–23.
74. *Ibid.*, 22.
75. There is no justification for Kehimkar's suggestion of Levite origin. *Ibid.*, 18.
76. Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayeem 581:2 and note 10, Beer Hetheb.
77. *HBII,* 23.
78. *Encyclopedia Judaica,* Jerusalem, 1971, q.v. Bene Israel, 2:493-494.
79. *Pinkas,* No. 139.
80. *HBII,* 188.
81. I. A. Ezekiel, "A Miracle of Survival," in *India and Israel,* 1:6, December, 1948.
82. *HBII,* 96–97.
83. *Ibid.*, 224–225.
84. Psalm 137:5–6.
85. Jeremiah 29:4–7.
86. See note 78, *Supra.*
87. Zwi Werblowsky, *Jewish Chronicle,* London, March 16, 1962, 25.
88. Perhaps as a rebuttal to such forceful protest, a book was published by the Chief Rabbinate containing the accounts of travelers and historians and the opinions of halachic scholars: *Bene Israel — Halachic Verdicts and Sources for Clarification of Their Case and the Question of Their Origin,* Jerusalem, 1962 (Hebrew), *Bene Israel — Piskei Halacha.*

W. J. Fischel, Ha-Yehudim be-Hodu (1960); S. Strizower, Exotic Jewish Communities (1962); N. Bar-Giora, Massa Be-Hodu (1960).

*Bene Israel*

M. Ezekiel, *History and Culture of the Bene Israel in India* (1937); R. Reuben, *Bene Israel of Bombay* (1913); L. I. Rabinowitz, *Far East Mission* (1952); B. J. Israel, *Religious Evolution among the Bene Israel of India since 1750* (1963); R. Dafni, *Indian Jews in Israel* (1969).

*Cochin*

G. Opert in: *Semitic Studies in Memory of Alexander Kohut* (1897), 396–419;

J. H. Lord, *Jews in India and the Far East* (1970); A. Marx in: *REJ,* 89 (1930), 293–304; S. S. Koder in: *Journal of the Ram Varma Archaeological Society,* 15 (1949), 1–6; A. Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade* (1967); I. G. Gowen, in: *Hadassah Magazine* (Dec. 1968); *Jewish Year Book* (1905–1906), 222; Walter J. Fischel, in: *Herzl Yearbook,* 4 (1961), 309–28; idem, in: *American Academy for Jewish Research,* 30 (1962), 37–59; idem, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 87 (1967), 230–48; S. Raffalovich, *Kadmoniyot ha Yehudim be-Malabar* (1901; repr. 1966); E. Carlebach, *Hodu* (1958), 244 f.; S. H. Gaguin, *Hayyei ha-Yehudim be-Cochin* (1953); N. Bar Giora, in *Sefunot,* 1 (1956), 243–78; Zachariah Alzahiri, *Sefer ha-Musar,* ed. Y. Ratsaby (1965).

*Chapter 20*

1. Moses Dwek, Meela Register, No. 2. Solomon was almost 94 at the time of his death in Calcutta on 10th Shebath 5666 (= February 5, 1906). Tomb No. ED 74. The age on his tombstone erroneously makes him 84. Judah had two other sons, Joseph and Alexander, born of a non-Jewish woman and circumcized by Moses Dwek, aged 17 and 14 years in 1829 and 1831 respectively (Meela Register, Nos. 31, 34). A daughter, Rebecca, died in Calcutta 14th Nisan 5633 (= April 11, 1873), almost a year after her mother Golda passed away 26th Nisan 5632 (= May 4, 1872).
2. Tomb No. EA 381.
3. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:39, see infra, ch. 23, p. 430 and supra, 266ff.
4. Arakie, *Diary,* 96. See chapter 15, p. 270ff.
5. *Mebasser,* 1:20.
6. *Ibid.,* 1:22, 1.
7. *Ibid.,* 1:23, 1; :24, 1; :25, 1, 2; :27; :28; :29; :30.
8. Tomb No. 278, bears the honorific title, Hakham.
9. *Mebasser* 2:7, 4.
10. *Paerah* 4:12, 58.
11. *Ibid.,* 11:4, 23; 11:39, 265.
12. *Maggid Mesharim,* April 1893.
13. 2:22.
14. *Eastern Hebrew,* 3:1.
15. *Paerah* 8:48, 333.
18. *Ibid.,* 5:1, 2.
16. Gubbay's list of circumcisions, No. 304.
17. *Eastern Hebrew,* 5:1, for Anglo-Jewish Association, see infra, p. 396ff.
18. *Ibid.,* 5:1, 2.
19. *Ibid.,* 1:2, 19.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 3, s.v. "Bombay." On August 17, 1971, V.V. Giri, President of India, unveiled a plaque at the entrance to the Petit Laboratory, in memory of Haffkine. *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book,* 1973.
22. See ch. 10, p. 172.
23. *Eastern Hebrew,* 1:1; 2:4.
24. *Ibid.,* 1:1, 12.
25. *Ibid.,* 1:1, 40, 41.
26. *Jewish Encyclopedia,* Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1906, 601–2.
27. *Mebasser,* 4:38, 148.

28. *Ibid.*, 5:2, 6.
29. *Paerah,* 5:29, 169.
30. *Ibid.* 5:36, 214. Other members were: Aaron R. Belilios, Aaron Abraham Cohen, E. M. D. Cohen, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Howard S. Howard, Joseph Simon Hyeem Isaac, Raphael Hyeem Simon Isaac, Aaron N. E. Judah, Joseph Rahamim Judah Levy, Elias Meyer and Raphael Elias Sassoon.
31. *Ibid.*, 5:40, 237–38. Among the subsequent donors were an Italian Jew, Gershon Cugelman and an American Jew, Henry J. Meyer (*ibid.*, 5:41, 245). An initial installment of £ 60 (Rs. 12.00 to a £) was sent to London at the end of April, 1883. The list is reproduced here to indicate the names of some of the Jewish community then: Moses Feinberg, Charles F. Lardmor, Judah Ezekiel, Mordecai Abraham Cohen (Bhagalpur), Ezekiel Saleh Moses, Nissim Nissim Adas, Ezekiel Joshua Gubbay, Ezra Hyeem Shalom, Abraham Elias Khadair, Aaron Shalom Joseph Judah, Shalom Rahamim Elisha Arakie, Ezekiel Ezra Gubbay, Ezra Meyer Aaron Abigdor, Hyeem Solomon Hyeem, David Solomon Moosa, Aaron Raphael Joshua, Isaac Joseph Mingail, Ezekiel Abraham Cohen (Purnea), Samuel Shalom Dwek Cohen (Dinapur).
32. *Ibid.*, 6:29, 169–170.
33. *Ibid.*, 6:31, 182.
34. *Ibid.*, 7:30, 212.
35. *Ibid.*, 8:23, 157.
36. *Ibid.*, 9:4, 24.
37. *Ibid.*, 9:23, 148.
38. *Jewish Encyclopedia,* 1, 601–602.
39. David Sassoon, "Asher Isaiah Halevy," *Jewish Chronicle,* London, July, 1930, Supplement, 4, 5; abbreviated in *Shema,* Calcutta, June, 1954, 8:11.

אברהם יערי, הרפתקאותיו של אשר הלוי, ירושלים,
הוצאת ראובן מס, תרצ"ח

40. *Supra* chapter 6, p. 87.
41. Tomb No. EF 3.
42. The following manuscripts were available at the Sassoon Library, the numbers being those of the catalogue *Ohel Dawid:* 845–848, 871–872, 874, on pages 957–958, 967–969, 978–979, 999–1000, 1035, 1044.

*Chapter 21*

1. I am indebted to A. Yaari, Sheluhay Erets Israel, Jerusalem 5711, for many facts mentioned in this chapter. This reference, 29. A list of Shaliahs and their activities in Calcutta, see appendix 7.
2. Zvi b. Solomon Zalman (Safed), 24 Shebath, 5612 = 1852. ED 193.
Bezalel Abraham Menahem Mendele, 5 Iyar, 5620 = 1860. ED 110.
Yom Tob b. Abraham HaKohen Ashkenazi, 22 Nisan, 5625 = 1865. ED 20.
Samuel Jonah b. Abraham, 22 Heshwan 5623 = 1862. EA 380.
Others too must have died there, as did Shooker b. Perets, said by Eleazar Arakie (*Diary,* 103, 104) to have been buried there but whose tombs were not recognizable in 1953. One of the earliest burials was that of Moses de Pas on January 1, 1812, reported by Moses Dwek in his *Diary,* but his tomb is not traceable.
3. Yaari, *ibid.*, 695.
4. 10:32.
5. The Kuppa boxes, placed in Calcutta synagogues, bore the names of these institutions and not, as commonly thought, similarly named local organizations.

6. Gen. Rabba 73, Num. Rabba 16, Yalkut Gen., 984.
7. On Exodus 32:10.
8. Epstein, Eldad Ha-Dani, 5, ex passim, quoted in *Jewish Encyclopedia,* 10, 681–683, by Max Seligsohn.
9. Iggeret Orhot Olam, *Jewish Encyclopedia, ibid.*
10. Chapter 22; appendix 8.
11. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 97.
12. *Ibid.,* 98.
13. *Paerah,* 11:9, 65.
14. Chapter 10.
15. *Paerah,* 3:5.
16. Chapter 8, at note 45.
17. Local presses, and the authors Hamoi and Sukhri, *infra.* Appendix 7.
18. *Paerah,* 9:46.
19. *Ibid.,* 10:1, 5.
20. *Ibid.,* 10:4, 25.
21. *Ibid.,* 11:9, 6.
22. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:14.
23. *Paerah,* 8:23, 159; see *supra,* chapter 6.
24. *Ibid.,* 10:4, 25.
25. Torat Immekha, 1886.
26. Exodus 21:3.
27. *Paerah,* 2:26, 122 and 3, 210.
28. *Maggid Mesharim,* 5:21.
29. *Paerah,* 3:20.
30. *Ibid.,* 1:42.
31. Walter Fischel, "Early Zionism in India," *Herzl Year Book,* 4, 1961–62, Herzl Press, New York, 309–328.
32. And as "Shoshana" until 1901.
33. Louis Fisher, "The Life of Mahatma Gandhi," quoted in *India & Israel,* 4:1, July 1951.
34. *India & Israel,* 1:7, January, 1949, 23, quoting "Harijan," November 26, 1938.
35. *Jewish Chronicle,* London, October 2, 1931.
36. *India & Israel,* 4:1, July 1951, 22.
37. *Ibid.,* October, 1950, India Recognition Issue.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.,* 3:2, August, 1950.

*Chapter 22*

1. For much of the material in this chapter I am indebted to A Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* University Press, Jerusalem, 1940, 2, 9–51.
2. He was a pioneer of trade with Singapore. One of his journeys was started on January 14, 1844. (Arakie, *Diary,* 15). He married Reemah, daughter of Hakham Abigedor Azriel, November 11, 1843, and died April 14, 1856 (*Ibid.,* 14, 91).
3. 1846. Arakie, *Diary,* 27.
4. My article in *Shema,* Calcutta, 9, 3, October, 1954.
5. He died in 1864 when he was over 60 years old. His father fled from San'a about the year 1800. It is, therefore, deduced that he was born between 1800 and 1804.

6. *Eben Sapir,* 1, 91a. A fine manuscript of which he was author was found by Jacob Sapir in San'a.

7. *Ibid.,* 1, 105.

8. Here is the inscription on his tombstone (EF 158)

מצבת קבורת הזקן הנכבד בר אבהן ובר ארין כה"ר
מארי אהרן סעדיה עראקי הכהן נ"ע נפטר יום י"א
חשון שנת התקע"ו ליצירה תנצב"ה

*Ohel Dawid,* 2, 573.
About the family of Arakie as devotees to Jewish literature, see the article, *Megillath Teman,* by David Sassoon, in הצופה לחכמת ישראל, 7, 3ff.

9. *Pinkas,* No. 8. He had a sister Rebecca, married Isaac Isaiah Sittehone, 12th Elul 5586 (= September 14, 1826).

10. One of his teachers was Hakham Eliyahoo Musleah, the grandson of the more illustrious Hakham Saleh Musleah, head of the Baghdad rabbinical academy from 1778 until 1785. See chapter 15, p. 270.

11. For list in chronological order extracted from *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 18–28, see appendix 8. Also, *Ohel Dawid,* 373–376, MS. 618.

12. Sefer Hapizmonim, Calcutta.

13. At the end of עין יעקב 5602–5608 (= 1842–1848); at the end of ספר קדושה and זבח תודה. He added also a hymn at the end of ספר הישר.
He was the author of a hymn in alphabetical order based on the thirteen divine attributes found in ספר הפזמונים, No. 42 starting אדון עולם שמו אחד, *Megillath Teman,* loc. cit., 4.

14. Arakie, *Diary, loc. cit.*

15. His tombstone inscription runs (EF 165):

ציון זה של העניו הז' הישיש אורין בר אורין ובר
אבהן המ' שלום אהרן סעדיה עראקי הכהן נ"ע נפטר ליל
ש"ק ונטמאן ליל א' יוד סיון התרכ"ח תנצב"ה

16. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 98.

17. Arakie, *Diary,* 30, May 29, 1846; 91, March 23, 1856.

18. *Eben Sapir,* 105.

19. The inscription on his tombstone EF 125 reads:

זאת מצבת צדיקא חסידא תורתו אומנותו אוהב צדקה וחסד
ירא ה' העניו הז' בר אבהן ובר אורין אלעזר מארי אהרן
סעדיה הכהן נ"ע נתבקש בישיבה של מעלה יום עש"ק כ"ח
איר התרכ"ד לפ"ק פה כלכתה תנצב"ה

*Ohel Dawid,* 2, 574.

20. For list extracted from A. Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 2, 29–31, see appendix 8.

21. And not his son, as mentioned by A. Yaari, *loc. cit.,* 14. See the weekly newspaper *Paerah,* 1:1, 2 for the correct relationship. Ezekiel, who was the editor of the newspaper *Mebasser,* wished to leave India and stopped publication for many other reasons.

22. The subject of chapter 6.

23. יורו משפטיך ליעקב. 5642 (= 1882).

24. For the list of his books extracted from A. Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 31–32, see Appendix 8.

25. See chapter 6.

26. From 1876–1879 he published in Baghdad three of his books — כתבנו לחיים, אילה שלוחה, נופת צופים, Yaari, *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 113–114, on Baghdad, Nos. 30, 32, 33. One of his books, חנוכת הבית לדוד was printed at the press of E. M. D. Cohen, Calcutta, 1885.

27. For list of the publications of this press, extracted from *Hebrew Printing in the East,* 32–47, see Appendix 8.
28. 1 מעוז חיי, דיני ר"ה
29. Psalms with Arabic translations, publisher, Almozag, 1885.
30. מעוז חיי, 2, to the end; שמע שלמה, Arabic translation and commentary on Koheleth, 1888; see *Paerah,* 11:29, 202.
31. An appeal to save these manuscripts was launched unsuccessfully in the *Eastern Hebrew & Annual,* Calcutta, 1944, 2:2, by Rabbi David J. Seligson, during his sojourn in Calcutta in World War II, and then by the present writer as Rabbi in Calcutta 1952–1964.
32. E. M. D. Cohen, editor of *Paerah,* issued an appeal to the community on Twena's behalf for help in publishing his books, *Paerah, ibid.*

*Chapter 23*

1. Minutes of the Hebrew Burial Board, June 1, 1913.
2. *Mebasser,* 4:32, 126.
3. *Paerah,* 2, 37.
4. Minutes of the Hebrew Burial Board, June 1, 1913.
5. *Paerah,* 6:33, 195.
6. Minutes of the Hebrew Burial Board, *ibid.*
7. Concrete Report on the Internal Working of the Oseh Haised — 1926 by Moses M. Wolff.
8. Minutes of the Oseh Haised Board, 1928.
9. *Mebasser,* 4:32, 126.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Paerah,* 7:18, 133.
12. *Ibid.,* 7:48, 325.
13. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:42, August 6, 1891.
14. Report of Oseh Haised Board, 1925.
15. See *Supra,* 433ff.
16. A description of each, except Gorakhpur, appears as Appendix 9.

*Chapter 24*

1. Exodus 30:11–16; *Eastern Hebrew,* 4:2, 14; *Shema,* 1:1, 2.
2. *Shema,* 3:8, 7.
3. *Ibid.,* 2:5, 2.
4. Chapter 15.
5. *Shema,* 4:2, 12. Vide also 1:11, 1; 1:12, 3, 4; 2:1; 2:2, 11; 3:11.
6. *Ibid.,* 3:8, 16; 3:9, 1; 3:10, 7; 4:8, 9.
7. *Ibid.,* 4:10, 10.
8. *Ibid.,* 1:10, 7.
9. *Ibid.,* 3:6, 4, 7.
10. *Ibid.,* 5:2, 1–2.
11. *Ibid.,* 6:7, 11.
12. *Eastern Hebrew,* 2:2, 5; 4:2, 20.

13. *Shema,* 7:6, 15.
14. *Ibid.,* 2:6, 2.
15. *Ibid.,* 1:8, 6.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.,* 1:9, 13.
18. *Ibid.,* 2:4, 3; 2:6, 13.
19. *Ibid.,* 3:11, 16.
20. *Ibid.,* 4:2, 15.
21. *Ibid.,* 1:12, 1.
22. Jewish Association correspondence. Vide also, *Shema,* 2:7, 1; 3:9, 6.
23. *Shema,* 2:2, 2.
24. *Ibid.,* 1:10, 1.
25. *Ibid.,* 1:12, 4.
26. *Ibid.,* 2:4, 6.
27. *Ibid.,* 2:9, 2, 12.
28. *Ibid.,* 4:9, 1.
29. *Ibid.,* 5:2, 4–5; 5:7, 10.
30. *Ibid.,* 4:12, 7.
31. *Ibid.,* 7:2, 2.

*Appendix 1*

## EXPLANATION OF NAWROOZ

A news item extracted from *The Times of India,* March 22, 1926, Bombay.

### JAMSHED NAOROZ

Day of Rejoicing for Bombay Parsis.

The Parsis of Bombay celebrated Jamshedi Naoroz on Sunday. The festival which is otherwise known as Sultani Naoroz falls on 21st March and is observed generally by the modern Persians, the Arabs and Turks for the computation of the solar year. Inaugurated by Jamshed, the third king of the Pershdadian dynasty who was the first to introduce in Persia the principles of reckoning time. It is celebrated in Persia for six days with great pomp and splendour. In India too it is regarded as a day of rejoicing. The Parsis, young and old, of both sexes were seen on Sunday moving about the city paying and returning visits to friends and relatives and exchanging warm greetings and felicitations. It was a day of feast and merriment for the entire community.

A novel way of celebrating the "New Year's Day," — for that is the meaning of Naoroz, although Jamshedi Naoroz is not observed by the Parsis as their New Year's Day, — was sought to be introduced by a member of the Parsi community named Mr. B. S. Banaji. His idea was to get the entire community together on an open space like the Esplanade Maidan, and form a "gala day" procession in which all could participate. He claims to have originated the idea which, according to him, will be a "National Day" and will promote unity and brotherly feeling in the community. This idea was stoutly opposed by some other sections of the community. . . .

A Second News Item from *The Times of India,* Bombay, 21st March, 1911.

Today the Parsis celebrated the Jamshedi Naoroz festival which is the first of the four quarterly divisions of the year, viz. the vernal equinox, the summer solstice, the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice. Regarding its celebration, Firdushi, the great Persian epic poet, says, "Order, grace and lustre came to the earth when the sun was dominant in Aries (March 21) and shone so brightly that the world grew young." In narrating the celebration of Naoroz the same poet speaks as follows: "The Shah, whose word was law, sat sun-like; the world assembled round his throne in wonder at his resplendent fortune; the people scattered on him jewels and bestowed upon the day the name of New Year Day the first of Fardaween month; when limbs repose from their labor, and hearts from strife; the noble chieftain held a festival and called for the goblet of wine and minstrelsy, and ever since that time this glorious day remaineth the memorial of the Shah."

The Parsis since their arrival in India counted 365 days in the year and have made no provision for a leap year, but have continued to observe Jamshedi Naoroz on 21st of March irrespective of their Parsi calendar. A movement was started

by the late Mr. K. B. Kama to revise the Parsi calendar commencing the Parsi new year from this day but it did not find favour amongst orthodox Parsis.

A letter in connection with Persia's New Year Day.

To the Editor,
"The Englishman"
Sir,

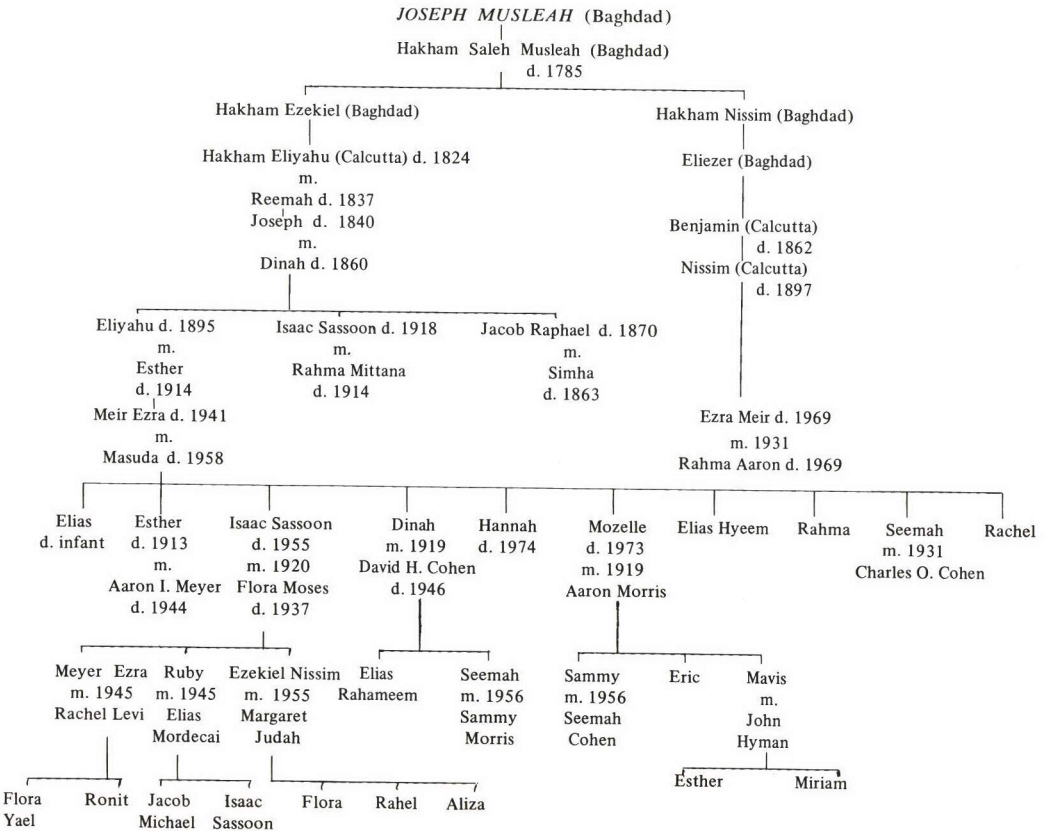
I should like to inform the public through the medium of your esteemed paper that as this year's Persian New Year (Novrooz, March 22) falls in the month of Ramazan [the Mohammedan month of fasting] there will therefore be no ceremonial reception held in the General Consulate.

Yours etc.
C. Nabaiz
227/1, Lower Circular Road,
Consul General of Persia
Calcutta, March 16 [1926]

The preceding appended to MS. No. 879, *Ohel Dawid.*

*Appendix 2*

## FAMILY TREE OF MUSLEAH



*Appendix 3*

## COMMUNITY REGISTERS

*Circumcisions*

*Moses Dwek* performed 343 circumcisions, 18 of the second generation, in Chinsura, Dacca, Dinapur, Calcutta. First, Moses, son of Yahya Taazi, 6th Tishri 5573 (= September 12, 1812) and last, Ezekiel, son of Sassoon Ezekiel Judah, 20th Kislev 5621 (= December 4, 1860). *Aaron b. Hakham Abigedor Azriel,* performed 116 circumcisions; first, Joseph, son of Solomon Agababa, 20th Adar 5619 (= February 24, 1859) and last, Ezekiel Hyeem, son of Solomon Mulla Isaac Joseph, 2nd Elul 5633 (= August 25, 1873).

*Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay,* performed 633 circumcisions. First, Abraham, son of Lemekh Mayshuhrar, 28th Sivan 5619 (= June 30, 1859) and last, Ariel Laniel, son of Hilali Elias Hyeem Hilali Solomon, 9th Shebath 5668 (= January 12, 1908).

The most widely traveled of all the Mohels, he was in Singapore and Hongkong in March, 1882. In Singapore, he performed four Meelas in a half hour. On his visit to Hongkong again in April, 1888, for the express purpose of circumcisions, he stayed over five days and did five operations. In September that year he was summoned to Darjeeling in the Himalayas for the Meela of the new-born son of Herman Kisch, a British Jew, Post Master General of Bengal, at the residence of the Bengal Governor. Appointed Honorary Magistrate, Gubbay tried cases in police courts in Howrah, a suburb of Calcutta.

*Saul Moses Lanyado* performed 496 circumcisions. First, Ezra Rahamim son of Benjamin Jacob Rahamim Solomon, 27th Nisan 5634 (= April 14, 1874) and last, Jacob, son of Saul Jacob Jonah Saddiq, 5th Heshwan 5682 (= November 6, 1921).

*Ben Zion Saul Moses Lanyado* performed 59 circumcisions. First, Elias, son of Isaac David (Bene Israel) 28th Kislev 5666 (= December 26, 1905) and last, Simon Hai Meir, son of Ezra Barook Moses Shooker, 26th Elul 5671 (= September 19, 1911).

*Samuel Shalome Moses Dwek Cohen* performed 254 circumcisions. First, Joseph Nathaniel Hai son of David Raphael (convert), 24th Adar I 5665 (= April 31, 1905) and last, David Hyeem son of Ezra Hai Isaac David Joseph Abraham Taazi (Tassie), 4th Ab, 5683 (= July 17, 1923).

*Sassoon Jacob Cohen* performed 752 circumcisions. First, Khlaif Salim son of Mordecai Khlaif, 5th Ab 5680 (= July 20, 1920) and last, Joseph Ibn Jerusalem, son of Saul Hai Khadoorie Abraham Sadka, 27th Ab 5710 (= August 9, 1950).

Two men performed during the next decade. *Joseph Malkoo* originally from Rangoon, Burma, died after doing a few operations and *Dr. Isaac F. Meyer, F.R.C.S.,* before he left India permanently. The community then found itself without a resident Mohel and had to summon one from Bombay at the incidence of a male birth in Calcutta.

The birth of girls was far less consistently recorded. For these one has to look in the diaries of the early settlers, the Hebrew-Arabic newspapers and the registers of the Jewish schools after 1881. No systematic listing has yet been made.

*Marriages* were performed by almost all the above-named functionaries and the Hazans of the synagogues, some of whom maintained registers. The earliest recorded consecrations are found in the diaries of Shalome Cohen and Moses Dwek and the register of Neveh Shalome Synagogue maintained by *Moses Dwek*. The first Jewish marriage in Calcutta was that of Moses Dwek himself and Shalome Cohen's eldest daughter, Luna, January 20, 1807, 11th Shebath 5567. The first marriage recorded in the Neveh Shalome register was that of Hyeem Simon Dwek Cohen and Rebecca, daughter of Shalome Aaron Cohen, 26th Kislev 5576 (= December 28, 1815) married in Chinsura, and the last, Mordecai Pinhas Cohen and Toba, daughter of Abraham David, 13th Sivan 5620 (= June 3, 1860).

Some of the other registers were maintained as personal records of the celebrants. *Aaron b. H' Abigedor Azriel* performed his first marriage 30th Shebath 5621 (=January 31, 1861) of David son of Abraham David and Esther, daughter of Elias Abraham and last (the 136th) on 4th Tishri 5634 (= September 25, 1873) of Khadair, son of Joseph Khadair and Hannah, daughter of Moses Aaron Lanyado.

*Eleazar Aaron Arakie,* sixty-seven marriages solemnized between 13th Nisan 5589 (= April 16, 1829) and 30th Adar I, 5624 (= March 8, 1864).

*Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay's* first marriage performed was that of Ezekiel Rahamim Jacob and the daughter of Farha Jonah Nissim on 15th Kislev 5626 (= December 3, 1865) and last on 12th Adar II 5668 (= March 15, 1908).

*Saul Moses Lanyado's* first marriage performed was of Sassoon Hyeem son of Benjamin Elia and Khatoon, daughter of Ezra Ezra Ezekiel Gubbay at Serampur on 7th Elul 5634 (= August 20, 1874) and last (his 362nd) of Jacob, son of Nissim Moses and Gala Mittana, daughter of Moses Aboodie Moses Amber on 13th Sivan 5681 (= June 19, 1921).

*Samuel Shalome Dwek,* Hazan of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, first four marriages performed at Shanghai, September, 1891–September, 1892, the next two in Hongkong, July, 1893–September, 1893. The seventh in Calcutta, December, 1906. The last, Ezra Meir (also called Nissim Ezekiel Sillman David) and Rahma, daughter of Aaron Ezra Eleazar Arakie (the 102nd).

*Elias Moses Dwek Cohen,* Hazan of Maghen David Synagogue, performed marriages but his register was not available to us. The next minister of Maghen David, *Ezra Meir Levi,* must have performed a few after Cohen's death in January, 1927. From the early 1930's when A. F. Morris was minister, Maghen David Synagogue maintained a marriage register taken over after his death in 1946 by the Maghen David Synagogue and continued by his successors David Hye Jacob Cohen and the present writer. Isaac Sassoon Musleah, this writer's father, performed a few.

*Abraham Abid Twena,* successor of Saul M. Lanyado as minister of Bethel Synagogue, kept a record of the marriages he performed. It is probably in the safe keeping of Bethel Synagogue. Others like *Sassoon Jacob Cohen* associated with Shaare Rasone Synagogue maintained a register of marriages. First, Mordecai Sassoon Ezra Ajmee Halevi and Freeha, daughter of Jacob Joseph Ajmee Halevi, 7th Tishri 5682 (= October 9, 1921). He solemnized some two hundred marriages, though his rough register in our possession accounts for 165 of them until 1944. He died at least six years later.

*Appendix 4*

## EXTENT OF PHILANTHROPY OF MOZELLE, WIFE OF ELIA EZRA.

*Easing Poverty*

She provided the poor with eats to break their fast, 1879. (2;17, 71. This and other references are in *Paerah*).

Commencing in 1879, she organized annual Hanukka assemblages of between three and four hundred needy persons who received money, winter clothing, blankets and food. (2:26, 119; 4:26, 124).

Prior to her departure for her regular Bombay visits with her mother, she distributed Rs. 14,000.00 to the poor in their homes. Her 1880 visit lasted 8½ months. (5:36, 213; 8:2, 9).

She took an interest in the School, Tehilla Le-Dawid. She was present at a Hebrew examination conducted by Moses Abeasis, 1884. (7:37, 250). In winter 1883, she took the boys of the School to the circus. Also she gave them an all-day treat at the Exhibition arranged for the Connaught's visit to Calcutta. (6:31, 182). On Purim 1884, 1885, she held a party for the boys. Her sons distributed Purim money. (6:38, 235; 7:38, 257).

*Assisting the Synagogues*

She donated thirty fans costing Rs. 340.00 to old Neveh Shalome Synagogue.

Donations of silver and appurtenances to Maghen David Synagogue totalled 3310 tolas, besides that which was removed from the old Neveh Shalome and not used. (7:50, 341).

(a) For the dedication in 1884, she presented six silver rimmonim (bells) each weighing sixty tolas, for the four corners of the front of the Tebah and either side of its entrance. (Her husband had donated two in addition) (7:33, 223).

(b) Unannounced, she delivered personally on the first evening of Hanukka 1884 a silver Hanukkia. (7:26, 183).

(c) To observe the second anniversary of the laying of the synagogue's foundation stone, February 1885, she contributed:

Ewer and basin for ritual washing of Kohen's hands.
Tray of Eliyahoo Ha-Nabi.
Kiddush cup with stand and cover.

Each inscribed: "Gift of Mazal Tob, wife of Elia D. J. Ezra, to Maghen David Synagogue 5645 (= 1885)."

Total Cost: Rs. 2000.00.

(d) In May 1885 she donated:

Twelve silver candle holders for Habdala. Four candle holders for the four corners of the Tebah and a bigger candle holder for the center of the Tebah. Tray to hold Kiddush cup and candle holder.

For circumcisions:
Goolabdan and Bekhurdan for the night of Akd-il-yas.
Rimmonim for Eliyahoo Ha-Nabi and Meela chairs.
Total weight: 3000 tolas
In August, 1885 she donated:
A big dish and two smaller dishes with covers.
A further pair of Goolabdan.
A cup for vinegar and a glass for sweet liquid for child.
Total value: Rs. 1000.00. (7:45, 305).
(e) In July, 1885 she presented:
Four small Ma'danat for four corners of the Tebah, weighing 134 tolas.
Sixteen containers, called Tasa, for money collections weighing twenty tolas.

Her first gift to Maghen David was an exquisite wedding canopy prepared by Valentine & Co., London experts, October, 1884. It had four pillars overlaid with gold. Its roof was maroon velvet inscribed with bridal verses from the Bible. Lovers knot in four corners.

She expressed an intention in 1882, to enlarge the ladies' gallery and the ark at Bethel as well as provide a clock tower and marble flooring at the cost of Rs. 50,000.00. The subsequent building of Maghen David Synagogue by her husband changed her intention. (5:36, 213)

*Praise of her generosity*

A letter requesting her to build a school for the community, 1878. (1, Page 38)
A letter of praise in Hebrew, 1879. (2:5, 19)
A letter from a resident of Hebron: she looked after him for five months during his stay in Calcutta. (8:4, 25)

*Philanthropy outside India*

In 1882, she donated 420 pounds sterling (= about Rs. 5000.00) to Jerusalem as follows: one hundred pounds pecuniary assistance to scholars, two hundred pounds for poor of Jerusalem especially Russian immigrants to Jerusalem, seventy pounds for orphans and widows, thirty-five pounds of clothing for children of the Talmud Torah, ten pounds for the sick, five pounds for a minyan to pray at the grave of Mother Rachel.
To the Yeshiba Mazal Tsomeyiah: One hundred and twenty pounds (= Rs. 1500.00) for the salaries of the scholars and the wages of the Shamash. She specified that this sum was to be sent to the Yeshibah every year forever. (Praise of Hakham Yehiel b. Adon, 6:11, 63)
She contributed to the tomb of Ezra Sopher to provide for a larger place for visitors. In response to an appeal for Rs. 1000.00, she sent Rs. 4000.00. Parochet and Tabawat for the tombs of Ezra Sopher, Ezekiel Nabi, etc., woven in satin and zaree. For inscription at the place, see p. 471.
Total Cost: Rs. 5000.00. (5:36, 213)

Born: October 13, 1853, Bombay
Parents: Sir Albert Sassoon and Hannah Khatoon
Married: Elia D. J. Ezra, Poona, September 6, 1870
Died: London, February 14, 1922, Aged 68

*Appendix 5*

## MAGHEN DAVID SYNAGOGUE

A. Inscription on Foundation Stone.

זאת זכרון לדור אחרון כי ביום ג׳ שנכפל בו כי טוב לסדר מתן תורה
שנת הנני מפרך והרביתך ונתתיך לקהל הג׳ השר סי׳ אליה דוד יוסף
עזרא הי״ו את אבן פנה היסוד במקום הזה לבנות עליו בית תפלה
למנוחת נפש המרוחם מר אביו זצוק״ל ויקרא בשם מ ג ן ד ו ד יכב״ץ
יהי רצון שתשרה שכינה במעשה ידיו ונזכה לבנין בית מקדשנו במהרה
בימינו אמן סלה: הוא יום ט״ו שבט התרמ״ג שהוא יום כ״ג גאנווארי
שנת אלף ושמנה מאות ושלשה ושמנים למספרם תחת ממשלת אדונתנו המלכה
הקיסרית ויכתוריה יר״ה שנת ששה וארבעים לממלכתה

B. Prayer recited by Rev. E. M. D. Cohen at dedication.

אני עבדכם הש״ץ בשליחות כל קהל עדתנו ה׳ ישמרם בעיו ומתחנן לפני
אלקינו שבשמים, אנא ה׳ המטוב המטיב לכל, הוא יברך ידידנו הגביר
סי׳ אליה דוד יוסף עזרא הי״ו על טובת לבו שהוא משתדל בכל כוחו
ובהונו להרים קרן עמך שיהיו לתהלה לשם ולתפארת, כן תרום ותגביה
כוכב מערכתו ותאריך ימיו ושנותיו בטוב ובנעימים: וכמו כן לרעיתו
הגברת הצדקת כי בצדקתה תרנין לב עגומים, ושמחו הצדיקים ביוצא
זלציהם לגדלם ולהשיאם להגיל להם ולכל אשר יפנו ישכילו ויצליחו
יבלו ימיהם בטוב ושנותיהם בנעימים עד עמוד הכהן לאורים ותומים
יברכך ה׳ וישמרך, יאר ה׳ פניו אליך ויחונך, ישא ה׳ פניו אליך
וישם לך שלום, ולו ולכל עח הקהל אני אברך ושמו את שמי על בני
ישראל ויקוים בנו הבטחתו יתברך שאמר ואני אברכם ויהי רצון שנזכה
גם לחנך הבית הכנסת בשמחה ולגילה שלימה בבנין בית קדשנו ותפארתנו
יראו עיניני וישמח לבינו אכי״ר:

C. Rules.

*In the name of God we shall Act and Prosper.*

We the undersigned have revised the former rules of the Maghen David Synagogue and have elected Mr. Nissim Isaac Silas Sassoon and Mr. Aaron Ezekiel Joshua Abraham to join us in the management of the said Synagogue as mentioned below: CALCUTTA. 1st Kislev 5654 [10th November, 1893].

Signed by:

Mr. Joseph Elias David Ezra.
" Ezekiel Elias David Joseph Ezra.
" Howard Syeed Howard.
" Rahamim Moosa Cohen.
" Aaron Ezra Arakie.
" David Hye Solomon Moosa.

*Rule No. 1 Chairman.* Mr. Joseph Elias David Joseph Ezra is the President of the "Board of Manhigim" and no election shall take place for this office. In case the Manhigim are equally divided, the President shall have a casting vote and whenever he is present he shall be the Chairman.

*Rule No. 2 Vice President.* The "Board of Manhigim" shall elect a Vice President yearly and in the absence of the President, he shall be the Chairman and shall have the casting vote. If both the President and Vice President are absent then the Manhigim shall appoint a temporary Chairman from among themselves and in case the Manhigim are equally divided, the same Chairman shall have the casting vote for that meeting only.

*Rule No. 3 "Manhigim."* Besides the President, the following Manhigim shall interest themselves in all matters concerning the Synagogue and everything shall be under their management:

1. Mr. Ezekiel Elias David Joseph Ezra.
2. " Howard Rahamim Sayeed Howard.
3. " Rahamim Moosa Cohen.
4. " Nissim Isaac Silas Sassoon.
5. " Aaron Ezekiel Joshua Abraham.
6. " David Hye Solomon Abraham.
7. " Aaron Ezra Arakie [Cohen].

If one of the Manhigim resigns or leaves the city, or remains in another country more than two years, then the Manhigim shall appoint another Manhig in his place. The Manhigim shall manage the Synagogue by rotation and in the absence of the Manhig during his term of management his power shall be exercised by the Manhig who is present.

*Rule No. 4 Meetings.* The Manhigim shall appoint a place for their meetings, which shall take place at least twice a year at the following seasons:

(a) A week before New Year.
(b) A week before Passover.

Minutes of the meeting shall be recorded in a Record Book and will be confirmed within a month of each meeting. At the conclusion of every meeting the Record Book shall be given to the Manhigim to be signed, so that all the minutes of the past meetings may be well recorded.

*Rule No. 5 "Honorary Secretary."* The Manhigim shall elect yearly an Honorary Secretary who shall record every event of the meetings of the Manhigim. He shall interest himself in the accounts and income and expenditure of the Synagogue. He shall call meetings whenever necessary and interest himself in every matter that pertains to the Manhigim. If two Manhigim want to call a meeting they shall write to the Honorary Secretary and inform him about the points they wish to be placed before the committee and the Honorary Secretary shall call a meeting and send the Manhigim an agenda a week beforehand. In every meeting at least four of the Manhigim shall be present, for no meeting shall take place with less than the said number of Manhigim.

*Rule No. 6 Synagogue Affairs.* The Hazanim, Gubbayim, Shamashim, as well as all the servants of the Synagogue including all the furniture and appurtenances belonging to the Synagogue shall be under the management of the Manhigim and they have the right to see whether to increase the number of servants of the Synagogue or

to decrease it, or to change the Hazanim, Gubbayim and Shamashim of the Synagogue according to what they think best. This change, whether effected to punish the employee for his mistake or because of his unsatisfactory services is left to the Manhigim to decide. An employee of the Synagogue can be dismissed without notice if he acts against Synagogue rules. If the Manhigim want to make a change in order to bring about an improvement, they shall give three month's notice in writing to the person who is to be dismissed. The Manhigim have the full right to modify or increase the rules of the Synagogue according to what they think best, save that such changes must have the consent of the President. As regards the Sepharim of the late Mr. David Joseph Ezra and the late Mr. Elias David Ezra, they will be brought out in their appointed time and this rule shall not be altered.

*Rule No. 7 "Hazanim."* The Hazanim (or others) shall read the prayers and the Sefer Torah according to rules made by the Manhigim at each period and no other person shall act as Hazan in the Synagogue, unless he obtains permission from the Manhigim. The Hazan shall appoint honorary assistants (SOMEKH) for himself, by obtaining permission from the Manhigim.

*Rule No. 8 "Gabbai."* The Gabbai shall collect every income and pay every expense of the Synagogue and render an account to the Honorary Secretary, or to the Manhigim whenever asked, as the Manhigim shall require. He shall also keep a list of all the belongings of the Synagogue for which he shall be responsible and answer for their loss. A duplicate of the same list shall be kept by the Honorary Secretary. He shall keep a register and enter there all marriages solemnized in the city especially those which are solemnized in the Synagogue, either of residents or of guests. The name of the Solemnizer, witnesses to the Ketubah, birthdays, circumcisions, and the name of the Mohel shall be entered in the same book. Furthermore he shall keep another book in order to record the proceedings of divorce, Haleesah and deaths. He shall have control over the Shamashim and the servants of the Synagogue.

*Rule No. 9 "Shamash."* Shamashim are bound to be present in the Synagogue during prayers, and Synagogue doors shall be opened and closed by them. They shall supervise the work of the other servants of the Synagogue, such as cleaning, dusting and swabing the floors of the Synagogue, and the Sisiths with their cases and the books shall be in their charge. They shall roll the Sefer Torah to the required place, change the Parokhets (Holy Curtains), light the Chandeliers &c., and perform other work of the Synagogue that is needed of them. At the conclusion of their duties they shall tell the overseer of the servants to take care of the Synagogue.

*Rule No. 10 "Seats."* By the order of the Manhigim, the Gabbai shall usher members of the Congregation to their seats, especially the guests, Hakhamim and those who occasionally attend this Synagogue. If any seat holder of this Synagogue shall leave this city and shall dwell in another city, or shall attend other Synagogues for one month, either owing to ill-feeling between him and the Manhigim or to break the rules of the Synagogue, he loses the right over his seat. No one is allowed to go up to the Bimah during prayer time with the exception of the Hazan, his assistants and the choir. After the death of a seat-holder (if he has sons) one of his sons shall have the right to his father's seat.

*Rule No. 11 "Ladies' Gallery."* The same rules of Seat-holders as mentioned in No. 10 shall apply to the Ladies' Gallery and a male child above ten in not allowed to sit there or to go up without the consent of the Manhigim. Servants not belonging to the Synagogue are not allowed to go up to the Ladies' Gallery or to take away the chairs of their masters until all the ladies leave the Gallery.

*Rule No. 12 "Time of Prayer."* The Manhigim shall fix the time for prayer and the Hazan shall announce it on the preceding Sabbath. The congregation shall abide by the appointed time and the Hazan is not allowed to commence before or after the fixed time unless permission is granted by the Manhigim.

*Rule No. 13 "Discipline."* The congregation shall sit quietly in their places and shall not raise their voices or talk during prayer time. No one shall audibly felicitate fellow congregants in any way, such as the Arabic-speaking Jews who congratulate brides &c., with a shrill outcry. No one shall throw sweets and flowers in the Synagogue at any time. At the services of the feasts of Tabernacles and Simhat Torah, every one shall act in a civil manner so that the Holy happiness may be enjoyed in a normal way. Confetti of any sort of paper, or of sweets shall not be brought to the Synagogue. During the feasts of Purim the use of fireworks in the Synagogue and the producing of any sound from any kind of instrument even in the compound of the Synagogue are forbidden. Fathers should control their children so that they may not cause any kind of confusion, making them sit next to them quietly. No one shall spit on the floor or on the windows of the Synagogue. If any person has ill-feeling with another he shall not row with him, but must bring the same to the notice of the Manhigim and they shall suggest a remedy. If any one contravenes the rules made by the Manhigim, the Manhigim have the right to remove him from the Synagogue. Such power is vested with the Manhigim and no member shall question them. Poor people or travellers are not allowed to lodge or to live in the Synagogue area. It is forbidden to bring non-Jews to the Synagogue without the consent of the Manhigim. Should any one enter the Synagogue without their consent, the Manhigim have the power to refuse him admission. On the night of Simhat-Torah, no invitation should be extended to non-Jews absolutely. If any ordinary person enters the Synagogue and does not behave himself properly, the Manhigim may turn him out.

*Rule No. 14 "Privileges"* (Special Offerings.) Every privilege shall be sold with the consent of the Manhigim and they have the authority to refuse to sell any of the privileges. If they wish to withhold the sale of privileges to one of the seat holders, they may instruct the Hazan not to accept his bids and for which they are not bound to show cause. Special offerings (Mi-Sheberakh) shall be made by the "OLIM" for the following purposes:

> For the honour of the Holy Torah, for the prosperity of father, mother, father-in-law, wife, children, sons-in-law, brother, sister, bridegroom, bride and their

assistants, the Solemnizer of the ceremony, the father of the new born child, for the Honour of the chair of the Prophet Elijah, the new born child, the Circumciser, for the health of the sick, for the prosperity of the buyer of the privilege and the one who buys the privilege of lighting the lamps of the Synagogue, for the prosperity of the reader of maftir, as well as friends, relations, guests and the whole congregation. A memorial prayer may be recited for the repose of the souls of the departed. If any one wants more names mentioned, he shall pay two annas for each name.

There shall be another special offering for the following purposes:

Whenever the father of a new born child or a bridegroom is present in the Synagogue or a new Sefer Torah is offered to the Synagogue, a special offering shall be made and all the money of the offering shall be added to the Synagogue account. If the Abi-Haben and the Hathan are poor, the Manhigim shall present them with the extra special offerings, if they are deserving. No Mi-Sheberakh (offerings) shall

be made for the poor or for the Hakhamim in the Synagogue, but in case of an emergency the Manhigim shall use their discretion.

*Rule No. 15 "Olim."* The Olim of Saturday morning shall come up to the Torah as the "MADLIQ" (one who buys the privilege of lighting the lamps) wishes, with the exception of the last one who gets up "MAFTIR." If a person has YARSEIT (death anniversary) he has the right of getting up "MASHLIM" and the "MADLIQ" shall not object. If more than one person have YARSEIT on one day, the one who has more merits according to the rule, shall get up. For instance, the YARSEIT of the father before the mother, the mother before the brother, sister, son, daughter, the wife and the uncle. Now, if two persons have the same kind of YARSEIT in one day, the resident of Calcutta has the right over the non-resident, the old resident over the new seat holder, one whose dead is buried in this city, over the one whose dead is buried in another city, one who attends this Synagogue over one who normally attends another synagogue, one whose dead died recently over the one whose dead died long ago. Besides these rules, if there be two persons of the same degree and of the same kind of YARSEIT, then the Mashlim shall be sold and the parties bid until one of them obtains the privilege. As for the Sefer of the late David Joseph Ezra and the late Elias David Joseph Ezra, they must be brought out on the YARSEIT day for they have the right before any other member of the Synagogue. If a Cohen has a YARSEIT he should inform the Gubbai a week before hand, i.e., before the sale of the Maftir of the next Saturday, so that no Cohen may buy the MAFTIR of the coming Saturday and consequently lose his own privilege. But if there are two "SEPHARIM" on the same day, it is permitted for two Cohens to be called up one after the other. If a Cohen forgets and does not inform the Gubbai a week beforehand and another Cohen buys the Maftir of the next Saturday, then he loses his right of Mashlim and the other Cohen who buys the Maftir shall have the right of getting up. On the day that the privileges of the Olim are sold, one who has YARSEIT must buy the privilege. If there are "ABI HABEN" and "HATHAN" in the Synagogue on the same Sabbath, the "ABI HABEN" shall get up on the Sefer before the HATHAN. If there be more than one "ABI HABEN" in the Synagogue the ABI HABEN whose son was born first shall have the prior right of getting up. The ABI HABEN whose son is to be circumcised on the 8th day, has more right than the ABI HABEN whose son's circumcision is adjourned. If, a Hathan and an ABI HABEN are in the Synagogue, and the ABI HABEN's sons circumcision has been adjourned, the Hathan has prior right of getting up. If more than one Hathan is in the Synagogue, the one who was married first shall have prior right of going up to the Torah.

*Dilloog:* Each Hathan or ABI HABEN is at liberty to invite *two* persons more than the usual number to get up, and the Hazan must repeat a certain passage (called DILLOOG) in these cases. If there be two HATHANS or ABI HABENS in the Synagogue, each has the right of inviting one DILLOOG only. On such days if many visitors are due to get up, the Gabbai shall obtain permission from the Manhigim and invite the visitor for extra DILLOOG. The OLIM are not allowed to read the Sefer unless permitted to do so by the Manhigim.

*Rule No. 16 Sefer Torah.* "Sefer Kol Nidray" must not be sold but the Hazan must offer a special blessing called "HANNOTHEN" for the President according to the yearly custom and the Sefer of David Joseph Ezra must be brought out for same. The same Sefer shall be carried out on Kippur morning at "SHAHRITH" as well as at the Shahrith of the first day of Passover, and on every New Moon called ROSH HODESH that falls on a week day. When there are two ROSH HODESH days,

the Sefer of Elias David Joseph Ezra must be carried out on the 1st day and that of David Joseph Ezra on the 2nd day. But if on a ROSH HODESH day a seat holder has YARSEIT his Sefer must come out instead of the said SEFARIM. On the YARSEIT days of the owners of the two above-mentioned Sefarim, the latter must come out in preference to any other YARSEIT, and the Gabbai must ask the permission of the President as to when the Sefer of the latter should be brought out. SEFER SHISHI of KIPPUR night must be brought out during the next afternoon prayer (MINHA). The man who buys the privilege of reading SHEERAH (songs of Moses) or ESSER (TEN COMMANDMENTS) has the choice of Sefer.

*Simhat Torah.* On SIMHAT TORAH day the HATHAN TORAH (the last portion of the law) or HATHAN BERESHITH (Genesis) or Maftir (reading the Prophets) has the choice of Sefer.

On KIPPUR day, Sefer KOL NIDRAY must come out first and the man who buys Maftir has the choice of Sefer. If on a Shabbat it happens that three SEFERS are due to come out, the first SEFER is brought out in turn, and must come out. The second SEFER and third SEFER are the option of the persons who buy the MASHLIM and MAFTIR.

*Turn of the Sefarim.* The first SEFER on the list of SEFARIM must come out first on ROSH HASHANA day and the other SEFERS take their turn according to the list, with the exception of the following days:

KIPPUR morning Service; 1st day of Passover; the Shabbat on which SHEERA (Song of Moses) is read; the Shabbat on which ESSER (Ten Commandments) is read. The above mentioned list of SEFARIM should be arranged by the Manhigim and copy of same kept by the Gubbai who must bring out the SEFARIM by turns. If a new SEFER is donated to the Synagogue, it must come out for four weeks continuously with the exception of the days on which the YARSEIT of any seat holder falls. In such cases, after the YARSEIT is over, the aforesaid new SEFER will be brought out again regularly until four weeks from the first day of its being donated is complete. The days on which it was not brought out owing to YARSEITS are forfeited.

If on the day that a new SEFER is donated another seat holder has YARSEIT and he possesses a SEFER, the YARSEIT sefer must be brought out and the bringing out of the new SEFER is adjourned. The Gabbai must bring out the SEFARIM on their YARSEIT days but if any YARSEIT falls on KIPPUR day or on days on which the privileges are sold then the YARSEIT sefer is adjourned. If any YARSEIT falls on a Sunday, on which day SEFARIM do not come out, the YARSEIT Sefer comes out on the preceding Saturday. If YARSEIT falls on a Saturday on which day the privileges are sold, or any of the above rules prevents its SEFER coming out then the YARSEIT sefer must come out at MINHA (afternoon prayer). If a YARSEIT falls on a Tuesday or Wednesday its SEFER comes out on Monday. If two YARSEITS fall on a week day or Saturday the man who buys Mashlim will have the privilege of taking out his SEFER. If a man offers a SEFER during his life time, his SEFER must come out on the 30th day after his demise. But if on the same day there is another YARSEIT then the former SEFER must be brought out.

*Rule No. 17 Bills.* Bills for privileges or special offerings must be paid within three months, failing which the Gabbai must remind the buyer of same. If bills are not paid within six months, the Manhigim have power to refuse and not accept his bids or they may use their own discretion in the matter.

*Rule No. 18 Announcements.* Every coming event must be announced to the congregation by the Hazan, who will be directed in all such matters by the Man-

higim. Before the announcement the Beadle must take the written notice to all the Manhigim the sanction of the Manhigim who may be present in the Synagogue will suffice.

CALCUTTA

2nd Adar 5654
Corres:
8th February 1894

Sd. Joseph Elias David Ezra.
" Aaron Ezekiel Joshua Abraham Ezra.
" Ezekiel Elias David Joseph.
" Rahamim Moosa Cohen.
" Howard Sayeed Howard.
" Nissim Isaac Silas Sassoon.
" Aaron Ezra Arakie.
" David Hye Solomon Moosa.

*Appendix 6*

## PRAYER AT THE DEDICATION OF EZRA HOSPITAL, CALCUTTA

*By Rev. E. M. D. Cohen*

Almighty Father, Supreme King of Kings, enthroned on high and abiding with those who are meek and lowly in spirit! Unto Thee we direct our supplications in this auspicious hour in which we are assembled here to lay the Foundation Stone of a building for the benefit of the sick whether of the Jewish or any other Religion, who may come hither to be healed. May they be blessed in their coming in and in their going out. We know that "except Thou build the house, they labour in vain that build it, except Thou keep it, the watchman waketh but in vain." We, therefore, beseech Thee to grant us Thy blessed cooperation in this intended home for the sick which has been devised by Mrs. Mozelle Ezra in commemoration of her late husband, Elias David Joseph Ezra and which accordingly shall be called Ezra Hospital. "Thou killest and makest alive. Thou bringest down to the grave and bringest up." Thus we have Thy holy assurance that man created in Thine image is immortal; that the very death itself is the seed out of which life shall come. Let then, O Father, this our building when completed stand before Thine eyes as a symbol of the promise of resurrection to be fulfilled in time. Out of the death of him in whose memory this hospital is founded by his sorrowing widow let there spring health and renewed life to those whose health has suffered and whose life has been crippled in the struggle for existence. We believe that disease is more than a physical derangement; that it denotes moreover a disobedience on the part of the sick to Thy holy Will. We believe that the observance of the great law carries with it life and lengthened days of happiness and contentment; that the Law is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it; that sickness is the exact measure of the distance between the man smitten and Thee, Source of all life! Nevertheless do we build this house; nevertheless do we invoke Thy blessings for those who suffer in health, knowing as we do through Thy holy prophets that with Thee is mercy and forgiveness of sin.

Father of all mercies! Fill our hearts with the steadfast desire to tread in the footsteps of those that are quickened by the love of Thee, that we may labour in Thy cause, quickened by the love of Thee, and the love of our fellowmen.

Bestower of all good! Vouchsafe to give Thy blessing unto this country, beneath the shadow of whose throne we dwell in happiness. May there be peace within her boundaries, and may her prosperity wax exceedingly great. Cause Thy face to shine upon our Mother, our Sovereign Lady, Victoria, the Queen Empress and make her glad, we beseech Thee, with the joy of Thy countenance. Protect her son, the Heir apparent, and may her offspring, even unto the third and fourth generations be blessed of thee. Vouchsafe wisdom unto her ministers and counsellors; bless our noble Viceroy and all the members of his Council. Bless our Lieutenant Governor, Sir Rivers Thompson, that this work begun under his auspices may prosper.

Be gracious unto us O Lord! Illumine us with the light of Thy paternal goodness.

Cause envy and hatred to perish, so that all may delight in the abundance of peace and goodwill; cause to arise amongst all of us the sunshine of righteousness which carries healing within its wings. Enable Thy children to proclaim with one accord, "Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good; His mercy endureth for ever." Amen! Amen!

A portion of the tomb inscription of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen:

פה ינוח נין אהרן במנוחתו
כאהרן בתפילותיו במעלה קטרתו
עדד החסיד ג"ן שנים קהילתו
כשרון בעליו וטובת מעשיו לעדרו
השאיר אותו אחריו לתהילתו
יגיעתו וטרחתו לקהילת ישורון הגדיל
ללמד תושיע לבני עמו מאין הבדיל
היה מנהל ומנהג עמיתו נעצבים על פרידתו
דבורו ועצתו נבחר בממשלה ובעדתו
ומיודעיו בעמים ספדו פטירתו
הזקן הישיש אלייהו עת נסיעתו
כתר שם טוב עטרוהו לכבודו
בגן עדן הכינו לו דירתו
והלבישוהו במעיל צדקתו
מלאכי השרת נאמרו לו שלום בואו
תהי נשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים אמן

Aaron Abigedor's tombstone inscription reads:

ציון של המ' הנכבד אהרן ח' אביגדור ח' עזריאל
נ"ע נלב"ע יום א' י"ט לחודש אדר תרל"ד תנצב"ה

*Appendix 7*

## THE EMISSARY MOVEMENT: ENVOYS AND OTHER VISITORS

The movement reached the west coast of India in the eighteenth century — Cochin in 1740 and Bombay in 1790.[1] The earliest record of a Shaliah in Calcutta is dated January 1, 1812, when the community comprised mostly the family of Shalome Cohen. *Hakham Moses de Pas,* representing Safed, died that day and was buried in Calcutta.

There must have been visits of other emissaries to Calcutta in the first half of the nineteenth century but till 1843 no other is recorded. This may be attributed to the preoccupation of Shalome Cohen with business concerns that kept him away from Calcutta for long periods. His son-in-law, Moses Dwek, the other diarist in the earliest days, was out of town less frequently, especially after 1827; apart from the Safed Shaliah, he makes no mention of any. An entry dated January 21, 1822 indicates that a certain *Hakham Nissim Israel* was buried in Calcutta,[2] but there is no knowing if he was a Shaliah or a learned resident.

One to whom the emissary movement meant much was Eleazar Arakie who records in his diary the arrivals and departures of Shaliahs for the most part, only by name, and on occasion, not even by name. Seldom does he add the city of origin or shed light on a particular activity. A few Shaliahs lived in his house, such as *Jacob Sapir* and *Solomon Zalman.*[3]

*Rabbi David D' Beth Hillel* was born in Lita and emigrated to Palestine in 1815 with the second wave of the followers of the Gaon of Vilna. It is difficult to ascertain if he was an envoy of his community or a private traveler. From 1828–1837 he traveled through Syria, Kurdisthan, Iraq, Persian Gulf cities. He was in Bombay in October, 1828. In 1832 he reached Madras, intending to leave for Egypt and afterwards, for Palestine but was persuaded by missionaries, whom he had taught Hebrew, to tarry there. At their instance, that year they published for him an English translation of a book he wrote in Hebrew entitled, *The Travels of Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel From Jerusalem, Through Arabia, Kurdisthan, Part of Persia and India, to Madras.* Five years later, he returned to Palestine.

We find him in Calcutta again in January, 1845 when he attended the wedding of his co-traveler, *Raphael b. Moses Zalkind* who married Rebecca, daughter of Elias Isaac. In an extraordinary reference to that occasion,[4] Moses Dwek recounts that just prior to the ceremony, David D'Beth Hillel entered and exclaimed that he did not receive the dowry. The ceremony was delayed till David Jonah Jacob, a relative of the bride, handed over to the officiant, Moses Dwek, the balance of the unpaid dowry, representing a sum of Rs. 250.00 in "Bank of Bengal notes."[5]

At the end of the ceremony, Moses Dwek was about to hand over the money to the groom when D'Beth Hillel requested that it be given to him as, he claimed, Zalkind

was adopted and brought up by him and was to be the Rabbi's sole beneficiary under the terms of his will. This was done on the groom's confirmation. About a year later, before February 6, 1846 the Rabbi died. Zalkind wrote to the Jewish community of Calcutta requesting certification of these facts, which were promptly supplied.

David D'Beth Hillel's chief aim was to find the trail of the Lost Ten Tribes.

*Hakham David Shizana, Hakham Judah Hyeem Solomon* of Hebron and *Hakham Meir Ashkenazi* of Jerusalem were in Calcutta respectively in March, 1845, March, 1846 and September, 1846.

In March, 1847 *Hakham Solomon Zalman* of Jerusalem was in Calcutta. He availed of the hospitality of Eleazer Arakie who wrote: "The Shaliah of Jerusalem, Hakham Solomon Zalman lived at my home for a day." A letter he wrote in India and signed by him, is preserved in the Sassoon archives.[6] He was the father-in-law of Jacob Sapir, Shaliah of Jerusalem in 1860.[7]

*Hakham Moses Yapheh* arrived in Calcutta May 5, 1848.[8] He was sent by the Hassidic community of Tiberias to Egypt, Yemen and India in August, 1846.[9] He had been on a previous assignment and brought back reports about the Ten Tribes, in which Rabbi Yehoseph Schwartz, the famed geographer, showed great interest. On the eve of his second visit, Schwartz asked Moses Yapheh to be on the alert for possible clues. In September, 1847 he wrote a detailed letter from Bombay to Schwartz describing his conversations with the British authorities in Aden who indicated possibilities in the Falasha and Chinese Jews. He wrote another letter in Bombay in January, 1848 after completing inquiries in India. Thence he visited China, and returned to Calcutta, where he wrote about the existence of the River Sambation in China.[10]

Two Shaliahs visited Calcutta in 1849,[11] *Hakham David Majar* in July and another in November from Safed, whose name is not mentioned.

*Hakham Nahum Moses Cohen* arrived in Calcutta in April, 1851.[12] He was a Shohet and taught Shehita to Ezra, son of Eleazar Arakie.[13] It is admirable that Eleazar Arakie, himself one of the leading Shohets in the city, would not certify his son for fear of partiality, but preferred to await the certification of an expert outsider. The Shaliah also declared Hyeem Simon unfit to practise Shehita.[14] Presumably he performed the Halitsa of Rahma, daughter of Asher and her brother-in-law, Solomon Khashani.[15] He left Calcutta in November, 1852, after being there almost two years.[16]

*Hakham Isaac Ze-ebi* was in Calcutta in July, 1852, and lived in Eleazar Arakie's house.[17]

*Hakham Shneur Zalman b. Menahem Mendele* of Hebron, sent to several Arab countries by Chabad, the Kabbalistic group of Chokhma, Binah, Da-at, in 1853. His activity was centered mainly in Bombay where he was well received by the Sassoons. They donated enough money to build two synagogues for his group in Hebron and Jerusalem. His second visit to India coincided with the Indian Mutiny 1857–58, which prompted a prayer by him for Queen Victoria. Later he was received in audience by the Queen who presented him with a letter of thanks, which proved a boon on his subsequent visits to the Orient. He published several books, one of them "Zikhron Yerushalaim," 1876.[18] In the latter section he describes Jewish life in several cities including Calcutta and Bombay.

The records of Neveh Shalome Synagogue, Calcutta, in the Sassoon collection[19] contains the name of *Samuel Shapira,* son of Rabbi Zvi Shapira of Jerusalem as a witness to a marriage in 1856.

*Hakham Yehiel Ha-Cohen* left Calcutta May, 1858.[20]

*Hakham Bezalel Abraham Menahem Mendele,* a young man, died in Calcutta April 25, 1860.[21] His mother, Sipporah, departed Calcutta for Jerusalem in Novembe of the same year in company of Sarah Benjamin Abraham and Barook Mayshuhrar.[22] She must have made the trip to India after hearing of her son's death.

In August, 1860, *Hakham Jacob Sapir* arrived in Calcutta after having visited Egypt, Yemen, Aden, Bombay, Cochin and Colombo (Ceylon). He wrote a book, *Eben Sapir,*[23] about his travels, which is by far the most comprehensive travelogue written by a Shaliah. Though he earned his living with difficulty, it was not poverty that led him to become an emissary but "out of a burning desire to leave the troubled environment of narrow, walled-in Jerusalem, to nourish his thirsty poetic soul and satisfy his craving for knowledge of various peoples and tribes, to see his brethren, the children of Israel in their dispersion among whom he hoped to find the Ten Lost Tribes."[24]

Sapir was very understanding of all types of people, without giving evidence of his own point of view. He said of himself, "The pious consider me learned, and the learned think me to be simple; in my own eyes, I am neither the one nor the other."[25]

His book is outstanding for its sensitivity to truth, and reflects genuine reporting. Yaari[26] describes his journalism succinctly and lucidly: "His observation and interest covered everything — present and past; daily occurrences and expressions of deep faith; the country and its inhabitants; Jews and non-Jews; human characteristics and events . . . the relationship between ruler and citizen and between Jew and Arab; between man and woman, between rich and poor; between the Jew resident in the capital city and his fellow living in other cities; business and work; eating and drinking, dress and abode; week days and Sabbaths, festivals and solemn assemblies; Torah and prayer, the opinion of elders and education of children. In order to observe, he was prepared always to go out of his way and even to risk his life."

His account of Calcutta and its Jewish community is one of the few sources of objective history in the mid-nineteenth century.[27] He arrived in Calcutta in August, 1860 and left the following May.

*Hakham Isaac Khalphon* left Calcutta November, 1860.[28]

*Hakham Salim Joseph Saleh* died April, 1861.[29] From the remark in Eleazar Arakie's diary, he must have been an authority in Kabbalah.

*Hakham Solomon Abraham* and *Hakham David Abraham* left for the Holy Land May, 1863.[30] This is the last Shaliah mentioned in Arakie's diary.

Before 1864, *Menahem Nahum Brill* of Jerusalem was a Shaliah in Calcutta. We know this from a strange source. He was also in Stockholm where Rabbi Levisohn of that city related,[31] in 1864, the story of a Shaliah (Brill) who had been a few months previously in Calcutta and Aden where he saw peculiar creatures. In Calcutta, at a garden of one of the wealthy residents, he saw a one-horned ox.[32]

The Calcutta community was afforded a great spiritual benefit by *Hakham Hyeem Jacob Cohen Feinstein's* three visits to India.[33] He was sent to India by the Hassidim of Safed in 1866, 1873 and 1886. On his first visit in Bombay he read a newspaper report in "Ha-Magid" about a cholera epidemic in Jerusalem. Immediately he set about collecting funds for Jerusalem and advised people to pay Pidyon Nefesh of Hai, 18 coins each. He collected Rs. 1,175.00, a major part from the Sassoons and commended the technique to other Shaliahs.

In Calcutta he gave a ruling in the case of a minor daughter of Sassoon Ezekiel Judah betrothed without her knowledge. Rabbi Jacob supported the father in declaring the betrothal invalid. He wrote also to the Sephardi Rabbi, Hyeem David Hazzan, Rishon Le-Sion in Jerusalem, who confirmed his ruling.[34]

On his second visit to India via Yemen, he published a book *Imray Shabbat* at the press of Ezekiel H' Sillman in 1874, dealing with prohibiting the use of "Railways" (trams or trolley cars) on the Sabbath. The local residents were evidently riding them without an awareness of the legal stricture.[35]

The third time he went to India he published in Calcutta another book *Torat Imekha* at the same press. The book deprecated many unworthy customs that became rooted among Indian Jews, and touched upon several moral matters. He upbraided "the rich who fritter much wealth to build beautiful synagogues . . . but are not particular about choosing a permanent Hazan." His reference, of course, was to the magnificent synagogue built by Elia D. J. Ezra, called Maghen David, but the reference to a minister is difficult to interpret, because E. M. D. Cohen, a third generation minister, was the Hazan of Maghen David Synagogue and Saul Moses Lanyado, descendant of one of the oldest residents and most respected families, was reader of Bethel. The old Neveh Shalome was then no longer in use.

*Hakham Abraham Hyeem Abu,* son of Hakham Samuel Abu, of Safed was Shaliah to India in 1869.[36] (The father, Samuel, was Shaliah in Bombay, twice, in 1835 and 1859. He is said to have championed the cause of the Bene Israel against discrimination by the Baghdad Jews.)

Yet another brother, *Jacob Hai Abu,* also Shaliah from Safed, was in Calcutta in 1888. *Paerah,* the Hebrew-Arabic newspaper in Calcutta, commented then that a brother (Abraham Hyeem) had visited Calcutta in 1868 and was well received by David Joseph Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay.[37]

Fourteen weeks later a news item in *Paerah* reported Abraham Hyeem Abu died in Cochin during Sukkoth, after having completed his mission in Bombay.[38] Abraham Hyeem must have returned to India and been stricken in Cochin. Next on his itinerary was Calcutta, where a triple collection had been made for him in advance of his intended arrival — the usual Arba Aratsoth campaign, the cost of repairs to a room at the tomb of Rabbi Simon b. Yohai and a special donation for relief of poverty. After notice of his death was received, the proceeds were sent directly to Safed.[39]

*Hakham Moses Jacob,* Gabbai of a Synagogue in Safed, paid a visit to Calcutta about 1870. Awad Sayeed Awad (= Howard S. Howard) then a resident of Sillete, Assam, presented him with a Sefer Torah for his synagogue. In 1886, Howard sent him a Parochet through the Shaliah, *Shalome Sisu.*[40]

In a letter of thanks from Safed, Moses Jacob acknowledged the Sefer Torah and Rs. 77.00 in cash and appealed to the Jewish communities of Rangoon and Singapore for pecuniary aid for the communities of the Holy Land.[41] In response, Raphael Isaac Joseph of Calcutta sent a contribution of Rs. 1000.00 for the Yeshiba named "Zohar Ha-Rakiah," together with a pledge of an annual donation. Moses Jacob later praised Calcutta for its generous support[42] and made a special plea for assistance to the Ari synagogue in Safed, where Moses Alshekh, sixteenth century rabbinic authority, preacher and Kabbalist, is said to have worshipped.[43]

Some Shaliahs became rabbis of the communities they visited. Though there was no official appointment, *Hakham Moses Mayohas,* Shaliah of Batay Mayhaysah, Jerusalem, in 1871, settled in Calcutta on the termination of his mission. Descended from a distinguished line of rabbis and a reputable family,[44] he assumed leadership in religious, education and communal spheres. He was to wield a decided influence in the Calcutta community in the next three decades. These contributions to the life of the Calcutta Jewry are discussed in their respective places. Here we set forth the introductory letter in English he took with him on his mission to India.

"Doubtless it is well known everywhere how very expensive is living in . . . Jerusalem . . . especially House rent. The Mosleman [Moslem] proprietors yearly increase the rent of their houses, and how is the poor man to live here? . . . Therefore we the undersigned seeing this great distress . . . have resolved to appeal to our dear brethren abroad, and have sent some years ago a Rabbi from here to Europe. . . . Our benevolent brethren there have . . . purchased a piece of ground here in Jerusalem on Mount Zion measuring 21,000 square ells, and we have built on it 29 nice and large rooms . . . And as the said ground is large enough to erect more rooms on it, but not having the means to do so, we . . . have agreed to awaken the hearts of our . . . brethren . . . in India. . . . We have appointed for that purpose Rabbi Moses Meuchas, son of the late Rabbi Mordecai Haym Meuchas, a great Rabbi in Jerusalem. . . . Committee of the friends of Zion and Jerusalem."[45] The document is signed by the leaders of the Ohabei Zion organization, — Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Berliner, son of Solomon, Ab Beth Din, London, Rabbi Meir, son of Isaac Sheinbaum, Rabbi Azriel Zelig Hoizdorf, Rabbi Moses Saks and Rabbi Johanan Shlank.

Some Shaliahs would not undertake long journeys to a small town if they thought they would not get a good enough response, or because of illness or fatigue or old age. So *Moses b. Isaac Brunstein* wrote a letter in 1878 to Calcutta from Bombay to send its contribution to Bombay.[46] In April, 1880 Calcutta received a letter from *Hakham Moses Maimon,* Shaliah of Safed, who was at Bombay. Being an old man he wished to be spared the long travel to Calcutta and appealed for funds to be forwarded to him.[47] More frequently, this procedure was followed by a Shaliah in Calcutta to Rangoon or Singapore because the journey was more tedious than from Bombay to Calcutta.

The Shaliah, *Hakham Jacob Hyeem (Ha-Cohen)* of Safed was busy with several religious ceremonies on his visit to Calcutta in May, 1875. After fulfilling the purpose of his mission in Calcutta, he was accompanied to Lahore in northern India, by Maari Salim Sillman to conduct a divorce of Joseph Hyeem and his wife Leah, daughter of Elias Simon Awad Cohen.[48]

On his return presumably he performed the divorce of Isaac Ezra Hakham Isaac Bilbool and Salha daughter of Joseph Khaleefa in the ante room of Bethel Synagogue.[49]

Advance notice from Solomon Bekhor Hussein, the famed Baghdad printer, announced the impending visit of *Elias Hayun* to India in March, 1877. His credentials included rabbinical ordination in Baghdad.[50] *Mebasser,* the Hebrew-Arabic newspaper, remarked, "Baghdad satisfied him, Bombay made him happy, Calcutta through its new organization, Honen Dallim, will similarly make his visit worthwhile."[51] He gave a sermon in synagogue on Parashat Tsav, made a Misheberakh for the congregation and in particular, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Gabbai of Arba Arasoth, at whose home the Shaliah was staying.[52]

A Shaliah with the same last name, *Jacob Hayun,* of the Sephardi communities of Safed,[53] was in India in 1881. He prepared for his visit by having letters directed to Elia David Ezra and Howard S. Howard, dated Adar II 5641 (= 1881).[54] Yet another letter was addressed to Moses Mayohas at Calcutta by the same authorities in Safed, dated Adar II 5646 (= 1855).[55] In place of welcoming the Shaliah, a notice from the Gabbai of Arba Aratsoth, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay announced his death, and recommended that donations from Calcutta and other places in India be sent in to him. These would then be forwarded to Safed, so that it would not be necessary to send out another Shaliah. Evidently, Hayun's next place of call was Calcutta, but he was not fated to complete his mission.[56]

*Hakham Joseph b. Mordecai Mayohas,* (brother of Moses b. Mordecai Mayohas), was Shaliah from Jerusalem for the Hassidim of Bethel and for Gebul Almanoth, a building project for widows in Jerusalem, in August, 1880. To his appeal, the Sassoons contributed Rs. 1,000.00[57]

When he arrived at Calcutta, he was approached by the Cochin Jews there to alleviate their inferior status vis-a-vis the Baghdadis. There, he copied a long letter found in the records of Neveh Shalome Synagogue[58] and forwarded it to the Rishon Le Sion in Jerusalem. Unfortunately the Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim had died and the matter was shelved.[59]

He was sent specifically to Calcutta again some time before June, 1890 to endeavor to settle the dispute between the synagogues Maghen David and Neveh Shalome. According to his younger brother's account,[60] Joseph failed in his mission because he was not acquainted with the disposition and mentality of the litigants, who insulted and embarrassed him.

On behalf of the Sephardi community of Jerusalem came *Hakham Asher Abraham Halevi* in 1882. His most vital activity was undertaken in Bombay in support of the "Black Jews" who were once slaves of Jewish masters and were manumitted. The Shaliah went through the ritual of immersion with them and regularized their status as Jews.

*Hakham Israel Benjamin,* Shaliah of Jerusalem, made a plea for poor Russian children in Jerusalem in November, 1882.[61]

*Hakham Samuel Mayohas* of Jerusalem preached eloquently on Shabbat Mikkets and Shemot in December, 1883, and left for Bombay in March, 1884.[62] He was back in September and participated in the dedication services of Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta.[63]

*Joseph Epstein,* Shaliah of Chabad, Jerusalem, in May, 1885 made an appeal in a beautiful acrostic poem[64] for aid to Russian Jews.

The movement for the search of the Ten Tribes was given momentum by *Hakham Isaac b. Hyeem Barook Halevi* of Tiberias. Certain clues had reached Palestine presumably during the Russian pogroms of the 1880's, and perhaps because an urgency for redemption was felt and a belief that the finding of the Ten Tribes would hasten it, the search was stepped up. As the Shaliah mentioned during his stay in Calcutta,[65] "Information has reached us in Tiberias that the nations had risen up and slew more people of Israel than perished in the destruction of the Second Temple. After weeping, I girded my loins and told them that the remedy for this is to inform the Bene Moshe." The Shaliah set out in the summer of 1883 with letters of recommendation to the Bene Moshe from the Ashkenazi and Sephardi rabbis of Tiberias, including Rabbi Solomon Abulafia, the chief Sephardi rabbi. For a year, he tried unsuccessfully to reach Sambation via China.

When he arrived in Calcutta in January, 1885, he introduced himself to the Jewish communities of India by a notice in *Paerah.*[66] "I am Shaliah of all sections of the communities of the Holy Land sent to our brethren the Bene Moshe who dwell on the other side of the River Sambation for 2400 years." He solicited financial aid of Rs. 300.00 from the Jewish community for his fares to Tibet, and expressed a determination to complete his mission with or without it.

The editorial comment on this notice is interesting as it reveals the thoughts and religious feelings of the local Jews, and the Shaliah's detailed plans. "This notice deserves the support of our community. Though we are unable to predict the outcome of his journey, he is confident that he will reach his destination, the Bene

Moshe. Having failed to consummate his purpose via China, he now will try via Nepal. May the Almighty help him.

"We note that he has in his possession details of the journey from Calcutta to Lhasa, capital of Tibet, that will take up to two months to complete. He also has two introductory letters to Nepalese military commanders, one of whom is a government minister. He will surely receive their help to reach Lhasa.

"He is prepared to risk his life and enter into such dangers in behalf of his people and has every hope that his meagre request will not go to waste. According to the letters he has, the Nepalese government is prepared to help him financially too, should he require it. We hope for the advent of the Messiah and who knows if this may not be the cause of his coming."

In June of the same year,[67] he reported to the Calcutta Jewish community that he had tried two routes to Sambation: one, from Jhinghai to Lhasa — 21 days and thence to Sambation — 15 days, and two, from Calcutta to Lhasa via Nepal — 2½ months. Both of these went fruitless. Now he had heard of a third route via Darjeeling, lasting only 1½ months. He appealed once again for funds to set out with a delegation of ten men and was convinced that his efforts would be crowned with success.

This time his pleas went unheeded in Calcutta, so he took off for Bombay in the fall, where he instituted the Hebrat "Mekeemay Degel Israel," publishing a few booklets and one issue of a paper "Wa-Yatsets Tsits," as propaganda for his mission. The Society aided him to undertake a final expedition. Like the previous two, it ended in failure. The British guards at the border suspected him of being a spy and turned him back. Having exhausted his spiritual resources and the material possibilties in the main centers of Indian Jewry, he decided to return to Tiberias. He bid au revoir in a letter in *Paerah*,[68] where he described his experiences and assured his readers that the British had intervened to prevent the redemption. He advised the Jews of India to continue the efforts he had initiated.[69]

*Shalome Sisu,* Shaliah from Safed, delivered a eulogy at Maghen David Synagogue in July, 1885, when news of the death of Sir Moses Montefiore was received in Calcutta.[70] He had a similar role at the 7th day (Shiva) ceremonies at the passing of Reuben Meyer, eldest of the trio who comprised the famed firm of Meyer Brothers that functioned from Calcutta and Singapore. The family's intention at the time was to fund a Yeshiba in Palestine.[71] The Shaliah stayed at least five months in Calcutta at the end of which he acknowledged a very satisfactory reception, including a donation from the estate of Ezekiel Judah co-founder of Bethel Synagogue.[72]

The Shaliahs prepared for their missions months in advance by keeping abreast of happenings in the cities they were due to visit. *Jacob b. Samone* of Tiberias wrote a letter of condolence to Mozelle Ezra on the death of her husband Elia D. J. Ezra who, he presumed, would have been his most generous benefactor.[73] He followed that up with a congratulatory message to the lady on the occasion of the foundation laying ceremonies of the Ezra Hospital she was putting up as a memorial to her late husband. He arrived in Calcutta in August, 1886,[74] and was still there in the following January when he canvassed for funds with Moses Abeasis and Hakham Melamed,[75] Shaliah of Hebron.

Jacob b. Samone began his stay in Calcutta on the same day as another Shaliah, *Abraham Bekhor Shaul* of Hebron, whose primary purpose was to aid the hungry, foster education and provide for dowries of indigent brides.[76]

*Joseph Bekhor Benveniste,* Shaliah of Bethel, Jerusalem, gave a sermon[77] at the

30th-day ceremonies of Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay who died 9th Adar 5647 (= March 3, 1887). Gubbay had been Gabbai of Arba Aratsoth in Calcutta for four decades. The deceased settled in Calcutta in 1842, aged 30, was one of the leading merchants in the city till he lost his fortune. When David Sassoon & Co. opened a branch in Calcutta, he headed their department of indigo in which he was expert. A charitable individual in the days of his prosperity, he never ceased being host to visiting Shaliahs and aiding the rabbis and poverty-stricken of the Holy Land. One of his last acts was the despatch of a collection he made to alleviate starvation in Safed. In a message of condolence the Jerusalem rabbis praised his integrity and dedication to the cause of Zion. A meeting of the Anglo-Jewish Association scheduled for the Sunday following his death was postponed as a mark of respect.[78]

Benveniste, a popular Shaliah, returned to India in 1905 on his seventh and last mission,[79] but nothing is known about his activities at that time.

The presence of *Hakham Nissim Israel Sassoon* of Jerusalem[80] in Calcutta is revealed in a preface to *Sepher Megillat Esther,* published with an Arabic translation by Hakham Solomon Abid Twena in 1889.[81] In July, 1888 he took part in the controversy involving the translation of the Idra Zuta into Arabic by Abraham Sillman Ezekiel of Poona, India.[82]

*Hakham Jacob Hyeem Alafia* of Jerusalem collaborated with Hakham Sassoon in repudiating the translator of the Idra Zuta and favored the decision of the rabbis of Safed that the translation violated an unwritten law, prohibiting translations of mystical writings. He delivered the eulogy on the seventh day after the demise in July, 1888 of Abraham Aaron Cohen, one of the oldest Calcutta residents,[83] and a sermon in Maghen David synagogue the previous month.[84] Finally, he expressed gratitude to Joseph Elia Ezra and Elia Shalome Gubbay who, he claimed, contributed more to his mission than those of other Shaliahs.[85]

In December, 1890 *Hakham Israel Halevi,* Shaliah of Safed, came to Calcutta via Cochin where he inaugurated a Yeshiba and headed it for six months.[86] His activities in Calcutta are not reported.

The Moroccan-born *Hakham Raphael Chana,* who settled in Tiberias in his teens, was in Calcutta from November, 1893 until April, 1894. In the interim, he visited Hongkong and Rangoon returning form the Far East in February, 1894.[87]

We know about *Hakham Elias Moses Fanichel* from the writing of the following Shaliah, *Hakham Ben Sion Abraham Kuenka* who wrote, "All the honor that was shown me in India was caused by my friend, Rabbi Elias Moses Fanichel who, a year previously (1898), very successfully represented Jerusalem in Calcutta and Bombay. He obtained many subscribers to *Ha-Mayasef* (a religious magazine edited in Jerusalem by Kuenka), so that when I arrived there I found considerable ground gained."[88]

Kuenka himself was Shaliah of the mystics' Bethel of Jerusalem in 1898-1899. Editor of *Ha-Mayasef* from 1896 until 1915, he stipulated that he would solicit subscribers and funds for his magazine in addition to the official campaign. In his memoirs he wrote, "In Kislev 5659 (December, 1898) I arrived in India from Aden and was greatly honored during my travels especially in Calcutta and through the effort of Moses Abeasis (erroneously written Moshe Ari Aziz). I collected generously both for my mission as well as for *Ha-Mayasef.*[89] It was his intention to describe in detail several events that happened during his stay in Bombay and Calcutta but it did not materialize.[90]

Finally, in 1900 *Rabbi Simon Zvi Horowitz,* Shaliah of "Yeshibath Etz Hyeem," Jerusalem, made an appearance — his aim was to raise funds for the Ashkenzi

institutions in Jerusalem, i.e. Yeshibath Etz Hyeem and the Diskin Orphanage, and to go in search for the Ten Tribes. In India he visited Bombay, Cochin and Calcutta and Shanghai in the Far East.[91]

### *Other Visitors*

*Israel Joseph Benjamin,* or simply Benjamin II (to differentiate him from the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela), Rumanian traveler, was born in Folticheni, Moldavia in 1818 and died in London, 1864. He left home at the close of 1844 in search of the Ten Tribes and was in Calcutta about 1850. His adventures lasted about seven years.

He wrote a book on his travels published in Lyck, 1859, in French and German and then in Hebrew. The Hebrew title is *Sepher Masei Israel.*

His accounts are mostly fragmentary and superficial. His estimate of the Jewish population in Calcutta is inaccurate but he does recall briefly the names of community leaders, economic standards and religious customs.

*Solomon Reinmann,* a European Jew who settled in Cochin in south-west India. He visited many Indian cities and territories in mid-nineteenth century and set down his impressions in writing. His descriptions being limited to India (with passing references to Burma and China) it is far more detailed than Benjamin II. He tells of the approach by sea from Europe, the history of foreign rulership and Indian philosophy, religion and culture. He sketches in some detail the history and customs of the Bene Israel and Cochin communities.

His narrative on Calcutta is unreserved but faulty in parts. He portrays the Jewish communal life, particularizes national origins, characterizes education and economic and social strata. His recital of Jewish-Hindu relationships is enlightening.

The circumstances leading to the publication of this volume are extremely interesting and bring us to another traveler, *Wolfe Schur,* so we will briefly recount them. Forty years before the writing of his book, Reinmann left his native Galicia, traveled widely in the East doing big business, became very affluent, and married the daughter of the rabbi of Cochin, of the famed Rahabi family. He was taken prisoner by the British in their war with Siam as he carried goods to trade. He lost one eye and part of left hand in the war. His efforts to find a business partner proved futile, and he was reduced to poverty. His knowledge of the oriental world intrigued a fellow European traveler in Cochin whose arrangement of a subvention through Dr. Jellenik, nineteenth century Viennese scholar and preacher, induced him to set forth his memoirs. Envisaged as a three-volume treatise on India, Burma and China, he completed only the first, as he was fatally injured in an epileptic attack in Vienna.

The manuscript lay ten years in the hands of Reinmann's sponsor who partly rewrote and edited it, for the original Hebrew was poorly ordered and interspersed with other lingual phrases and words. But he hadn't the time to prepare it for publication. The work was turned over to yet another European traveler, Rabbi Wolfe Schur, who added his own comments and corrected what he thought were erroneous impressions of the original author. Thus was the book, entitled *Massoth Shelomo,* published in Vienna in 1884.

Wolfe Schur commenced his travels in 1876, and visited Syria, Kurdistan, Baghdad and India. The purpose of his visit was to observe the ways of life of Jewish communities and their economic position. His observations are detailed but touch

only externals. Nevertheless, they are valuable as objective analyses of the local Jewish scene and its Moslem environment.

*Jacob Solomon Sukhri,* a Hakham from Damascus, Syria, and son of the Rabbi of that city, was in Calcutta in May, 1882 after being in Bombay. He made an impact as a preacher on the religious life of Calcutta Jews as he delivered sermon every alternate week in Neveh Shalome and Bethel Synagogues, and Debar Torah (religious discourse) following daily evening services. Some homiletical observations were printed in *Paerah* from week to week.[92] Sukhri became very popular and attracted large audiences. He induced E. M. D. Cohen, also of Syrian descent, to suggest the hiring of a permanent preacher for Calcutta.

He ceased his public discourses to engage in the preparation of a book *Yoru Mishpathekha Le-Yaakob* on ethical and ritualistic aspects of the Sabbath, prayer and philanthropy, printed at the press of E.M.D. Cohen. He hoped the proceeds of the sale of the book would cover the cost of printing as well as net enough money to give two sons and a daughter in marriage. No price tag was put on the book. Copies were sent to members of the community, who donated appropriately. Throughout his stay Sukhri lived with Elias Hyeem Hilali [Solomon].[93] In his foreword, he praised Elia D. J. Ezra and his wife Mozelle, the brothers Aaron and Elia Shalome Gubbay, Ezekiel Saleh Gubbay, Howard S. Howard, Rahamim Moosa Cohen, Raphael Elias Sassoon, David Hai Moses Mordecai, David Hai Solomon Moosa and Ezekiel Ezra Ezra Gubbay.

The visit of *Abraham Shalome Hai Hamoi* from Jerusalem synchronized with that of Sukhri. Author of fifty-six books, many of which were published, he gave an impressive sermon at the opening ceremonies of the Tehilla Le'Dawid School, November 1, 1882, in memory of David Joseph Ezra.[94]

He was one of the leading Shohets of Jerusalem. Many controversies concerning the competence of Calcutta Shohets raged. Joseph Simon Awad Cohen had his knife examined by him and it was declared "Kasher." Other Shohets referred to him were Hakham Faraj Hyeem, Hakham Moses Halbi and Hakham Abraham.

In April of the following year, Hamoi had a book published at the press of E.M.D. Cohen, entitled *Yimaleth Naphsho,* a liturgical compendium, mostly mystical, for special and other occasions. In announcing its publication, he mentioned that we was ill and wished to return home. He followed the same procedure as Sukhri in the sale of his books — on the inside front cover was a printed compliment from the author and the name of the recipient was written in square-charactered Hebrew. Donations were sent in return. He too lived at the home of Elias Hyeem Hilali [Solomon] for almost two years, part of the time simulaneously with Sukhri — which speaks loudly of the hospitality of their host.

Hamoi died in Persia in July, 1886.[95]

*Notes to Appendix 7*

1. A. Yaari, "Sheluhay Erets Yisrael Be-Hodu," Sinai, Vol. 26, Jerusalem.
2. Tomb No. ED 219.
3. See chapter 23.
4. *Pinkas,* 86, reproduced in "History of the Jews of Basra," David Sassoon, *J.Q.R.* (N.S.) Vol. 17 (1926), 418–419; also, *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 971.
5. Arakie, *Diary,* 22, 26, 31.
6. *Ohel Dawid,* 2, Ms. No. 669.
7. See below. Yaari, *Hodu,* 13. Yaari seems to have confused this Shaliah with

another named Zvi Solomon Zalman who died in Calcutta on 24th Shebath 5612 (= 14th February 1852) and not as Yaari says, 24th Shebath 5608. This is according to his article in "Sinai." In his subsequent comprehensive treatment of the emissary movement, *Sheluhey Erets Israel,* 1951, Solomon Zalman is reported to have arrived in Nisan (= March) 1847 and died in Shebath (= January) 1847! The entry on 24th Shebath 1847 has nothing to do with a Shaliah. Thus, an apparent discrepancy has to be pointed out. Eleazar Arakie wrote on February 14, 1852, "At night Hakham Zvi Solomon Zalman died." His tombstone inscription (ED 193) bearing the date 1852 also declares him as being from Safed. Yaari quotes Frumkin-Rivlin as indicating that Solomon Zalman was originally a Shaliah of Safed but in 1834 changed over to Jerusalem, presumably representing Jerusalem till his death. This would contradict the tombstone information. It is therefore clear that Solomon Zalman of Jerusalem and Zvi, *son of* Solomon Zalman were different persons, the latter being a Shaliah from Safed in 1852. His is, incidentally, the first recognizable grave of a Shaliah in Calcutta. The inscription runs thus:

מצבת קבורת החכם השלם הזקן רבי צבי ב"ר שלמה
זלמן נ"ע מתושבי עיר הקדש צפת תוב"ב נפטר ליל
ש"ק כ"ד שבט ש' התרי"ב ליצירה תנצב"ה

8. Arakie, *Diary,* 12.
9. Yaari, *Hodu,* 13.
10. Yaari, "Shelihim Me-erets Yisrael La-Asereth Ha-Shebatim," Sinai, 1940, Vol. 4, 163–178, 344–356, 474–482. Also, Yaari, Sheluhei Erets Yisrael, Jerusalem, 5711, 788. Schwartz settled in Jerusalem from his native Bavaria in 1833, and published *Tebu-oth Ha-Arets* (The Produce of the Land). It includes the topography of the land of Israel, geographical names in the Bible, and its flora and fauna. When Schwartz visited America, the book was translated into English by Isaac Leeser with the title, *A Descriptive Geography and Brief Historical Sketch of Palestine,* printed together with a map and illustrations, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1850 (reprint 1970).
11. Arakie, *Diary,* 49, 51.
12. *Ibid.,* 60.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.,* 67.
16. *Ibid.,* 60.
17. *Ibid.,* 68.
18. Yaari, Erets Yisrael, 140; *ibid., Hodu,* 14–15.
19. *Pinkas,* 324, p. 138; *Ohel Dawid,* 2, Ms. 897, 971–973.
20. Arakie, *Diary,* 103.
21. *Ibid.,* 116; Moses Dwek, *Diary,* last page.

Tomb No. ED 110: ציון של המ' העניו ח' בצלאל אברהם מנחם מנדל
נ"ע נלב"ע ה' איר שנת התר"ך תנצב"ה

22. Arakie, 119.
23. Published in two volumes — the first in Lyck, 1866 and the second in Magentsa, 1874.
24. Yaari, Erets Yisrael, 821.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.,* 139.
27. *Eben Sapir,* 2, 96–107, 113.
28. Arakie, 122.

29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 134.
31. 24th Adar 5625 = 1865.
32. Yaari, Hodu, 17.
33. *Ibid.*, Erets Yisrael, 831.
34. אוהע"ז וחו"מ שו"ת של ר' ח. ד. חזן, נדיב לב, ירושלים, תרכ"ו, מס. 24
המגיד, שנת י"ג, מס. 23 ז' תמוז התרכ"ט
35. Appendix 8, No. 29.
36. Yaari, *Hodu,* 12, 20–24.
37. *Paerah,* 11:22, 156.
38. *Ibid.*, 11:36, 252.
39. *Ibid.*, 12:3, 17.
40. *Ibid.*, 8:36, 251.
41. *Mebasser,* 1:44, July 1874.
42. *Ibid.*, 1:45, 2, July 1874.
43. *Ibid.*
44. As attested from his signature to a letter in *Mebasser* 2:6
מגזע היחס משה בהרב מרדכי מיוחס
45. Yaari, Hodu, 25; *Ohel Dawid,* 1, 402, Ms. No. 538 (K).
46. *Paerah,* Vol. 1, p. 15.
47. *Ibid.*, 2:43, 199.
48. *Mebasser,* 2:31, May, 1875.
49. *Ibid.*, 2:32.
50. *Ibid.*, 4:18, Feb. 1877.
51. *Ibid.*, 4:23, 89.
52. *Ibid.*, 4:24, 93.
53. Yaari, *Hodu,* 27.
54. *Ohel Dawid,* 2, 1054, Ms. No. 876 E & F.
55. The later date may be an error for 5641 (= 1881), the date on the other two letters, because Jacob Hayun died in Cochin in May, 1881.
56. *Paerah,* 3:49, 219.
57. *Ibid.*, 3:7, 27.
58. *Pinkas,* 154, 160.
59. *Paerah,* 3:9, 35.
60. Moreh Be-isba, 2.
61. *Paerah,* 5:21, 121.
62. *Ibid.*, 6:40, 241.
63. His sermon is printed in *Paerah* 7:14, 101. Also, the pamphlet "Tehilla Le-Dawid" containing the order of service for that occasion.
Yaari, Erets Yisrael, 753.
64. *Paerah,* 7:45, 308.
65. *Ibid.*, 8:2, 11.
66. *Ibid.*, 7:33, 223.
67. *Ibid.*, 8:2, 11.
68. June, 1886.
69. Yaari, Erets Yisrael, 149–150; Hodu, 29–30.
70. *Paerah,* 8:9, 59.
71. *Ibid.*, 7:40, 41; 267, 277.
72. *Ibid.*, 8:10, 73.

73. *Ibid.*, 8:48, 333.
74. *Ibid.*, 9:9, 57.
75. See above and *ibid.*, 9:32, 221.
76. *Ibid.*, 9:10, 63.
77. *Ibid.*, 9:42, 289.
78. *Ibid.*, 9:37, 259; 9:38, 261; 9:45, 311. He experienced further ill-fortune. He lost his first wife by whom were born two sons. One was in Baghdad at his father's death; the second, in Calcutta, lost his wife at the birth of a daughter who was brought up by her grandfather.
79. M. Benayahu, *Jerusalem,* the quarterly, first year, 5608, 180–193.
80. Yaari, *Hodu,* 31.
81. Appendix 8, 85.
82. *Paerah,* 11:6, 42.
83. *Ibid.*, 11:10, 73.
84. *Ibid.*, 10:47, 336.
85. *Ibid.*, 11:12, 87.
86. *Maggid Mesharim,* 2:9.
87. *Ibid.*, 5.
88. Yaari, *Hodu,* 32, quotes

ספר הזכרונות והתולדות של... כמור"ר בן ציון
31 אברהם קואינקה זצ"ל ירושלים, תרצ"ח, עמ' 30 , הערה

89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*, 33.
91. *Ibid.*, 34.
92. 4:1, pp. 2, 3, 8, 13.
93. *Ibid.*, 4:47, 216. See page 250 for title page of this book.
94. *Ibid.*, 5:20, 115, 118–120.
95. *Ibid.*, 9:6, 37.

*Appendix 8*

## LIST OF HEBREW-ARABIC PRINTING

1. שיר השירים The first Calcutta publication was an attempt at lithography in response to a need for a manual containing the home service text read a chapter a day during Pesah. It includes the interpretation of Onkelos in Aramaic and a free Arabic translation by Isaac b. Jacob of Baghdad. The name of the publisher is not mentioned but it may be safely presumed that it was Eleazar Arakie, since the volume saw the light of day the same year as his first typographic work. At the end appears a Purim hymn sung on Shabbat Zakhor and Purim.
5601–1841; 199 pp. Yaari, No. 1

A. *Published by Eleazar Aaron Arakie.*

*Liturgical Volumes.*

2. ספר הפזמונים Yaari 5, Sassoon 20.
238 hymns for the sabbath, festivals and other auspicious occasions such as in honor of a groom or a child who reads a maftir the first time.
Tishri 5602–1841; 73 pp.

3. משמרת הקודש Yaari 10, Sassoon 15.
Sabbath prayers
5604–1844; 76 pp. bound with שיר חדש see No. 22.

4. חקת הפסח Yaari 11, Sassoon 10.
Passover haggadah with Arabic translation.
5604–1844; 52 pp.

5. עבודת השבת Yaari 12, Sassoon 18.
Sabbath prayers, with laws governing them.
5604–1844; 110 pp.

6. הפטרת תשעה באב Yaari 13, Sassoon 4.
The haftarah for Tisha B'ab including a folk commentary in Arabic.
5604–1844; 11 pp.

7. מסכת אבות Yaari 15, Sassoon 1.
The tractate 'Aboth' with Arabic translation.
5604–1844; 46 pp.

8. הקפות לשמחת תורה Yaari 18, Sassoon 5.
The order of service for the seven circuits around the Tebah on Simhat Torah.
5606–1846; 16 pp.
(See English translation of above by the present author, Calcutta, Tishri 5722–1961).

9. חקת הפסח Yaari 20, Sassoon 11. (Sassoon has a second edition of 46 pages, No. 12).
Passover haggadah with Arabic translation and notes in Arabic.
5607–1847; 40 pp.

10. תפלת בית עלמין Yaari 22, Sassoon 28.

Prayers recited at the cemetery on the eve of Rosh Hashana and/or Kippur according to the custom of the city of Hebron.

5611–1851.

(See English translation of above by the present author, Calcutta, Tishri 5714–1953).

11. ספר הפזמונים Yaari 25, Sassoon 21.

297 hymns for various occasions.

5616–1856; 91 pp.

*Legal Compendia.*

12. שערי קדושה Yaari 2, Sassoon 26.

Abridged laws of Shehita according to the rite of San'a (Yemen) compiled by the printer Eleazar Arakie.

5601–1841; 31 pp.

13. פסחעוביץ Yaari 3, Sassoon 22.

Rites of Passover according to Hyeem (b. Israel) Benveniste, seventeenth century Turkish authority, with an original Arabic translation of the printer Eleazar Arakie.

5601–1841; 49 pp.

14a. ספר ימין משה Yaari 14, Sassoon 14.

Laws of Shehitah according to the arrangement of R. Moses (b. Joseph) Ventura, (educated at Jerusalem and rabbi of Silistria, Bulgaria in sixteenth century) with additions by מהר"ק"ש and מהרמ"ג and Hyeem Moses Karigal, Hàzan of the Sephardim in Jerusalem.

5604–1844; 115 pp.

Moses Ventura's ימין משה was printed with

14b. ספר זכרון לבני ישראל in Amsterdam, 1718. Arakie followed the same procedure.

Laws of Shehitah according to the arrangement of Abraham Mizrahi, rabbi and Shohet at Jerusalem in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

5604–1844; 16 pp.

14c. Also bound in this edition is שוחטי הילדים a poetic rendering of the laws of Shehitah by Israel (b. Moses) Najara, sixteenth century Syrian liturgist, cabalist and preacher. The title implies that the versified form makes the laws facile even for children. Included is another song commonly sung on Shabbat Hanukka.

5604–1844; 5 pp.

15. חיי אברהם Yaari 16, Sassoon 9.

Assorted laws and an attempted reason for them by Abraham Khalphon, published originally in Livorno (Leghorn, Italy).

5604–1844; 145 pp.

16. שערי קדושה Yaari 21, Sassoon 27.

Laws of Shehitah abridged according to the arrangement of the Yemenite Shohet, Yahya b. Saleh.

5611–1851; 24 pp.

17. זבח תודה Yaari 23, Sassoon 6.

Laws of Shehitah, compiled by Yahya b. Saleh.

5611–1851; 134 pp.

*Literary Treatises.*

18. ספר יוסיפון Yaari 4, Sassoon 13.

A history of the Jews from the fall of Babylon 539 BCE to the destruction of the

Jewish State by the Romans 70 CE by Joseph Ben Gurion. The Arabic translation was made by a Yemenite Jew, hence Arakie's interest therein.

5601–1841; 199 pp.

19. ספר המעשיות Yaari 6, Sassoon 16.

Stories culled by Arakie from various sources.

5602–1842; 127 pp.

20. כתנות אור or עין יעקב — 3 volumes.

Yaari 8, Sassoon 19.

A reproduction of the famous עין יעקב, a midrashic compilation. Vol. I, 5603–1843; 325 pp.; Vol. II, 5605–1845; 302 pp. and Vol. III, 5608–1848; 324 pp.

21. ספר הישר Midrashic stories about the early biblical period from Adam to the Judges. Authorship attributed to Moses, Joshua and the elders of the children of Israel.

5603–1843; 193 pp.

22. שיר חדש Yaari 10, Sassoon 15.

Printed with משמרת הקדש No. 3. A small commentary on שיר השירים by Jacob b. Joseph Ha-rofeh, scholar at Baghdad.

5603–1843; 110 pp.

23. ספר בן סירא Yaari 24, Sassoon 3.

The Apocryphal volume, Ben Sira, thought to be the son of Jeremiah. Published at Amsterdam 1697, then at Livorno 1828.

5616–1856; 30 pp.

24. ספר אלדד הדני Yaari 26, Sassoon 2.

Ostensibly the autobiography of Eldad of the tribe of Dan in search of the 'lost' ten tribes. Published previously at Constantinople in the sixteenth century at Piorda and Livorno 1838.

Heshwan 5617–1856; 9 pp.

*Mystical Writings.*

25. ספר פתרון חלומות Yaari 7, Sassoon 23.

The interpretation of dreams by Hai Gaon, eleventh century, Babylonian chief rabbi, 5602–1842; 34 pp.

26. ספר רזיאל המלאך Yaari 17, Sassoon 24.

A talismanic volume used as a guardian angel.

5605–1845; 134 pp.

*Contra-Missionaries.*

27. ספר חזוק אמונה Yaari 19, Sassoon 8.

A defence of Judaism in the face of missionary activity by Isaac b. Abraham, published previously in אלטארף and Amsterdam 1705.

5606–1846; 140 pp.

B. *Published by Ezekiel Hakham Sillman Hanin.*

*Philosophy.*

28. ספר התפוח Yaari 28.

*The Apple* — by Aristotle. Translated previously from Arabic to Hebrew and published in the city of ריווא.

5632–1872; 20 pp.

*Law*

29. ספר אמרי שבת Yaari 29.

A treatise by Hyeem Jacob Cohen Feinstein, Shaliah from Safed, on the prohibition of riding by railway on the Sabbath, thought by many in India to be permitted.

5634–1874; 19 pp.

30. קונטרס תורת אמך Yaari 32.

Exhortation to the Jews of India on local customs that violate Jewish law, by Hyeem Jacob Cohen Feinstein, Shaliah Safed.

5646–1886; 32 pp.

*Wedding Songs.*

31. פזמון נאה ויאה Yaari 30.

In honor of the marriage of Joseph Albert Sassoon, 10 Sivan 5635 (= June 13, 1875).

32. פזמון נאה ויאה Yaari 31.

In honor of the marriage of Aaron Nissim Ezekiel Judah, 12 Sivan 5635 (= June 15, 1875).

*Arabic Proverbs*

33. אמתאל אל ערבית Yaari 33.

834 proverbs in Arabic collected by the editor Hanin.

5647–1887; 42 pp.

*Calendars*

34. עיבור שנים Yaari 27.

For the years 5632–5635 (= Sept. 16, 1871-Sept. 29, 1875)

5631–1871; 56 pp.

35. לוח עיבור השנים Yaari 35.

For the years 5654–5665 (= Sept. 11, 1893-Sept. 29, 1905)

5633–1893.

36. Calendar for 94 years. From the year 1893–1986

Yaari 36. 1893; 1 page.

37. מסכת אבות Yaari 34.

The tractate 'Aboth' with Arabic and English translations.

5651–1891; 69 pp.

C. *Published by Elias Moses Dwek Cohen.*

*Rabbinic Ethical and Homiletical Treatises.*

38. ספר יורו משפטיך ליעקב Yaari 37.

By Jacob Sukhri of Damascus.

5642–1882; 142 pp.

39. ימלט נפשו Yaari 39.

By Abraham Hamoi

5644–1884; 119 pp.

40. ספר חנוכת הבית לדוד Yaari 41.

Matters concerning the festival of Hanukka by Hakham Shelomo Abid Twena.

5645–1885; 112 pp.

41. ספר הגיון ברכה Yaari 38.

A sermon preached on the occasion of the 97th birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore by Israel Benjamin Lempert, Preacher of the Great Synagogue, Beth Jacob, Jerusalem.

*Miscellaneous*

42. מזמור לדוד Yaari 40.

The order of the service of dedication of the Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta.

5644–1884; 12 pp.

43. חברת עוזר דילם Prospectus of the "Jewish Charitable Society" with list of subscribers etc. including the central rules. 1885–1886.

D. *Published by Solomon Abid Twena.*

*Liturgical Volumes.*

44. הגדת פסח Yaari 43.
Passover Haggada with Arabic translation and commentaries. 5648–1888.

45. ראשי פרקים הסדר אלפא ביתא Yaari 49.
Mishnaic readings for death anniversaries.
5648–1888; 72 pp.

46. אירלת השחר Yaari 51.
TIKKOON HATSOT — HATARAT NEDARIM, SELIHOTH with laws governing them.
5649–1889; 24 pp.

47. הגדה של פסח Yaari 53.
Passover haggada with Arabic translation and commentaries.
5649–1889; 87 pp.

48. הגדה של פסח Yaari 54.
Passover haggada with Arabic translation and Twena's own commentary.
5649–1889; 89 pp.

49. הגדה של פסח Yaari 55.
Passover haggada with Arabic translation and laws governing it.
5649–1889; 42 pp.

50. הלל בן שחר Yaari 56.
TIKKOON HATSOT — HATTARAT NEDARIM, SELIHOTH with laws governing them in Arabic.
5649–1889; 24 pp.

51. מסכת אבות Yaari 64.
The tractate Aboth with Arabic translation and Twena's own commentary.
5649–1889; 40 pp.

52. ספר הקינות שסימנם נביא"ה Yaari 65.
Five dirges (Kinoth) for the days in the month of Ab before Tisha B'ab.
5649–1889; 7 pp.

53. מסכת אבות Yaari 67.
The tractate of Aboth with Arabic translation and an *unfinished* commentary by Twena.
5650–1890; 24 pp.

54. הקפות לשמחת תורה Yaari 73.
The order of service for the seven circuits around the Tebah on Simhat Torah.
5651–1890; 12 pp.

55. הקפות לשמחת תורה Yaari 79.
*Ibid.*
5654–1893; 11 pp.

56. מי כמוך ואין כמוך Yaari 97.
Yehudah Halevi's hymn for Shabbat Zakhor with other hymns for Purim
5657–1897; 24 pp.

57. ספר ברכת החמה Yaari, 98.

The blessing of the sun (recited once every 28 years) for the occasion of Wednesday 5th Nisan 5657 (= April 7, 1897); 4 pp.

58. אני ביער הלכתי קול צפרים שמעתי Yaari 106.

A song.

5658–1898; 1 page.

59. ברכת האילנות Yaari 110. Yaari 110.

The blessing over the trees (recited on a Tuesday in Nisan before Pesah at the sight of a blossoming fruit tree)

No date; 2 pp.

60. הפטרת תשעה באב Yaari 111.

The haftarah for Tisha B'ab with Arabic translation.

No date; 12 pp.

61. Service for the eve of New Years — Yaari 112.

English translation of several prayers of the high holyday period. No date; 32 pp. Published by Shalome Joshua Arakie in Twena's press.

62. עת שערי רצון Yaari 113.

With English translation.

No date; 8 pp. Published by Shalome Joshua Arakie in Twena's press.

*Rabbinics and Folklore*

63. ספר מדרש אליהו Yaari 44.

One of the seven eulogies delivered by Twena following the death of Elia David Joseph Ezra who had the Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta, built. (The others appeared in the *Paerah.*)

5648–1888. 32 pp.

64. אגרת פורים Yaari 50.

The story of Purim translated into Arabic by Twena.

5649–1889; 34 pp.

65. הגדה של פורים Yaari 52.

Originally printed in Livorno, a parody of the Passover haggada applied to Purim.

5649–1889; 20 pp.

66. חק לישראל Yaari 57.

The usual compendium of biblical passages with Twena's commentary אגיד חקיך limited to the beginning of בראשית The rest was not published.

5649–1889; 12 pp.

67. מנות פורים Yaari 63.

An imaginative portrayal of the last will of Haman to family. In Hebrew. First published in Baghdad 1889.

5649–1889; 12 pp.

68. נטעי שעשועים I, Yaari 68.

Stories and anecdotes in Arabic, first published in Twena's newspaper, *Maggid Mesharim.*

5650–1890; 44 pp.

69. *Ibid.,* II, Yaari 69.

5650–1890; 80 pp.

70. ספורי נפלאות Yaari 70.

Stories compiled by Moses of Zollshin, author of Tikoon Shabbat.

5650–1890; 39 pp.

71. ספורי נפלאות Yaari 76.

The story of the life of Rabbenu Gershom in Arabic written by Twena.
5652–1892; 16 pp.
72. כרם שלמה Yaari 80.
A eulogy by Twena delivered at Neveh Shalome Synagogue, Calcutta, on the eighth day after the death of Sillman David Sassoon of Bombay, 10th Adar II 5654 (= 18th March 1894)
5654–1894; 49 pp. unfinished and not published.
73. היינו דאמרי אנשי Yaari 87.
Collection of 102 Arabic sayings.
5656–1896; 8 pp. — unfinished and not published.
74. קצת המן ומרדכי Yaari 93.
The story of Haman and Mordecai.
5656–1896; 4 pp. — unfinished and not published.
75. כבוד מלכים Yaari 95.
Sermon delivered by Twena in Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta, in the 60th year of the reign of Queen Victoria — 20th Sivan 5657 (= 20th June 1897) — 5657–1897; 5657 – 1897; 9 pp.
76. מגלת איכה Yaari 96.
The Book of Lamentation with Twena's commentary אבלם לששון 5557–1897; 32 pp. — unfinished and not published.
77. ספר קרית חנה Yaari 109.
Explanations of selected verses in the Pentateuch.
5561, 62 — 1901, 1902; Printed in parallel columns
24 pages, unfinished, in limited edition.

*Legal Works*

78. קונטרס מנות הלוי Yaari 45.
Laws of Erubin compiled by Abraham Zvi Halevi, Rabbi at Tiberias. Published by the author's son Judah Halevi with financial assistance from Hannah, wife of Sir Albert Sassoon, Mrs. Mozelle Ezra, his daughter, Aaron Moses Gubbay, his son-in-law.
5648–1888; 12 pp.
79. ספר פרסומי ניסא Yaari 46.
Blessings for the Hanukka lighting in Hebrew and Arabic and the story of Hanukka in Arabic. The bulk of the book deals with the laws governing the festival.
5648–1888; 32 pp.
80. פרחי שושנה Yaari 109.
Selected laws of Shulhan Arukh Orah Hyeem in the order of the weekly portions of the Torah. Printed in columns with 24 pages — unfinished. Published in a limited edition 5661, 62 — 1901–2.

*Translations*

81. ספור קצת חנה Yaari 47.
The story of Hannah and her seven sons 5648–1888; 8 pages.
82. ספור קצת חנה Yaari 48.
*Ibid.*, with additions
after 5648–1888; 8 pp.
83. ספר מגלת איכה Yaari 58.
The Book of Lamentations translated into Arabic but not by Twena.
5649–1889; 11 pp.

84. ספר מגלת איכה Yaari 59.

*Ibid.*, with Twena's Arabic commentary.

85. ספר מגלת אסתר Yaari 60.

The Book of Esther with Arabic translation and Twena's commentary מעשה תקפ"ו Foreword by the Jerusalem Shaliah, Nissim Israel Sassoon.

5649–1889; 150 pp.

86. ספר מגלת רות Yaari 61.

The Book of Ruth with Arabic translation.

5649–1889; 16 pp.

87. ספר מגלת רות Yaari 62.

*Ibid.*, with Twena's Arabic commentary חוטר ישי. In a foreword Elias Joshua Obadiah of Baghdad counts 68 volumes written by Twena in manuscript or published.

5549–1889; 66 pp.

88. ספר חנך לנער Yaari 66.

The story of Hanukka by Rabbi Abraham Sittehone.

5550–1890; 12 pp.

89. ספר אורות אלים— I, Yaari 71.

Ethical and homiletical treatise compiled by Eliezer Papo.

5651–1891; 86 pp.

Published first in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 1 No. 12 to Vol. 2 No. 11 (9th Shebath 5650 — 14th Tebeth 5651).

90. ספר אורות אלים –II, Yaari 72.

*Ibid.* Published first in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 2 No. 12 to Vol. 3 No. 2 (21st Tebeth 5651 to 11th Heshwan 5652)

5652–1892; 76 pp.

91. ספר דברי הימים Yaari 75.

History of Israel to modern times by Rabbi Wolfe Yabetz.

First published in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 2 No. 40, 17th Tammuz 5651 (= July 23, 1891) onwards.

5652–1892; 76 pp.

92. צדיק ונושע Yaari 77.

The plot of the story takes place in Castille, Spain, written by Ludwig Philipson in German, translated into Hebrew by Moses M. Astrinski, Warsaw, 5630 (= 1870) which Twena used for his Arabic translation.

First appeared in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 3 No. 14 to No. 33, 6th Shebath — 5th Tammuz 5652 (= 4th February 1892 — 30th June 1892).

5652–1892; 82 pp.

93. ספר צדיק ונשגב Yaari 78.

A story based on the life of Rabbi Yom Tob Lippman Heller written by Ludwig Philipson in German and translated into Hebrew by Nahum Sokolov, Warsaw 5643 (= 1883).

First published in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 2 No. 21 to Vol. 3 No. 13 (5th March 1891 to 28th January 1892).

5652–1892;107 pp.

94. עמק הארזים II, Yaari 83.

Historical novel by Grace Aguilar, translated into Hebrew by A. S. Friedberg.

First appeared in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 4 No. 39 — Vol. 6 No. 25 (15th Ab 5653 to 8th Iyar 5655 = July 28, 1893 to May 2, 1895).

5655–1895, 158 pp.

95. קצת בנת רבי עקיבא ז"ל Yaari 84.

From Midrash Pesikta Rabati
First published in *Maggid Mesharim* from 28th March 1895 — Also, See *Ohel Dawid* p. 333
(?) 5655–1895; 15 pp.

96. אהבת ציון Yaari 85.
Story by Abraham Mapu.
5656–1896; — 40 pp. Incomplete and not published.

97. בוסתנאי Yaari 86.
Bostenai, written in German by M. Lehman and translated into Hebrew by Samuel J. Pin ( פין ), Vilna 5632 (= 1872)
First published in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 6, No. 13 to Vol. 7, No. 6 (28th Tebeth 5655 to 11th Kislev 5656 = January 24, 1895 — November 28, 1895).

98. ספר החלוף Yaari 90.
*The Israelite,* written in German by M. Lehman and translated into Hebrew by S. J. Pin ( פין ), (Vilna 5641–1881)
First appeared in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 7, No. 7 to No. 32.
(5th December 1895 — 4th June 1896).

99. חתן המלך Yaari 91.
A novel based on the Chmielnicki persecutions.
Written in German by M. Lehman and translated into Hebrew by Mendele Merlinkski.
First appeared in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 7 No. 13 to Vol. 8 No. 3.
(1st Tammuz 5656 to 15th Heshwan 5657 = June 12, 1896 to October 22, 1896)
5656–1896; 80 pp.

100. מסתרי פאריז ח"א Yaari 92.
Written by אירן סי, translated into Hebrew by Kalman Shulman.
5656–1896; 24 pp. Incomplete, and not published.

101. ספר שרח משלי Yaari 94.
The Book of Proverbs, translated and explained in Arabic by Twena. No Hebrew text.
5656–1896; 46 pp.

102. סיפור בחיק האדמה Yaari 99.
Extracted from *The Israelite* by אבי"ח Ellis of Vilna.
First published in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 8, No. 22 — No. 31.
(4th March–13th May 1897)
5657–1897; 32 pp.

103. סיפור זוס אפפענהיים Yaari 100.
Zoss Oppenheim — written in German by M. Lehman and translated into Hebrew by Hillel Aryeh Lel Lifshitz, Maintz, 5633 (= 1873)
5657–1897; 132 pp.

104. סיפור מלחעות כפירים Yaari 101.
A murder story written in German and translated into Hebrew by Levi R. Zimlin.
5657; 72 pp.

105. ספר נועם המדות Yaari 102.
By R. Amram.
5657–1897; 12 pp. Incomplete and not published.

106. סיפור קצת בנת רבי עקיבא ז"ל Yaari 104.
From *Midrash Pesikta Rabati,* 2nd edition.

Published through the interest of Isaac Abid Solomon Moses Twena (See Nos. 95 and 107)

5657–1897; 16 pp.

107. קצת בנת רבי עקיבא ז"ל Yaari 105.

From *Midrash Pesikta Rabati,* 3rd edition

after 5657–1897; 15 pp. See Nos. 95 and 106.

108. קצת בנת רבי עקיבא ז"ל Yaari 107

Extracted from *The Israelite* for the paper *Lebanon* by Yadin b. Habib.

Published first in *Maggid Mesharim,* Vol. 13 from 23rd Tebeth 5659 (= January 1899) onwards.

5658–1898; 92 pp.

*Miscellaneous*

109. ספר מיני מגדים Yaari 74.

A collection of miscellaneous writings culled from *Maggid Mesharim* where in vol. 2 No. 3, 28th Elul 5651 (= October 1891) an announcement for its sale was made. 72 pp.

110. מורה באצבע Yaari 81.

A circular letter addressed to the Calcutta Jewish community by Hakham Moses b. Mordecai Mayohas, Shaliah Jerusalem, 1871, who settled in Calcutta, concerning the dispute between Maghen David and Neveh Shalome Synagogues, Calcutta. It contains also the rabbinical decisions pertaining thereto.

5654–1894; 9 pp.

111. קוואנין בית הכנסת מגן דוד Yaari 82.

Rules of Maghen David Synagogue, Calcutta in Arabic. Another edition was printed on one page for display in the Synagogue.

5654–1894; 13 pp.

112. וישב שלמה Yaari 88.

Replies to questions put Twena in his paper *Maggid Mesharim* reproduced here.

5656–1896; 72 pp.

113. וישב שלמה Vol. II, Yaari 89.

*Ibid.*

5656–1896; 75 pp. Incomplete, not published.

114. סם חיים Yaari 103.

Traces the causes of earthquakes and what a Jew should do in the event of one by Hyeem Palaji. (A severe earthquake betook Calcutta on 12th Sivan 5697 (= Saturday, June 12, 1897).

5657–1897; 14 pp.

## APPENDIX 9

### מערת ישראל JEW'S CEMETERY

NO. 37.

Calcutta.

| A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

1 1
F G

A. Repaired in 1953. Perhaps the highest built structure and the oldest inscription.

מצבת קבורת האשה המרוחמת גאלה בת נסים יצחק
אברהם נ"ע נלב"ע יום ב' כ"ט תשרי התרל"א
ונקברת יום ג' ר"ח חשון ל' תשרי תנצב"ה

B. First line illegible.

...נ"ע בת המרוחם משה יחייא נ"א
נפטרת יום ונקברת יום א'

The rest of the inscription sunk under newly-cemented ground.

C. Illegible.

D. מצבת קבורת הא' המ' צלחה נ"ע בת המ' שמעון
אשר מצליח נ"ע נלב"ע יום ד' ו' טבת התרמ"ח תנצב"ה

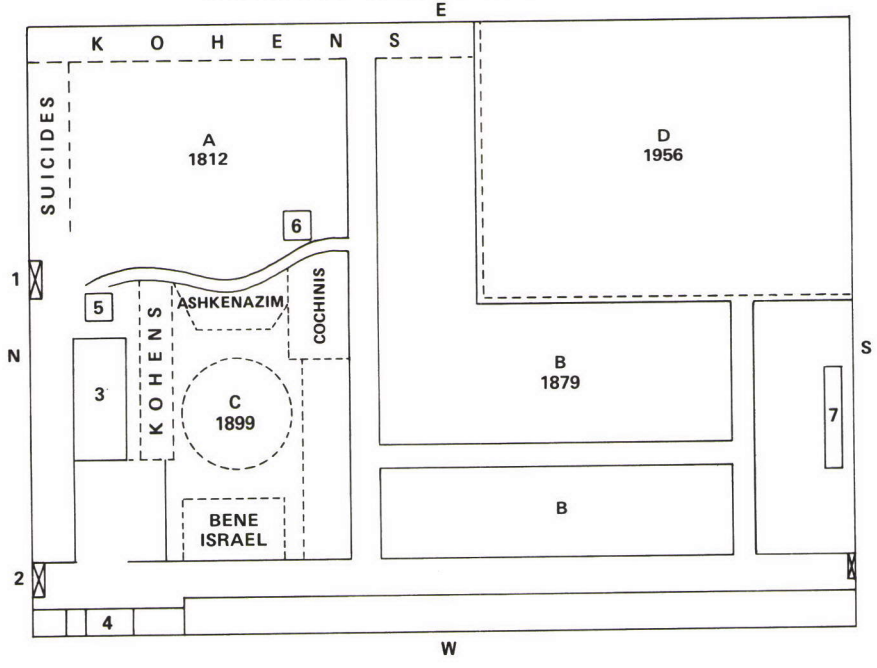
E. Child.

F. Child.

G. ציון של המ' סלימאן יוסף יחזקאל עזריה נ"ע נלב"ע
יום א' של סוכות ונקבר ליל ב' של סוכות...

The rest of inscription sunk under newly-cemented ground.

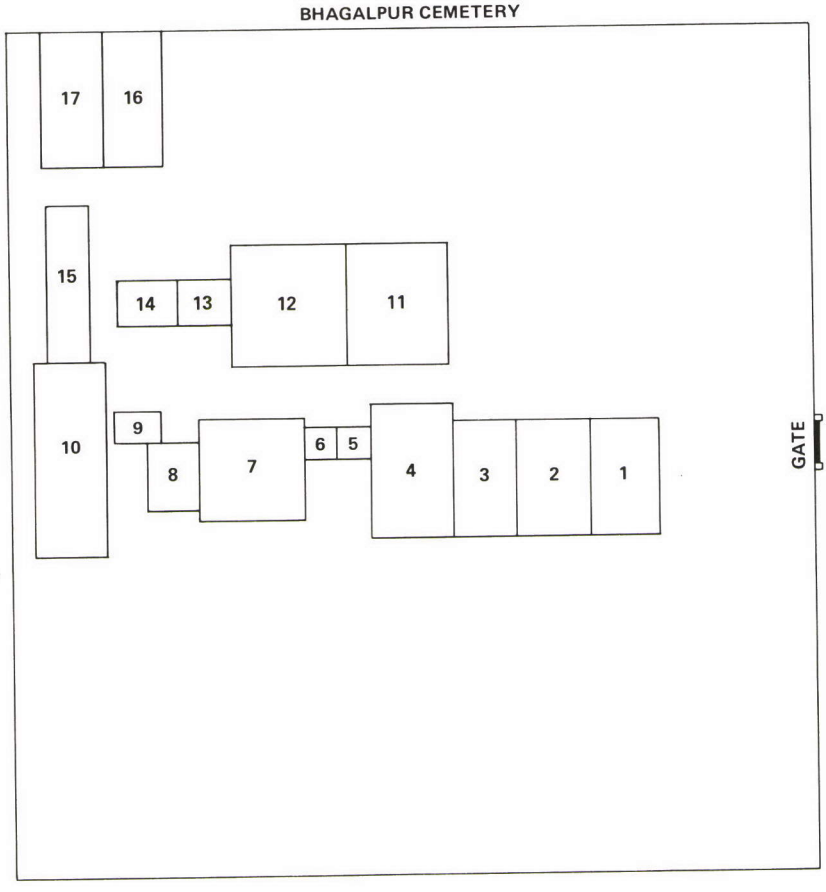
SKETCH OF CALCUTTA CEMETERY



It is appropriate here to set forth descriptions of the burial grounds located in towns along the Ganges where some Calcutta Jewish residents migrated for business and settled. The Gorakhpur cemetery layout was not available to this writer.

*Jewish Cemetery – Bhagalpur, Bihar*

1. Farha daughter of Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Died Sunday 12 Shebath 5676 (= 17 January 1916).
Aged about 53 years.
2. Salha wife of Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Died Sunday 26 Ab 5668 (= August 23, 1908).
3. Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Died Saturday night Rosh Hodesh Tebeth 5660 (= 2 Dec. 1899).
4. David Joseph Hakham Zechariah.
Died 16 Nisan 5615 (= 4 April 1855).
5. } Twin children of David Sassoon Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
6. }
7. David Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Died Tuesday 24 Tebeth 5617 (= January 20, 1857).
8. Big child.
9. Child.
10. Samra daughter of Simon Abdulla Cohen,
wife of Darwish.
Died Rosh Hodesh Kislev 5647 (= November 28, 1886).
11. Rachel wife of Elias Mordecai Cohen.
Died Thursday 4 Elul 5690 (= August 28, 1930).
Aged about 70 years.
12. Elias Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Born Rosh Hodesh Nisan 5618 (= March 16, 1858).
Died 2 Tishri 5685 (= Sept. 30, 1924).
Aged 66 years.
13. Abraham Shalom Mordecai Abraham Cohen.
Died 23 Kislev 5683 (= December 13, 1922).
Aged 13 months.
14. Big Child.
15. Farha wife of David Joseph Hakham Zechariah.
Died Friday ? Adar 5658 (= February/March 1898).
16. Rachel wife of Ezekiel Barook David Jonah Jacob.
Born 29 Ab 5649 (= 6 August 1889).
Died 6 Sivan 5702 (= 22 May 1942).
Aged 53 years.
17. Florrie wife of David H. Rodda.
Born 9 Shebath 5639 ( = 26 February 1879).
Died 7 Sivan 5702 ( = 23 May 1942).
Aged 63 years.


BHAGALPUR CEMETERY
17
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GATE

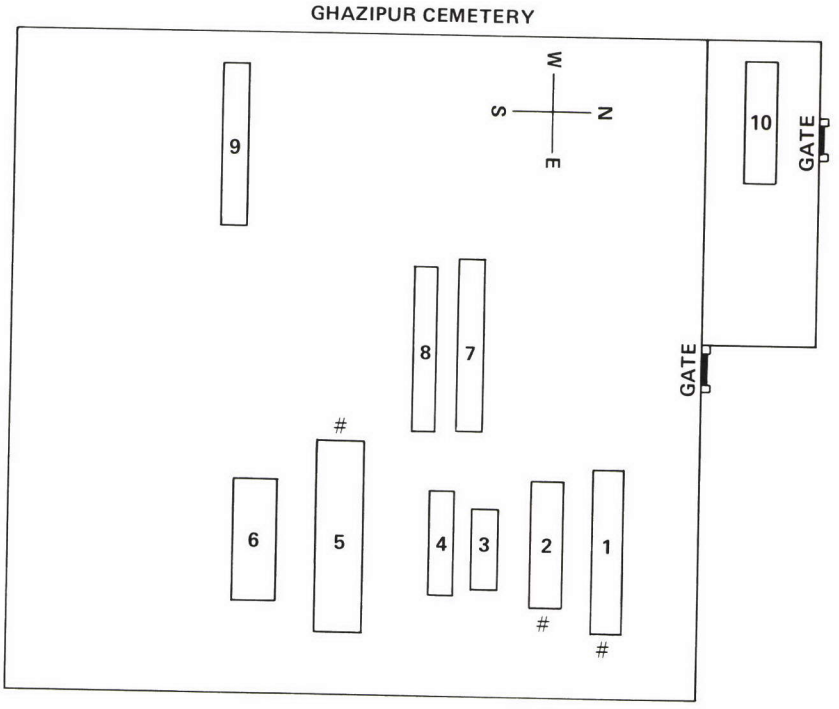
*Ghazipur Cemetery*

1. Ralph Moses died 14th March 1903.
2. Mrs. Ralph Moses, died 16th October 1902.
3. A son of Joseph Hyeem Ralph Moses.
4. Reemah, daughter of Joseph Hyeem Ralph Moses.
5. Chahla wife of Joseph Nissim Shaya.
6. ?
7. Sarah wife of Moses Ezra Raphael Moses.
8. Joseph Hyeem Raphael Moses.
9. ?
10. Sarah, maternal grandmother of 3 & 4.

At the suggestion of the Oseh Haised Board, Calcutta, the cemetery was brought under the supervision of the Burial Board in Calcutta. Graves were repaired by the local contractor at the expense of the relatives whose remains lie in the cemetery, namely, Mr. Ralph Moses, Superintendent of Police in Fategarh (U.P.) (later Lucknow), and Mrs. Rachel Moses, wife of Harry B. Moses of Calcutta.

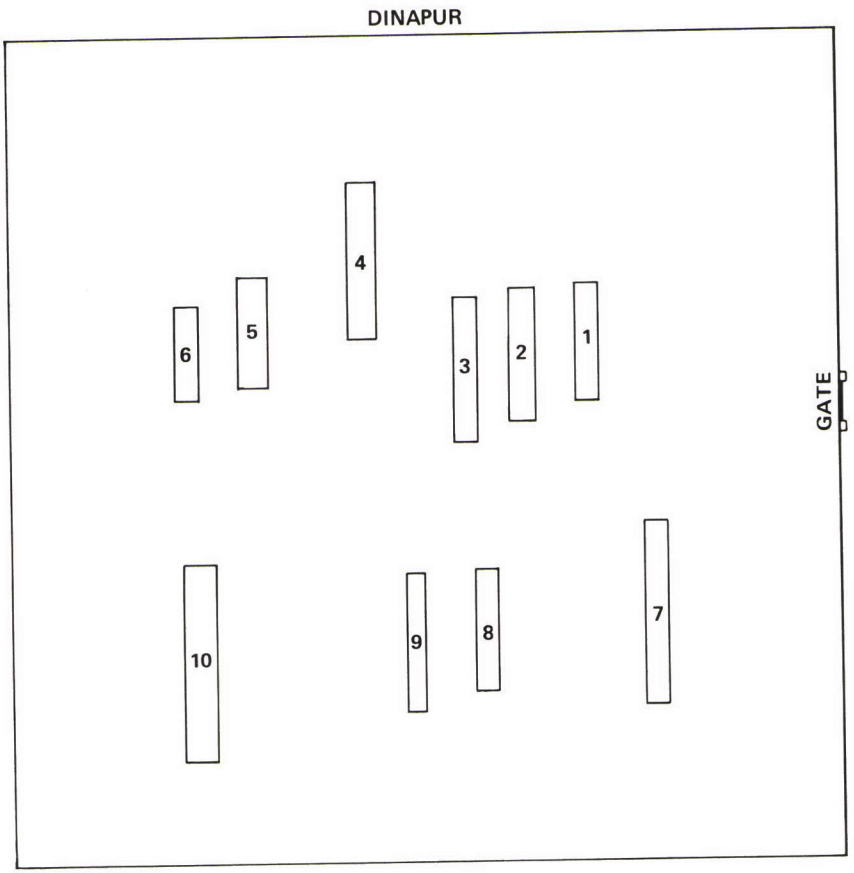
Total cost of repairs of graves and whitewash of boundary wall .. 260
Yearly payments for upkeep ..... 60

Oseh Haised and the two above-mentioned persons pay the annual charges.

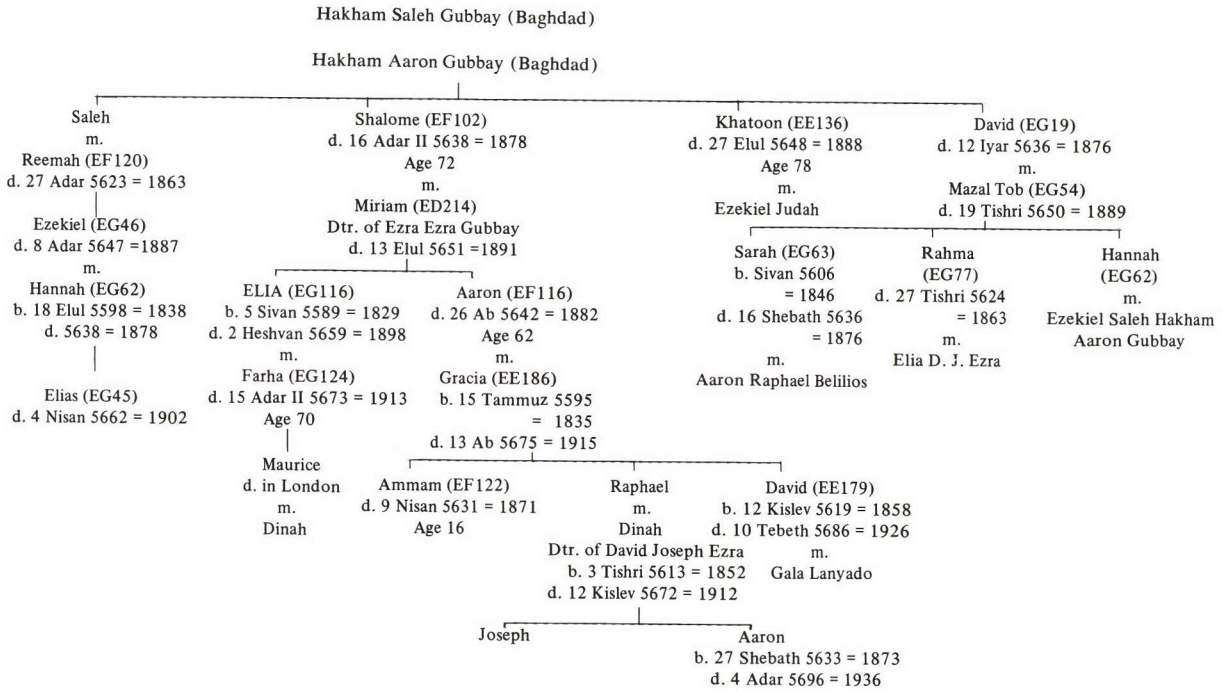


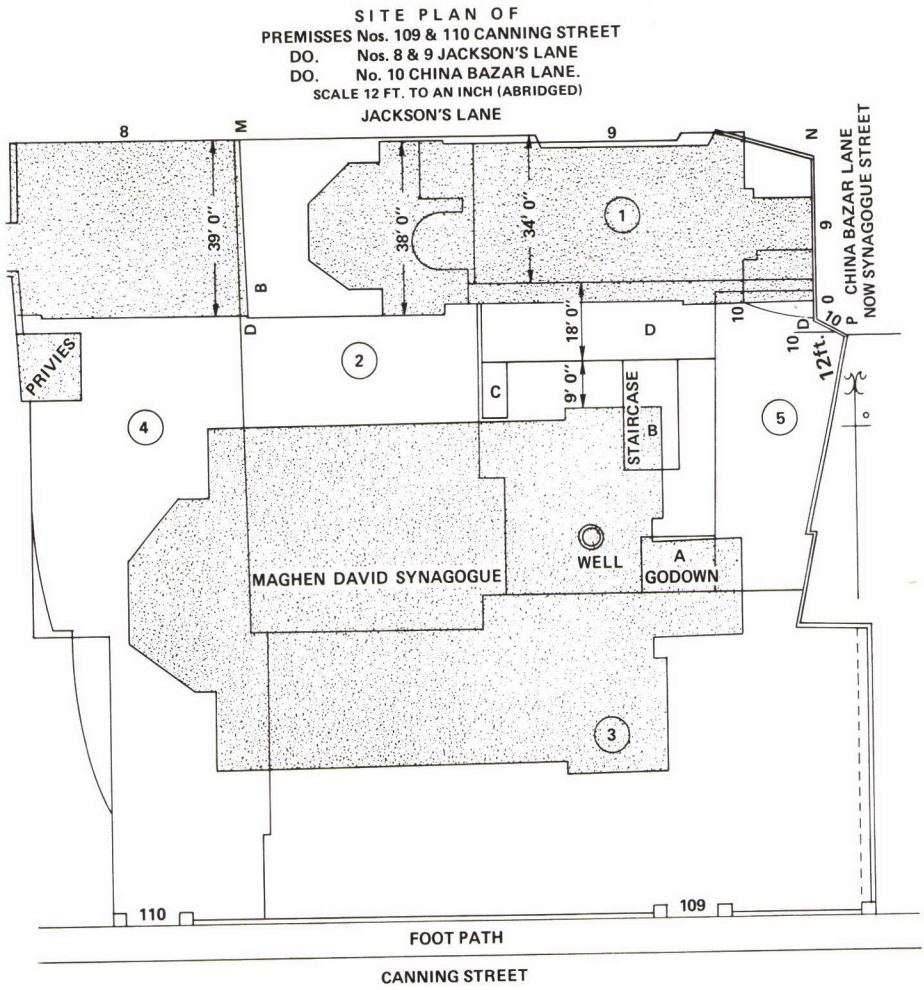
*Jewish Cemetery — Dinapur*

1. Rachel Khatun daughter of Yahya Joseph Harir wife of Moses Mordecai Israel. Died Thursday night and buried Friday morning 11 Sivan 5630.
2. Sarah wife of Raphael Hyeem Mulla Elia Cohen. Died at Delhi Monday 26 Sivan and buried 30 Sivan 5663.
3. Raphael Hyeem Mulla Elias Cohen died Thursday 30 Sivan, buried Thursday night Rosh Hodesh Tammuz 5663.
4. Ballore wife of Raphael Jeshua Akbar? aged 15 years 9 months 11 days 24 Tishri 5606?
5. & 6. Illegible.
7. Rosa wife of Joseph Sepaktur, 11th Tammuz 5652.
8. Rachel Khatoon daughter of Silliman Joseph Hyeem 26 Adar I, 5654 13 years old.
9. Kumayra daughter of Joseph Salim Cohen, 26 Misan 5644 17 years old.
10. Nissim Silliman Kadair (?), Monday night 23 Adar I 5641.



## GENEALOGY OF ELIA GUBBAY




SITE PLAN OF
PREMISSES Nos. 109 & 110 CANNING STREET
DO. Nos. 8 & 9 JACKSON'S LANE
DO. No. 10 CHINA BAZAR LANE.
SCALE 12 FT. TO AN INCH (ABRIDGED)
JACKSON'S LANE
8
9
M
N
39' 0"
38' 0"
34' 0"
18' 0"
9' 0"
B
D
C
A
P
1
2
3
4
5
PRIVIES
STAIRCASE
WELL
GODOWN
MAGHEN DAVID SYNAGOGUE
CHINA BAZAR LANE
NOW SYNAGOGUE STREET
12ft.
110
109
FOOT PATH
CANNING STREET

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*Continued From Front Flap –*

By the late 1940's, India became independent of the British Crown and was faced with enormous economic travails. Fiscal stringencies began to make themselves felt. The Jewish community, though still politically comfortable, evidently felt the pinch. Emigration began first in trickles and later in streams. The State of Israel was both an impetus and a destination. It shared the emigres with England for the most part, but others found their way to North America and Australia. Before very long the Jewish community in Calcutta and others of Indian Jewry will be but a memory.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR –

Dr. Ezekiel N. Musleah was born in Calcutta, India, of a family that emigrated from Iraq in 1820. He is a graduate of the University of Calcutta and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he received his ordination and doctorate in Hebrew Literature. Immediately following graduation, he returned to India, where he was religious leader of the Calcutta Jewish community for twelve years. He currently occupies the pulpit of Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the second oldest Jewish Congregation in the United States.

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The front cover is illustrative of three aspects of Jewish life in Calcutta. The building at the bottom is one of the finest and most outstanding in the city, a memorial to Queen Victoria, and depicts affinity with the British, and participation in the general community. The sketch at the top portrays a decorative piece which hangs over the entrance to the Ark Room in Calcutta's largest synagogue. Called a Menorah because of the two seven-branched candelabra represented, it symbolizes the centrality of the synagogue in Jewish affairs and a dedication to religious observances. The picturesque border is taken from a hand-painted marriage document or Ketuba, typifying the beauty and solidarity of family life.