David Sitton

SEPHARDI COMMUNITIES TODAY

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Translated from the Hebrew



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Sephardi Communities Today

DAVID SITTON

David Sitton was born in January 1909 in the Nahlat Zion Quarter of Jerusalem.

He began his education in a "Kotab" (heder) and then entered a boy's school, whose principal was Yosef Meyuhas. He did only two years of secondary schooling at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jerusalem, and had to leave due to economic difficulties at home. It was then that he chose his path in life. He was accepted at the "Rawdat Al-Maaref" (Moslem) High School in the Old City of Jerusalem, where he studied the Arabic language and Middle Eastern literature. Thereafter, he continued his studies at the Cardinal Ferreira School which was housed in the building of the present-day Terra Sancta.

Already in his early youth, David Sitton showed an interested in the youth movements, particularly in underprivileged youth. He and the educator Pinhas Zimran (an immigrant from Russia) together set up the "Hanitzan" Youth Society for youth from various communities.

In 1942, he became the editor of the Sephardi weekly "Hed Hamizrach" and in 1946 was elected to the Sephardi Council in Jerusalem. In July 1951, he participated in Paris in the Preparatory Committee for the First Sephardi Congress which was convened in November 1951 in Paris. At this congress the foundation was laid of the World Sephardi Federation, whose aim was to organize the Sephardi communities thoughout the world on behalf of Israel. He was elected honorary secretary of the Federation and later became its vice-president. In 1957, he was elected Chairman of the Executive of the Jerusalem Sephardi Council.

David Sitton is a fighting journalist, who is able to pinpoint the shortcomings of our society and find the remedies. He is one of the few who aspire to extricate the Eastern communities from the well of apathy and impotence. He is optimistic as to the future, and he untiringly prods his friends to action in the face of the malady of indifference.

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In conjunction with diverse activities in the sphere of guidance and education of the Sephardi Jewish heritage among the youth and the general population, David Sitton edited for over thirty years the Sephardi journals "Hed Hamizrach" and "Bama'aracha", as well as the various volumes of "Shevet Ve'am" which deal with research into Sephardi literature, history, poetry, folklore and education. He has published many books on the Eastern Jewish heritage. His first journalistic steps were taken in the "Doar Hayom" newspaper edited by Ittamar Ben Avi, which was succeeded in the '30's by "Haboker" founded by the General Zionists. Upon the latter's closure, he went over to "Hadashot Achronot" edited by Pesach Ginsburg. He has published numerous articles on Middle Eastern subjects and on the Arab-Jewish conflict, on Zionism, politics, kibbutz problems and the integration of the returning exiles. He has also written studies and stories of life in Jerusalem neighbourhoods. He wrote books on the situation of Sephardi and Eastern communities throughout the world and a book in Arabic on the 3,000-year-old Jewish history of Jerusalem.

David Sitton is indeed a writer and a fighter: the bloody events under "enlightened" British rule brought him, in addition to all his public activities, to the revolutionary youth circles and he was thus witness ot the birth of the "Etzel" underground organisation and was one of the pillars of the "Lehi" underground movement. As such he was active for years with David Raziel and Avraham (Yair) Stern. Because of these underground activities, David Sitton was imprisoned in Jerusalem, Acre and Sarafend. Upon the establishment of the state, he was among the first to support the dissolution of the underground organisations, as he saw in the rise of the state the fulfilment of the Zionist dream.

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Preface

In early July 1950, I was sent by the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem to take part in the discussions of the preparatory committee for the World Congress of Sephardi Communities, whose ultimate purpose was the re-establishment of the Sephardi World Federation. Representatives of Sephardic communities in France, Britain, the United States and Israel participated on this committee. which was set up following the journey that Mr. Elie Eliachar, President of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem, had made to Western Europe and the American continent. These travels, planned in conjunction with the Jewish Agency, were aimed at mobilizing aid for rescuing those Jewish communities in the Arab countries, which were faced with the threat of annihilation at the hands of the Moslems, after approval by the United Nations at the end of November 1947 of the plan for partition of Eretz Yisrael and the creation of a Jewish state. Stormy demonstrations, directed against the "Zionists" who were taking control of Moslem holy places in Eretz Yisrael, broke out in Aden, along the Persian Gulf, in Egypt and in the countries of North Africa. The rioters began to rob, destroy property, and murder Jews. On the return from his journey, Mr. E. Eliachar succeeded in convincing the heads of the Sephardi communities in the countries he had visited, to set up the World Organization of Sephardic Communities. This body was to have two main goals: rescue of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora from the threat of assimilation and spiritual degeneration; and mobilization of the Sephardi communities around the world for the purpose of strengthening the State of Israel.

With the establishment of the state on May 14, 1948 the "People's Administration" appealed to the Jews of the world to come on mass *aliyah* to the fledgling country, and to help build the state and secure its existence. Great numbers of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa responded to the call. Entire communities rose up and made *aliyah* to Israel. Hence, Jewish communities in the Middle East, and remnants of other communities in the Balkan countries, suddenly ceased to exist. However, it should be pointed out in regard to the Arab and Islamic countries, that a considerable portion of the Jewish communities were simply forced to depart out of fear of the fate awaiting them if they should remain. The Arab governments, defeated in the war they themselves had launched to prevent the establishment of the Jewish state, hastened, through their own

efforts, the destruction of the majority of the communities in the Middle Eastern Countries: in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Libya.

In November 1951, the First Sephardi Congress was held in Paris and, as a member of the World Executive of the Sephardi Federation, I was constantly visiting Sephardi communities on all continents. I learned at first-hand about their problems, and I made the acquaintance of the heads of the communities and the spiritual leaders. I wrote articles of my impressions of the meetings and discussions I had conducted with these people; these articles were then published in various periodicals, among which were the monthly "Bema'aracha", and the "Shevet Ve'am" anthology. Such articles comprise a considerable portion of this book. There may also be found herein more exhaustive surveys concerning those communities of the Middle East and North Africa which have disappeared since the establishment of the State of Israel. These surveys examine the trials and tribulations suffered by ancient communities that were three thousand or more years old; that had known times of growth and splendour, and had served as centers of culture which bequeathed to our people some of the great creations that have shaped Judaism: the Babylonian Talmud, the various commentaries, the Responsa, and the blessed works of the spiritual giants who arose out of these communities and illuminated the horizons of the Jewish faith. With the rise of Islam, however, there began a marked deline in the spiritual greatness of Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa, and thereafter they virtually ceased to play any role in the Jewish world. And yet, even in the darkest of hours there existed centers of Torah and scholarship in the Eastern communities, in the Balkan countries and in North Africa, where the leading minds made great contributions to the Jewish heritage. Thus, for example, we have the spiritual center in Safed in the 16th century, under the guidance of Joseph Caro and Ha-Ari. But also in the other communities of the East there appeared sages and great men of Torah who composed a vast rabbinic literature; a veritable hidden treasure which awaits the researchers who will sift and sort it, shedding light upon the yet unrevealed secrets in the history of these communities.

According to data and the estimates of various researchers, Eastern-Sephardi Jewry of the world today numbers close to three million. More than half of them have already found redemption through *aliyah* to Israel. Eastern and Sephardi communities currently exist on all the continents. With the disintegration of the Jewish communities in North Africa, France has turned into the largest communal center of Jewry in Western Europe. During the past fifty years, other large centers of Sephardi Jewry have also come into being, in the U.S.A., Canada and Latin America.

Furthermore, there are Jewish concentrations which harbour national sympathies in Soviet Asia, which, through their struggles on behalf of

aliyah to Israel, have made the world aware of their existence. It should be remarked, however, that already generations ago close ties existed between emissaries from Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish communities in Georgia, in the Caucasus, in Bukhara and in Dagestan. These emissaries, who were largely rabbis and intellectuals, visited the remote mountain communities of Jews in Russia, promoted ties with the Land of Zion, and advanced the idea of the rebirth of the homeland. At the end of the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth centuries dozens of families from these communities made their way to Eretz Yisrael and found their place in urban and agricultural settlements. Some of them joined the Workers' Movement and became members of the Hashomer Association.

However, since the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, this segment of world Jewry has vanished behind the Iron Curtain and been largely forgotten. The Georgian Jews were the first to wave the banner of rebellion and to forcefully demand of the Kremlin leaders that they be allowed to leave for Israel. Their cries aroused Jewish and world public opinion. They were the first to break through the wall that divided the "Jews of Silence" from the rest of their people, and they were among the first of the redeemed.

According to conservative estimates, the number of Jews that still remain in Asiatic Russia approaches a quarter of a million. These Jews may be regarded as belonging to the Eastern-Sephardi community of world Jewry, since their life style, traditions and modes of religious observance are similar to those of that community.

I have attempted in my surveys of those communities which have since ceased to exist, to present a summary of the main events and periods in order to give the reader a basic understanding of Sephardi Jewry, both in the past and the present. It was the *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael by the major portion of the communities in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans which brought about their disintegration. It is imperative that in the renascent State of Israel their Jewish heritage be preserved.

Jerusalem, 9.1.1974

Preface to the Expanded Second Edition

The first edition of *Sephardi Communities Today* made its appearance more than ten years ago. It was an initial survey of Sephardi and Eastern communities that had undergone disintegration, and had made *aliyah* in large numbers to Eretz Yisrael, where they played an historic role in laying the foundations of the state. The book also dealt with the communities which have come into being on various continents since the expulsion from Spain. Particularly noteworthy are the new communities which North African Jews established in France and Canada.

In this, the second edition, I have dealt with further large and important communities which have ceased to exist and were not included in the first edition. One of these is the Jewish community of Bulgaria, who had a firm belief in redemption and who, after mass *aliyah* to Israel, immersed themselves in the life of the state and made a significant contribution to Israel's development and consolidation. Another community which is given attention in this edition is that of the Jews from Kurdistan. They came to Israel from northern Iraq and Iran, and they too were successfully absorbed into the young state. Further details have been added to the section which appeared in the earlier edition. Since publication of the book, the author has made further travels to the new Sephardi communities in Spain, to the Jewish communities in Mexico and in France following the election there of the new chief rabbi, Shmuel Sirat. There are also impressions from a visit to the Egyptian Jewish communities after the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt.

But the work does not end here. For in the meantime, striking changes have taken place in various communities and not all the facts have been presented in the second edition. But the additional sections presented will provide a better understanding of the present situation of these communities. It may be said that the Eastern and Sephardi communities face a greater danger of assimilation today than at any time in the past; for they have been thrust into an environment vastly different from that in which they had existed during long generations, faithfully preserving their ancient traditions. The young generation are drifting further and further away from these traditions and are being assimilated into the new surroundings. The tendency to mixed marriages is becoming more prevalent and therefore further limbs are being severed from the living body of our people. It is thus a personal duty, as well as the duty of the Zionist

Organization and the World Sephardi Federation, to intensify activities among these communities, particularly in the area of education, in order to rescue the young generation from the threat of spiritual annihilation. Sephardi and Eastern Jewish communities, by contrast with Ashkenazi communities, are characterized by organizational shortcomings: they find it difficult to maintain schools or to provide Jewish education to their children, when relying upon their own resources alone. The imparting of Torah and Jewish tradition to the younger generation is a national obligation, the responsibility for which rests with the Zionist Organization and other Jewish bodies.

Jerusalem, January, '82

SECTION I:
JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN MOSLEM COUNTRIES

Disintegration of the Jewish Communities in the Arab and Islamic Countries

Part 1

The Six-Day War of June 1967, in which four Arab states (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq) launched a war of annihilation against the State of Israel, will be recorded in the annals of the Jewish people not just as a victorious campaign of the Israeli Defence Forces against those four Arab countries, but also as marking the last days of ancient Middle Eastern Jewish communities which dated back two and three thousand years. In fact, this process of disintegration of these communities of the Arab and other Moslem countries of North Africa, the Near and Far East, began in the 19th century, when most of the Middle East, and even the "Magreb" were under Ottoman rule. The decline of the Ottoman Empire as a major power politically, mililtarily and economically prompted many residents of the Middle East, and in particular, minority groups who had been brought to the limits of their endurance by persecution at the hands of Moslem fanatics, to pack their belongings and seek a new and happier life. Many Christians and Jews migrated across the oceans. The Christians, the majority of whom were Catholics, were readily received by the Catholic peoples of South America and even became assimilated among them. The Jews established new communities in Latin America, Western Europe and the Far East.

However, the migration of Jews from the Middle East began to grow most markedly after World War I, and reached a peak following World War II, first with the United Nations decision in November 1947 calling for the partition of Eretz Yisrael, and second with the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948 when the British mandate terminated.

The position of the Jews in the Islamic countries had never been good. Although the Moslems did not conduct progroms like those in the Christian countries, the assertion that Jews living in the countries of Islam enjoyed equal rights lacks all foundation. Since the advent of Islam, Jews were usually considered to be citizens benefiting from the protection of the Moslem rulers. They were often compelled to pay a ransom in order to continue to reside in their native countries. This status of second or third-class citizens continued into the last generations. If one excludes the

glorious periods of Arab rule in Spain, and perhaps also the initial period of the Ottoman Empire, then it may be said that the Jews generally lived a life of persection and humiliation among the Moslems.

Most serious was the condition of the Jews living in Shi'ite-Moslem states, such as Yemen and Iran, where the situation of non-Moslems, Jews and Christians alike, was the most grave. They were not only denied civil rights, but were regarded by the Moslem masters as defiled and unclean. In Yemen the Jews lived under constant persecution. According to the Shi'ite-Moslem law, which was deemed the constitution of the state in Yemen, a Moslem who murdered a Jew was not required to pay for his crime with his life, but could simply pay compensation to the family of the murdered individual; and even this was only necessary if two Moslem witnesses were ready to give testimony against the Moslem murderer. Moslem law states that evidence offered against a Moslem by a Jew, or the member of any other religious group, is not valid. Jews in Yemen were obliged to attire themselves in simple dress, not to wear a turban, and even to go about bareheaded. Jewish orphans were taken into custody by the authorities and converted to Islam.

These decrees cast a heavy shadow over the lives of Jews in Yemen and many of them had already sought ways to escape many generations ago. These refugees had to wander about among the mountains by night and to hide during the day in rock crevices, until they succeeded in fleeing to sanctuary in Aden or other countries.

The situation of the Jews of Iran worsened when, in the beginning of the 16th century, the Moslem-Shi'ite faith became the state religion. The religious factions which ruled the state established laws based on persecution and humiliation against non-Moslems. Even when enlightened and liberal kings ruled Iran, they were not successful in altering the dictates of the Shi'ite ruling caste. Jews were viewed as unclean, and when they went to market they were forbidden to touch merchandise lest they defile it and make it unfit for Moslem consumption or use. As in Yemen, the testimony of a Jew against a Moslem was not deemed valid. A Jew who converted to Islam was eligible according to the Moslem-Shi'ite constitution to inherit the property of all his Jewish relatives.

The situation of Jews in Arab lands and to a considerable extent in other Moslem countries, deteriorated after the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Though in the thirty years between the two world wars, the Arab countries were under mandatory rule or under the influence of the two great Western powers, Britain and France, riots were instigated against the Jews and the number of persons killed was large.

Emissaries of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, played a major role in organizing such riots. El-Husseini succeeded in having him-

self appointed as head of the Arab High Committee and the Moslem Supreme Council. He then made use of these two positions to create a pan-Moslem movement as well as to mobilize Moslem support for a "jihad" (holy war) against the Jews who were endeavouring to "rob" the Arabs of their land in Palestine. The outbreaks of violence organized by Haj Amin el-Husseini and his supporters over the years, beginning in 1920 at the time of the Jewish Passover, continued to grow in intensity as time went on; and not only did they lead to the loss of many Jewish lives and the destruction of Jewish property in Eretz Yisrael, but there were repercussions in the Arab lands of the Middle East and in other more distant Moslem countries.

Towards the end of 1931, the Mufti convened a World Arab Conference in Jerusalem. This gathering was held after the riots which broke out in Eretz Yisrael at the end of the Jewish month of Av, 1929, when the Mufti incited the populace to acts of violence against the supposed wish of the Jews to take control of the Western Wall, which, as he put it, was considered sacred to Moslems, because Mohammed had hitched his steed there when he arrived to visit the Temple Mount.

Haj Amin was also responsible for turning the courtyard of the Temple Mount into a cemetery for important figures, both Arab and Moslem. Through his efforts, King Hussein, father of the Hashemite dynasty which today rules in Jordan, was brought to burial in the courtyard. He also arranged for the burial there of the Moslem-Indian leader Mohammed Ali (one of the participants in the Moslem congress in Jerusalem) at the end of 1931. Thereafter, Mohammed Ali's family became his allies. But el-Husseini did not concentrate on the encouragement of a pan-Moslem, pan-Arab movement alone. He also strove to arouse a Christian religious movement to save the holy places from the hands of the Jews. To this end, he made efforts to win over the heads of the Christian churches in Eretz Yisrael to his side, including the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

The churches were desirous of turning the Moslem wrath, which had been directed towards them since the Arab conquest of the land in the 7th century, in the direction of the Jews. Moreover, the Christians felt a strong and inherent antipathy towards the Jews, who desired to renew their presence in the land and to re-establish their state, an ambition directly opposed to the Christian belief that the Jews were cast in a lowly state since the time they had murdered Jesus, in which condition they ought to remain.

From time to time, delegations of Moslem and Christian religious leaders organized joint missions to Western Europe, Latin America, and the United States, to encourage church leaders to organize an anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist campaign to help save Eretz Yisrael from the infidels. The national and religious motives complemented one another well in the

Mufti's Moslem-Christian campaign of incitement; he threw in his lot with Hitler, and egged the latter on in the execution of his systematic plan for the liquidation of the Jewish people.

He played an active role too in organizing the anti-Jewish riots in Baghdad, which took place during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot in 1941, when Rashid Ali el-Gaylani (a Nazi agent) gained control of the government from Nuri es-Said, and from the regent of the Hashemite royal house, Amir 'Abd el-Ilah. Many Jews were murdered and their property stolen by the rioting mobs inflamed by the rulers who were interested in inflicting punishment on the Jews. Haj Amin was also active in the liquidation of Yugoslav Jews by mobilizing the country's Moslems to assist the Nazis and encouraging them to join the Croation people in a concerted attempt to destroy the Jews.

Part 2

Indeed, the United Nations' decision in favour of a Jewish state led to a ceaseless campaign (which has continued to this day) to uproot the ancient Jewish communities from the Middle East and North Africa. As soon as the first reports concerning the creation of a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael were publicized, many assaults were made against the Jewish communities. In Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, where there are many nationalistic and fanatic Moslem elements, fourteen Jews were slaughtered in November 1945, two years before the United Nations' decision. In December 1947, a few days after ratification of the resolution, anti-Jewish riots took place in Aden. The rioters looted Jewish property and the damage was estimated at 4.5 million dollars. In Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus, and Aleppo attacks were made upon Jews and their property.

In the aftermath of the riots and the pillaging, which came to a halt following the intervention of Western governments and international organizations, the Arab governments decided to embark upon a policy of oppression of the Jews. In Lebanon, for example, laws were introduced undermining freedom of religious practice. Rabbis and cantors were required to pay a special tax to the government for permission to hold prayer sessions. Religious persecution became official policy. Twenty-five synagogues and *Batei Midrash* (study-houses) were closed down in Iraq. With the liberation of Jerusalem in June 1967, Jews were made aware of what they had suspected: the extent of the damage to the Jewish holy places in the Old City. Houses of prayer had been converted into stables or reduced to piles of rubble. In August 1949, the Great Synagogue in Damascus was the scene of a large explosion during the Sabbath prayer service. Twelve Jews were killed and twenty-six wounded.

The Arab armies suffered resounding defeats in three wars with Israel: the

War of Independence, in which seven Arab nations took part; the Sinai Campaign of 1956, after Nasser tightened the maritime blockade of routes to the Far East; and the Six-day War of 1967, when Egypt and her allies (Syria,Jordan and Iraq) planned to overrun Israel and wipe it off the face of the earth. The debacle of the Arab armies, particularly that of Egypt, led to the intensification of government persecution of the local Jews. Thus they hoped to avenge the shameful routs they had suffered on the battlefield. After the defeat of 1948, the ruling faction in Iraq sought a scapegoat among the local Jews. In September 1948, Shafik Adas, one of the Jewish notables in the city of Basra, was accused of being a Zionist spy and of handing over state secrets to the Zionists. This, they asserted, had led to the defeat of the Iraqi army. He was executed and his property, valued at twenty million dollars, was confiscated by the state.

Nuri es-Said, the prime minister of Iraq at that time, issued a series of laws which froze all Jewish holdings in the local banks. When Nuri es-Said finally allowed the Iraqi Jews to depart en masse for Israel in Operation Ezra, they were forced to leave behind some 120,000 dollars in bank deposits, and real estate valued at 300,000 dollars.

The mass migration of Jews from Egypt commenced after the Sinai Campaign. In 1956 the government of Egypt expelled 20,000 Jews, most of whom were of foreign nationality. The Jews were forbidden to take with them anything but the suit of clothes they were wearing and a paltry sum of money. According to data publicized in August 1971 by a committee of Egyptian *olim* in Israel, the abandoned property was estimated at a billion dollars. This sum includes the value of all the personal property of Jews who left Egypt up to the present day, as well as the value of the communal property which was apparently expropriated by the Egyptian government.

Part 3

The resounding defeats suffered by the Arab countries had detrimental repercussions, not only for those Jews residing in the states which took part in the wars against Israel, but also for Jews living in other Moslem countries. In North Africa the situation continued to worsen, especially after the countries there gained independence. Libyan Jews left in large numbers in the first days of the new state and the majority made their way to Israel. They too were the victims of riots and looting. However, the other Jewish communities of North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) began to hasten their departures immediately after those countries achieved independence and set up Arab regimes. In the three North African states there lived about half-a-million Jews (a quarter million in Morocco) prior to independence.

When we examine the history of these three ancient communities, we discern four principal stages: 1) They had always blossomed and withered in accordance with the local political conditions. However, with the conquest of Algeria by the French in 1830, the Jews gained recognition as citizens having equal rights with the French settlers, and even became partners with those in power. 2) In Tunisia, the lot of the Jews was improved with the arrival of the French in 1882. 3) The situation of the Moroccan Jewish community too improved with the arrival of the French in 1912. 4) The fourth period in the history of relations between France and North Africa is connected with the French conquest of Marrakech and southern Morocco in 1936. From then on France extended its influence over all of North Africa, and the position of the half million Jewish inhabitants was strengthened and improved economically and politically.

As French imperial rule became more entrenched, it left its imprint on the ways of the Jews of North Africa. The schools established by the French, side by side with those of Alliance, speeded up the process of assimilation of the local Jewish population into the French way of life; and gradually the Jews, particularly those in Algeria, began to lose touch with the sources of their religion, culture, and ancient traditions.

The community leaders in Morocco, on the other hand, endeavoured to set up religious educational institutions, as did to a considerable extent the Jews of Tunisia. Consequently, these two groups were more successful in preserving their ties with Judaism. The majority of Moroccan and Tunisian Jewry spoke local dialects of Arabic amongst themselves; however, in the port towns and cities they spoke Spanish and French.

Most of the younger generation in Algeria completed studies at French universities. Even Moroccan and Tunisian youth continued their studies at academic institutions in France.

Violence broke out in Morocco too. The Arab military defeat was used as a pretext for rioting against the Jews. In July 1948, as soon as rumours began arriving regarding the defeat of the Arab armies, citizens of the city of Oujda, which lies close to the Algerian border with Moroccan, started rioting. Forty-three Jews were killed and one hundred and sixty were wounded.

After Morocco achieved independence, the situation of the Jews deteriorated. Nationalist circles, which rallied around the flag of the extreme right faction, the Al-Istiklal party together with circles of the extreme left employed incitement tactics against the Jews as a weapon in their war with King Hassan and his regime.

The two attempts on the life of King Hassan in the summers of 1971 and 1972, served as a warning to the remnants of the Jewish communities to

leave Morocco before it was too late; for they were well aware that the toppling of Hassan II would have dire consequences.

Up to the time of the second assassination attempt, General Ofkir, the King's right-hand man and the Interior Minister, was considered a protector of the Jews. However, with the revelation that Ofkir was party to the second assassination attempt, Jewish concern was aroused that it had lost its defender. Nevertheless, after this attempt on his life, King Hassan felt obliged to announce to the Jews that as long as he remained alive he would protect them.

In Algeria, the Jews decided to leave as soon as the nationalist factions took control from the French in 1962. Out of a total Jewish population of 150,000, 110,000 found refuge in France together with a million French nationals who had previously lived in Algeria and were now forced to abandon everything they had there. The Jews of Algeria had lived there for thousands of years and even pre-dated the Arab conquerors who subsequently became their masters.

One of the Jewish leaders, Professor Henri Shmueli, explains the motives behind the frantic departure of the Algerian Jews:

"We left Algeria because we could not assent to live under an Arab regime which we did not believe would be based on free democratic principles. Even if the regime were to resemble a democratic administration, we felt that our children would not have a future in an underdeveloped country like Algeria. We had no wish to regress and live under conditions similar to those of the Algerian populace, in the hands of the fanatical rulers of Algeria in the event of renewed war between the Arabs and Israel."

Henri Shmueli is a professor of philosophy and the author of several important books. He undoubtedly expresses the mood that prevailed when General de Gaulle resolved to forsake the million French nationals in Algeria and to grant the Algerian nationalists full control of their own affairs; even to the extent of leaving them free to act as they saw fit regarding both the French residents and their property. The Jews were quick to realize that if the French themselves were to be left to the designs of the nationalist rulers then it was almost certain that they, too, would be abandoned.

Part 4

Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, more than one million Jews lived in the countries of Islam, including in Yemen and Aden. Jewish myth has it that there were links between these two countries and Israel in the days of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,

1,600 years before the appearance of Mohammed, the founder of Islam. The hundreds of thousands of Jews who lived in Egypt also arrived in the Land of the Nile thousands of years ago. Thus their connection with the ancient Egyptians dates back a thousand years before the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. The history of the Jewish community in Babylon, today Iraq, which numbered 150,000 in 1948 is tied to the history of that country going back millennia; and there is little doubt that their connection with the land of Babylon precedes by at least 1,200 years the penetration of the Arabs into that region.

The 50,000 Jews who lived in Syria and Lebanon came to those countries some three thousand years ago, in the period of King David and his son Solomon. These two communities were considered to be part and parcel of the populations of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, a portion of which resided in the southern reaches of Syria and Lebanon. The Jewish community in Libya, which numbered 40,000 had very old origins too. According to well documented records, Jewish exiles arrived in Libya following the Roman conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Some maintain that a portion of Libya's Jews made their way there at the time of the First Temple. The Jews, like the Phoenicians, were a seafaring people, and they sailed in their ships between the ports of the Mediterranean Sea.

The history of the Jews of the Magreb is also an ancient one. The 500,000 Jews who lived in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco in 1948, were the descendants of settlers who arrived before conquest by the barbarians; that is long before the advent of Christianity.

The two Jewish communities in the Moslem countries of Iran and Turkey which gave immediate recognition to the State of Israel were also affected by the ill winds which blew over the Moslem world as a consequence of the rioting and incitement by the propaganda offices of the Arab states. More than 155,000 Jews resided in these countries in 1948; 80,000 in Iran and 75,000 in Turkey.

Messianic winds blew through all the generations of the Jewish communities in the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and Iran. Though the Zionist Movement did little to organize the communities or prepare them spiritually for *aliya* to Israel, when word of the establishment of a Jewish state after 2,000 years of exile reached them, they were inspired with a renewed spirit; and before long they began streaming to Israel, and like those who preceded them, setting to the task of fortifying the state and developing its agriculture and industry.

These Jews, making *aliyah* in the thousands during 1948-1955, quickly changed the demographic make-up of the state. Whereas prior to the establishment of the state, Sephardi and Eastern Jewry constituted only 25% of the total *yishuv* of 650,000 within a few years, with the *aliyah* of

800,000 from the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkan states, the Sephardi and Eastern Jews came to comprise a majority in Israel.

Entire communities arrived in Israel from Iraq, Yemen, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. The largest mass *aliyah* came from North Africa. The Libyan Jewish community came almost in its entirety to Israel. Thus far, 350,000 Jews have arrived from Morocco.

At the end of 1966, six months before the Six-Day War, the number of Jews living in the Arab countries was 133,600. To this number should be added another 70,000 in Iran and 35,000 in Turkey. The Six-Day War brought calamity upon these Jews, in particular to the remaining communities of Egypt, Syria and Iraq.

Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities between Egypt and Israel, the Nasser government embarked upon a campaign of punishment against the Jewish community in Egypt. About five hundred males were taken away to prisons where they underwent terrible tortures. The detainees were bound together and beaten without the slightest pretext. This system of torture continued until 1971. Several Western nations, and in particular Spain appealed to the ruler of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, demanding the release of the imprisoned Jews and that he allow them to leave the country. Thanks to this intervention, group after group of Jews was released but had to leave the country empty-handed. At the end of 1972, Chief Rabbi Haim Dwek, left Cairo; this marked the end of the community.

Much has been written of the hardships endured by the remnants of the Jewish community in Iraq. Like their brethren in Egypt, the Iraqi Jews also found themselves under house arrest initially. They were forbidden to possess an automobile or have a telephone in their homes, to withdraw funds from deposits they held in the banks, with the exception of small sums necessary for a sub-standard existence. The persecutions reached a climax in January 1969. On the fourth of that month, nineteen Iraqis were arrested and accused of being traitors to the "fatherland" and spies for the enemy.

Fourteen of these nineteen were Jews. They were subjected to a secret underground trial without any opportunity to defend themselves, and sentenced to death. On January 27, 1969 the world was notified of their execution by hanging. The bodies of the hanged men were seen on the television screens in Iraq, swinging from the gallows in Al-Tahrir Square (Liberty Square) in Baghdad.

Even worse is the condition of the Jewish community in Syria. The remnants of that community number 4,000 and they are obliged to live in ghettos that were set aside by the authorities in Damascus, Aleppo and the town Al-Kamishli, near the border with Turkey.

The Syrian authorities look for special ways to maltreat these wretched Jews. Police guards are maintained near the ghettos to ensure that the Jewish residents make no attempt to flee. Prayer books were examined and any reference to "Israel" and "Jerusalem" were deleted. A pogrom was carried out in the town of Al-Kamishli after the Six-Day War in which 57 Jews were killed. The Syrian army requisitioned the synagogue in the town and converted it into army barracks.

As in Iraq, it was forbidden for the teachers in Jewish schools to instruct pupils in the history of the Jewish people or to teach them Hebrew. The Jewish pupils are required to reiterate every morning the phrase: "The Jews are criminals and should be wiped off the face of the earth."

Thanks to the Committee for Human Rights which was formed in France under the presidency of Alain Poher, President of the French Senate, there arose a strong movement in all countries of the West for granting freedom to Jews in the Arab countries. Thus far, the committee has managed to bring redemption to the Jews of Egypt and Iraq; the majority of the Jews in Iraq have now been freed. The authorities in Damascus, however, persist in their obstinacy and refuse to respond to the repeated demands of the committee that the Jews of Syria be allowed to leave the country. At the end of 1972, the committee succeeded in bringing about the release of a number of Jews who were detained in prisons without trial. Two Jewish youths, who succeeded in escaping from Syria to London at the end of December 1972, told how the Syrian Government had resolved to destroy the remainder of the community and not allow any Jews to depart from the country alive.

Only the Jews of Lebanon can be said to be living in relative freedom. And yet, after the Six-Day War, there was the danger that the Jews of Beirut might fall victim to frenzied mobs. The Israel Government received reliable reports at the time that the Government of Lebanon stood behind the organizers of the planned pogroms. The Israeli Government sent a speedy warning to Lebanon indicating in no uncertain terms that if anti-Jewish riots were to take place, Israeli soldiers would have no option but to march on Beirut. In this way, riots were prevented in Beirut. Two years ago, Albert Elia, the sixty-seven year old secretary of the Beirut Jewish community, was kidnapped while walking in the streets. The Lebanese news agency claims that he was kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists and brought to Damascus.

After the Six-Day War, total annihilation of the Jewish community of Aden seemed a real possibility. But the British authorities, who were still in control of the colony, evacuated all the Jews in time; and the very old Jewish community there came abruptly to an end.

Because of the authorities' refusal to allow emigration, the Jewish com-

munity in Syria has remained more or less the same size. But in Iraq and Egypt, the number of Jews is decreasing from day to day. There are now in Baghdad about 500 Jews. In Egypt there are a few hundred elderly and impoverished souls who have no interest in leaving the country and prefer to remain in their homes until they die. In Lebanon too, there remained only 1,000 Jews. There are no more than a few hundred Jews today in Algeria. In Morocco and Tunisia, however, there are still substantial communities. In the former about 35,000, and in the latter about 10,000. After the Six-Day War, anti-Jewish disturbances broke out in Tunisia too. However, Habib Bourguiba, President of Tunisia, expressed his regret and promised government compensation for the victims.

Part 5

The inception of the State of Israel and the methodical persecutions by Arab and Moslem leaders led to the *aliyah* of 800,000 Jews from the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans. But not all the refugees went to Israel. Many moved to other countries where they set up new communities of exile. Practically the entire Algerian Jewish community of Jews moved to France, where it re-established itself in pockets in the cities. Today, the largest community of Jews in Western Europe is to be found in France the majority of whom hails from North Africa. Apart from Algerian Jewry (which enjoys equal rights like other French refugees who arrived from Algeria), Moroccan and Tunisian Jews also found refuge in France. A new and large Jewish community is gradually emerging in Spain, centered around immigrants from North Africa. Furthermore, a French-speaking community numbering about 30,000 has come into being in Canada.

But not only Jews from North Africa established new communities in exile. On the various continents of the globe there exist new communities founded by immigrants from other countries of the Middle East. Jews from Iraq, Egypt and the Balkan Peninsula, found their way to Western Europe, Canada,the U.S.A., Latin America, Australia and even Hong Kong. Due to the economic prosperity of the free world of Western Europe and the American and Australian continents, the immigrants who arrived virtually penniless were able to establish themselves and even to become wealthy. The great majority of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa had previously been involved in commerce. They studied the conditions in Israel, and a portion of them, in fact, even came. But fearing that a life of poverty awaited them here, they resumed their wanderings and arrived in places where the climatic conditions are very different from those to which they were accustomed. Indeed, they adapted themselves with difficulty to the new conditions and were able eventually to strike roots in their new homes and attain economic security.

But at all times their eyes are turned towards Zion, and they fulfill their duty to the Zionist enterprise. In many cases they have family in Israel, and are therefore bound by strong sympathies with what goes on in the country. They visit Israel regularly and thus maintain strong ties with the country and its people.

The new generation in the Diaspora receive an academic education and assume important positions in society. Unlike their forebears, these young people are confronted with the same changes that are affecting their peers, and they are time and again prey to serious worries and troubling new ideas. They are on the lookout for a new contextual framework for their lives and also for new content. They want to found their lives on new principles different from those of their parents. Though the majority live outside any religious framework, they make an effort to familiarize themselves with the problems confronting the Jewish people. There is no doubt that the Six-Day War, which so shook many, elicited hopeful and encouraging signs among the Sephardic and Eastern communities of the Diaspora. And this young generation gives its full attention to the many problems which occupy the people of which it is an integral part.

Hence we can understand the hopeful enthusiasm which spread throughout these communities, both young and old, when they received word of the reconstitution of the World Sephardi Federation as part of the World Zionist Organization. The tremors registered in Israeli society with the appearance of the "Black Panthers" in Israel found a response among the young generation of the Diaspora, which had grown up under completely different conditions. They concluded that if they did not now lend a hand to ease the suffering of their brothers in Israel, then they would never be able to favourably influence the situation.

Educated and generous youth was among the first to respond to the call for the reconstitution of the Sephardi World Federarion as an umbrella organization which would embrace all the Sephardi communities throughout the world. In October 1972, three conventions were held on the American continent with the aim of laying the foundations for the new branches of the Sephardi Federation. The gatherings were held in conjunction with the congresses of the general Zionist federations: one in Chicago — of the Zionist Federation of the United States; a second one in Lima, Peru — of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Congress in Latin America; and the third in Ottawa, capital city of Canada — at the convention of the Zionist Federation of Canada. Together with the three general conventions, they held three gatherings of delegates from the Sephardi communities, at which three new branches of the Sephardi Federaton were established. Young and distinguished leaders serve at the head of these branches. The head of the Sephardi Federation in the United States is Professor Daniel J. Elazar; of the Sephardi Federation of Latin Amer-

ica is Dr. Reuven Beracha; and of the Sephardi Federation of Canada is Mr. André Amiel. The participation of young, educated people of high standing serves as a guarantee that the federation on the American continents will make a meaningful contribution to the fulfilment of the aspirations and goals of the World Sephardi Federation.

Above all, it is the duty of the leaders of the Sephardi Federation to dedicate themselves to the consolidation of the other branches around the world. French Jewry needs to be given shape and direction. A new Zionist movement has arisen in that country, of particular strength among the immigrants from Morocco; a movement which calls itself "Ziona", with the purpose of *aliyah* to Israel. To the extent that the Sephardi Federation is able to provide them with direction, French Jewry will advance to fulfill its national tasks. This Jewry including those from North Africa, constitute a valuable human reservoir for *aliyah* to Israel. It is the duty of the Zionist leaders and those of the Government of Israel to acquaint themselves with the difficulties relating to the social standing of large families which presently enjoy rights in France that enable them to raise their children in good conditions and provide them with free education at all levels. Benefits, which are given to large families in accordance with the law, are what ensure that they are able to rise socially and become part of an advanced economy.

Part 6

Before concluding this survey of Jews of the Islamic countries, we must make special mention of one group which undoubtedly provides great encouragement to Eastern-Sephardi Jewry. This is the Georgian-Caucasian-Dagestanian "tribe".

The Georgian Jews were the first to raise the flag of rebellion in Soviet Russia and to unflinchingly demand the right to emigrate to Israel and join their brethren in building the country. Their cries reached as far as the institutions of the United Nations. The Israel Government made use of their daring call in order to compel the Soviet Government to allow the Jews to leave for Israel. And the Georgian Jews were indeed the first to obtain permission to leave. Today, they constitute almost a half of the *olim* from the Soviet Union. In their footsteps, the Jews of Bukhara began to arrive. And today we hear the calls of additional communities from the far plains of Soviet Asia; such as, the Jews of Dagestan and those of the other Moslem republics.

These remote communities which, during the fifty years that Soviet Russia has been in existence, have been in a sort of latent state, have always felt a strong bond with the Jewish people. Thousands of Jews from Georgia, Bukhara, the Caucasus and Dagestan made their way to Eretz Yisrael

in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth. But, because of the unbending position of the Soviet authorities, *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael from these communities was later curtailed.

Incidentally, emissaries from the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem made a practice of visiting Diaspora communities for many, many years. The council sought assistance in maintaining its long standing educational and charitable institutions, namely, *Talmud Torah Tiferet Yerushalayim*, the old aged home and the orphanage. The emissaries had a great influence upon the remote communities of the plains of Asia. One such *shaliah*, the Rishon Lezion, Chief Rabbi Yaacov Meir, who went on such a mission ninety years ago to all the communities of the East, reached the Jews of Bukhara. Due to his influence, they were inspired with a strong love for Zion and many of them emigrated to Eretz Ysrael in the last century and were among the founders of the Jewish settlement in Jerusalem. They established the magnificent neighbourhood known as *Rehovot Habukharim*. The philanthropists of the community built the various charitable institutions, such as, the Sephardi Orphanage in the center of the city.

According to estimates, the number of Jews in the existing communities of Georgia, Bukhara and the remaining areas of Asia approaches more than quarter of a million. The majority of them are pious and observant. There is no doubt that they are ready to immigrate in large numbers to Israel. They have made great strides in improving their condition during the fifty years that the Soviet Union has been in existence. The children of merchants and businessmen are university graduates and academics. This is a sign of the times. Their *aliyah* to Israel would surely bring a great blessing to the economy.

Fate of the Jews in Arab Lands

The creation of the State of Israel brought fundamental changes in the political, economic and social standing of the Jews in the Arab countries. Immediately thereafter the Arab rulers pretended to make a distinction between the State of Israel and the community of Jews in their midst; that is, they claimed to relate to the Jews residing within them as if they were citizens possessing more or less equal rights. However, the grim truth is that such declarations were merely propaganda to win Western public opinion so that they might benefit from material and military aid, particularly from the United States.

The situation of these Jews had never been good. The fanatic adherents of Islam considered it their duty to persecute other ethnic and religious groups. But while the Christian communities enjoyed the protection of the European powers, the Jews provided an easy target for their persecutors as they were unprotected.

An extreme example of their halpless condition was to be found in Yemen. Its rulers enjoyed a considerable degree of independence due to the country's geographical position; at first they were distant from the center of authority in Istanbul, while later they were removed from the regions of French and British influence. They treated the Jews as if they were little better than slaves. Like the caste of "untouchables" in India, the Jews were forbidden to engage in certain trades, to wear fine clothes, or to live in comfortable quarters. The governors even sought ways of luring the Jews away from their faith. Orphans were taken away from the homes of their relatives and converted to Islam under the pretext that they were the "property" of the state.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I led to vast political change in the Arab countries. Yemen, Hejaz and Najd arrived at full political independence. The other countries achieved a measure of national unity and began the march towards political independence. In February 1922, Egypt gained almost complete autonomy notwithstanding certain British reservations insofar as the security of the Suez Canal was concerned. Eretz Yisrael, with its natural boundaries, already a British Mandate was divided up. An Arab state was set up east of the Jordan River with the Emir Abdullah Ben Hussein of Hejaz as its ruler under British mandatory rule. Iraq too, with its vast area and a sparse popula-

tion which is split into a number of sects and clans, also fell into British hands; the British were officially entrusted with the task of nurturing the country towards political independence. On the other hand, Lebanon and Syria, under French influence since the 19th century, were now formally handed over to French mandatory rule along the lines of the British mandate in Iraq.

In the Days of the Mandate

Throughout the initial years of British and French mandatory rule in these countries, the Jews experienced a degree of well-being and even enjoyed a special social status. They belonged to the intelligensia and were consequently entrusted with positions of high standing in the mandatory governments.
Furthermore, in Egypt and Iraq, a number of Jews attained the rank of ministers and other high government positions, and for a while played an important role in financial administration, the management of public transportation and other government enterprises.

Unfortunately, this period of glory was short-lived. As the Arab national movement gained strength the Jews, like other minorities, were squeezed out of their prominent positions as was only fitting in the case of such alleged "agents" of Western imperialism. The national movements strove, in a short period of time, to transfer the administration of the affairs of state into the hands of the younger Arab generation and indeed, a group of educated young people, who had studied in universities and institutions of higher learning in the United States and Europe, succeeded in gaining control of key positions.

After the removal of the Jews from government positions, the Arab nationalists passed on to religious oppression similar to the worst anti-Semitism in the Christian countries of Eastern and Central Europe. As the Arab countries gained greater independence, and gradually reduced the influence of the Western powers in their internal affairs, persecution of the minorities became part and parcel of their internal policy. One year after Iraq's acceptance as a member of the League of Nations in 1933, a terrible massacre was instigated against the local Assyrian population.

At first, the persecution of Jews was along religious lines but it quickly found justification in political pretexts. Immediately after the approval of the British Mandate in Eretz Yisrael, and with the commitment to a national homeland for the Jews, emissaries of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, began making their way to the Arab countries in order to mobilize Arab governments in a campaign "to rescue Palestine from the Zionists". These emissaries were not satisfied with calls to action, but began disseminating poisonous hatred against the Jewish communities in

the places they visited. This incitement reaped the desired results with the cancellation of British and French mandatory rule.

The Iraqi Government was among the first to be stirred to "rescue activities", and it despatched monetary aid, as well as arms and gangs of murderers to Eretz Yisrael. It was also the first to follow a policy of undermining the social and economic status of the Jewish community in Iraq, which at the time numbered more than 130,000 persons. Like the Jews of Germany before them, the Jews of Iraq were stripped of all economic positions. Nazi personnel served as teachers and advisers for the pupils in Baghdad. But this was not sufficient for the Iraqi Government; measures were taken to bring about the spiritual impoverishment of the Jews. Special laws were enacted forbidding Jews to provide Hebrew education, and it was not long before there appeared a generation that had become completely divorced from Jewish tradition.

From time to time, the persecution and oppression of the Jews exploded into bloody outbreaks of violence and pillage. In the beginning of the summer of 1941, with the fall of the rebel government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, frenzied mobs carried out a terrible massacre of the Jews of Baghdad. Hundreds were murdered or wounded, and property valued at millions of pounds sterling was stolen from the victims.

The fate of the Jews of Lebanon and Syria was no better than that of Iraqi Jewry. Though the hired hands of the Arab nationalists in these countries did not dare to resort to massacre as did the mobs whipped up by the Mufti of Jerusalem in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, they did not refrain from pressure tactics or from threats against Jewish lives. From time to time, bombs were set off in the Jewish ghettos of Damascus and Aleppo, as well as in the Jewish residential areas of Beirut. Both the Syrians and the Lebanese extorted money from the local Jews for the great cause of "rescuing Palestine" from the Zionists. And the Jews were compelled to "contribute" in order to demonstrate their allegiance to the "Arab fatherland".

Western Powers Give Backing

Regretfully, the persecution directed against the Jews was partially aided by the conciliatory attitude adopted by the Western powers vis-à-vis the perpetrators of these tragic acts. The powers occasionally even lent a helping hand to the crimes. For many years certain Arab countries refrained from involving themselves in problems that arose beyond their own borders; consequently, the appeals made to the leaders of the nationalist movement in Egypt by emissaries of the Mufti, asking for assistance to the Arabs in Palestine, fell on deaf ears. British experts on the Near East, however, were of a different view. They were hopeful that by turning

the Palestinian problem into a world Moslem and a pan-Arab one, Britain would find a degree of relief from her own woes. At the beginning of the thirties, in the middle of the mandatory period, British advisers were already providing guidance to Haj Amin el-Husseini; and they initiated the World Moslem Congress in Jerusalem at the end of 1931 in the hope of bringing the Moslem world into line with British aspirations. But the congress delivered no political benefits for the British. Britain had been confident of gaining a measure of support in her struggle with Italy, who at the time had become a serious contender of hers in this region.

For the Jewish communities of the Arab and Moslem countries, however, the congress proved a source of serious trouble. Delegates to the congress had imbibed hefty draughts of racist and religious hatred against the Jews, and they returned from Jerusalem with the firm intention of launching a war of destruction against the Jews in their own countries; for as they saw it, these Jews were the brethren of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael who were plotting to "conquer the Holy Land", "to destroy the El-Aksa Mosque" in Jerusalem, and "to establish in its stead their Temple".

Subsequently, on the eve of World War II, Britain convened a congress of all the Arab states to deal with matters pertaining to Palestine. This congress, like the former, granted her almost no substantial gains, and merely served to drag into the fray against the Jews those states which had hitherto avoided direct involvement in the affairs of Palestine.

Neither was France guiltless: as a consequence of the differences between that country and Britain, and in the heat of the struggle to determine the future political status of the countries of the Levant, the Arab violators of public order (at the forefront of whom stood Haj Amin Husseini), were able to flee from Palestine and find refuge in Lebanon. From 1936 onwards, both Syria and Lebanon became centers for Arab trouble-makers interested in striking at the Jews of Eretz Yisrael as well as at the local Jews.

The Jewish Predicament after the Creation of the Arab League

The establishment of the Arab League at British initiative in 1944, enlarged the field of activity for Arab inciters in many countries.

British statesmen, headed by Anthony Eden the then British Foreign Secretary, had hoped to bring all the Arab states into an alignment by means of the Arab League, and then to turn them into an allied political bloc in the great war against Germany and Italy. It was also hoped that after that war they would serve the same function in the struggle against Soviet Russia. The league was furthermore entrusted with the role — and the flames were fanned with pan-Arab slogans — of pushing the French out of the Levant and of frustrating Jewish hopes of national rebirth.

But, of all these hopes, Britain was successful in realizing only one: the expulsion of France from Syria and Lebanon. And even this goal was not attained as a result of the power of the Arab League, but by reason of France's military and political weakness following her military collapse in 1940. In that year she lost control and mastery of all her colonies. The Movement for a Free France under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle, made strenuous efforts to consolidate France's position in her colonies; but he was not successful in Syria and Lebanon. Britain had wrested control of the two countries from the Vichy regime and she was not willing now to allow the return of the French. And if the symbolic rule acquired by de Gaulle was subject to the condition that he bestow independence upon the Levant figuratively, the British agents in the Middle East were able similarly to accredit the expulsion of the French from the Levant to the Arab League.

The Arab League, however, did not constitute an important factor on any of the remaining fronts, or filled the roles designated for it by its creators. The Arab statesmen did not change their attitude to Germany and Italy and persisted in their position of hostile "neutrality" vis-à-vis the Allies-.They continued to stand, so to speak, at the side; but in reality they responded to all the directives issued by the headquarters for sedition that Haj Amin el-Husseini maintained in Italy and Germany throughout the war.

Britain's failure was most apparent, however,in her efforts to convert the Arab League into a supporter of her objectives in the struggle against the Soviet Union in the Middle East. The conference of kings and presidents of Arab countries, which took place in the Anshaf Palace under the guidance of King Farouk, as well as the conference of delegates of Arab states which convened in Syria were both initiated by British emissaries in the Middle East in the hope of consolidating the pan-Arab front against the Soviet Union. But all these efforts ended in total failure.

At the pan-Moslem conference in Jerusalem in 1931 and at the Arab congress in London prior to the war, the Arab states served as a useful tool to combat the restoration of the Jewish people in their homeland, and also as a punitive agent against the Jewish communities still living in the Arab countries. Worse still, after the creation of the Arab League, the Jews in Arab countries became virtual hostages in the hands of all sorts of fanatical and seditious elements.

When the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry of 1946 and the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) of 1947 — came to examine Jewish claims for a state, the Arab League resorted to threats and proclaimed Jewish communities in Arab countries as their hostages. During these years, riots were instigated against the Jews of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Libya. And, with the approval by the U.N. Assembly

on the 29th November,1947 of the plan for partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state, the wave of incitement spread further and encompassed not only the member states of the Arab League, but also the North African colonies of Tunisia and Morocco.

The inciters threatened to carry out massacres of Jews living in all the Arab countries. However, they gave free rein to their virulence only in remote communities, such as Aden, and the principality of Kuwait beside the Persian Gulf. But the Arab leaders schemed to sabotage Jewish hopes for a state, and they despatched their national armies to invade Eretz Yisrael upon the termination of the British mandate, on May 14, 1948.

The War of Independence and Fate of the Jews

With the invasion of the Arab armies, the Jews turned overnight into enemy subjects. Martial law was declared in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and thousands of Jews were imprisoned as collaborators with the enemy. Increased surveillance was instituted, particularly of young people who were suspected of being members of youth organizations.

The military debate of the Arab states led to the ultimate collapse of their regimes. A long string of military coups were carried out in Syria. Adventurer-officers who had faced military defeat thirsted for revenge upon their return to Damascus; they resolved to overthrow the political leaders and proclaim a military dictatorship. The wave of coups soon reached Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. Yet the military coups did not bring about political stability in the Arab lands. At present, however, these countries stand at the threshold of a new era. The dictators have been unseated in Egypt and Syria, and the initiative has once again passed to the political parties which ruled prior to the war in Eretz Yisrael.

The defeat of the Arab armies in the War of Independence endangered the very existence of the Jewish communities in the Arab countries. Arab leaders sought a scapegoat for their defeat and directed their wrath against the local Jewish inhabitants. There was a state of lawlessness. Shafik Adas, a wealthy Jew from Basra, was executed in Baghdad for the alleged crime of collaboration with Israel. Thus, the Iraqi rulers sought to pacify the masses enraged by the disgrace of the Arab military disaster. Hostile activities against the Jews were the order of the day in all the Arab countries.

In 1948 the Jewish communities in these countries (including Libya and the French colonies of North Africa) numbered close to 750,000 people. As a result of the war, about an equal number of Arab refugees fled from Eretz Yisrael. It was natural, therefore, that the Government of Israel should take advantage of the victory on the field of battle in order to

reach an agreement with regard to an exchange of populations. That is, to rescue and bring to Eretz Yisrael all the Jews from the Arab and North African countries, in exchange for the Arab refugees. There was also reason to hope that the transfer of populations between Israel and the Arab states would lead to a general agreement concerning the salvaging of Jewish property there in return for compensation which the Government of Israel was willing to pay for property left behind by the Arabs in Eretz Yisrael.

Several efforts were made by the government to implement this plan, but regretfully, they proved fruitless. It seemed at first that the Arab governments were unwilling to permit the Jews to leave for Israel. But suddenly this attitude changed. The first movement came from Yemen with the *aliyah* of more than 45,000 people, And before the rescue of the Yemenite Jews was complete, there arose the necessity to come to the aid of the Jews of Iraq. The Arabs hoped that the frenzied influx of thousands of Jews into the Jewish state, beset as it was by severe economic difficulties, would bring about its economic collapse. At the same time, the state undertook to rescue Libyan Jewry. Since 1948, 200,000 Jews have been brought in from the Arab lands. They left behind property valued at many millions of pounds sterling.

Remnants of communities still survive in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Libya. In Egypt there is a community of a few hundred individuals. The remaining Jews of Syria live under conditions of oppression and humiliation, though they have declared themselves to be loyal citizens. Until the removal of Sheik Bishara el-Khuri from presidential office in Lebanon at the end of the summer of 1952, it appeared as if the Jews of Lebanon had regained a life of freedom. Many Jews of Aleppo and Damascus, pursued by Syrian persecutors, had found refuge in Lebanon. Since they were involved in commerce the Jews of Lebanon were allowed free movement inside and outside the country. However, with the election of Camille Chamoun as President, the position of the 10,000 Jews again deteriorated. Those who had acquired office in the military and government administrations were removed from their positions and censured as enemy agents. Additional restrictions were imposed on the communtiy. It was forbidden for them to travel abroad, under the pretext that they were involved in smuggling to Israel and in maintaining regular contact with it. The youth movements were disbanded for allegedly receiving military training and Zionist education.

The dictators in Syria and Egypt put up a pretence at distinguishing between Israel — their enemy, — and the local Jewish inhabitants. By broadcasting programs in Hebrew from Cairo and Damascus, the rulers strove to demonstrate their tolerance towards their citizens. The Syrian rulers initiated audiences with delegations from the remaining Jewish

community of Damascus from time to time who expressed their community's esteem and appreciation of the courteous treatment accorded them as to citizens with equal rights. On *Yom Kippur*, Radio Damascus broadcast the *Ne'ilah* prayer from the Great Synagogue in the Jewish ghetto. However, between these prayers and the thankful paeans expressed by the Jewish delegations, the acts of humiliation and oppression continued. The only way to rescue these Jews is through their removal from oppression.

The remaining Jews in Arab countries number about 75,000. They remained out of fear for the fate of their property. Ways must be found to rescue them while, at the same time, arriving at a comprehensive arrangement with regard to Jewish property of those Jews who have already immigrated to Israel and those who are still to come. A hasty departure will bring tragedy to the Jews of North Africa.

We are also watching with anxiety the changes taking place in the French colonies in North Africa. The struggle between the nationalist movements in Tunisia and Morocco and the French regimes is intensifying from year to year. Even if a compromise arrangement is attained, it is doubtful whether this must be sufficient guarantee for the maintenance of what is a steadily deteriorating Jewish position. Thousands of Jews still live in these countries and they constitute an ever-available victim of Arab incitement promoted by propagandists despatched from the center of the Arab League in Cairo. Every passing day of inaction reduces the possibilities for rescuing these Jews together with their property. It is out duty to give immediate attention to the problem before it is too late. We must do our best to rescue the remaining Jews in the Arab lands and in North Africa — for this is the order of the day. With the rescue of these thousands of Jews we will also bring salvation to our state!

(1954)

The Iraqi Jewish Community

Babylonia — a Major Center in Jewish History

For many generations, the Jews of Babylonia (modern day Iraq) played a key role in Jewish life. With the exile of the First Temple period, Babylonia became a major Jewish center. Even after Cyrus' famous declaration encouraging the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple, Babylonia did not cease to occupy a major position as a center of Jewish community life. This was, in no small part, due to the fact that many exiles had no interest in returning to Eretz Yisrael. Like Egypt, Babylon was a hive of intellectual activity, and without a doubt it supplanted Eretz Yisrael for a long time as the spiritual center of the people. The Babylonian Talmud and the writings of the *Geonim* are the greatest legal and literary contributions made to Judaism by this community and they came to comprise the foundation of the Jewish legal system, the *Halacha* and Jewish ethics.

This community which produced so many eminent figures was generations later to play a crucial role in the rebirth of the Iraqi nation. It is not possible to trace the course of Iraqi national rebirth without mention of the disproportionate contribution of the minority Jewish population to the economic development of a country, sunk in ignorance and dreadful poverty, and which was a virtual backwater. Iraq has always been of geopolitical value, and during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was the focus of the struggle between the European powers. In the First and Second World Wars, Britain and Germany fought over the rights to Iraq. Iraq's importance increased during the last war when rich petroleum wells were discovered within her territory. It was also at an important juncture between Europe and the Far East. Britain tried through Egypt to maintain its control of the Suez Canal, the maritime connection with her distant colonies in India, Australia and the Far East. Iraq also provided an important parallel route by land. Its importance has continued to increase in the past fifty years with the development of air communications; British airplanes pass via the airbase in Habbaniya (near Baghdad) en route between Britain and her colonies in the Far East and Australia.

The Jews served as an important factor in the economic and administrative development of Iraq. Many Jewish families helped lay the foundations of the economic and government systems in the new Iraq after World War II. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, established families made their

way to the Far East where they founded centers of British trade. However, Iraq continued to serve as the center of activity for the families who never severed their ties with the Jewish community there and who, with their vast experience and connections, breathed life into the economy of the new Iraq. They formed the base of the administration which slowly took shape during twenty years of British mandatory rule. The Jews organized the transportation and telegraph networks, the telephone and postal systems; and also made a substantial contribution to the organization of the national movement. They contributed much to the development of the Arabic literature of Iraq. Modern Arabic journalism would not have come into being in that country without the participation of Jewish journalists and writers who possessed a profound knowledge of the Arabic language and literature, and who occasionally outmatched the finest of their Arab colleagues.

However, as the wave of Arab nationalism in Iraq gained momentum, the hatred for and opposition to minorities — viewed as foreigners who had seized control of economic and administrative posts — increased. The nationalist leaders had little interest in giving recognition to the significant contributions that Iraqi Jewry had made to the young state, and they conveniently ignored the fact that the Jews had been residing in Iraq for thousands of years, and had, therefore, even pre-dated the Arabs themselves.

Persecution of Jews after Independence

With the attainment of independence and the termination of the British mandate in 1932, there began a systematic campaign of expulsion of Jews from public posts. They were replaced by Moslem officials. The Jews held their own in a few essential services such as the railways, the customs and government financial institutions, simply by virtue of the fact that suitable and competent Moslem replacements could not be found.

Though Britain still exercised mandatory powers in Iraq in 1925, the Iraqi Government already began showing its displeasure at the existence of a Zionist Movement. Upon the attainment of complete independence, the new rulers adopted an official policy against all Zionist activity. In the Jewish schools, there was a prohibition against the instruction of Hebrew and the history of the Jewish people. Jewish teachers from Eretz Yisrael who had played an important part in educating the youth in a Zionist spirit were arrested and expelled from the country. Only a restricted number of lessons in Bible in Hebrew were permitted but later the Iraqi Government decreed that even *Tanach* must be taught in Arabic. Under these circumstances, the Zionist movement was compelled to go underground; but as restrictions against Hebrew language instruction and religious studies increased, Jewish national feeling among Iraqi Jews intensified. And the idea of *aliyah* gained ground among all sectors of Jewish society, from young to old.

The Jews of Iraq had always felt a bond with Eretz Yisrael. There was hardly ever a time when Jews were not packing up and heading for Eretz Yisrael with the purpose of rebuilding the land. These included wealthy families, most of whom settled in the two holy cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. The Yehusa family established itself on land in Motza, and other families founded Kfar Yehezkel, while government agricultural schools in Eretz Yisrael for Jews and Arabs were established through the generosity of the Kaduri family.

The increased persecution made it clear that there could be no hope of preserving a Jewish way of life any longer. Thus the youth movement came into being with the aim of preparing youth for *aliyah.*

At first, it was promised that minority groups would have representation in the legislative institutions and even in the government. The Jews were granted one seat in the Senate and four seats in the Parliament: 2 from Baghdad, 1 from the Basra District, and 1 from the Mosul District. In the initial governments formed by King Faisal I, a Jew was appointed minister of finance. But it soon became evident that these rights were losing their significance; and as the Moslem factions became stronger, the minority groups became more alienated from the workings of the state.

Only one year after its independence (in 1933), Moslem zealots organized a frightful massacre of the Assyrians. They also intensified their oppression of the Kurdish minority and the Yazidis (pagans) who live in northern Iraq. These acts of cruelty served as a clear warning as to the future of the Jews.

Relations between Jews and Moslems in Iraq were largely determined, by the shifting relations between Arab and Jew in Eretz Yisrael. When bloody violence broke out in Eretz Yisrael, incitement against the Jews increased in Iraq. The years 1936-1938, the period of the Arab uprisings in Eretz Yisrael, were a time of persecution and suffering for Jews in Iraq and other Arab countries. Emissaries of the Mufti of Jerusalem persuaded the Iraqi Government and the public to throw Jews out of their official government and commercial positions. This incitement also led to murder. Arab rioters killed ten Jews in Baghdad and Basra, and looting was carried out by the frenzied mobs. Bombs were tossed into Jewish clubs. The Jewish community of Baghdad declared a two-day strike in protest against the killings. When the president of the Baghdad Jewish community appealed to the authorities to punish the culprits, he was informed that he must first declare publicly, in the name of the Jews of Iraq, that no connection existed between them and the Zionists.

The increasing hostility jeopardized the future of Jews in Iraq. Some were ǒutright proponents of assimilation within Moslem society, mainly the younger elements who had been educated in government schools where

they were lured away from Judaism and Zionism. They tried to imitate Moslem neighbours; for instance, they wore the *sidara* (Iraqi national hat) and sent their offspring to serve in the national army. Many of the intelligentsia joined the political parties where they gave obeisance to party leaders and assumed an extreme nationalist stance.

Some of the younger generation were won over to communist ideologies and played a role in the founding of the Communist Party in Iraq. The police relentlessly persecuted communist activists just as they persecuted Zionist youth. Thus, in the prison cells Jewish youths, aligning themselves with the two mutually antagonistic movements, were given the opportunity to conduct penetrating debates among themselves.

Generally speaking, however, the majority of Jews in Iraq remained on the fringe and showed little interest in public life. They bore the maltreatment of Moslem fanatics in silence, hoping that the days of hardship would pass and that life would shortly return to its normal course.

Rioting during the Shavuot Holiday (1941)

The course of events in Iraq during World War II dispelled any illusions that the Jews might still have been harbouring. In the autumn of 1940, Haj Amin el-Husseini made his way to Iraq following his expulsion from Syria by the French authorities. The Mufti was welcomed in Baghdad with great pomp and ceremony. And after his arrival there began an earnest campaign of incitement against both the Jews and the English. Haj Amin created a special bureau for this purpose, and he bought out several newspapers which served as the tools of his unrestrained calls for revolt against the British and virulent diatribes against the Jews. The bureau was maintained with moneys of the Axis powers: Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Only a few months after his arrival, Rashid Ali Al-Gaylani seized power in April 1941. Al-Gaylani was counted among Hitler's faithful and was more than ready to cooperate with the Mufti. He announced the alignment of Iraq with Hitler's camp. The Iraqi Regent Amir Abd el-Ilah, the child King Feisal II, together with a host of politicians and statesmen who were among Britain's allies, headed by the veteran statesman, Nuri es-Said, fled to Rabbat Amman. Later, they moved to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the British proceeded with the task of cleansing Iraq of all Nazi agents: they saw a great danger to their position in the entire Middle East should Iraq remain a Nazi stronghold and maintain Nazi bases like those set up by the Vichy regime in Syria and Lebanon. Britain mobilized air forces to strike at the air bases which were maintained by the government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. The Arab Legion in Jordan, under the command of British officers, was summoned to march on Iraq and topple

the Gaylani government. Thus at the end of May 1941, Rashid Ali al-Gaylani fled to Iran together with Haj Amin el-Husseini after the British force had reached the outskirts of Baghdad and threatened his life. British forces, together with Free French Forces, then pushed on into Syria and Lebanon and purged the countries of the Levant of Nazi agents.

During the weeks of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani's rule in Iraq, the Jews suffered physical violence and persecution. Iraqi youth brigades, similar to the Hitler youth brigades, were organized by the government for the purpose of "keeping the peace" in Baghdad. These youth brigades did not hesitate to maltreat Jewish residents.

In the days between al-Gaylani's flight and the restoration of governmental control to the Regent Amir Abd el-Ilah, there was widespread chaos in Baghdad. One member of al-Gaylani's government, Yunes es-Sibawayh, who was renowned for his hatred of the Jews, had not fled the country with al-Gaylani; he continued, instead, to terrorize the city. On the 30th of May, he summoned the president of the Jewish community, Sasson Kaduri, and ordered him to instruct the Jews that for a period of three days, beginning May 31 and ending on June 2 (days of the *Shavuot* festival), they must not leave their homes. Apparently, Yunes es-Sibawayh planned to despatch the youth brigades to inflict harm upon the Jews and rob them of their property. Fortunately, however, only a few hours after the meeting, es-Sibawayh was arrested by the Internal Security Committee and deported to Iran where his comrades, Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and Haj Amin el-Husseini, had already found refuge.

The reports of his deportation greatly heartened the Jews who had been saved in the nick of time from the threat of riots. The rejoicing was short-lived however. Very soon afterwards, the inflamed rabble utilized the temporary vacuum in the rule of the country to fall upon the Jewish neighbourhoods during the Shavuot holiday. They murdered, raped and robbed the local denizens.

The Security Committee which kept a watch on of the rioters quickly realized the danger facing all the residents of Baghdad if the mobs were allowed to continue without restraint. Companies of Kurdish soldiers were immediately alerted and proceeded to open fire upon the unruly crowds. The authorities also imposed a curfew upon the city. A number of rioters were killed and quiet was soon restored to Baghdad.

The new government of the Regent appointed an enquiry committee to study the causes of the violence. The findings confirmed that the rioters included Iraqi soldiers and police. But the guilty were never punished. Possibly the Regent Amir Abd el-Ilah, who was present in Baghdad on the day of the rioting, simply turned a blind eye to these acts believing

that they were carried out by Gaylani's faithful supporters and that it was preferable that the Jews should be the scapegoats.

It was estimated, that some 170 Jews were murdered, while hundreds were wounded. The Jewish property which was looted was valued at more than a million pounds sterling.

After the riots, there began a mass movement of Jews from Iraq. Some found refuge in neighbouring Iran, while others settled in Israel. The assault sharpened the awareness of the younger generation to the fact that the Jewish community must never again be abandoned to the whims of a mob, which is liable to resort to violence any moment against the Jews. Consequently, youth brigades began to train in the use of arms so as to be able to defend the community. Later, emissaries from Eretz Yisrael arrived in Iraq and set up the *Hagana* Organization, with the purpose of training the youth for defence and for *aliyah*. The *Hagana* Organization and other youth organizations were active in the community until the mass *aliyah* of Iraqi Jewry in 1950-1951.

U.N. Discussions on the Palestine Problem and the Fate of Iraqi Jewry

After the Second World War, when the United Nations Organization was discussing the future of Palestine, the position of the Jews in Iraq was deteriorating rapidly. Moslem propagandists threatened to punish them for the fact that their Jewish brethren in Eretz Yisrael were robbing the Arabs there of their land. As the Arab armies invaded Eretz Yisrael to prevent the creation of a Jewish State, the persecutions of Iraqi Jewry intensified. Jews were arrested and tried in military courts in Baghdad, accused of maintaining contact with Zionists. Those with relatives in Eretz Yisrael were considered traitors because they corresponded with them. Police made frequent raids upon Jewish homes in order to uncover suspicious material. A letter written in Hebrew or any material connected with Eretz Yisrael was incriminating.

The defeat of the Arab armies, and of the Iraqi army in particular, created an unbearable atmosphere for the Jews of Iraq. Shafik Adas, a Jewish businessman of Syrian birth, residing in Basra in southern Iraq, was brought to trial in a military court on the charge of spying for the Zionists. He was sentenced to death and hanged in a central square of Baghdad. Thus the Iraqi leaders sought to pacify the rage of the masses, which had reached a peak following the defeat by Israel of the Iraqi army. The Jews were aroused to the dangers in store for them. Thousands fled to Iran often with the aid of Arab smugglers. But the Iraqi Government soon decided to speed up the exodus of the Jews. In March 1950, a law was issued permitting their departure on the condition that they renounce their citizenship and their property. Thousands of Jews registered for

departure and within one year, from June 1950 to June 1951, 110,000 Jews made their way to Israel. Fifteen thousand Jews found refuge in Iran. Thousands settled in other countries in Western Europe, Canada, the U.S.A. and Australia.

They were permitted to leave with 50 pounds sterling for each adult, and 20 pounds sterling for each child though some managed to sell their property at low prices and to smuggle the money out of the country.

In March 1951, another law was issued freezing all property of citizens who had left the country or who were about to leave (in other words the Jews). This property was valued at between 150 and 200 million dollars.

Of the 130,000 Jews who had been living in Iraq in 1948, only 6,000 remained by early 1952.

Even with the mass exodus of Iraqi Jewry persecution of the remaining Jews did not cease. A short while after the exodus, two youths were arrested on the charge of possessing weapons and belonging to an illegal organization. They were tried and sentenced to death and were hung in a Baghdad public square in January 1952.

The Remaining Community

Of the 6,000 Jews residing in Iraq in 1952, there remained only four hundred persons in 1973. In the twenty years following the mass exodus the remaining community was the victim of indescribable suffering and was in constant danger. These few thousand Jews, most of them people of property, did not wish to leave Iraq and lose their wealth; for they feared that they would not be able to begin anew in a different country and achieve even a modicum of a decent existence. Meanwhile, Moslem neighbours saw the remaining community as a source of wealth to be exploited. They began to abuse them and extort ransoms.

In these twenty years, there have been many changes and coups d'état. The deposing in 1958 of the Hashemite royal house by Iraqi officers under the leadership of Abd el-Karim Kassim and 'Abd es-Salam 'Arif, led to the establishment of an unstable dictatorship. Each coup d'état brought a new dictator to power who eliminated his predecessor. And in all these upheavals, the Jews were the victims of persecution and cruel tortures. The military defeat of the three Arab states—Egypt, Syria and Jordan—in the June war of 1967 intensified Moslem pressure on the Jews. Persecution reached its peak in 1970, when nine Jews were sentenced to death and publicly hanged in a central square of the capital city, in revenge for the Arab defeat by Israel.

The wave of protest on all continents against Iraqi tyranny forced the rulers to allow another few thousand Jews to depart. Then, in 1972-1973,

the situation of the remaining Jews in Baghdad deteriorated drastically. At least 23 Jews were murdered in prisons and in their homes by agents of the secret police. Five members of the Kashkush family were shot to death by criminals who burst into their home and killed them with a machine-gun. According to reports, the murder was carried out by the police. Nothing is known regarding the fate of the other fifteen men and three women who were arrested between September 1972 and April 1973. There is good reason to believe that they were all put to death by government men, though nothing is known about where they were killed and buried.

In regard to some of the missing Jews, Baghdad newspapers published notices to the effect that these missing persons had escaped from "the hands of justice". Such pronouncements were usually made to inform the public that missing persons had been executed in prison.

Eric Rolo, a French journalist for *Le Monde,* relates that Nazem Kazer, head of the security services in Iraq, who attempted to do away with the Iraqi President Hassan el-Bakr and his right-hand man and deputy Tzadam a-Takriti in the summer of 1973, is the man responsible for these murders. Kazer's enemies also told, after his execution, how he would lure Jews into his trap with promises to smuggle them into Iran for huge sums of money, and how they were murdered by Kazer's men on the road to the Iraqi-Iranian border. The Kashkush family was also murdered by Kazer's men. It is said that the murder was committed in revenge for the liquidation of three terrorist organizations in a commando unit raid by the Israel Defence Forces in Beirut.

Though the Iraqi authorities blame the murders on Nazem Kazer, the President of Iraq, El-Bakr, and his henchmen, themselves continue to persecute the Jews. Despite the pressure of world public opinion, the remaining Jews have not yet received permission to leave Iraq.

The Yom Kippur War, which began with attacks by the Egyptian and Syrian armies against Israel on the Day of Atonement 1973, led to intervention by an Iraqi division of 15,000 soldiers including armoured and air forces, which rushed to the aid of Syria as the Israel army advanced towards Damascus; the Iraqis were badly battered in the battles. This disaster will further undermine the stability of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq under the leadership of Hassan el-Bakr. There is great apprehension that the 400 remaining Jews will serve as a scapegoat for the Iraqi military debacle. World public opinion must be aroused before it is too late to come to the rescue of these Jews. The Government of Iraq must be required in no uncertain terms to allow the departure of these people.

With their departure, a three thousand-year-old history will reach its end. These Jews saw days of joy and light, but latterly lived through a time of frightful gloom which will remain as a mark of disgrace in the history of modern Iraq.

The Jews of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq

In northern Iraq there are Jews living amongst the "tribes of Kurdistan". These tribes constitute one portion of the tribes of the Kurdish people which inhabit mainly three regions: Iraq, Iran and Turkey. There is also, a Kurdish minority in Syria. In these regions there is an age-old Jewish population.

Tradition has it that the Jews entered the Kurdish regions in the time of First Temple during their forced exile by the Assyrians. The greatest concentration of Kurdish Jews lives in northern Iraq and at one time numbered 146 communities. In the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iran, there were 24 and 19 communities respectively. The Jews were concentrated in the cities of Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil, Amadiya, Zakhu and Barashi.

During the thousands of years of their exile, the Kurdish Jews spoke a special language — the Aramaic language which is called *"Lashon Hatargum"* and is closely related to the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud.

Although Iraqi Kurdistan is a part of the state of Iraq, its Jewish community had always been cut off from and distinct in its culture and life style from the other Jews of Iraq. The Kurdish Jews were not at all influenced by the Jewish cultural atmosphere which prevailed elsewhere in Iraq, where there were *yeshivot* which nurtured thousands of *geonim,* and where the Talmud and the literature of the *geonim* emerged.

The Jews of Kurdistan were subject to the rule and authority of the chiefs of Kurdish families whose religion was Sunnite Moslem. These chiefs were called Agha's to whom the Jews paid taxes for their protection from other members of the tribes. But despite this commitment it not infrequently happened that bandits fell upon the Jews and robbed and murdered them. There were instances of Jews being sold into slavery and they were compelled on occasion to forsake their religion in order to be saved from such a fate.

The history of the Jews of Kurdistan is poorly documented. And despite the historical continuity of hundreds of years, there are few sources to shed light upon the life of these communities. But from the scanty information passed down from father to son, it is known that occasionally the Kurds resorted to blood libels against their Jewish neighbours, similar to those invented by the Christians. At different times throughout history,

these ancient lands were vanquished by numerous conquerors arising from the heart of Asia. During these invasions, entire Jewish communities, in particular those in Turkish and Persian Kurdistan, were annihilated by the cruel victors. In 1871, rioting broke out against the Jews in the city of Amadiya in Iraqi Kurdistan, forcing them to flee.

As stated, the Kurdish Jews differed from their Iraqi cousins in their dress, way of life and language. The traveler, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visit Kurdistan in Iraq in 1170, related that he had encountered more than one hundred communities of Jews there. In one city alone, Amadiya, he found 25,000 Jews. He tells how he found learned men among them.

These Jews endeavoured to organize their affairs communally. In the large cities with substantial communities, a council of "seven good men of the city" was appointed headed by a "wise man". This council administered the synagogue and supervised ritual slaughter. In the early sixteenth century, Kurdistan Jewish rabbis attained fame; they came from the families Barazani, Mizrachi, Dugeh, Hariri and others. There were also liturgical poets, some of whose poetry has been preserved to this day.

The wise and learned Professor Joseph Joel Rivlin of Jerusalem gathered and translated dozens of religious poems from the language of the *"Targum"* into Hebrew. He published them in his book *Poetry of the Jews of the Targum* with appended explanatory notes. For many generations these works were preserved as part of an oral tradition handed down through cantors and singers. Occasionally only one or two verses from the original poem were retained by the singers. who had to rely only upon their memories.

The Woman Rabbi Asenath Barazani

Though great rabbis and Torah scholars did not arise among the Jews of Kurdistan to the same degree as among Babylonian Jewry, the woman rabbi, Asenath Barazani, daughter of Rabbi Shmuel Barazani did become famous. She was born in 1550 and already in her early years her talents and greatness in Torah became apparent, She was raised on the benches in the *Beth Hamidrash* of her father, who was the spiritual leader of the Jewish community of Barazan. He established *yeshivot* to train Torah scholars in Barazan, Mosul and Amadiya. Asenath's husband, Yaacov, who was also her cousin, inherited her father's position as head of the *yeshiva*. Upon her husband's death, she became the head of the *yeshiva* in Mosul. In a letter in her own hand to the community of Amadiya she wrote: "I never once left the doorstep of my house, I was like a princess there... I grew up in the lap of wisdom and I was closely tied to my father... I learned no other work besides the service of the Lord."

In addition to her being a spiritual leader, Rabbi Asenath also administered the *yeshiva* and raised contributions for the maintenance of its scholars. In another letter, she wrote to one of the communities, "I alone remained to teach *Torah* and provide spiritual succour. I instruct upon the importance of the *Shabbat* and prayer and on the laws of ritual bathing and impurity."

The sages who turned to her for advice, opened their letters with the term *"Tana'it"*. The Jewish community of Baghdad requested that she despatch one of her pupils to them that he might serve as their head. She sent her son Shmuel. It is known to the Jews of Kurdistan that Rabbi Asenath wrote an interpretation of the "Book of Proverbs". which has unfortunately been lost. She died at the age of eighty.

Messianic Movements

Although the Jews of Kurdistan had always been cut off from other tribes of Israel, they yearned unceasingly for redemption and the chance to return to Eretz Yisrael from which they had been exiled in ancient days, to rebuild the land. Hence, they constituted fertile ground for the appearance of leaders who called for the mass mobilization of the Kurdish Jews to bring redemption to the people of Israel. These leaders, like others who appeared at different times and inevitably failed in their self-appointed missions, were called "false Messiahs". We will mention two such "Messiahs". In the years 1113-1121, there appeared in Amadiya a Jew, Menahem Ben Shlomo Ibn Ruhi, who gathered about him Jews from his own tribe in Kurdistan and from Baghdad and Persia, and sent proclamations to various Jewish communities declaring the imminence of redemption. However, he was soon captured by the authorities and quickly put to death.

In 1159 there arose a second leader in Kurdistan, who also sought to bring redemption to his people. He was David Alroy, who had great influence in numerous communities throughout the Jewish world. He mobilized an army of Jews and prepared to journey to Jerusalem to conquer the city by force of arms and restore the Kingdom of Israel. The Crusaders were at the time masters of Eretz Yisrael, and the messianic belief that redemption was close at hand filled the hearts of Jews in all parts of the world. Alroy's activities for mobilizing a Jewish army, however, aroused the concern of the Persian rulers, who arrested and executed him before he could set out to liberate Jerusalem from the Christian masters. The Jews of Kurdistan were never willing to believe that David Alroy was a false Messiah. And his name has been preserved in their tradition as a hero who tried to rescue his people from exile. The Kurdish Jews who later made *aliyah* named one of their settlements after him.

Rabbis engage in Kabbala

At the beginning of the 16th century many rabbis were to be found in Iraqi Kurdistan, some of whom engaged in *Kabbala* and in the secret teachings of Ha-ari. In Iraqi Kurdistan are located the burial sites of prophets and *tzaddikim* whose names are engraved in the history of the Jewish people; such as, the prophets Jonah, Nachum, Daniel, Hanania, Mishael and Azaria.

Travelers and emissaries who had wandered about the world among Jewish communities also found their way to the Jewish tribes in Kurdistan. Their appearance often inspired these tribes with hope of impending redemption. They recorded details of the life and condition of the Kurdish Jews during different periods, One of these visitors was the poet, Rabbi Yehudah el-Harizi, who visited Kurdistan in 1128. Another was Benjamin of Tudela who came in 1170. The poet of Yemenite Jewry, Rabbi Zachariah el-Tzahari *("Baal Sefer Hamusar")*, arrived there from his native San'a in the 16th century. In the 19th century Rabbi David Dawit Hillel arrived and recorded impressions.

From time to time, emissaries arrived from Eretz Yisrael for the purpose of collecting contributions for the maintenance of *yeshivot* and charitable institutions there. They also sought to ascertain whether the Kurdish Jews were indeed the descendants of the ten tribes who had been exiled by the King of Assyria.

Educational Institutions

As in other lands of the East, the Jews of Kurdistan established *kutabim* and *Talmudai Torah* for the instruction of their children. The pupils learned from the *Mullah*, who instructed them in recitation, since writing was not taught. The girls learned only the recitation of the *"Shma"*. But in 1906 a new period began in the educational history of these Jews. *Hevrat Kol Yisrael* began to establish educational institutions in the East and North Africa. This organization opened schools in Mosul and Kirkuk. The Kurdish Jews began to receive advanced educaton which greatly raised their standards.

Kurdish Jews engage in Agriculture and Crafts

The Kurdish Jews were distinguished from all other Deaspora Jews who were involved primarily in commerce and finance, in that they also engaged in agriculture and worked their lands with the aid of Moslem partners. Some also practised various crafts and trades. Doctors, pharmacists and healers appeared, the latter's cures being based on folk remedies.

The main crafts which they practised were tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, tanning, weaving, silver and goldsmithery.

Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael

The Kurdish Jews made their way to Eretz Yisrael centuries ago. But in the 16th century, they began to arrive in increasing numbers. The first of these *olim* settled in Safed. In the 18th and 19th centuries there were additional waves of *aliyah.* The majority of these *olim* settled in Safed, Jerusalem and Tiberias.

In the decade of the 'thirties of this century, entire villages in Kurdistan emptied of their Jews after wholesale *aliyah* to Israel.

With the announcement by the Iraqi government that the Jews would be allowed to leave the country upon renouncing their Iraqi citizenship, Kurdish Jewry in toto joined the ranks of those who emigrated to Israel in Operation Ezra and Nehemia in 1950.

Most of Kurdish Jewry had engaged in manual labour. Many had been builders and stonecutters, and with the creation of Israel many *olim* settled on the land and started *moshavim.*

Preservaton of Ancient Traditions

The younger generation which grew up in Israel were sensitive to the danger that they might become cut off from the tradition and culture of their forefathers. They have attained an education and a generation of learned people has emerged which is finding its place in all walks of national life. Haviv Shimoni, a former *Knesset* member showed an awareness of the problem of cultural identity among all the Eastern ethnic groups in the state. He raised the question of the encouragement of Eastern Jewish cultural values in the *Knesset,* and was later instrumental in the establishment of the Center for the Integration of the Eastern Jewish Heritage in the Ministry of Education. He published the collections *"Hitchadshut"* in which he describes the drive to preserve the Kurdish Jewish legacy. "Hitchadshut" seeks the preservation of the heritage, not only of the Kurdish community, but of the various Jewish communities.

The Jews of Kurdistan usually lived in the mountainous regions and were accustomed to going out with their families in the spring to the mountains for two days to one week, to enjoy the beauties of nature. On these days of recreation they would dress up in colourful festive clothes and adorn themselves with jewelry to demonstrate their wealth and standing. The celebrations included dance and song expressing love and longing for

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nature. They would put up tents and hold feasts; these festivities are known as *"Saharana"*.

The organization of Kurdish Jews in Israel, under the leadership of Haviv Shimoni, has renewed the *"Saharana"* celebrations. And every year during the week of *Succot,* the Kurdish Jews gather in the *moshavim* of Yardena and Beit Yosef in the Beit Shean Valley in order to celebrate the *"Saharana"*, just as in the days of yore in Kurdistan.

The Jews of Syria and Lebanon

The Jews in the Period of French Rule

Until the end of World War I, Syria and Lebanon constituted one political entity under Ottoman rule. However, following the acts of violence by the Druse population against the Christians in Lebanon in 1860, the French Government took the Christians under its protection.In response to French pressure, the Ottoman authorities agreed to grant partial autonomy to the Lebanon mountain area which is inhabited mainly by Maronite Christians. At the end of the war, Britain and France came to an agreement for dividing up the countries of the Middle East between them. Eretz Yisrael, Transjordan and Iraq were handed over to British rule, Lebanon to French rule. The fate of Syria was undecided. France claimed Syria while Britain resolved to establish an Arab kingdom which would come under its protection.

Therefore, when the British army entered Damascus in 1918, it brought in Feisal and his forces in the hope of assuring their control of Syria. They encouraged the Syrians to crown Feisal as their king and establish an independent Syrian state under his rule with the aid of Britain. In March 1920 Feisal was crowned King of Syria, but the period of his monarchy lasted no longer than a few months; in July 1920 the French conquered Damascus and the remaining areas of Syria. Feisal was deposed and forced to flee. The French Government knew that the nationalists in Syria would not accept French rule without opposition, and so it expanded Lebanon's borders and created the state of "Greater Lebanon". But throughout the period of French mandatory rule in these two countries, from 1918 until 1945,the year when France was compelled to grant both Lebanon and Syria their independence, the Syrian nationalists never ceased their demands for the annexation of Lebanon (or at least of the regions populated by Moslems in the northern Tripoli district and the southern Sidon district) to Syria. However, these demands only strengthened the resolve of all the Lebanese Christian factions and their new allies, the Shi'ite Moslems, to resist any sort of unification with Syria. They vigorously insisted upon the preservation of Lebanese political independence.

The political changes in the two states north of Eretz Yisrael had an effect upon their Jewish populations. As the national ferment intensified in

Syria and Lebanon, the Jews became increasingly the victims of assault. Particularly severe was the condition of the Jews in Syria.

During the French mandatory period the Jews of the Levant had already found themselves living a precarious life. In Syria and Lebanon they engaged primarily in commerce and only a few occupied government positions. As the incitement against them grew the sources of their income dwindled. This was a direct result of the boycott by Arab neighbours, Christian and Moslem, of Jewish businesses.

In October 1925, following the outbreak of the Druse revolt against the French Government, the rebels fell upon the Jewish quarters of Damascus. A number of Jews were killed and wounded, and homes and businesses were looted. By kidnapping a handful of the city's Jews, the Druse also succeeded in extorting ransoms from the Jewish community.

From 1935 onwards, the situation of the Jews became critical. Emissaries of the Mufti of Jerusalem arrived in Syria and engaged in unbridled incitement against them. As a result in 1938, the Jews of Damascus were assaulted by youths brandishing knives and some of them were killed. As the situation of the *yishuv* in Eretz Yisrael deteriorated, so did that of the Jews of Syria. Sporadic attacks were instigated against the Jewish quarter, and in June 1945 the principal of a Damascus Jewish school was murdered.

Syrian Jewry — Scapegoats

With the U.N. decision in favour of the partition of Eretz Yisrael and the establishment of a Jewish state, the Jews of Syria became a prey in the hands of their neighbours. Upon publication of the U.N. resolution, anti-Zionist demonstrations broke out in Damascus, and pamphlets calling for a boycott of Syrian Jewish business were circulated by nationalist organizations. At first the subversives concentrated their attacks against individuals, but soon the criminal activities became official policy of the Syrian Government. In December 1947, frenzied mobs fell upon the Jewish section of Aleppo in northern Syria, set fire to most of the synagogues, broke into sixty shops, and burned down 150 homes after looting them. In February 1948, when there was outright revolt against the Jewish settlements in Eretz Yisrael, terrorist activities against the Jews of Syria increased. Syrian terrorists occasionally tossed bombs into the Jewish quarters in Damascus. Dozens of Jews were wounded and killed. The authorities went as far as to demand that the community leaders make a declaration condemning Zionism, and stating that they enjoy equal rights as citizens of the state.

Upon the attainment of Syrian independence in 1945, the authorities issued restrictions against the Jews. They were officially denied the right

to leave the country and their movements within Syria were limited even within the cities of their residence. All Jews were required to carry an identity paper indicating their religion ("members of the Mosaic religion"); whereas other citizens, Moslem or otherwise, were not required to indicate religious affiliation. Jews were forbidden to move beyond a four kilometer radius from municipal areas. In the city of Kamishli, near the Turkish border in northern Syria, the Jews were subject to a curfew for a number of years, permitting them to leave their homes for only a few hours daily in order to buy food. Jews were arrested summarily on the pretext of violating these regularions and were put on trial. As a result of these policies the Jews gradually lost the sources of their livelihood. But thanks to their brethren in the United States and Latin America, who continue to send them financial aid, they have been saved from starvation. However, the government has imposed a tax on this financial aid, with the argument that these citizens must be taxed in order to be allowed to live.

As their situation deteriorated, the Jews began to look for ways to leave the country. Many succeeded in escaping with the help of Arabs in return for large sums of money for the service of smuggling them across the border. Many found their way to Israel, but the majority found refuge in Lebanon.

This flight from Syria greatly reduced the size of the community. At times the larger cities mainly Damascus and Aleppo had been big Jewish centers. Though their situation had never been good, it was, superior to that of their Arab neighbours. In 1932 there were about 26,000 Jews in Syria, but this number diminished from year to year. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the second president of Israel, visited Syria in 1937 and wrote in his book *Nidchai Yisrael* (pg. 108), that at that time there were no more than 6,000 Jews in Damascus and close to 7,000 in Aleppo. In all of Lebanon and Syria at the time there were about 17,000 Jews.

A Life of Hell after the Six-Day War

The defeat of the Syrian army in the 1967 Six-Day War led to even greater persecution of the Jewish population. They now numbered about 4,300 persons: 3,000 in Damascus, 1,000 in Aleppo and the remaining 250-300 in Kamishli. In one Jewish neighbourhood in Damascus, the authorities placed Palestinian refugees and members of Palestinian terrorist organizations in the same apartment houses where Jews lived, and where the lavatories and the kitchens were shared. The Palestinians maltreat, beat and slander them. The Jewish children hear daily threats of the impending murder of their parents.

Most fearful is the situation of young Jewish girls. They dare not leave

their homes after dark for fear of being assaulted and raped by Arab neighbours. Acts of rape have become everyday occurrences and complaint to the police is liable to have dire consequences. There have even been instances of young girls falling victim to the police themselves. The latter assaulted the girls and evicted them from the station with verbal abuse.

A report issued in the summer of 1973 by the Committee for the Rescue of Jews in Arab Countries (whose headguarters are in the United Stated under the chairmanship of the American general, Lucius Clay), states that eight Jews were thrown into prison in Syria on the charge of attempting to leave the country illegally. Five women and one child were among the detained. Only after a hue and cry was raised in the free world did the authorities release the women and the child; first, however, they were beaten. These women are now under house arrest until they stand trial. One of the women was pregnant during her stay in prison and was feeling ill; the prison authorities refused her request for medical help and would not allow a doctor to examine her. Two of the male prisoners, who had been cruelly tortured, were transferred to a military hospital when the prison authorities feared they might die.

Anti-Jewish Decrees

The Syrian Government set up a committee to lay down guidelines for the treatment of Jews. On this committee are representatives of the intelligence service, the justice department, the treasury department, and the Palestinian organizations in Syria.

Because Syria wishes to conceal its abuse of the Jews from the protest movement which is gaining momentum throughout the free world, she has avoided legislating prejudicial laws which would reflect an official policy. But the Syrians act in accordance with instructions issued by the committee.

The restriction on leaving the country applies not only to Syrian Jews but also to those of foreign nationality, since every Jew is considered an enemy whose movements should be restricred. Foreign nationals have been conferring with their diplomatic representatives in Syria.

It is forbidden for Jews to travel freely from one city in Syria to another, and when one wants to go from Damascus to Aleppo, for example, he must formally request permission which is generally refused.

In compliance with the instructions of the committee, Jews were dismissed from their positions in government offices, in public economic enterprises and in banks.

It is forbidden for tourists to visit the Jewish ghetto in Damascus, or to

converse with the Jews of Aleppo. The Moslem residents were ordered not to have any commercial dealings with Jews.

Only Jewish professionals, such as doctors and pharmacists, have been authorized to continue in their practices, but they may only tend to Jewish patients.

When a Jew dies, his property comes under the jurisdiction of the committee for Jewish affairs, and members of his family are only eligible to retain the property in exchange for rental payments.

A Jew is not allowed to keep a telephone in his home, or have a driver's licence. Those already in possession of a valid licence may not have it renewed upon expiry.

The ancient cemetery in Damascus was destroyed and a certain portion of it was expropriated to pave a road leading to the airport. The many requests by the heads of the Jewish community for an alternative plot of land for their cemetery have found no response from the authorities. In these circumstances, the Jews are compelled to bury their dead atop the existing graves. They cover the old tombstomes with earth and bury the recently deceased on top.

Today, the Damascus Jewish community has two primary schools while in Aleppo the community has one. A number of schools were closed by the authorities and expropriated. In these three schools Moslems appointed by the Syrian security service serve as directors.

The synagogues in the ghetto of Damascus and in the Jewish quarter of Aleppo are also under the surveillance of the Syrian security authorities, since the Jews have been accused of using the premises for gatherings aimed at political subversion and not just for religious services.

A sixteen-year-old Damascene of Jewish descent, Shimon Habas, who is critically ill and faces imminent death, has not been given permission to be flown out of the country to undergo open-heart surgery. The Canadian Jewish community formally appealed to the Government of Syria to allow the youth to travel to Canada; they even agreed to pay $5,000 as a pledge that the boy would be returned to Syria after the operation. But the request was rejected by the Syrian authorities.

Murder and Rape

It appears that the Syrian "second office" (security service) became envious of the murders committed by the Iraqi security services. On one of the last days of March 1973, therefore, three men from the "second office" burst into the home of a Jewish businessman, Zaki Kasab. Upon discovering that he was not at home, they questioned his wife regarding

his whereabouts, for they wanted to talk with him urgently. She explained that he was at her father's apartment, preparing invitations for her brother's wedding. The three men immediately rushed to the father's apartment, and only a few minutes after they forced their way into the premises, fire from an automatic weapon was heard. Zaki Kasab's wife had felt an uneasiness about the conversation with the three men, and she quickly hurried to her father's home where she was confronted with her husband's body, lying in the stairway, covered in blood. She caught a glimpse of the three men making their get-away in the car in which they had arrived.

The murder of the businessman aroused the Jewish community of the city. Jewish youths plucked up courage and demanded that the police arrest the murderers. But a police officer harshly responded that the "case was closed for want of sufficient evidence", and that they had better let things be.

Perhaps the peak of police brutality came to the fore when one day while patrolling the Jewish quarter, the police stopped a young Jewish woman in order, supposedly, to "ask her a number of questions", tried to drag her off with them, and when she resisted took her into an abandoned house, raped her and disappeared. The victim's father lodged a complaint with the police. The inspector asked the father to bring his daughter in for examination in order to help uncover the identity of the attackers. The father did so and, to his astonishment, was himself witness to an attempt by the police officer to rape the girl before his own eyes. He tried desperately to intervene, but was quickly pushed aside by other policemen and arrested.

Such acts aroused the Jewish community to recognize that they could no longer remain passive victims of the malicious whims of the authorities and the mob. The news of an ever-growing protest movement in several countries of the free world publicly denouncing the acts of the Syrian Government also encouraged them to initiate a series of protest activities themselves to prove to the authorities that they would no longer silently accept violent acts against them. The Syrian Government tried to deny the reports of persecution of the Jews. In August 1973, the security services wished to bring five members of the Damascus Jewish community council to the television studio in order to make them declare in a telecast for foreign viewers that the Jews were enjoying equal rights as citizens of Syria and that all the reports of persecutions were completely false. The council leaders had been forced in the past to appear before foreign journalists visiting Damascus and make declarations approved by the Syrian security authorities. This time, however, a group of Jewish girls banded together, burst into the offices of the Jewish council, and warned the members in the presence of security service men not to appear on the

television with false information regarding the condition of the Jewish community as required by the Syrian authorities. As the girls shouted their warnings, the police appeared and tried to lead the council members off by force. But the Jewish community had been forewarned to the site and they warned the police that they would not allow the council members to go to the television studios. The police realized that the community might react with force and the security men therefore departed empty-handed and the program was cancelled.

The Jews of Aleppo also reacted vigorously to maltreatment by the authorities. In the summer of 1973, the authorities detained a number of Jews whose sons had escaped from Syria. The Aleppo community leaders made protest speeches against the authorities and despatched a delegation demanding the release of the parents. The governor received the delegation, heard what they had to say and promised to discuss their demand. Though the parents were not released, the strong stand by the Jewish community induced the authorities to review their behaviour towards the community. For any act against them today is reported abroad, and the Committee for the Rescue of Syrian Jewry hastens to publish news regarding any maltreatment of the Jews. The Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York, a well-to-do community, plays an important role in directing the protest movement against the Syrian Government. The community leaders have enlisted the aid of statesmen, members of Congress and of the Senate, as well as others in the United States towards attaining the release of Syrian Jewry.

Part 1

The Jewish Community of Damascus

The Jewish community of Damascus is the most ancient in the world. It has been in continuous existence for the past three thousand years. Damascus has been linked to Jewish history at all times and is mentioned in the days of Abraham: later King David wrested it from the Arameans. After the death of King David, Damascus was recaptured from Israel, but Jeroboam Ben Joash successfully recovered it for the Jewish Kingdom of Israel.

In Arabic, Damascus is called E-Sham, whereas the Turks called the city Sham-Sharif, that is "Damascus the Holy". Numerous armies and peoples have conquered the city and brought destruction upon it. Damascus goes under many descriptive names in Arabic such as "The City of Paradise" and "The City of Many Pillars". It nestles in the midst of mountains, valleys, plains and streams. Its rich lands yield vast produce, and its fields and gardens are cultivated with fruits of all varieties. Damascus is encircled by a wall and appears to be immersed in a sea of gardens and orchards. Seven rivers water the city's agricultural areas, of which the most famous are the Barrada and the Figah which flow right through the city itself. Jewish tradition associates these two rivers with the Amana and Parpar of the Bible, which were said to pass by Damascus.

As stated, there has been a Jewish community in Damascus from ancient times. Until very recently, there was a Torah scroll in one of its synagogues dating back a thousand years. In the same synagogue there is a handwritten copy of the Book of Prophets, with colourful illustrations of the Temple, the walls of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the Temple altar and gilded utensils used for religious ritual.

Over the years, the Jewish population spread into surrounding settlements. In the village of Juber which lies adjacent to Damascus, there is a very old synagogue which, according to tradition, was built in the days of Elisha the prophet who was a disciple of Elijah. In this synagogue there is a stone upon which Elisha is believed to have anointed Hazal as king over Aram. To the right of the synagogue is a small cave which is also associated with one of the Jewish prophets. Elijah is said to have hidden there when he was commanded by the Lord to "Go back to the wilderness of Damascus" (Kings I, 19).

The synagogue of Juber was held sacred by both the Jews and the Kara-

'ites. Jews and Kara'ites alike would come from afar to prostrate themselves on the graves of the holy in Damascus, and then follow this with prayer in this synagogue.

For 26 years, between 1594-1620, Rabbi Haim Vital, a pupil of Isaac Luria, lived in Damascus and immersed himself in *Kabbala.* He saw himself as fulfilling a messianic mission and even called himself Messiah Ben Joseph. Many legends were woven around him and his period of residence in Damascus. It is told, for instance, how the Pasha of Jerusalem heard about Rabbi Haim Vital, how he was known among the Jews as a man of God able to perform all sorts of miracles and wonders. And the Pasha commanded him to open up the channel of the Gihon spring in Jerusalem which had been blocked up since the time of King Hezekiah. If he should fail, he was to be put to death. And indeed Rabbi Haim Vital failed to meet the test and was compelled to flee for his life; this he did by means of one wondrous leap which landed him in Damascus and to safety. He was buried in Damascus after his death.

The poet, Rabbi Yisrael Najara, who wrote the book *Zemirot Yisrael,* often visited Damascus and was eventually interred there. His songs and laments were familiar to the Jews of Damascus and they recited them in times of joy and sadness. Rabbi Najara tells how he set out in 1580 in the company of other rabbis from Eretz Yisrael for the villages in the surrounding area of Damascus, with the purpose of collecting money for the poor of Eretz Yisrael.

According to Mr. Wutchestein, the Prussian consul in Damascus over one hundred years ago, the synagogue in Juber was also sacred to the Moslem inhabitants. He states further that the Jews of Damascus and its surroundings would come to the synagogue every Friday evening with their wives and children and pass the night there. They believed that this would lengthen their lives. The Moslem residents of the village supposedly treated the Jewish pilgrims with great courtesy for, according to their own tradition, they themselves were none other than Jews who had adopted the religion of Islam.

Until the Moslem Arab conquest of Syria, the native population of the country, then mostly Christians, spoke a number of languages mainly Greek and Aramaic. The population of Syria in general, and of Damascus in particular, had always been divided along lines of race, religion, sect, etc. From an ethnic standpoint, the Syria population has never been an integrated national entity. But the conquest by Moslem bedouins emerging out of the Arabian Desert endowed the population with one language and one religion. The Arab armies defeated the Byzantine army with relative ease because the latter was in a state of advanced degeneration at the time and riddled with corruption.

The Jews of Syria were among the few groups in the country which

succeeded in preserving their culture and religion, and were not engulfed by the victorious Arab culture during the 1300 years of its dominion. Over the years, however, the Jews did adopt Arabic as their language and learned the Arabic way of life and its customs. But a few intellectuals, as well as the rabbis, cantors and other religious officials, continued to learn and recite the holy tongue, Hebrew. They acquired knowledge of the language from reading the Bible and strove to impart this knowledge to their children. In fact, however, the majority learned the prayers and songs for the festivals by rote, and understood little of their content and meaning.

The Jews, like the Christians of Damascus, lived in a special ghetto. The Jewish ghetto is known by the name *Harat el-Yahud* (The Jewish Neighborhood); both rich and poor have lived side by side within its precincts.

Until the arrival of the Spanish exiles, the Jewish community of Damascus were mainly natives of the city, joined by those who had made their way there from Eretz Yisrael and other lands. These Jews are known as *mistarbim,* that is, speakers of Arabic. With the Spanish expulsion, many exiles found their way to Damascus and established a community which grew to include 1,500 families. But the Spanish exiles did not live in harmony with the Jews of the older community, whose ideas, customs and tradition were different from their own.

Unlike the Jews of Babylonia, the Jewish community of Damascus did not play a central role in the spiritual life of the Jewish people, and did not give birth to *geonim* and rabbis of note. Most of the rabbis who have served in Damascus in recent generations have come from without. Nevertheless, the 18th century is considered a period of fruitfulness for this community with many distinguished figures who filled vital roles in the affairs of state.

The most celebrated families in the 18th and 19th centuries were the Farhi family, the Angil family (known in the Damascus community as the Shem'aya family), the Stambuli, Lizbona, Pijoto, Laniado and Adas families. The oldest of these families is the Farhi family which originated in the Arab lands and is unrelated to the community of Spain. At the beginning of the 19th century, one member of the family, Rabbi Raphael Shehade (Saul) Farhi, was the Minister of Finance in Damascus. His brother, Rabbi Haim Farhi, served as the finarce minister of the Pasha in Acre. Thus, the financial affairs of most of the cities of Syria and Eretz Yisrael at that time were concentrated in the hands of one Jewish family. Rabbi Haim fell victim to the envy of the Governor of Acre, Ahmad Jezar, who was known as "the cruel governor". Jezar gained control of the government in Acre by force, and his first act was to attack the honour of the finance minister by plucking out his right eye and cutting off his nose. Rabbi Farhi had the opportunity to escape, but fearing for the

fate of the other Jews he chose to remain in his house. He was sentenced to death by the governor and hung in 1818. After his execution, his property was seized for the state treasury. When his brothers in Damascus, Raphael and Moshe, heard what the ruthless governor had done to their brother, they appealed to influential Jews in Istanbul to persuade the Turkish regime to avenge his death. And in fact, the Jewish banker in Istanbul, Jalibi Bikor Carmona, one of the city's notables, succeeded in obtaining a favourable religious ruling from Sheikh El-Islam; and the two brothers turned to the governors of Damascus, Aleppo, and to two more pashas, and after laying out sums to hire armies, set out to do battle with the governor of Acre. But despite their substantial forces, they were not able to overpower him and one other brother of the Farhi clan, Rabbi Shlomo, was also executed by the Pasha. The two remaining brothers, realizing that they would not succeed returned to Damascus with their forces.

Members of the Shemaya Angil, Stambuli and Lizbona families also played major roles in the life of the community and in government affairs in Damascus. The Shemaya Angil family did much for the benefit, not only of their brethren in Damascus, but also of Jews everywhere in Syria and Eretz Yisrael. They supported their brothers in times of trouble. When the lives and property of the Damascus Jews were threatened during the rioting and massacres between the Christian, Druse and Moslem communities in the 19th century, the Shemaya Angil family used their influence to save them.

Blood Libels

In 1840, the Jewish community of Damascus was in danger of spiritual destruction and physical annihilation. The Christians waged a campaign of incitement against them alleging that they had murdered a monk by the name of Thomas, to use his blood for ritual purposes.

At the time, Syria was under the rule of the Egyptian Muhammad Ali (of Albanian extraction), who enjoyed the full support of the French in his war against the regime in Istanbul. Meanwhile, the British and Austrian governments supported the Turks for fear that victory for Muhammad Ali, and conquest of the Arab countries by his armies would assure a firm grip by France on the Near East. The Christians in Syria, who for generations had suffered humiliation and suppression under Turkish regimes, now took heart and joined the ranks of Muhammad Ali. But they were not able to harm the Moslems who lagged behind them in both economic standing and education; and so they turned their wrath, instead, against the Jews, who were considered to be an influential minority in governmental institutions and economic life.

The Christian perpetrators of the blood allegation appealed to the Governor of Damascus, Sharif Pasha (Muhammad Ali's representative there), and demanded that he punish the Jews of Damascus with the full force of the law since, as they said, the monk had been murdered during a visit to the Jewish quarter. The leaders of the Jewish community, headed by Rabbi Yaacov Antebi, were thrown into prison and cruelly tortured. The authorities even arrested many young schoolchildren and tortured them too, in order that they might expiate the sins of their parents. One of the community leaders, Moshe Abulafia, was unable to withstand the tortures; he converted to Islam and even joined ranks with the slanderers in order to save his life. The French consul in Damascus played a central role in this affair, for he tried to obscure the truth and prevent the accusers being revealed for what they really were.

Reports of the blood libel aroused the Jews of Europe to come to the rescue of their cousins in Damascus. In the forefront of the rescue efforts stood Adolphe Crémieux (a leading Jew of France), and Sir Moses Montefiore of England. They demanded that their respective governments intervene with the government of Muhammad Ali to see that justice was done and the innocent parties released. Sir Montefiore and his secretary, Dr. Levy, went to Egypt and obtained an order from the Egyptian ruler to his ministers in Damascus for the release of the innocent Jewish victims of the blood libel. As a result, the Jews were released and the governor, Sharif Pasha, who had so ruthlessly tortured them, was himself sentenced to death and executed.

But the European Jewish leaders were not satisfied with this victory realizing that the blood libel was not an isolated incident, and that the Christians in Syria would seek to take revenge against the Jews. In the meantime, however, Syria fell once again into the hands of the Turkish Sultan and his forces, and the Jewish leaders knew that they would find an attentive ear in the person of the Sultan of the ruling house of Istanbul. Sir Monteriore departed for Turkey and obtained a royal order from the Sultan Abdulmecid promising to protect the Jews in the event of any future blood libels.

Economic Conditions

In the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th (up until 1914), there began a major decline in the spiritual and economic life of Syrian Jewry and in particular of the Jews of Damascus. Despite the special position of Damascus, which lies at an important juncture of routes through the countries of the Near East, as well as directly on the path of pilgrims going to the holy Moslem cities of Mecca and Medina, the city had not succeeded in making any economic progress.

Its Moslem residents were culturally backward and this affected the rest of the population, Jews and Christians, who deteriorated to similar wretched conditions as those of their Moslem neighbours. With the arrival of thousands of exiles from Spain in the late 15th century and large groups of immigrants from Italy, it seemed that these Jews, who were of a higher educational level, would have a beneficial influence on the community materially and spiritually. But it wasn't long before these immigrants were themselves absorbed into the backward surroundings, had adopted the local language and patterns of living and customs, and had totally lost their former identity. They became outwardly much like the native residents, Jewish, Christian and Moslem. Even the Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe were fully assimilated within the local Jewish community: they prayed in the Sephardi style, ceased speaking Yiddish and adopted Arabic as their tongue.

In the early 20th century there were 400,000. inhabitants in Damascus, most of them Sunni Moslems. There were 30,000 Christians and 10,000 Jews. The Kara'ite community in Damascus, which had been in existence for many generations, had disappeared completely and their synagogue was sold to the Christians who converted it into a church.

Despite the successful adaptation of the minorities to the ways of the Moslems, the Jews and Christians continued to live on in special ghetto areas, and thus remained separated from the other residents of the city. The streets of these ghettos were cleaner than those of the Moslems, but the Jewish residential areas suffered from a greater degree of neglect than the Christian neighbourhoods. However, within the Jewish ghetto, which appeared outwardly neglected, the rich built magnificent and luxurious mansions tiled with ivory and full of costly objects. Around the courtyards fruit trees were planted and the halls of these houses were high and spacious. But the alleyways outside were narrow and filled with garbage and refuse. Within the Jewish ghetto there were synagogues, schools, *Talmudei Torah,* community institutions, etc.. The Jews were renowned for their religious zeal and the entire community was observant. It assiduously maintained *yeshivot* where scholars, young and old, as well as religious legal arbiters could devote themselves to study.

A hundred years ago, most Damascene Jews engaged in commerce and crafts, such as, the working of copper, silver, gold, and wood; weaving; dyeing and spinning of silk. The factory owners, were generally, either Christians or Moslems, while the workers were Jews. Women also worked at these crafts. The Jewish workmen gained a reputation in all the lands of the Near East, and objects like copper candelabras, trays and stands are the handiwork of such artisans. These lovely works of art adorned the homes of the middle and upper classes in all the countries of the region. The utensils were often inscribed with verses from the sacred books of

Islam and Judaism, specially the Koran and the *Torah.* The weaving industry also thrived in those days, and the mills engaged in the production of materials for cloaks, tablecloths and carpets.

The Christian and Moslem owners of the dye-works, and the dyers themselves, held an eminent status in Damascus, for they had brought their trade to a high level. These craftsmen aimed at the highest standards of workmanship, were well trained in their occupation, and were rewarded, consequently, with high wages. The Jews also engaged in the spinning of silk, but this did not bring in a good income.

Despite the proximity of Syria to Europe, the country was characterized by religious fanaticism and social backwardness; and this clearly affected the Jews. The bulk of the community remained faithful to their religion and paid homage to their "sages" (rabbis). But this did not assist in the creation of communal or educational institutions. The wealthier elements did not respond to the appeals of the religious leaders for the requisite sums to maintain the communal institutions and rescue the younger generation from ignorance. Thus, thousands of boys and girls grew up ignorant of *Torah* and Jewish culture, whereas their neighbours, the Christians, established exemplary institutions and dedicated themselves, in the main, to the education of their youth. In the latter part of the 19th century, most of the well-to-do Jewish families began sending their children to the Christian missionary schools, where they became estranged from Jewish tradition.

In these circamstances, the inauguration of the Alliance (Alliance Israelite Universelle) schools in Damascus came as a welcome ray of light. The school for boys opened in 1880 and the girls' school in 1883. In addition to the regular program of studies, which was conducted in French the pupils received religious instruction and learned Hebrew.

The Alliance schools rescued the young generation from complete assimilation, but did not endow them with sufficient knowledge and values of Judaism. Their education, which was more French than Jewish, enabled them to fortify themselves socially and spiritually, but these youth eventually went to pasture in the fields of strangers.

In 1911, the first Hebrew school opened in Damascus. Its director was the well-known writer from Jerusalem, Rabbi Avraham Elmaleh, and one of the school's teachers was the writer from Hebron, Yitzhak Sh'ammi. A kindergarten was set up next to the school. The two institutions took in about five hundred girls and boys. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the pupils were educated in a national spirit as in the Hebrew schools of Eretz Yisrael.

These pupils, who grew up in a Jewish atmosphere, were in due course to

become an important factor in the Damascus community and to do much to change local conditions.

Apart from these schools, there were also *"kutabim"* (heders) in the Jewish street of Damascus. There, the children learned mainly Torah and prayer and spoke a stammering Hebrew. These *Talmudei Torah* were housed in damp and dimly-lit rooms which were badly maintained. Those pupils of the *"kutabim"* who were not particularly successful in learning were sent later to Christian schools to continue their studies. It is obvious that whatever Judaism was absorbed in these *heders* was not adequate for cushioning them from the influences of the Christian surroundings, and they too became estranged from Jewish ways upon reaching adulthood.

The Damascus Jewish community had gained formal recognition from the Turkish authorities. The chief rabbi was appointed by order of the sultan in Istanbul. The community was directed by a council of nine members who were elected to their posts once every two years by the community. In addition to the council, there was also a Beth Din (religious court) which dealt with Jewiah matrimonial affairs. The court would convene twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, to deal with divorce cases or make peace between quarrelling husbands and wives.

The source of the community's funds was the "appraisal". The members of the community were appraised and then required to pay tax accordingly. Every trade and social class established its own appraisal committee which determined the amount to be paid by each individual. Some were exempt from the payment of tax: rabbis, Torah scholars, religious and community officials, officials of the rabbinate, and labourers or craftsmen who could prove that they were unable to pay.

Community members who refused to pay their tax as stipulated by the committee were expelled from the community. As further punishment their sons would not receive Brit Milah, their dead would not be buried and their children could not be married. The Beth Din would also refuse to handle their matrimonial problems.

The synagogues too served as important sources of income for the community. Not only did the community synagogues and study houses come under the supervision of the community authorities but also private synagogues and study houses. Every synagogue was obligated to pay a fee to the community fund as determined by the council.

As in all Jewish communities, the tax collected for ritual slaughter constituted the primary source of income. The rabbis were empowered by a special licence from Istanbul to collect the tax by the most appropriate means.

In 1882, the community established an association to offer medical aid to

underprivileged members. At first the service was financed by monthly payments from the individual members; however, these were insufficient for paying the salary of the doctor and buying medicines. Several years before the outbreak of the First World War, a Jewish philanthropist from London donated a large sum which enabled the community to develop their medical institutions. Thereafter, they were able to offer medical assistance to all the needy of the community who previously could only turn to the Christian medical organizations.

A doctor of *"Bikur Holim"* would attend to the ill twice weekly, two hours on each occasion. He would also make free house calls to the poor and sick in accordance with a note received from the tax collector of the association.

In 1886 another association came into being, *"Ozer Dalim"*, whose purpose was to give aid to the very poor. Every week the association distributed bread and small sums of money to the poor, and gave special attention to the beggars to ensure that they too received full assistance; all this on the condition that they ceased to rove about in the streets. The money for the operation of *"Ozer Dalim"* also came from contributions and financial support.

The difficult material conditions in Damascus at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century caused the emigration of large numbers to the Americas. The Jews, like many others, were swept along in the stream to the lands across the sea where they hoped to better themselves. Particularly numerous among these migrants were young people who had completed their studies and were unable to find suitable work.These emigrants established new communities in the main cities in England, the United States and Latin America; and those who were successful made sure to provide regular financial support for their parents. Others brought their parents over after a while and supported them until they too were able to establish themselves. Many settled in Eretz Yisrael and set up new neighbourhoods in the cities, particularly in Jerusalem.

The Damascus Community and Jewish Exiles from Eretz Yisrael

Despite their own difficult position and the decline of their material and spiritual life, the community leaders made personal sacrifices to rescue the leaders of the *yishuv* in Eretz Yisrael during the First World War who were expelled by the Turks and exiled to Damascus. Jamal Pasha, who had been appointed Governor General of Syria, Lebanon and Eretz Yisrael, as well as to the post of supreme commander of the Fourth Corps of the Ottoman Army, viewed the Zionist leaders and the Arab national leaders as traitors to the Ottoman regime and as allies of the Western powers, particularly the French and the English; and he resolved to elimi-

nate them. At first he executed by hanging the leaders of the Arab national movement in Damascus and Beirut, and then began to vent his wrath on leaders of the *yishuv* in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the *moshavot.* Many leading figures, among them Meir Dizengoff, Albert Antebi, David Yellin, Avraham Shapira, Yaacov Chelouche, Joseph Rivlin and Avraham Elmaleh made the long trek from Eretz Yisrael to Damascus bound in handcuffs. They were thrown into jail to await trial before military courts.

Two members of the espionage organization Nili, who had spied on behalf of the British, were hanged at the end of 1917 in Damascus after being sentenced to death by a Turkish military court. The Damascus Jewish leaders, headed by the scholar from Jerusalem, Bashi Yaacov Danon, who had been appointed by order of the Sultan in Istanbul in 1910 to serve as rabbi in Damascus, made many efforts to ease the sufferings of the prisoners. Professor Joseph Rivlin told me that he sat in prison together with many Arab leaders who were later, after the war, to fill important positions in the Arab government under the leadership of King Feisal ben Hussein. In prison, friendly relations were cemented between the *yishuv* leaders and the heads of the national movement, which were later to constitute a basis for communication and talks between them. Prof. Rivlin points out that the Arab leaders felt esteem for the Jewish leaders and also recognized the right of the Jews to establish a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael.

One of the main figures in the rescue of many Jewish leaders from almost certain death was Mr. Gedalia Vilboshevitz who served during the war as engineer of the Municipality of Damascus. Mr. Vilboshevitz gained the trust of Jamal Pasha and he persuaded the tyrannical ruler to rescind the death sentences against the leaders of the *yishuv.* Though the majority returned safely home, some did not remain alive. Among the casualties was Albert Antebi who until the outbreak of the war was the director of Alliance Israélite Universelle in Jerusalem and had done much to strengthen the *yishuv.* He was exiled by Jamal Pasha to the plains of Anatolia, where he contracted typhus and died far from home.

National Awakening in the Damascus community

With the end of the war the community in Damascus experienced a national awakening. The hope that filled the hearts of the Zionist leaders that the day was not far off when a Jewish state would come into being within its historical borders motivated the Committee of Delegates for Eretz Yisrael to develop large-scale organizational and educational activity. They concentrated their efforts among the community in Damascus, a city which was then considered to be within the borders of Eretz Yisrael. A delegation of the best Hebrew teachers from Eretz Yisrael, headed by

Prof. Joseph Rivlin and the writer Yehuda Burla, arrived in Damascus and set up Hebrew schools for boys and girls, where thousands of Jewish youth were able to receive a Jewish education. Among the teachers was Bezalel Basrow who dedicated his time and effort to the establishment of the youth movements *"Hamaccabee"* and "Young Maccabee", which comprised pupils of the upper classes of these Hebrew schools.

The Hebrew teachers succeeded, in a very short time, in infusing the youth and even the adult community with a national spirit. Up to that time, the tendency had been towards assimilation and absorption within the surrounding society, because of the lack of a Jewish education. Even the pupils who studied in the Alliance schools were uninformed regarding the Zionist Movement.

The activities of the teachers and of the Zionist youth movements aroused the entire community. The leaders, who until then had been far from any attachment to the *yishuv,* now became faithful allies of the Hebrew teachers from whom they received guidance as to their relations with the Arab national leaders.

In March 1920, after Feisal had been crowned King of Syria, Prof. Rivlin joined the congratulatory delegation of Jewish community leaders to the new monarch. He wished to emphasize by this gesture the identity between the emissaries of the *yishuv* and the community leaders. At the time, friendly relations were taking shape between the Arab national leaders and the emissaries. Prof. Rivlin recounted to me the lengthy discussions he had with King Feisal and with these leaders concerning the historic role which the Jews and Arabs were destined to play in the development of the region. The national leaders regarded the establishment of a Jewish state and the return of the Jewish people to their homeland as an accepted fact. They even spoke of the creation of a confederation of the Arab states and the Jewish state-to-be.

But the bright days and the hope for Arab-Jewish interchange did not last long. Only months after the coronation of Feisal, the French forces marched on Damascus and conquered it and Feisal was forced to flee. The Arab resistance was weak and Syria and Lebanon were declared a French mandate. The activity of the council of delegates also declined steadily, after it was made clear that Syria would be under a French mandatory regime. In 1923, the Hebrew schools were closed down for lack of sufficient funds and lack of will on the part of the community's leaders to maintain the schools through their resources alone. And so the work of educating the youth in a Jewish and national spirit, which had continued for only five years, came to an end.

But despite the closure of the Hebrew schools in Damascus, educational activity among the Jewish youth went on. The Maccabee and the Young

Maccabee organizations continued their activities. And though there were not such talented and audacious educators as Bezalel Basrowi to stand at the helm, his pupils made strenuous efforts to carry on with the work.

The proximity of Damascus to Eretz Yisrael ensured that the influence of the Zionist Movement was felt among the young people of the city. Each year thousands of tourists from Eretz Yisrael would visit Syria and Lebanon, and their presence had a positive effect on the youth.

At the end of 1928, Yehuda Kopelowitz (known as Almog), an emissary of the Kibbutz Hameuchad Movement and a member of Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, set up the Hechalutz Movement, which was the first pioneering organization in the countries of the East. This movement aimed to cultivate the lands of the Horan, which had been purchased by Baron Edmond de Rothschild and were recorded in the holdings of the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PICA).

With the outbreak of violence in Eretz Yisrael between 1936-1939, the orderly activities of the Hechalutz Movement in the cities of Syria and Lebanon came to a halt for fear of friction with the Arab national leaders who had established terror organizations to serve as bases for their activities against the *yishuv* in Eretz Yisrael. However, the core of the pioneering youth in Damascus did not stop its activities and it began to prepare members for *aliyah* in order to join *kibbutzim.* A number of students from Eretz Yisrael, such as Eliahu Epstein (today Elat, former President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem), did much to further the development of the branch of *Hechalutz* in Beirut.

In 1933 Yitzhk Ben-Zvi, then head of the *Va'ad Leumi,* visited Damascus, and his presence there accelerated and stimulated the organization of the youth and their *aliyah.* These organizations carried on their activities underground lest the Arab authorities should harm their members. The work centered around clubs where boys and girls studied Hebrew in evening classes and heard lectures on the movement of national rebirth and development in Eretz Yisrael.

Dozens of youths from these organizations today fill positions in various sectors of Israeli society. Some of them spent many years in *kibbutzim,* raised families, and became active in all facets of our life.

The residents of the "ghetto" of Damascus continued to live during the French mandatory period just as they had in the period prior to World War I. They engaged in the same trades and maintained the same customs. However, the ghetto residents did not believe that they would long be able to continue as before and therefore many of those who did not join ranks with the proponents of *aliyah* set out for the United States and Latin America.

During the Second World War, when Syria and Lebanon were caught in the tangle between the Vichy and Free French regimes, the Jewish community of Damascus dwindled in size. Those years too were fruitful ones for the organizations which were active among the youth in the promotion of *aliyah.* In 1943, Mrs. Rahel Yanait Ben-Zvi, wife of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, arrived to encourage the *aliyah* of girls from Syria and Lebanon to Eretz Yisrael. It was not easy for Mrs. Ben-Zvi to persuade the parents to allow their daughters to go on *aliyah* and study in agricultural schools, since they preferred that the girls study in local schools and continue to live near them. Despite the difficulties, Mrs. Ben-Zvi was successful with the aid of *Hechalutz* activists in mobilizing dozens of young girls who came to Eretz Yisrael, learnt agriculture, and later served as the impetus for bringing their parents to the country.

No doubt the youth movements Maccabee and Young Maccabee (in the early years of the 'twenties), and *Hechalutz* (in the 'thirties and 'forties) played a key role in the disintegration of the Jewish community of Damascus, most of whose youth left for Eretz Yisrael and joined in the task of building the homeland.

Establishment of Israel Brings the End Nearer

The struggle to liberate Syria from the grip of the French continued throughout the years between the two world wars. From time to time the resistance of the Arab national leaders broke through the surface. But in 1936, the Arab National Movement of Syria came to an agreement with the Léon Blum Government in France that Syria's independence would be formally declared after three years. Also that the two countries, France and Syria, would form a military alliance to guard Syria's independence; but, in point of fact, the alliance was simply designed to preserve France's military status in Syria.

With the outbreak of World War II, however, all the cards were shuffled. Syria and Lebanon were drawn into the whirlwind of battling armies from both camps. With the defeat of France at the hands of the Germans and the institution of the Vichy regime, Syria became one of the bases from which the Germans were active in undermining the British positions in all the Arab countries. This spurred the British on to wrest Syria and Lebanon from the the Vichy Government. Together with the Free French of General de Gaulle, both Syria and Lebanon were conquered and a Free French Government was set up in the shadow of the British military conquest.

Later the British encouraged the Syrian nationalist leaders to revolt against French rule and promised to support their demands for the establishment of an Arab state in Syria. They hoped that by squeezing the

French out of the area, they would become the masters of Syria and Lebanon, and thus rule all the countries of the Near East. However, with the fulfilment of Arab aspirations and the declaration of independence for both Syria and Lebanon, this spelled the end of British influence. The Arab nationalists strove in all possible ways to expel the British from the Near East.

This alone was not enough for the Syrians, and they poured out their wrath not only against on the imperialist powers of France and Britain, but also against the minority groups, particularly the Jews. In 1945 riots broke out in Damascus and other cities; bombs were tossed into the Jewish quarters and a number of people were killed or wounded. During the United Nations debates on the formation of a Jewish state, the situation of the Jews of Syria, and particularly those of Damascus, worsened. The Damascene Jews were the worst off, since they sat virtually beneath the whip of a Syrian government still intoxicated with the victory of having expelled the French from Damascus. The "independent" government showed its fangs immediately after liberation from the yoke of French supervision by the imprisonment of dozens of Jews on the charge of "connections with the Zionists in Eretz Yisrael". In 1947, with the U.N. decision to partition Eretz Yisrael and create a Jewish state in one portion, the Jews of Syria were compelled by order of the government in Damascus to publicly declare their opposition to Zionism and to the establishment of a Jewish state. Many Jewish prisoners were viciously tortured by the intelligence agents who demanded that their victims admit their alleged connectons with the Zionist leaders. The Syrian Government also introduced a law calling for the death penalty for any Jew attempting to emigrate to Israel.

With the creation of the State of Israel, the Syrian Jewish community was doomed to extinction. Rioters burst into the Jewish quarters in the cities and mercilessly destroyed property. The rioters vented their rage particularly on the Alliance school which they hated for two reasons: firstly, because they were French schools; and secondly, because the Jews were being educated there. In 1947-1948, dozens of synagogues were destroyed in Damascus and Aleppo. Many Jews were murdered and young Jewish girls were kidnapped and raped.

This persecution gave impetus to the mass flight of Jews from Syria. But the watchful eye of the Syrian secret police did its best to hamper this movement — specially the exodus of the Jews of Damascus, who were confined under seige in their ghetto. Nonetheless, the Jews continued to flee the country. The large waves of emigration greatly reduced the community, so that by 1950 there remained only 5,000 Jews in all of Syria, 3,000 of whom resided in Damascus. Many Jews had only managed to escape with their lives through the payment of a ransom; for the so-called

"legal" exit permit cost them 800 dollars, in addition to 225 dollars in order to submit the required forms for granting the permit. Mobilization of the necessary funds was hampered by numerous difficulties, for the Jews were not allowed to sell their property. The required funds were largely obtained from relatives in America. The property of the departing Jews passed into the custody of the Syrian authorities and as the number of Syrian Jews steadily decreased, the exit tax increased in value.

Among those who were successful in leaving Syria, some found their way illegally to Israel; others found refuge in Lebanon or went to join existing communities in North and South America. Until recently, Syrian Jews who sought sanctuary in Lebanon were deemed aliens and were liable to deportation back to Syria. But due to the intervention of world Jewish organizations as well as of other non-partisan institutions, the government in Lebanon finally agreed to grant the refugees the right of permanent residence.

During the short-lived rule of Husni es-Zaim in Syria, which lasted only a few months after the military coup he masterminded in March 1949, it seemed as if there would be some improvement in the condition of the Jews of Damascus. He required their leaders to declare publicly that they were enjoying freedom and the protection of the authorities. But before they could do so, es-Zaim's adversaries assaulted the Jews murdering a number of them.

Husni es-Zaim despatched armed forces to protect them, but then went so far as to incriminate the Government of Israel as the guilty party in the murders. However, with the murder of Husni es-Zaim himself and the appearance of other rulers in the wake of repeated coups, the fate of the community was left to the whim of adventurers who considered them a convenient scapegoat.

Since then, the pitiful remnants of the community have been virtually imprisoned within the walls of the Damascus ghetto, and their survival depends upon the support of Jewish institutions such as the "Joint" (American Joint Distribution Committee) and others, and upon contributions from relatives in America. From time to time bits of information regarding the critical condition of the Damascus Jews are obtained from Jewish and Christian travelers of foreign nationality who visit the ghetto.

The impoverished community even now maintains a *Talmud Torah* where most of the ghetto's children study. Obviously, the Jewish institutions exist only by virtue of assistance from abroad. The Syrian authorities cannot accept the fact that studies in the *Talmud Torah* are carried on in Hebrew and they repeatedly demand the cessation of the instruction of Hebrew and insist upon prayer and religious studies in Arabic.

On the other hand, the Jews provide them with a convenient tool for the

condemnation of Israel. Time after time the leaders of the Jewish community are called upon to appear in the studios of Radio Damascus to make disparaging statements about Israel on the program "Hebrew Corner".

A special government law forbids Jews from serving in the army since they are considered enemy subjects. However, upon reaching military age, every male Jew must pay a sum of money in return for release from the obligation of military service.

As a consequence of the dwindling community, it is difficult for the women to find husbands. The young males have largely managed to escape from Syria, and thus the women have been left behind without spouses. Worse still, some girls were kidnapped by violent young Moslems, who forced them to adopt the Islamic faith and marry. The parents do not dare to object for fear of their own lives.

This is the fate of a community which has been in existence for some 3,000 years. Syrian Jews did not distinguish themselves, spiritually or materially, but some left their imprint on the intellectual and economic life of Syria at various times. I have mentioned the glorious period when the Parhi family filled important administrative and financial functions during the 19th century. In conclusion, it should be mentioned that a French Jew built the railway between Damascus and Aleppo on the eve of the First World War. The Syrian national bank was set up by Jews from Egypt. The creation of the first French newspaper in Syria after World War I, *L'Orient*, was the undertaking of an Egyptian Jew. Damascene Jews also took part in the Arab national press.

In the early days of the Arab national movement, young Jews from Damascus joined ranks with their Arab co-nationals in the belief that the it would grant them equal status and equal rights. In the early 'twenties, all the chairs of the Damascus University (founded 1923) were occupied by scholars of Jewish extraction from Western Europe. Foreign trade, transportation and the tourist industry were mainly in the hands of Jews. From the second half of the 19th century up to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Jews were crucial in the establishment of important industries and trades. All this was lost and destroyed by men of illwill who saw the Jewish people, who had lived on Syrian soil continuously for three thousand years, as alien elements. The wretched souls penned up in the ghetto of Damascus wait only for the day when the authorities will allow them to depart. It is our bounden duty to do all that is in our power, with the aid of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations of the enlightened world, to save these people who no longer have a future there.

(Part 2)

THE LEBANESE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Equal Rights for the Lebanese Jews (in Theory)

Though the Jews of Lebanon may ostensibly consider themselves citizens with full rights, in actual fact their condition is little different from that of the Jews in the other Arab lands. Their future outlook is not promising, and the day is not far off when the Jewish community of Lebanon will also cease to exist. While the number of Jews in Lebanon in 1962 was around 9,000 their number did not exceed one thousand in 1981.

Lebanon's population is split along religious lines into numerous factions and sects, and the government has created special conditions for the coexistence of the various sectors. This is the weakness of the country, but also the one factor enabling its continued existence as an independent entity. From time to time, attempts are made by Moslem nationalists, both from within and from without, and particularly by neighbouring Syria, to undermine the foundations of the Lebanese regime in the hope of bringing about the country's annexation as part of Syria. Thus far, the leaders of the different faiths and sects have managed to extricate their country from the mighty storms which have beset it. Of particular note, was the crisis of 1958 when Nasser, the ruler of Egypt, tried to take Lebanon by force which led to military intervention by the United States until stability was restored.

Even after Lebanon became the center of operations for the terrorist organizations in all their different factions and loyalties, following the loss of their base of action in Jordan in 1970-1971, the country's fundamental condition did not alter significantly; although bloody conflicts occasionally break out between the Christian and Moslem populations, or between the populace in general and the Palestinian refugees in the camps. These clashes often resemble outright civil war. Despite all this, the country's leaders have hitherto succeeded in finding a common basis for life together and have overcome the crises which recur every few months.

In these circumstances, the government in Lebanon feels it a duty to protect the Jews, and to demonstrate to the world that the Jews benefit from civil rights. The authorities show alertness and make a supreme effort to ensure that the Jews are not harmed during the anti-Zionist

demonstrations which are organized periodically. Police are also stationed in the Jewish neighbourhood twenty-four hours a day to safeguard the residents.

The Lebanese Jewish community, too, is of ancient lineage. The Jews viewed Lebanon as a land close to Eretz Yisrael, and since there were periods when borders did not divide the countries of the Middle East off from one another, the Lebanese Jews felt as if they were virtually residing in Eretz Yisrael. Like the Jewish population of Eretz Yisrael, which gained a blood transfusion in the form of exiles following the expulsion from Spain, so too did the Jewish communities of Syria and Lebanon receive reinforcements of Spanish exiles. Many families bearing Spanish names settled in these countries and played outstanding roles in the public life of their respective societies. And though they have lost the Spanish tongue, their Spanish-sounding names remain as testimony to their origins.

Both Lebanese and Syrian Jewry engaged primarily in commerce. The regime in Lebanon did not deprive the Jews of the right to serve in government positions. Lebanese Jewry is not subject to travel restrictions, and even now may leave the country when they please after being afforded the chance to liquidate their property. They may take their capital out of the country; but before their departure they must sign a declaration stating that their departure is final and irreversible.

Murder of Jews after Lebanese Independence

Still, at times the authorities were able to prevent harm being done to the Jews; even murder and robbery. In 1945, the wave of incitement against the Jews reached a peak, and an unruly and frenzied mob in the Sunni Moslem city of Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, fell upon the small Jewish community and killed twelve persons; in January 1948, a Jew was murdered in Beirut; in January 1950, the Alliance school in Beirut was completely destroyed when a bomb was thrown into the premises; the school's administration was buried under the rubble; another Jew was murdered in Beirut in January 1970. These violent tactics were a means of extorting money from the Jews, who were even forced to raise contributions for the Arabs of Eretz Yisrael.

Despite these violent acts Lebanon has always served as a place of refuge for Jews fleeing Syria. In the 'fifties, refugees from Iraq too arrived. For this reason, Lebanon was the only Arab country whose Jewish population continued to grow every year after World War II. But the Jews did not install themselves permanently in Lebanon. With the increasing number of terrorist attacks in the Middle East, they frequently decided to gather their possessions and move elsewhere. Some made their way to Eretz Yisrael, while others sought a safe haven in Western Europe or in the Americas where there were existing communities of Lebanese and Syrian Jewry, as well as new communities of Iraqi Jews.

Organized Community Life Down to the Last

Despite the steady erosion of the Jewish community, an organized mode of life has persisted to this day. The head of the community is Dr. Yosef Attiye, an orologist by profession. Rabbi Shaul Shrem, who is a native of Aleppo, has been the Lebanese community's rabbi for the past twenty-five years. There are eight synagogues which are open on Shabbat,four of which also have a *minyan* for prayers on weekdays for *Shaharit* and *Minha*. Rabbi Shrem told a journalist visiting Lebanon in 1973, that on Shabbat 300 come to pray and on weekdays about one hundred. The rabbi performs the marriage ceremonies. There are no mixed marriages and the number of converts to and from Judaism is insignificant.

Most Jews keep a kosher home. The meat they bring into their homes is kosher, whether they are strictly observant of all the *kashrut* laws or not. Two ritual slaughterers work three times a week, and the meat is stamped by the rabbinate with a Hebrew stamp displaying the name of the weekly portion from the Scriptures, which testifies to the date of slaughter. There is one kosher butcher in Beirut. But it is also possible to obtain kosher meat in non-Jewish butcher shops. Rabbi Shrem points out that the Jewish merchants close their establishments on *Shabbat;* but probably Jews working for non-Jewish are compelled to work on the Sabbath.

The community has two *mohalim;* that is, two merchants who serve as *mohalim.* The Jewish cemetery is well maintained by the community. All the children learn in the Alliance school. There are nine classes with about 400 hundred pupils. The graduates of Alliance go on to secondary school studies in Christian schools of the city. The Alliance school is government supported, but parents pay fees in accordance with their ability. There is compulsory study of four languages: French, Arabic, English and Hebrew. In addition to the basic syllabus of any public school, Bible and religion are also taught. Obviously Zionism and Jewish history are not part of the study program.

As a minority, the Jews have no direct representation in the Lebanese house of representatives; nevertheless, they maintain an ongoing partnership with the Protestant community, and a delegate from the Protestant community also represents the interests of the Jewish community. The Jews are not active in any political party or organization, but a few are active in the Phalangist organizations under the leadership of the Maronite Christian, Pierre Jemayal.

Kidnapping of the Beirut Community Secretary

On September 6,1971, Albert Elia, a sixty-year-old Jewish merchant, who served as the secretary of the Beirut Jewish community, was kidnapped on his way to the community offices. According to information from

Arab sources in Beirut, he was kidnapped by Syrian government agents with the aid of the terrorist organizations; and he is imprisoned in a Syrian jail to this day. Arab nationalist circles claim that Albert Elia was kidnapped because he assisted in the smuggling of Jews from Syria to Lebanon. Despite intervention by the Government of Lebanon and protests by organizations for human rights in the United Nations, the Syrian Government persistently refuses to release him.

It is evident that the Jewish community of Lebanon is doomed, and Dr. Attiye and his colleagues will be compelled in the not too distant future to close the community offices for want of a sufficient Jewish public. Also until the late 'fifties, Jews were living in other Lebanese cities. Today there is a limited number in Sidon and southern Lebanon. The Arab residents of Sidon, however, are fanatic Moslems who persist in harrassing the Jews. Thus, sooner or later they will be compelled, to move to Beirut, and from there to emigrate like the rest of the community.

Disintegration of the Lebanese Jewish Community

The Jewish community of Lebanon had known periods of emigration but usually for economic reasons. The rulers of Lebanon, particularly the Christians, always made efforts to protect them from rioters who sought to take revenge for the losses suffered by the Arabs in their wars against Israel. The community has taken an active if limited part in civilian life and participated in elections to the parliament, as well as to their local municipal councils. This is especially true of Beirut. They held a prominent place in the economy of the country, in banking and in finance. Since Lebanon has a policy of a floating currency rate, the Jews filled an important role in commercial and financial links with the world. After the U.N. decision of November 1947, they began to liquidate their businesses and to leave the country.

Most of this community of small merchants has moved to the United States, Canada and Brazil; some found refuge in Europe, mainly in Italy, Switzerland, France and England and in Israel.

We find an interesting description of the disintegration of the community in the Beirut Arab newspaper, *A-Said.* An article appearing in April 1969 states: "Though the Jews in Lebanon enjoy Lebanese citizenship with all the rights attaching to such, though they engage with full freedom in commerce, industry, banking and other financial fields, and though the authorities grant them special protection in the areas of their residence during demonstrations, the Jews have begun to liquidate their properties, to sell their possessions and to withdraw their capital from the marketplace in preparation for final emigration. The reason for Jewish emigration from Lebanon is not an immediate fear, but rather a misplaced apprehension of bloody confrontations that might occur in the future."

A-Said admitted that since the fall of Palestine into the hands of the Zionists on May 15, 1948, the Lebanese Jews had shown an increasing tendency to dissolve their business enterprises and emigrate. After 1956 (the Sinai Campaign) about 500 Jewish families from Iraq and Syria arrived in Lebanon. But by 1969, of the former 15,000 Lebanese Jewish nationals there remained only 3,000 and of the 500 stateless families, there remained only 200.

Statistics indicate that since 1964 there has been a marked emigration of Jews. But following the Six-Day War in June 1967, emigration had accelerated and reached alarming proportions, emphasized *A-Said.*

"First, the Jew readies his passport, next he attends to the gradual liquidation of his business interests and personal property. He does this in order to avoid huge material losses and also to avert harm to himself at the hands of incensed neighbours. Jews who are not Lebanese nationals sign a declaration upon departure obligating them never to return to the country. The Lebanese authorities record them on a black list which deprives them of the right of return."

The Arab newspaper admitted that Jewish merchants had begun to feel that Lebanese consumers — that is Arabs — avoided making purchases in Jewish stores mainly because of hostility towards the existence of the State of Israel. As a result, Jewish merchants put a freeze on their activity in preparation for emigration. The withdrawal of Jewish capital from the marketplace had a dramatic effect on the Lebanese markets and particularly upon the stock exchange. Some of the recent bankriptcies were directly connected to the Jewish departure and the removal of their capital from the country.

The article concludes: "Informed sources indicate that by the end of next year there will be left in Lebanon no more than a few hundred Jews in Lebanon. The majority of commercial companies once controlled by Jews have now found controlling interest among the Lebanese, that is among Christians and Moslems; for the Jews are registering enterprises on the stock exchange and selling the shares to their neighbours. The Jews in Lebanon are happier than their brethren in Syria and Iraq, where the governments prohibit the departure of Jews."

Second Exodus of Jews from Egypt

Part I

Wretched Remnants of a Once Glorious Community

By the time the Yom Kippur War broke out in 1973, the departure of the Jews from Egypt was almost complete. Only a small fraction of the original community, some four hundred persons, remains from what was considered the most ancient and most magnificent of all the Jewish communities. These last few Jews are old and poor, and they wander about the streets of Cairo like shadows, as if they have lost their spirit. They do not dare venture beyond the walls of their neighbourhood (Harat el-Yahud) or to leave Egypt, since they have no hope of building a new life for themselves elsewhere.

An Israeli journalist, Robert Gary, who visited the Jewish neighbourhood of Cairo on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, encountered a Jew standing beside the Ibn Ezra Synagogue, considered the oldest synagogue in Egypt. He was dressed in a white silk jelabiya and had a white a silk skullcap on his head. A Star of David adorned the gate of the synagogue. The building was in a state of neglect and on the verge of collapse, like the remaining buildings of the quarter. The man told his story to the journalist: "The Jews have been living in Egypt since the time of Moses. There is evidence that the Jewish quarter actually dates back to that time. The original synagogue was constructed in the middle of the 6th century B.C.E., but it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Finally, in 1115, Avraham Ibn Ezra came to Egypt from Jerusalem and asked the Patriarch, Alexander the Fifty-Sixth, for permission to rebuild the synagogue. The request was granted after the Jewish community agreed to pay twenty thousands dinars of gold every year."

Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Egypt in 1169, mentions this synagogue in his writings. Also the discovery of the famous and magnificent *Geniza* in the synagogue unlocked the door to the grand and glorious past of the Egyptian Jewish community to researchers. A number of people had encountered the material in the *Geniza* in the past, but had not given it much attention. But when the well-known researcher, Professor Solomon Schechter, visited the synagogue in 1894, he began to rummage about in

the *Geniza* and soon discovered the rich historical nature of the material stored within. He uncovered an ancient Torah scroll, books of *Halacha,* and ancient manuscripts, including the book of Ben Sira and the *"Ketuba"* of Rabbi Avraham (the son of the Rambam). He transferred the *Geniza* to England and commenced the investigation of its treasures. Many of the finds from the *Geniza* are today scattered in museums and libraries throughout the world. Scholars of and researchers into the history of Egyptian Jewry make use of the vast material discovered in the *Geniza.* Thanks to this major find, they are able to shed light on many obscure aspects of the history of the community.

The first Jewish diaspora after Nebuchadnezzar exiled the Jews was in Egypt. Some of the exiles went there with Jeremiah the Prophet; thereafter, there was a continual Jewish presence in the area. The community experienced periods of vigorous development as well as times of poverty and degeneration. As far back as the last days of the Second Temple and in the first years of of exile, Alexandria became the largest Jewish center in the Diaspora. In the opinion of historians, there were no less than one million Jews in Egypt at that time. Great intellects were born to this community who left their mark upon the culture of their people: Philo of Alexandria, Sa'adia Gaon and the Rambam. Although Maimonides was not born in Egypt, he settled there and later composed his greatest works, which came to constitute the basis of the *Halacha* and of Jewish thought.

Continuous Jewish Presence

Apparently there was no other country in the Jewish Diaspora that was distinguished by a more persistently continuous Jewish presence than Egypt. The Jews of Egypt maintained regular contact with the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. There were periods when the latter gave spiritual and material aid to the former. And Egyptian Jewry too stood behind their brethren in Eretz Yisrael in times of suffering and want. The proximity of the two countries and the fact that they were frequently under the same rule, promoted strong links and a mutual influence.

As stated, the history of the Jews in Egypt dates back to the days of our consolidation as a people. Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt when there was famine in Eretz Yisrael; and in the land of Goshen the people lived under conditions of slavery and oppression until they were delivered by Moses. He brought them out of Egypt to restore them to the land of their fathers, where they could live a full national life. But the destruction of the First and Second Temples led to the creation of new communities in Egypt, which persisted for thousands of years until their disappearance under the most tragic circumstances in our time.

After the destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.E.), a stream of emi-

grants from the Land of Judah found its way to Egypt; thus was created the first Jewish community in the Diaspora. There is evidence that a Jewish military colony was located in Yeb, or as it was called in Greek, Elephantine; the Jews served in the local garrison. Yeb was located on an island in the Nile River on the southern border of Egypt, opposite the city of Aswan on the east bank of the river. This region has changed greatly since the construction of the Aswan Dam by engineers from the Soviet Union. At the initiative of the revolutionary leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, with the purpose of increasing the water reserves and the electrical power for the cultivation of additional lands in the desert regions, villages were demolished to make way for the dam, and the inhabitants were compelled to abandon their land and homes and to seek new homes.

A collection of Aramaic papyri discovered in Egypt revealed the existence of the ancient colony of Jewish military men who served in the local garrison of Yeb. Also that trade and commerce at the time were concentrated in the hands of the Phoenicians, while the Jews were soldiers who had settled on lands given them to earn a livelihood. As was customary in ancient Egypt, the Jews who made up the local garrison were permitted to worship their own god. And in fact, the Jews of Yeb built themselves a temple where they made sacrifices.

When Gambyses, King of Persia, conquered Egypt in 525 B.C.E., the Jews of Egypt professed their loyalty to him. He entrusted them with the security of the entire southern region of the country. Darius II, King of Persia, instructed the Jews to observe the festival of Pesach in accordance with the laws of the Torah, as it was observed in Jerusalem. Apparently he saw fit to encourage the Jews to live according to their tradition, and to help them abide by the precepts of their Torah as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem and in Judah.

The community in Egypt continued to grow steadily especially after the great campaign of Alexander of Macedonia. He established on the Mediterranean coast the city which bears his name, Alexandria. Separate kingdoms inherited the vast empire of Alexander. During the reign of Ptolemy I (322 — 285 B.C.E.),possibly as many as 100,000 Jews were exiled from Eretz Yisrael to Egypt. Many political Jewish refugees arrived later in Egypt in particular during the period of the harsh "religious" decrees issued by Antiochus the Fourth. Philo of Alexandria observed that the Jewish community of Egypt reached its peak in the first century C.E. And as mentioned, he testified to a community of more than one million Jews, over 12 percent of the total Egyptian population.

A Jewish Temple in the Period of the Second Temple

Onias, the son of the High Priest, received permission from Ptolemy the

Sixth to build a temple in the city of Leontopolis, which was in the district of Heliopolis. The Jewish temple was constructed on the former site of a sanctuary to an Egyptian goddess. In this Temple of Onias forms of worship were instituted similar to those in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Jews of Egypt made sacrifices there. The Talmudic sages did not object to practices in the Egyptian temple, and did not deprive the priests who served there of the rights and privileges attaching to the priesthood. The Temple of Onias existed for 230 years.

Right down through the generations, the Jews of Egypt succeeded in conducting a fairly autonomous communal life. During the period of rule by the Greek kings in Egypt, the Jewish community was recognized as an autonomous entity. The community was granted the right to judge itself and collect taxes. A council of 71 elders (the same number as the Sanhedrin) administered the affairs of the community.

With the Roman conquest of Egypt, factions inimical to the Jews gained greater sway for political and economic reasons. But above all there was religious hatred. The inhabitants of Alexandria claimed that the Romans had gained control of Egypt with Jewish assistance. After the destruction of the Second Temple, many Jewish zealots and saboteurs arrived in Alexandria, who tried to organize a revolt against the Romans in Egypt. However, the Jewish leaders in Alexandria fearing for their own future and their lives, turned them over to the authorities.

From the moment that Christianity gained ascendancy among the citizens of Egypt, hatred of Jews took on a distinctly religious colouring. Jews were mercilessly persecuted. They were punished at times with exile from Alexandria, but in the course of time found their way back.

Translation of the Bible into Greek by Jewish Sages

One of the most splendid accomplishment of the Egyptian Jewish community is the translation of the Bible into Greek by seventy scholars. It was completed during the reign of Ptolemy the Second (285-247 B.C.E.), who was a patron of intellectual pursuits and encouraged the Jewish scholars to undertake the task. This translation was intended to satisfy the needs of the Hellenized Jews; and was done in the colloquial Greek of the Egyptian Jews. It is considered one of the most significant literary achievements in general and of the Jewish people in particular. The translation enabled religious and secular scholars throughout the world, and in particular Christian writers, to study the Bible.

During this period, the intellectual life of the Egyptian Jews blossomed and consolidated itself. Many writers appeared who composed a rich and varied literature.

Jewish writers of the Hellenistic Period in Egypt regarded Greek culture as the universal culture. But though they delved deeply into its treasures, they remained loyal to the Mosaic faith. The most celebrated of the writers and thinkers of the time was the philosopher, Philo of Alexandria. He lived between 20 B.C.E. and 40 C.E. Philo led the Jewish delegation to Rome in 40 C.E. which went to plead on behalf of the Jews of Alexandria. He also made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and with enthusiasm tempered by holy awe he described the tremendous impression the holy city made on him. In his writings he takes issue with those Hellenized Jews who had stopped observing the Jewish commandments. Like other Jewish writers who had absorbed Greek culture, Philo strove to reach a satisfactory compromise between Judaism and Greek philosophy. He was influenced by Plato and the Stoics. He wrote many essays in which he presents his interpretations of the Bible. The ties between the Jews of Egypt and Eretz Yisrael in those days were strong, And although the Temple of Onias existed in Egypt, the Jews made pilgrimage to Jerusalem and raised contributions for the Temple there. It was also customary for Jews to journey from Egypt to Jerusalem to study Torah with scholars in Eretz Yisrael. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple, many young people from Egypt found their way to the academies of the *tannaim*(writers of the *Mishna*) in Eretz Yisrael.

Part 2

The Arab Conquest

In the first half of the 7th century, the invading Arab armies turned towards Africa. With little difficulty they conquered and gained control of Egypt from the Byzantines who were in a period of marked decline. Shortly before, the Byzantine rulers had succeeded in briefly regaining control of Egypt after the brief era of Persian conquest which began in 616 C.E.

Apparently the effort required in expelling the Persians weakened the Byzantine regime, which was thus unable to repulse the invading Arab armies. These armies received a warm welcome from the Egyptian populace, Jews included, because of their antipathy towards the Byzantines who had encouraged religious persecution and had crushed them under a massive burden of taxes. Arab historians relate how 70,000 Jews abandoned Alexandria during the siege, and upon entering the city the Arab armies found only 40,000 Jews still there. With the conquest of Alexandria, the conquest of all of Egypt, which required three years, was complete.

Then began the process of Arabization and the spread of Islamic ideas

among the populace. The process was slow, and it took many years before the Moslems became the majority in Egypt. In fact, the Arab conquerers were little different from those before them. Like the Pharaonic rulers, the Ptolemaic kings, the Roman emperors and the Byzantine rulers, the Arabs adopted a policy of oppression of the masses and the imposition of heavy taxes. The tax burden led to repeated revolts in the 8th century.

During the Abbasid rule in the caliphate empire, the policy was still one of heavy taxation. The inhabitants of Egypt made futile attempts to free themselves from this burden. Between 752-807 five rebellions broke out, which the Arab rulers quelled mercilessly. A further rebellion was instigated in 829 by the Copts, who considered themselves to be ancient Egyptians who had undergone conversion to Christianity.

But notwithstanding the heavy taxation, the Arabs adopted a policy of tolerance towards the various religious groups; and particularly in regard to the monotheists. Despite the fanaticism of the Moslem religious authorities, the rulers granted the Copts licences to construct new churches and repair the old ones. The fanatics responded with incitement against the rulers who had dared grant the Copts such permission. Subject to their pressure, the governor, Ali ben Salman, had little choice but to destroy in 786 the churches which had been built. Later he reversed his stance and authorized the church leaders to proceed with the improvement of their churches.

Because of the lack of education of the majority of Moslems, the caliphs had to entrust most government positions to non-Moslems. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to issue a number of decrees imposing special dress for the "infidels". Soon after the Arab conquest, the Jews and the Christians were reduced in status and were deemed to be inferior citizens. They were forced to pay a "head tax" which was determined in accordance with the economic capability of each individual. This tax was viewed by the Moslems as symbolic of the subservience of the infidels. Despite the discriminatory policies, the condition of the Jews was greatly improved under Arab rule, compared with that under the Byzantines, for the Arabs did not interfere with the Jewish devotion to their religious tradition. During the period of Arab rule, and later under the various other Moslem regimes, the Egyptian Jews continued to maintain close links with the heads of the *yeshivot* in Babylon, and even gave them their financial support. They regarded the heads of the Babylonian *yeshivot* as their spiritual guides and leaders and sent their sons to study in Babylon, whence they drew much of their culture.

As Arab rule gained a firmer foothold in Egypt, the Jews felt a greater need for the Arabic language. Soon there emerged an entire generation of Jewish intellectuals who delved into the works of Arab philosophers, who had in their turn absorbed Greek influences. The Jewish sages adopted

and adapted the method of the Arab sages, and soon they too began to seek the golden path which would form a bridge between a religion based upon godly revelation and philosophical thought which depended on logical evidence.

The movement of opposition to the Talmud, which had arisen among the Jews of Persia and Babylon, and which led to a split in Judaism and the creation of the Karaite sect, also found its way into Egypt. At the head of the resistance to the Karaites in Egypt stood Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon who was born in Egypt in 892, studied in *"batei ulpana"* there, and served as a judge for the community in the city of Piyum. In 915, while still in Egypt he wrote *Sefer Hatshuva,* which was directed against Anan, founder of the Karaites. His book elicited widespread response among many Karaite writers. Worthy of special mention is Salmon Ben Yeroham, born in the town of Fustat in 885, who settled in Jerusalem. However, in 923 he returned to Egypt in order to do battle with Sa'adia Gaon. But Sa'adia Gaon did not remain idle; he published an essay entitled *Sefer Hahavdala* in responsed to the attacks by Ben Yeroham. Around the time when he was waging his ideological battles with the Karaite sect, Sa'adia Gaon was called to Babylon in order to serve as the head of the celebrated *yeshiva* in Sura, the spiritual focus of the Jewish world of that day. The fact that a religious scholar of the prestige of Sa'adia Gaon had grown up and been educated in Egypt, and had attained such a high level of learning as to be called to head this *yeshiva* amply testifies to the intellectual level of the Jews of Egypt of that period.

Religious Tolerance in the Days of the Fatimids

The caliphate dynasty of the Fatimids, which claimed descent from Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, prophet of Islam, conquered Egypt in 969 with the aid of an army of Berber mercenaries. Two years later, Al-Mu'izz (head of the Fatimids) moved to Egypt from Tunisia and thus established Egypt as the center of the Fatimid Empire. Al-Mu'izz's descendants ruled in Egypt for the next two hundred years. In the first generations of their rule, the economy of Egypt flourished and the country was considered to be the strongest in the Near East. The Fatimids also conquered Eretz Yisrael and Syria, and even extended their rule over the Hejar and vast provinces in North Africa. They were followers of the Isma'ayli school in Islam, and they attempted to impose the Isma'ayli doctrines upon Egypt and convert the whole country to that Islamic stream. But failing to achieve this aim, they adopted a policy of tolerance towards the different Moslem sects and even towards the non-Moslem communities. They allowed all religious groups to build houses of worship, and Jews and Christians were appointed to high office in the administration.

An ancient Jewish source informs us that a Jew by the name of Paltiel, who was a scion of a prominent Jewish family in southern Italy, played an important role in consolidating Fatimid rule in Egypt. Following the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, Paltiel became the ruler of Egypt if not "the ruler of all the Middle East as far as Mesopotamia and over all Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem." Paltiel asked the Fatimid caliph who was then ruling for permission to build a temple in Jerusalem. The caliph authorized him to clean the Temple Mount of the refuse which had accumulated over the centuries. Though there is some exaggeration in the source, it may be safely concluded that in the early years of Fatimid rule in Egypt, Jews held important positions in the administration. Entire departments were under the direct control of Jews and Christians.

In the middle of the 11th century, two Jewish (or perhaps Kara'ite) brothers who arrived in Egypt from Persia, Abu Sa'ad and Abu Nezer, played important roles in the court of the caliph. Abu Sa'ad had great influence in the court of Abu Tamim who had assumed the caliphate throne in 1036. He was even appointed to act as minister in the administration. On the recommendation of Abu Sa'ad, the office of chief vizier was given to Zedakah ben Yosef Alfalahi, a Jew who had converted to Islam. However, Zedakah repaid his benefactor with evil. He despatched murderers to kill Abu Sa'ad in 1048. Several months later his brother, Abu Nezer, was also murdered.

At the beginning of the 11th century, a Jew by the name of Abu al-Manjah ben Shiah served as an inspector in eastern Egypt, and gained renown for his program of digging a canal from the Nile, for it greatly promoted agriculture in the region. The excavating of the canal required six years, and as a tribute to his initiative, the water project was named after him.

Not all the caliphs, however, followed a policy of tolerance towards non-Moslems. Al-Hakim, who ruled from 996 until 1021, presents another picture. This caliph was characterized by almost inexplicable behaviour in all his deeds, and also in regard to his treatment of the Jews and the Christians. At first he showed favour and later began to persecute them. In 1004, he decreed that the minority communities be separated from the Moslems, and that they wear a black headdress. Four years later he ordered the destruction of their houses of worship and extended his restrictions concerning their clothing. In 1012, he issued further descriminatory measures. He prohibited non-Moslems from riding on horses and employing Moslem servants. As a result, many Christians and a somewhat smaller number of Jews were compelled to convert to Islam. Al-Hakim went so far as to demand the destruction of non-Moslem houses of worship in all the provinces of Egypt, Syria and Eretz Yisrael. Jews and Christians sought refuge in neighbouring countries. And then suddenly,

towards the end of his life the caliph retracted his discriminatory decrees and the minority communities returned and rebuilt their houses of prayer.

The positions attained by Jews in the courts of the caliphs aroused the envy of many Moslems. And in the days of Al-Hakim, Jewish-Moslem relations deteriorated to such an extent that Moslems began to commit acts of violence against Jews. The Christians too displayed considerable jealousy of Jews who had acquired key positions at the beginning of the 12th century. But such instances were relatively rare and in general the period of Fatimid rule has always been considered one of the happier periods in the history of the Jews under Moslem rule.

Jewish Communities under Fatimid Rule

During the Fatimid period there was a large Jewish community in Fustat comprising two principal elements: the Babylonian community and the community of Jews descended from expatriates of Eretz Yisrael. These communities took shape as a result of the large numbers of Jews who had earlier streamed to Egypt from Babylon and Eretz Yisrael. Babylonian Jewish communities also settled in other cities of Egypt and Eretz Yisrael. The two groups maintained separate *Batei Din* (courts of justice) both of which convened twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday.

Cairo, was built by the Fatimids north of Fustat, and from its first days contained a substantial Jewish population. The Jews established synagogues and academies. There was an important Jewish community in Alexandria too. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Aharon Ben-Zion Yehoshua al-Amani served in the rabbinate of Alexandria; he was a well-known poet and doctor. Benjamin of Tudela visited Egypt in about 1070 and he mentions in his memoirs that there were fifteen Jewish communities there. According to his estimate there were 7,000 Jews living in Cairo but another source puts the number at 2,000 or less. In all the remaining communities there was a total of 13,600 Jews altogether. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela does not specify whether he is referring to males who were paying taxes. If this is so, then the number of Jews in Egypt at the time was far larger than the figures given in his books. Other investigation has determined that the number of Jews did not exceed 25,000 within a general population of four million.

The Jews always lived in separate quarters and neighbourhoods, each community according to its own manner and tradition. With the passage of time, however, the Jews began to adapt themselves to the surrounding Arab and Moslem culture. They kept slaves and many married two wives, as was the Moslem custom.

Egyptian Jewry was deeply involved in Arab literature. The rich families kept private poets who would both deride and praise their masters. But it

was customary for Jews to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and prostrate themselves before the tombs of the holy. Many would bring with them the bones of deceased family members for burial on the Mount of Olives.

Since Eretz Yisrael was also under Fatimid rule, the Jews living there saw fit to request the intercession on their behalf of the Jewish leaders in Egypt in times of trouble, before the Fatimid rulers. As a result of the Jewish influence on the caliphs, the Jews in Eretz Yisrael enjoyed the protection of the caliphate and even received material benefits.

The Organization of Jewish Communities under the Nagid

From *Geniza* documents there is evidence that in the days of the Fatimid caliphs a general organization was established to include all the Jewish communities of Egypt. Its head was a Jewish minister who went under the title of *"Nagid"*. Arab sources refer to him as "Rais el-Yahud". The *nagids* represented the Jews to the government and were responsible to it. They appointed judges and supervized the rabbinical judicial system. The Jewish leaders elected the *nagid,* and the office of the caliph would then give its approval to the choice. At times, the caliph would only approve a *nagid* who was close to the ruler, to the dissafisfaction of the Jews.

In the middle of the 12th century, the power of the caliphs was substantially undermined when they became mere tools in the hands of the military commanders and the viziers. In 1171, a military commander Saladin, succeeded in fortifying his position within the ruling structure and became the governor of Egypt. In due course, he removed the Fatimid Dynasty from power and established a new dynasty which was renowned for its wars with the Crusaders who had taken control of the Holy Land. The new dynasty of the Ayyubids ruled in Egypt, Eretz Yisrael, Syria, and in different parts of the Arabian Perninsula and Mesopotamia until the middle of the 13th century. Saladin acted strictly in accordance with the spirit of orthodox Islam, because he believed that in his war with the Crusaders he must first gain the support of the main religious factions in order to attain his ultimate goal: to expel the Crusaders from the Holy Land. During his reign, the attitude of the government towards the non-Moslem elements changed. In 1181, for example, he re-enacted the decree forbidding Jews and Christians to ride on horses or mules. Nevertheless, this did not deter him from employing Jewish doctors in his court. One of these was Habat Allah Ibn-Jamah, who dedicated some of his time to writing, and wrote a book in Arabic, "Guide to Reform of Body and Spirit." Jewish doctors were employed in public hospitals too.

Crisis in Jewish Communal Organization under the Ayyubids

During the rule of Saladin, the Jewish communities were faced with

serious organizational crises due to the tremors which rocked the regime. The communities lost the autonomy which they had enjoyed prior to Ayyubid rule. Nonetheless, there was considerable development of Jewish spiritual values during the first years of this rule due mainly to the Rambam. The great spiritual leader arrived in Egypt in 1165 and set up home in Fustat. Upon his arrival, he immediately began to play a central role in the Jewish community. He served as the *nagid* of the community, though not formally appointed.

Maimonides wrote his finest works on religious practice and Jewish thought while in Egypt.During his first years there he did the final editing of his exegesis of the Mishna, which was completed in 1168. He also wrote his well-known "Guide to the Perplexed" while in Egypt, in which he attemps a compromise between the Aristotelian philosophy and the Jewish concept of the world based on the belief in divine revelation. This was the second such attempt by a great Jewish thinker, the first being by Philo of Alexandria. The Rambam's efforts met with opposition from conservative circles throughout the Jewish dispersion. Like most of his works, *Guide to the Perplexed* was written in Arabic, and was completed in 1191. At the same time as he was writing his great works, the Rambam continued to pursue his career as a physician. He was the personal doctor of the vizier El-Kadi el-Fadl. He was also summoned to serve as one of the court doctors for King el-Afdal, son of Saladin and his successor.

The Rambam's only son, Rabbi Avraham, who was born in 1186 and died in 1237, was also appointed official doctor to King al-Kamel Muhammad. Like his father he served as a physician in the Cairo hospital. In 1232 his father's books, *Guide to the Perplexed* and *The Book of Knowledge* were burned in southern France by fanatics.

The Jews of Egypt inducted Rabbi Avraham as *nagid,* and from that time the office of *nagid* was an accepted institution which lasted for more than three hundred years.

Part 3

The Jews under Mameluke Rule

The dynasty of sultans from the house of Saladin al-Ayyub fell from power in 1250 when the last of the dynasty, Tora-Nasa, was murdered. Shortly after his death, military commanders who had taken part in the assassination gained control of Egypt and established a regime quite different from those of the Fatimids and the Ayyubids. This was a military dictatorship of men of different ethnic backgrounds. During the previous periods of rule, the army had had a policy of kidnapping young

boys of foreign extraction to serve as slaves in Egypt, who received a superb military education. After completion of their military training, the men were freed and granted land holdings of vast areas as well as serving as the regular army. Military service became a family tradition and their descendants thus acquired great power within the country and even became its rulers. They became a part of the civilian population and since they were rulers who spread terror among the people they were called the "Mameluke Kingdom".

During the second half of the 14th century, the regular army of Egypt consisted of 20,000 cavalry soldiers. The Mamelukes extended their power over the Holy Land, Syria, and parts of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Hejaz. In the middle of the 13th century, the Mamelukes succeeded in repulsing the wave of Mongol invaders who had conquered most of the Asiatic lands and threatened the Mediterranean shores. They also expelled the last of the Crusaders from their strongholds in the Holy Land and Syria.

Not all the Mamelukes belonged to the same ethnic group. Some originated from Turkish tribes and some had Circassian roots. Mameluke rule may be divided into two main periods: the first was that of the Turkish Mamelukes who ruled from the mid-14th century until 1381; the second was that of Circassian rule from 1381 until the beginning of the 16th century, when the Turks conquered Egypt.

The treatment of non-Moslems under the Mamelukes was little different from that of the earlier Moslem rulers. The Mamelukes too were compelled to acquiesce to the demands of Moslem fanatics and leaders to purge the government of non-Moslem officials and for restrictions of the religious rights of non-Moslems. They issued decrees to this effect, one in particular obligating non-Moslems to wear special clothing, so as to humiliate them when in the presence of Moslems. During the rule of El-Malach el-Ashraf (1290-1293), there were outbursts of violence against Jews and Christians alike by mobs stirred to a frenzy by Islamic fanatics.

By decree in 1301, non-Moslems were ordered to wear hats of a specified colour. The Christians had to wear blue tarbushes, Jews yellow ones, and Samaritans red ones. It was forbidden for Jews and Christians to employ Moslems for manual labour or to keep Moslem slaves. It was once again prohibited for Christians and Jews to serve in government positions. With the increasing incitement, violence broke out in the streets of Cairo and in other Egyptian cities. The growing intensity of the persecutions led many non-Moslems to prefer conversion to Islam to the humiliation of the discriminatory laws. Both in the historical and literary documentation of the time it is possible to find a long list of Jewish names which were given a Moslem flavour.

During the rule of the Mameluke descendants of Turkish slaves, the number of Jews engaged in the crafts increased. They even took part in the development of other industries, in particular the sugar industry. But their main profession was medicine.

With the spread of Mameluke rule to all the lands of the Near East, the Jewish communities thoughout Egypt, Eretz Yisrael and Syria united under the authority of the *nagid.* The latter had two deputies, one in Jerusalem and one in Damascus.

From the time of Rabbi Avraham (son of the Rambam), the office of the *nagid* was the prerogative of his descendants. Rabbi David, grandson of the Rambam, lived from 1212 to 1300. In 1285 he was unseated from this office and in his stead was appointed a man not descended from the Rambam. This *nagid* had served previously as physician to the court of the caliph. Rabbi David left Egypt for Acre, which was still in the hands of the Crusaders, where he lived in poverty. But in 1290, he was authorized to return to Egypt and resume the title of *nagid.* He died in 1300 at a ripe old age, and his remains were brought for burial to Tiberias.

The Circassian regime was characterized by instability. They were not successful in establishing either a stable regime or a long-lasting dynasty. Nevertheless, they managed to prevent large-scale strife and even conquered additional lands. The island of Cyprus was overrun in 1426. Within the period of their rule, however, the country's economy collapsed. Many crafts and industries closed down, and the size of the population in general dwindled as did that of the Jews. At the end of the fifteenth century, two Italian Jews en route to Eretz Yisrael stopped over in Egypt. One of them, Meshullam of Voltara, came in 1481. He tells of 800 Jewish families living in Cairo, 150 of whom were Karaites and 50 were Samaritans. The second was Rabbi Obadiah of Bartenura, who came to Cairo seven years later. He talks of 500 Jewish families, 150 Karaite and 50 Samaritan. Rabbi Meshullam speaks of 60 Jewish families in Alexandria, while Rabbi Obadiah mentions 25. Thus it may be deduced that towards the end of the fifteenth century, all the Jewish communities in Egypt together numbered less than 5,000 persons.

Jewish Exiles from Spain and Portugal find Refuge in Egypt

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the Jewish communities of Egypt were on the threshold of spiritual decline if not total extinction. There was a growing fear that the internal impoverishment would lead to assimiliation within the surrounding Moslem population. Fortunately Jewish reinforcements arrived from Spain and Portugal, and they had the beneficial effect of adding an invigorating new element to the depleted indigenous communities. These refugees brought about a complete

change in the history of the Egyptian Jewish community. The Iberian refugees had a momentous impact too on the other Jewish communities of the region. Wherever they settled they infused new blood into local Jewish life in particular that of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael. In the wake of this infusion of new life, the Jewish centers of Eretz Yisrael blossomed and they endowed Judaism with many spiritual giants, who through their teachings provided an inspiration which reached all corners of the Jewish world.

Rabbi Obadiah discovered 50 families of Spanish Marranos living in Egypt in ~~1948~~. They had found sanctuary there before the large-scale expulsion from Spain in 1492. From the time of the expulsion, the flow of Jews from Spain to Egypt continued to grow. The movement of the descendants of these lasted right up until after World War I. In general, Egypt served as a half-way station for exiles in search of a haven in the region of the Near East. The newcomers took up residence mainly in the two largest cities, Cairo and Alexandria. They breathed new life into the faltering communities there. Their influence was also felt in many areas of non-Jewish life.

They included celebrated rabbis, who were to nurture many pupils who gained renown through their rich literary output on *Halacha* and interpretations of the holy writings. Worthy of particular mention is Rabbi David Ben-Avi Zimra, who arrived from Jerusalem in 1513, where he had lived following his escape from Spain. Rabbi Zimra (Radbaz) lived forty years in Egypt where he amassed great wealth through commerce and devoted his main efforts to Torah and *Halacha*.

Part 4

The Jews under Ottoman Rule

In 1517, having conquered Syria and Eretz Yisrael, the Ottoman armies advanced towards the African continent where they proceeded to wrest Egypt from the Mamelukes, a conflict that lasted more than thirty years. But the struggle between the Ottomans and the Mamelukes had already begun in the ninth decade of the 15th century. By then the Ottomans were growing in strength and they quickly began their advance, conquering the countries in their path and subjugating entire peoples. The first wars between the new power and the old one ended in victory for the Mamelukes (1485). However, at the beginning of the 16th century, Selim I mobilized huge armies, overran lands in the Middle East, and annexed them to his empire. The Turkish success was largely due to their use of artillery while the Mameluke armies were still based on cavalry, and were still employing tactics more suited to the knights of the Middle Ages. And

thus in 1516, in the battle near Aleppo (in northern Syria of today), the Mamelukes were badly beaten. In this fateful engagement, the elderly sultan of Egypt, Qansuh al-Ghauri, was slain, and all of Syria fell to the Ottomans. His successor, Tuma Nabai, mobilized a new army and despatched his forces to the Holy Land in order to prevent the invaders from reaching Egypt. But once again the Mameluke forces were completely routed, and the victorious Ottomans advanced towards Egypt in January 1517; by the end of that month, the last of the Mameluke rulers had been defeated. For the next three hundreds years and more, both Syria and Egypt became mere provinces in the great Ottoman Empire.

In these wars between the Ottomans and the Mamelukes, the Jews were once again scapegoats who suffered various forms of persecution. The Mamelukes accused the Jews of being supporters of the Ottomans and of spying for the enemy. In the intervals between one defeat and another, incensed mobs attempted to break into the Jewish quarters in Cairo and set the houses on fire. Jewish youths had however bravely organized themselves to repulse the attackers. They ascended the roofs of the buildings and threw stones down upon the rioters. In one particular attack of this sort, in January 1517, thirty assailants were actually killed in the fray.

The Ottoman conquest brought in its wake a growth in the Jewish population in Egypt and other lands of the empire, particularly in Turkey itself. The number of synagogues too increased. In the seventeenth century the rabbinical Jews had 31 synagogues in Cairo and the Karaites had one. By the eighteenth century the number of synagogues had grown to thirty-six. Alexandria too had a large Jewish community at this time. Other communities came into being in Al-Mansura, Dumyat and Rashid. Jews also took up residence in villages and traded with the peasants.

Like their predecessors, the Ottoman rulers dealt severely with the local inhabitants (including the Jews).

They appointed a governor in Egypt as in the other lands of their empire. The governor tended to squeezing heavy taxes from the population, which were forwarded to the sultan in Istanbul. Eight years after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, a group of wealthy Jews was in control of the mint headed by Avraham Castro. In 1523, the Egyptian pasha Ahmad tried to rebel against the Ottoman authority in Istanbul. He commanded Avraham Castro to mint a coin in his name, and thus indirectly crown himself governor of Egypt. Avraham Castro refused to carry out the pasha's wishes and instead fled to Istanbul where he disclosed the pasha's plot to the royal house. When the pasha got wind of Castro's betrayal, he decided to take revenge upon the local Jews. He imposed heavy fines upon them and threatened even harsher measures if they should fail to make payment. However, a minor miracle occurred, and on the day which had been set for payment, the rebellious pasha died. This day of salvation was ever

after commemorated by the Jews of Egypt as the "Purim Day of Egypt", which fell on the twenty-eight of the month of Adar. One writer even composed a *megilah* which recounted the infamous affair and the miracle which happened. It was customary for the Jews to gather once a year on this "Purim" in the synagogues of Cairo and to read aloud the *megilah*.

The persecution and oppression of the Jews continued throughout the rule of the Turkish pashas. The tyrannical governors did not cease to maltreat the Jews and tried methods for extorting heavy taxes from them.

Towards the end of the 17th century, the authorities in Istanbul introduced discriminatory laws against non-Moslems who were deemed heretics. In Cairo in the eighteenth century, it was prohibited for Jews and Christians to ride horses; they were only allowed to ride donkeys. Whenever such rider encountered a Turk or a Mameluke of position or social standing, he was compelled to dismount from his donkey and walk awhile on foot. Furthermore, it was forbidden for them to ride near mosques or in the vicinity of sites holy to Islam.

Economic Condition of the Jews

The wide dispersal of Spanish exiles throughout the Ottoman Empire gave impetus to the development of commercial ties between the lands of the Middle East and those of southern Europe. During the first centuries after the Turkish conquest, the Egyptian Jews maintained strong commercial links with the Jews of Kushta, Izmir, Salonika, Venice Livorno , Rhodes, and other cities on the Mediterranean coast. The Egyptian Jews also served as agents between the Egyptian and Christian traders from Europe who came to Egypt to trade. A Christian traveler visiting Egypt in the 18th century relates how the Christian traders would stop their dealings when the Jews were not working. The Jews also served as bankers for the governors and the wealthy. Money matters were concentrated in their hands and many were involved in currency exchange.

The affairs of the Jewish communities continued during the early days of Ottoman rule to be conducted under the leadership of the *nagids.* However, they were now sent by the sultan in Kushta and were not chosen by the community.

Towards the second half of the 16th century, this office was abolished due to internal strife among Egyptian Jewish leaders. Thereafter, a "treasurer" headed the Jewish community, who ruled in the name of the governor. The Jewish treasurer would collect the taxes and was also responsible for the mint. This functionary was called *Chalbi* or in Turkish, *Tzaraf Bashi.* The treasurers were always in peril, for if they failed to satisfy the governors, they were not fulfilling his wishes. In 1603, for instance, the

chalbi Shlomo el-Ashker was put to death, and in 1620, the treasurer Ben-Avraham Askanedri was executed because the newly arrived governor from Kushta, Arnaut Hussein Pasha, suspected that he was not fulfilling his duty towards the country's treasury. Likewise, in 1631, Jacob Tiboli was killed, and in 1655 Haim Peretz was executed by order of the Sultan in Kushta. The latter had been summoned to Kushta together with the pasha on suspicion that they had embezzled moneys from the treasury; they were both executed. The fate of his successor was no better; he was put to death by the incumbent pasha who was envious of his wealth. When the governor Krakush Ali Pasha arrived in Egypt in 1669, he also put the Jewish treasurer, Yosef Rafael to death in a fit of jealousy. After this execution, the title of *chalbi* was abolished and replaced by the title *bazrajan* (treasurer).

Spiritual State of the Jews during the First Centuries of Ottoman Rule

The Spanish exiles who came to the Middle East brought a rich spiritual heritage with them, which was to have a great impact on their adoptive communities including Egyptian Jewry.

The link with the spiritual center which arose in Eretz Yisrael (especially in Safed, the seat of the Jewish spiritual giants of the 16th century) continued to strengthen. Rabbis from Eretz Yisrael came to settle in Egypt where they imbued the community leaders with a spirit of hope. The rabbis who settled in Egypt and in Eretz Yisrael, or who studied in the local educational institutions, were to gain renown because of the religious works they wrote. The greatest of the rabbis who appeared in Egypt in the 17th century, Mordechai Ben Yehuda Halevi, wrote an interpretation of the Bible entitled *Avodat Hakodesh.* He also left behind a collection of responses entitled *Darchei Noam.* His son, Rabbi Avraham, who served as chief rabbi of the Cairo community, wrote a volume of responses called *Ginat Veradim.*

In the second half of the 17th century, the historian Yosef Sambari lived in Alexandria; he collected valuable documents and papers and studied the writings of Arab historians. He compiled a book entitled *Divrai Hachamim*, on the history of the Ottoman caliphs and their Jewish subjects.

The appearance of Shabbtai Zvi in the 17th century aroused a warm response among Egyptian Jewry. While Shabbtai Zvi was living in Jerusalem, the Jewish community were in difficult circumstances, and asked him to journey to Egypt to request the aid of wealthy Egyptian Jews in paying the heavy taxes imposed by the Turkish governor. At the time of Shabbtai Zvi's visit to Egypt, the Jewish *chalbi* was Yosef Rafael, an exceedingly rich man. But despite his wealth and lofty status, he was an ascetic. Beneath his ostentatious garb, he wore a garment of rough cotton. At

night he would follow a stringent regimen of self-mortification and frequent bathing in an attempt, to "reform" himself. He even beat himself and often received lashes voluntarily in the hope that by his suffering and self-torment he would help draw the Messianic age closer and perhaps even welcome it personally. The Messiah would then redeem the Jewish people from its pitiful state.

Just then Shabbtai Zvi made his appearance in Cairo and asked the *chalbi's* help on behalf of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael. By his explanations Shabbtai Zvi won the esteem and admiration of Yosef Rafael and the community. And when Nathan of Gaza later proclaimed Shabbtai Zvi the Messiah, the Jews of Egypt did not hesitate for a moment but flocked to him. The Messianic movement inspired many Jews in the Diapora, and Egypt was to serve as the center for Shabbtai Zvi's activities and for the aggrandizement of his name.

Napoleon's arrival in Egypt in 1802 was accompanied by an official declaration recognizing the rights of the Jews to the land of their forefathers. This declaration was intended to win the support of the Jews in his attacks on the Turkish armies, in order to expel the Turks from the Holy Land. But Napoleon was inconsistent in his policies towards the Jews. For despite his proclamation, he imposed heavy taxes upon them in order to cover the costs of his wars. He even ordered the destruction of the Jewish synagogue in Alexandria which was named after Elijah the Prophet. But the period of Napoleonic rule in Egypt was short-lived; for in his attempt to take Acre, which remained the last obstacle in his path to Kushta, he was routed by the Turkish armies defending the city. With this defeat, the great dream of Napoleon's vanished, namely, to gain control of the entire Ottoman Empire.

Part 5

Egyptian Jewry in Modern Times

With Muhammad Ali's seizure of power in Eygpt, there began a period of renewal. Muhammad Ali, who was born in Albania, determined to turn Egypt from a backward land into an advanced state, and thus improve the condition of the native population which had hitherto lived in abject poverty and want. Hence he built dams which greatly increased the area of arable land. He established schools in order that a newly educated stratum of society would eventually help in the promotion of his economic schemes. An additional measure was to send talented young people to academies in Europe where they could acquire education in fields essential to the social and economic advancement of Egypt. Muhammad Ali established links with various European states and strove to attract experts to his country who might carry out his development plans.

Upon taking control, there was a marked turn for the better in the situation of the Jews. In 1840, there was a blood libel in Damascus against the Jews. Due to the intervention of leading Jewish figures of that time, Sir Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Crémieux, Muhammad Ali (who was ruler of Syria) released the prisoners who had been cruelly tortured and saw to it that the persecutors were punished.

Muhammad Ali's development plans led to an economic boom in Egypt. The Jews played a central role in the development projects of the state and in the creation of industrial enterprises, and came to comprise the core of international banking activities concentrated in Egypt. The Jewish population of 1840 was estimated at 7,000. Later in that century and in the 20th, it increased due to the waves of immigration that flooded the country, which had now become an important economic center linking Africa with Asia and in close proximity to Europe.

The great interest displayed by European states in the development of Egypt led to the granting of special conditions for European nationals. The capitulatory regimes instituted in all the lands of the Ottoman Empire strengthened the position of the Egyptian Jews. According to a census conducted in 1897, about one half of Egyptian Jewry, 12,507 out of 25,200, held foreign citizenship.

When England gained control of Egypt in 1881, the condition of the Jews like that of other foreign nationals was improved even further. The Jews went on to attain prominent social and economic positions. The wealthy left the old districts of Cairo and built themselves magnificent mansions. New synagogues were constructed and the Jews began to find a place in public life. Some joined the Egyptian national movement which came into being towards the end of the nineteenth century. Worthy of mention is Yaacov Ben-Rafik Tsanoah, who founded a satiric paper in Arabic as well as an Arabic language theater.

The improvement in economic and social conditions affected Jewish community life. The communal institutions organized themselves on a new footing. Learned rabbis began to serve as chief rabbis most of whom were summoned to Cairo from Jerusalem. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Rabbi Yisrael, a Jerusalemite, was appointed chief rabbi in Cairo. At the end of that century, Rabbi Raphael Ben-Shimon, known for his wide learning, was appointed chief rabbi of Cairo Jewry. He wrote *Nahar Mitzrayim* on the customs of the Jews of Egypt. In a second book, *Tuv Mitzrayim,* he wrote about the rabbis of Egypt, their greatness and exceptional personal qualities.

On the other hand, the Jewish community of Alexandria preferred to recruit their chief rabbis from Italy. Most worthy of mention is Rabbi Shlomo Hazan, who came of a Jewish family from Rhodes. He gained

recognition through his book *Ma'alot Leshlomo,* which is a compilation of the life histories of modern Torah scholars. One of the Italian chief rabbis was Dr. David Prato, who filled that position between 1926-1937, and afterwards was appointed chief rabbi of Italy. Following his *aliyah* to Israel, he served as head of the Rabbinate in Tel Aviv-Yaffo.

Zionist Activity

At the time of World War I, many Jews who held foreign citizenship, particularly Russian nationality, were ordered to leave Eretz Yisrael by the Turkish authorities since they were considered to be enemy subjects. Many found sanctuary in Egypt which was then under British influence. They injected new life and vigour into the communities, especially those in Cairo and Alexandria.

Joseph Trumpeldor created the Mule Corps while in Egypt, though the initial idea for Jewish military units came from Ze'ev Jabotinsky. He discussed his scheme with Joseph Trumpeldor, who had just arrived in Alexandria after having been expelled from Eretz Yisrael. But the British supported the setting up of a mule corps only in order to aid their war effort against the Turks in the Straits of the Dardanelles. Jabotinsky rejected the suggestion, while Trumpeldor welcomed it believing that the Jews ought to fight the Turks on every possible front for the sake of liberating Eretz Yisrael from Turkish domination. Trumpeldor readily found sufficient Jewish (Eretz Yisrael) volunteers and enlisted men to make up the Mule Corps which took part in the attack on the Turkish straits. Following the failure of that military venture, the Mule Corps transformed into the core of the Jewish forces which Jabotinsky set up in England.

Prior to the First World War, unsuccessful attempts had been made to found a Zionist Organization in Egypt, since the local population, namely the Eastern elements, did not show any interest in politics or in Zionist activity.

After the Balfour Declaration, however, Zionist leaders began making regular visits to Egypt. They appeared before gatherings to clarify the Zionist stance and soon stimulated a degree of enthusiasm within a new generation which was absorbing the ideas of national rebirth. Zionist youth associations and clubs were founded in 1931.

World War II also accelerated Zionist activity in Egypt. Jewish volunteers in the British army, and later volunteers in the Jewish Brigade, passed long periods of time training in Egypt and were occasionally given the opportunity for encouraging local Zionist activity.

As Rommel's armies stood at the threshold of Egypt in 1942, the British

authorities ordered Egyptian Jewish activists to leave for Eretz Yisrael out of concern for their personal safety. After their arrival in Eretz Yisrael, they came into close contact with the country's Jewish settlements and this gave impetus to their support of national rebirth. They gained an intimate knowledge of the defence strategies of the Jewish community which was preparing itself for confrontation with the German army.

The foreign press in Egypt, particularly the French language papers, were sympathetic to the Zionist idea. The Zionists published their own paper. There was even an Arabic weekly which maintained a positive stance towards Zionism.

The Jews after the Balfour Declaration

After the British Government granted Egypt independence in 1922, the Wafd government with its nationalistic spirit, and the royal court, followed a policy of tolerance of foreigners and minorities in Egypt including the Jews. With the creation of an elected assembly and a senate in 1942, the Jews were promised representation in the two legislative houses. The head of the Cairo community, Yosef Katavay Pacha, was appointed minister of the treasury in the first days of King Fu'ad's reign. Jewish officials worked in important positions in the service of the state and Jewish representatives were elected to the municipal councils in a number of cities, including Alexandria.

In the early days of the British mandate in Eretz Yisrael, the leaders of the Egyptian national movement assumed a neutral stance vis-à-vis the Jewish-Arab conflict and were not swept up by the wave of incitement of Arab leaders in Eretz Yisrael. With the outbreak of bloody violence in August 1929, the Mufti, Haj Amin el-Husseini, made an effort to establish centers of anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism in Egypt. But King Fu'ad and the leaders of the national movement did not support him.

Then, towards the end of the 'thirties, the winds began to change. An interested press began to fan flames of religious hatred against the Jews. Associations were formed to encourage a boycott of Jewish businesses in Egypt in response to Jewish support for Zionism in Eretz Yisrael, and it was not long before the steadily growing wave of incitement began to have effect. In July 1939, explosive devices were found next to three Cairo synagogues; the bombs were wrapped in paper on which were printed warnings to the Jews, and demands that they cut off their support for the Jews of Eretz Yisrael. But the Jewish leaders paid little heed to such threats.

Nevertheless, as the crucial days for the future of Palestine drew nearer, incitement and propaganda against the Jews intensified. On November 2, 1945, the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, riots were organized

against the Jews. These riots served as a signal to leading anti-Jewish elements in Arab countries to follow in the footsteps of the Egyptian nationalists. At the forefront of the Egyptian incitement stood Ahmad Hussein, leader of the "Young Egypt" youth movement, and Hasan al-Bana, leader of the "Moslem Brotherhood". These organizations went on the rampage on November 2 and broke into the Jewish neighbourhoods of Cairo. A synagogue was set alight along with twenty-seven Torah Scrolls in the Holy Ark. In addition, several Jewish community institutions were destroyed: the hospital, the old age home and others. Jewish shops and firms were also hit by rioters. Anti-Jewish incitement continued to intensify and reached a peak when investigatory committees such as the Anglo-American Committee and the United Nations Commission of Enquiry arrived in Palestine. Political leaders and the Egyptian Government took a hostile stand towards Jewish immigration and the creation of a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. In fact, in the period between the United Nation's approval of the Partition Plan (November 29, 1947) and the end of the British Mandate (May 15, 1948) which was characterised by attacks by Arab gangs on Jewish settlements of Eretz Yisrael, Egypt led Arab states in a resolve to despatch armies to Palestine on the termination of the mandate, in order to obstruct the creation of the new state.

Since that invasion, which terminated in the staggering defeat of the Arab armies, and above all of the Egyptian Army, the Egyptian Government has followed a declared policy of harming all Jewish inhabitants of whatever nationality, and has continued to expropriate their property.

With the outbreak of war on May 15, 1948 hundreds of Jews were arrested and sent to detention camps for the alleged crimes of membership in the Zionist Movement and of serving as agents for the State of Israel.

In the months of June to November 1948, extremist organizations began carrying out systematic terrorist actions against Jews.

Bombs were placed in the Jewish quarter of Cairo and twelve houses were destroyed, thirty-four persons killed and over eighty people wounded. Terrorist activities continued in the following months and dozens of Jews were killed or wounded. The inciters extorted thousands of Egyptian pounds from the Jewish community for financing the Egyptian army and the Arab terrorist groups. Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum Effendi was forced to declare under pressure by the authorities that it was the duty of the Egyptian Jews to defend their country against "Zionist plots".

The overthrow of the government by the Free Officers and the resultant unseating of King Farouk in 1952 further undermined the position of the Jews. The situation became particularly intolerable when Mohammed

Naguib was removed from the office of president and replaced by Gamal Abdel Nasser. From that time onwards, the policy of the revolutionary government was explicity anti-Israel.

The Jews of Egypt served as a scapegoat for the authorities. And later, at the time of the Six-day War, the Jews were outrightly declared enemies of the state. All the males were sent to detention camps where they were cruelly treated. The departure of Jews from the country accelerated. The Nasser government stripped the Jews of all their property. In the wake of pressure, the government began to allow Jews to leave Egypt, but without any of their possessions. And indeed these people left Egypt while surrendering almost everything they owned.

During the Second World War, the Jewish population of Egypt reached 80,000. By the middle of 1956, the number had dropped to 40,000. Following the Sinai Campaign between November 22, 1956 and March 6, 1957, more than 14,000 Jews were expelled from Egypt. Within the next few months another 7,000 Jews were deported. The expulsions and flight continued unabated and by the beginning of 1960 a total of 36,000 Jews had left the country, the majority for Israel. But thousands also sought refuge in the United States, Canada and Brazil, and in Western Europe mainly France.

Property Confiscated by the Egyptian Government

There are various estimates as to the value of the capital and property seized by the Egyptian government. Among the property confiscated was the city built by the well-known philanthropist, Yosef Samuha, on land in the area of Alexandria which had been redeemed from lake country by his personal efforts. His confiscated property alone was valued at eight million pounds sterling, though the compensation which he received did not exceed one million pounds. This compensation was granted following an agreement between the governments of Britain and Egypt.

A convention was held in Paris on July 23, 1971 by Jewish refugees from Egypt, where the question of compensation for the seized property and capital of Egyptian Jewry was discussed. Advocate Shlomo Cohen Sidon, himself a refugee from Egypt who had settled in Israel, participated in this conference. He is involved in obtaining compensation for the confiscated property. In his opinion, the value of all the private property seized is 500 million dollars; while the public property he values at 300 million dollars. Advocate Sidon points out, furthermore, that the holy books which were seized have been valued at an additional 200 million dollars.

The public committee on behalf of the Jewish refugees who left Egypt has demanded that the United Nations oblige the Egyptian government to

pay out at least 10 thousand dollars to each Jewish family which was forced to leave Egypt. The committee has also demanded a compensation of 60 dollars for each day of imprisonment for every Jew who sat in Egyptian jails.

The Egyptian Government also adopted racist discrimination against the Jews. Every Jew who left Egypt was given travel documents with a red stamp across the first page. In addition, the passport was stamped with the letter "J" indicating "Jewish". On the travel papers it is specified that the bearer is forbidden to return to Egypt.

Western ambassadors played an active role in the release of Jews from Egyptian prisons as well as in facilitating their departure from the country. They were mainly from Britain, Italy and France because many of the Jews were citizens of these countries. In particular, the Spanish ambassador in Cairo gave his protection to all stateless Jews. He explained to the Government of Egypt that they were the descendants of Jews who had once lived in Spain, and therefore are deemed Spanish nationals to this day. And in fact such reasoning led to the release of many Jews from prison and to their departure from Egypt.

Anti-Zionist Propaganda during the Rule of the Revolutionary Officers

As the conflict between Arabs and Jews intensified, incitement against Zionists and Jews in general grew. In the twenty-five years of Israel's existence, there have appeared in Egypt many anti-Semitic publications which in their virulence are reminiscent of the anti-Semitic literature of the European Christian nations. The propaganda department of the Egyptian government published an edition of the *Protocols of Zion*. In addition, there are repeated gatherings of Moslem intellectuals and scientists, whose sole purpose is to give a solid foundation to Moslem anti-Semitic ideology.

On Passover Eve 1972, the Egyptian paper *Al-Akhbar* published a typical blood libel against the Jews. The paper wrote that "The Jews are bound by the chains of the Zionist belief, and are in the habit of corrupting moral values and of feeling great hostility towards humanity. And all this because of a blind fanaticism characterizing their conception of themselves as a 'chosen people'. The Jews make human sacrifices. They have a holiday called Passover, or the Holiday of Matzot. This holiday is accompanied by the bleeding of non-Jewish persons. Then, they take part of the flesh and mix it with the holy matzot. The slaughtering of the victim is carried out by the rabbi himself,with the aid of a group of Jews who are overcome with joy while they engage in this barbaric task. They burn the remainder of the corpse and disperse the ashes".

Several days later, the paper published another blood libel that went as

follows: "Many European Jews have returned, in submission to the secret doctrines of the Talmud, to the tradition of human sacrifice. Their sages have commanded them to choose their victims from among Christian children. Thus there have been instances of kidnapped children in the European cities; and the bodies of the children are later discovered after they have been killed in a special way and the blood sucked from them".

The newspaper ends the libel story "This is the faith of our enemy; this is the people whose allies wish us to be the great victim, down to our last drop of blood."

Around the time when the Egyptian paper was circulating its blood libels, Anwar Sadat gave a speech (Mohammed's birthday, spring 1972) which incited against the Jews in a style worthy of classic anti-Semitism. With a religious fervour he sought to arouse hatred against the Jews. Sadat reminded his ignorant listeners of the tense relations which had prevailed between Mohammed and the Jews immediately following his appearance as the Prophet of Islam. Sadat said: "They (the Jews) speak now of direct talks. And yet, when they lived in the Arabian Peninsula as neighbours of the prophet who had reached an agreement with them, did they not make a covenant with his enemies in order to strike a blow at him? For this reason he then expelled them from the entire Arabian Peninsula".

The Last Jews in Egypt

When the Yom Kippur War broke out, the Egyptian authorities were not able to send Jews to detention camps as they had done during the two previous wars; for the Jewish community of Egypt had virtually disappeared. There were only 350 Jews in Cairo and Alexandria at that time. Most of them were old and helpless, and some of them lived in a local old people's home. Among all these Jews there was not one young person; for the youth had left Egypt long before. Chief Rabbi Haim Dwek who had served in Cairo for twenty years, left Egypt at the beginning of the summer of 1972 after receiving permission from the Egyptian Government. Since the creation of the State of Israel, Jewish communal life in Egypt has declined steadily. Synagogue after synagogue closed down, and today there is only one synagogue in Cairo where prayer is still being conducted, mainly on the Sabbath.

Many ancient religious books are still to be found in the closed synagogues, but all Rabbi Dwek's attempts to obtain permission to transfer the books abroad came to naught. He believes that books hundreds of years old were left behind in Egypt, and they are today kept, at least in part, in the synagogue in the ancient quarter of Cairo. There are no longer any Jewish schools either in Cairo or in Alexandria; until a few years ago

there was a *yeshiva* in Cairo, but this too closed down and most of the students left for Israel.

This effectively ends the history of a Jewish community which was thousands of years old; the oldest community in the diaspora. As stated earlier, Jews had been living in Egypt in ancient times. Because of the geographical proximity of Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, many Jews from Eretz Yisrael saw their stay in Egypt as temporary. They had continued to maintain uninterrupted ties with the Jews of Eretz Yisrael up to the present time, when the new Egyptian rulers resolved to uproot all minority groups and European communities some of whom had been residing in Egypt for thousands of years. The pretext was that these people were strangers without claim or right to any part of the land of Egypt. The Jews were expelled on the pretext that they were linked to the Zionists in Israel and hence constituted a danger to the existence of Egypt.

The Grave of Rabbi Yaacov Abou Hassira in Damanhur

The town of Damanhur is much like the other towns sprawled out on either side of the road that runs from Cairo to Alexandria. In this town, inhabited by people who work the soil, is to be found the grave of the *Tzaddik* Rabbi Yaacov Abou Hassira, who died in 1880 without realizing the cherished dream of finding his way to the Holy Land to grace its soil.

Members of his family and also the local Jews and Moslems in Damanhur relate at length his deeds and life story. He is considered a saint by the local populace. In the last century there was a considerable community of Jews in Damanhur who engaged in commerce and acted as a link between the communities of Cairo and Alexandria. It was their good luck that the *Tzaddik* Rabbi Abou Hassira arrived in Damanhur following a gruelling trek from Morocco by way of the lands of North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Libya). He believed that he would soon realize his ideal and reach Eretz Yisrael. First, however, he resolved to stay awhile among the numerous admirers who welcomed him in Damanhur. It was not long though before he began to feel that his strength was waning. So he summoned his hosts and informed them that his days were numbered. He enquired which of them would be willing to purify his body, for he had seen in a vision that those who would purify his body would not see the end of the year, but like him, would be gathered unto their people. Two righteous men volunteered for the sacred task and they informed the community that if the rabbi's words should prove true then their only wish was to be buried at his feet.

And it is told further: Rabbi Yaacov lived on another day or two, praying and readying himself for the fateful day. And on Sunday, the 20th of Tevet 1880, his spirit went up to heaven, and the two volunteers purified his body for burial. Then a conflict arose among the community leaders of Damanhur. One side asserted that the grand and glorious community of Alexandria ought to bring the *tzaddik* for burial in its city. The second pointed out that the *tzaddik* had been their guest, and it was therefore their right to bring him for burial in their town. The second group won out in the end, and Damanhur thus gained celebrity. It became a custom for the Jews to make pilgrimages to the town in the month of Tevet to visit the grave of the *tzaddik* and hold festivities in his memory.

The Jews of Morocco in particular, known to be fervently pious, are strongly attached to the tombs of the *tzaddikim* which are scattered all over Morocco. The researcher, Dr. Issachar Ben-Ami, who is engaged in studying the magnificent Moroccan community, told me that he has hitherto discovered the names of 470 *tzaddikim*, each of whom had his own following of believers and admirers. Even now, when the young generation in Israel is drifting away from the tradition of its fathers, some still come to visit one of the *tzaddikim* who settled in Israel, to seek his protection and his blessing. One of the descendants of Rabbi Yaacov, Rabbi Yisrael Abou Hassira (nicknamed Baba Sali), lives with us today in Azata. Thousands of admirers of all ages from Israel and from the Diaspora make the pilgrimage to his home in order to receive his blessing and the miracle cures for which he is famous.

The tomb of Rabbi Yaacov Abou Hassira in Damanhur attracted thousands of pilgrims from Egypt and the neighbouring lands until the outbreak of hostilities between Egypt and Israel. The Jewish community of Damanhur fell into decay like the other communities of Egypt. Today there is not one Jew left in the town. Many feared that Rabbi Yaacov's grave had been destroyed and that his bones had been scattered far and wide. However, the Moslems who dwell in Damanhur did not damage his tomb; on the contrary, they came to regard his grave as a holy site of their own; he is esteemed by them and they believe in his personal grace.

How wonderful it was, therefore, when a delegation of the Sephardi Federation under the leadership of Mr. Nessim Gaon, comprising representatives from all continents, came to the grave. They came to visit the last remnants of their Jewish brethren, and on October 26, 1979 they went en masse to the tomb of the *tzaddik* to hold a *"Ziarah"*. Moreover, this delegation included one of the great-grandchildren of the *tzaddik*, namely Jacques Abou Hassira, head of the distinguished delegation from France. For the many participants of North African extraction, the *Ziarah* at the grave of Rabbi Yaacov Abou Hassira was the main event, and the chief purpose of their tour to Egypt. This was not, however, Jacques Abou Hassira's first visit to the grave of the *tzaddik*. But after the Camp David agreement was signed and the gates of Egypt were opened to Jewish tourists, he was the first to journey to Egypt from France and earn the right to re-establish the tradition of his ancestors, who had made their way to Damanhur to kiss the grave of the saintly Rabbi Yaacov, the jewel in the crown of the family.

The procession set out in a convoy of cars early in the morning so as to be able to visit the grave and also the Jewish community in Alexandria, and to return to Cairo before the onset of the Sabbath.

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The journey lasted about two hours and afforded us an opportunity to

gaze through the windows at Egypt and its people along both sides of the road which stretches from Cairo to Alexandria. The road is smoothly paved and comfortable for driving. Hundreds of villages of low mud houses sprawl on every side. The Egyptian *fellah* still tugs at his draught animal in order to work the soil which is flooded with water from the canals. One is reminded of what was taught in elementary school regarding the primitive cultivation methods of the Egyptian fellahen. The Egyptian land is blessed with three seasons of cultivation: three times it yields its fruit. And though fifty years have passed since those schooldays, the farming methods of the Egyptian *fellah* have not changed at all. Parallel with the road flows the Nile River which supplies life-giving waters to the narrow strip of desert soil.

However, in addition to the villages and towns, large industrial cities have sprung up by the roadside, such as Tanta, Al-Mahallah al-Dubra, the latter founded by Nasser. Cairo is bursting at the seams with the millions of villagers streaming into it seeking a livelihood. There are eleven million people living in Cairo today; housing conditions are shocking. About two million sleep under the stars, in cemeteries, and wander about in search of cover from the elements. In order to put a halt to the mass migration which threatens the existence of the capital, the government has begun to construct centers of work and industry far from the capital in an attempt to funnel the flow of fellaheen elsewhere. In this way it hopes to save Cairo from destruction.

I attempt to induce our driver to talk about the ways of life and the conditions of the people. What a surprise to learn that the driver has finished six years of study in a secondary school. He is father of a nice family. One son is a high ranking officer in the armed forces and other sons and daughters are studying in secondary and post-secondary schools. Studies are free. The driver says that it is the parents' duty to give their children an education which will enable them to achieve a standard of living superior to theirs.

And if you ask him about the living standards you sense a nostalgic note for those bygone days under King Farouk. "Inflation eats away at one's earnings", he complains. "In the days of Farouk, I could buy two loaves of bread for one ta'arifa. And in the days of Nasser the price of a loaf of bread increased by one-half ta'arifa. While today, the price for a loaf of bread is three grush". and he sighs, and adds as further evidence: "A kilogram of meat today costs two-and-one half Egyptian pounds, whereas in the time of Farouk it cost only sixty-eight grush (100 to a pound), and in the days of Nasser it cost one pound a kilo".

"The price of an egg today is seven grush, whereas in the days of Farouk the price of an egg was no more than one mil".

But lest there be a suspicion that he is criticizing the Sadat regime, he hurries to point out that Sadat inherited a destroyed land from his predecessor. And he must labour hard to rehabilitate the ruins. He extravagantly lauds Sadat because he had blazed the way to peace. "We are glutted with war. We have sacrificed abundantly in exchange for no benefit". And of course, he does not hesitate to say a few critical things about the Palestinians. "What do they want from us? Egypt sacrificed thousands of dead in the wars on their behalf, and now that Sadat endeavours to acquire a state for them and solve the problem of their refugees — they call him a traitor. That is the way of those villains! They are ungrateful. And therefore we, the Egyptians, have resolved to be rid of them. We want to live. To raise our children and enjoy the good life..."

Neither has our driver forgotten those days when the Jews lived in their midst, days of happiness and peace. "The Jews gave us an income and a life of prosperity. They regarded us as brothers and we reaped much benefit from them". Words of praise and admiration for the Jews did not cease during all the hours of the journey.

Suddenly the driver turned to me with a question: "How many people live in Israel?" And when I answer, "Four Million". he responds: "We have forty million, but thirty-eight million are just shadows of human beings, and only two million are worthy of the name 'human beings'."

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After two long hours of travel, we finally arrived in Damanhur. The car turned from the main road towards the town and suddenly you see the regression. The roads are dirt-tracks piled high with refuse. All along the branching canals perch women washing dishes in murky waters and laundering their clothes as in days of yore. The driver asks passers-by the way to the tomb of Abou Hassira. They immediately respond with a further question: "It is your wish to hold a *Ziarah* by the 'Sheikh'?" And they point out the way joyously.

We had to wind our way among the masses of people who crowded the alleys and the dirt tracks. Here a vegetable stall, and there a butcher. The carcasses are hung on bars and rods and the buyers press close to obtain a portion of meat.

We stopped at an intersection. A policeman, dressed in white, took up position and directed the movement of the dozens of vehicles which rushed about honking their horns. A traffic jam formed before the policeman's eyes. A number of trucks coming from the opposite direction blocked our path and the path of other passenger vehicles. The policeman unexcitedly worked to straighten things out until he managed to direct the trucks on their way and open up the way before us. Without coming to a full stop, our driver extends an arm through the window and inserts a

monetary token of appreciation into the policeman's receptive hand, out of gratitude for the wisdom which has rescued us from the difficulties.

We reached the place where Rabbi Yaacov is buried. The car bringing Mr. Nessim Gaon and his wife, and Mr. Aharon Uzan was awaiting our arrival. They were seated on a bench surrounded by a large crowd of local people. Hundreds of children whistled and called out loudly. Apparently they were waiting for the guard whom the government had entrusted with protecting the house where the tomb is located. And meanwhile, the crowd expected to benefit from a virtual rain of handouts from the guests. A woman carrying a little boy, draws out a breast to feed the baby; a lame old man advances and extends an arm, while children dance and prance around us. And miracle of miracles! Though they knew that we were Jews, not a soul treated us badly. On the contrary, they began to praise and glorify the name of the "Sheikh" Abou Hassira, and thay pointed out that it is a duty to welcome visitors who come to hold a *Ziarah* at the graveside.

The guard arrived with a key and rescued us from the commotion. Access to the site was difficult. The house stands on a high hill of earth and the climb of the loose soil made falling and tripping a likelihood. We helped one another on the way up until we finally reached the house and entered. There, right before our eyes was a Jewish grave. The story of the life of the *tzaddik* is inscribed on the tombstone in full clear letters. There is no sign of damage to the tombstone. At the foot of the grave are two more graves of the volunteers who had engaged in purification of the *tzaddik* and who had passed away in the same year; and in accordance with their request they were buried at his feet. But their tombstones had been torn down and we could not ascertain their identities.

In the din of wailing and shouting from the children who surrounded us and walked round the house, the celebration took place. Members of the delegation, Nessim Gaon and his wife, the Israelis headed by Aharon Uzan, Mrs. Lillian Winn, Mr. Steve Shalom from the United States, Mr. Mauricio Hatchwell Toledano, President of the Federation in Spain, all held lighted candles and took part in the ceremony. Mr. Uzan opened with portions from the Psalms in a pleasing Tunisian intonation and Dr. Issachar Ben-Ami gave him support. He sang with a Moroccan lilt and melody. Then the moment of exaltation came when Dr. Ben-Ami prayed *Tefilat Hahashkava*. He recalled the memory of all the family who had passed away in all the generations, men and women. And finally the *Azkarah* for the soldiers of the Israeli Defence Forces (I.D.F.) who had fallen in all the wars. His reading, which was given in an exalted style and moving voice, brought the assembled to tears. Mrs. René Gaon kneeled and prayed; while Mr. Nessim Gaon, wrapped in a *talit*, read from the Psalms. Mrs. Lillian Winn polished and wiped the frail tombstone carefully.

With the end of the *Hashkava* prayer, we opened a bottle of brandy. Then began the benedictions. Each of us gave two blessings: *"Shehakol Nihiyeh Bidvaro" and "Shehechiyanu Vekiyimanu"*. And then we drank a little from the bottle.

The Moslems who were present observed the ceremony and were envious of us. They too wanted to drink the spirits. And when we directed their attention to the fact that they were forbidden to drink the alcoholic beverage, they answered: It is allowed, for this is the drink of the saint Sheikh Abou Hassira.

But we avoided transgression. Instead we distributed bread and cheese as well as much fruit and candy. Quite a few money bills fell into their hands too.... and the generous Nessim Gaon made sure that they left with the feeling that the *Ziarah* of the Jews was worthwhile....

We terminated the *Ziarah* with the singing of *"Hatikva"*. As we were about to depart, a young man, who introduced himself as a teacher of English in the town's school, approached me and whispered: "Do you know why so many people are collecting around your group? Today is Friday. Most of the people are off work today, the schools are closed and the children are free. When they heard that Jewish visitors were coming to a *Ziarah* they decided to greet you en masse because they knew there would be money in it for them..." And they did indeed receive from generous hands.

On the Trail of the Remnants of the Splendid Jewish Communities of Egypt

When the *Ziarah* was over, the procession of cars with our delegation set out for the famous coastal city, Alexandria. The Jewish community in that city was established three hundred years before the Christian era; that is, a community with a Jewish history of great antiquity and richness. The city bears the name of the Greek Emperor Alexander of Macedonia, who conquered the lands of the Middle East and North Africa and made Egypt the center of Greek rule in the area. Greek cuture has always had a great impact upon Egypt. And even today, after the European minorities have left Egypt, the influence of the Greeks on economic life is still felt.

The Jews left their mark on the country over a long period of time too. Large sections of Alexandria were developed by Jews. As we entered the city, our driver pointed to a luxurious neighbourhood: "Do you see that luxurious neighbourhood? It is named after one of the most famous Jewish families which ever lived in the city, the Samoha family. Here, in this area, there had once been a large expanse of marshes which had taken thousands of lives. The head of the family received permission from the government to drain the swamps and he turned the area into a paradise..." He constructed magnificent houses and set up commercial centers which breathed new life into Alexandria. The Samoha family was forced to flee, however, when the Young Officers under Gamal Abdel Nasser went to war against Israel. The Samoha family possessed British citizenship. Like many other Jewish families they received only a paltry compensation for the vast property which was expropriated. This was the fate of all the property owners from among the minorities who had been forced to leave the fruits of the labour of many generations behind them in Egypt.

Upon our arrival, we turned towards the magnificent synagogue called "Elijah the Prophet". The community council and their chairman, Mr. Clement Sitton, were awaiting us at the entrance to the synagogue. He welcomed Mr. Nessim Gaon and the delegation in the name of the council and declared that he was hopeful that its visit would serve to re-establish the link between the Jews of Alexandria and other Jewish communities; a link which had been severed since Israel's War of Independence. There are today in Alexandria about one hundred and fifty Jews, mostly aged

people who are holding on to their property and passing the remainder of their lives in idleness. In Cairo there are no more than two hundred Jews, and their fate is no different from those in Alexandria. The Elijah the Prophet Synagogue was founded about one hundred years ago and the council keeps a close guard over it. In the vicinity of the synagogue are the splendid community buildings in which are housed the minutes and the accounts of the community going back untold generations. The Council maintains them as if they were of the highest value and keeps a close watch over them.

Gradually other Jews began collecting in the synagogue, for the council had notified them of our visit, and soon there was a sufficient number for the *"minha"* prayer. One old Jew of ninety years, Shahada Hadid, who has been serving as the cantor for many years, made his appearance in fancy clothes and with a crown on his head. He began to sing, and his shaky voice gave fit expression to the general decline of the community. One of the men who was praying, inclined himself towards me and whispered in my ear that the cantor was one of a very large family now in Israel, but that he himself refused to leave Alexandria and make *aliyah* because he owned much property which he was still holding...

On all the seats along the rows of benches were engraved the names of the individual members of the congregation. Only on the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, are there sufficient worshippers for several *minyanim*.

Mr. Clement Sitton expressed deep sorrow over the disintegration of the community. He recalled the visit of the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Menahem Begin, to the synagogue, which had greatly stirred the Jews there. Since then there has been a certain reawakening and Jews scattered around the city are showing a deep interest in the affairs of the community. Mr. Sitton hoped that diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel would make possible visits by Egyptian Jews to Israel where they could once again make contact with families from whom they had been separated for more than thirty years.

One of our delegation, Arieh Mishori, who is a native of Alexandria, began to relate memories from his youth in the city. Here, on this very chair beside the Holy Ark, the rabbi of the community, Rabbi Moshe Ventura, would be seated. The rabbi was forced to flee upon the outbreak of the War of Independence to avoid imprisonment. "Here, in this synagogue, my parents arranged for my Barmitzvah". Mr. Mishori and dozens of other youths who had been active in Zionist organizations were arrested by the authorities and detained in camps where they were maltreated for many days. They were accused of treason and of spying for the Zionist enemy. When they were finally released they were placed upon

ships and deported from Egypt. All the Zionist activists came to Israel and have found a prominent place in Israel society.

As ,mentioned, many established new communities in the Diaspora — in French-speaking countries such as France and Switzerland, in the United States and Latin America. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, I encountered a Jewish community of thousands who had come from Egypt. As in Egypt, these Jews became involved in economic activity. Right after the Sinai Campaign, the number of Jews in Alexandria declined to 2,760 from the previous 100,000 who had lived there for many generations. After the Six-Day War the number declined even further; the Egyptian authorities arrested about 300 Jews, including Rabbi Nafusi, and sent them to the notorious Zabel detention camp.

Upon completion of the *minha* prayer, the president of the congregation summoned Mr. Nessim Gaon to open the Holy Ark, and as the doors were opened wide a wonderful sight met our eyes: the interior of the Ark padded in purple velvet and dozens of Torah Scrolls in silver casings resting inside. The silverwork on the casings and on the various parts of the Torah Scrolls was the handiwork of superlative craftsmen.

The cantor began the chant of the *Hashkava* for those who had fallen on the altar of the foundation of the State of Israel and for the fallen of the I.D.F. He then intoned the *Mi Shebarah* benediction for the President of Israel and the Prime Minister, as well as for the President of the Federation and the guests. At the close, the strains of *Hatikva* rose up from the assembly and echoed within the synagogue. During the service, and particularly during the singing of *Hatikva,* I observed the faces of the worshippers and noticed how they were moved to tears.

The congregants were reluctant to separate from us. They sought to lengthen our visit; they brought us to the offices of the community and described at great length its glorious past. Clement Sitton reiterated that upon the death of the elders who maintain the community buildings, there would be no one left to preserve the historical materials of the community.

We tried to cheer him up by explaining that now after the peace agreement had been signed and the prospect of diplomatic relations, Jewish organizations around the world would be able to maintain regular contact with the congregation and to care jointly for its assets. We parted cordially from the congregants and expressed the hope that they would soon be able to visit Israel and meet with their families there.

Some of our comrades rushed back to Cairo, while I rejoined the car bearing Mr. Hatchwell Toledano and Prof. Charles Tapiero, member of the Zionist Executive, who had come from France to take part in the tour.

The three of us decided to visit various sites in the city and to get to know Alexandria. Mr. Toledano asked the driver to take us to a centrally situated secondary school, where his father-in-law had been educated. He wished to bring his father-in-law greetings from his alma mater. The driver, who was a native of Alexandria and had worked in Jewish enterprises for many years prior to the expulsion of the Jews, was well-informed about his hometown and knew every institution and business which had once been in Jewish hands. We met some pupils in the courtyard of the school. Mr. Toledano took photographs to show his father-in-law.

Then we continued to the neighbourhoods which stretch along the shore of the Mediterranean. Indeed, this was a heart-warming and even familiar scene. We had the feeling that we were travelling along the coast and beaches of Tel-Aviv and Netanya.

We sat down in a café on the beach front and talked about many things. We did not feel like strangers and the waiters who served us coffee and cold drinks seemed like old acquaintances. As soon as they learned that we had come from Israel, they expressed their happiness and declared loudly: "Long live our President Sadat, who made peace! Long live Egypt! Long live Israel!"

And without any prompting, the waiters began to tell us about the hardships of the Egyptian people; about the innumerable losses they had suffered for no reason; because of those ungrateful Palestinians! We encouraged them and said that we were embarked upon a new era and that the two nations, Egypt and Israel, would endeavour jointly to ease the suffering of their respective peoples and to bring wealth and prosperity to the area.

While we were in the café, the participants in the second delegation which had arrived in the same week came in. This delegation was the idea of the President of Israel and its purpose was to trace the remains of *genizot* in institutions and synagogues of the Jewish communities in Egypt. We exchanged impressions and related our encounters with the surviving communities. We had the feeling that the two delegations from Israel were touring about among ruins, in a vacuum, without finding what they were really looking for.

A Night in "Hart el-Yahud" in Cairo

Since we had fixed the date of our return to Israel for Monday, we decided to pass Sunday in visiting important places in Cairo. The first visit was to the National Museum which is only a few minutes from the Hilton Hotel where we were staying. In this museum may be found the lovely treasures of the Pharaohs and the royal houses of Egypt from ancient times, as well as the mummies of Egyptian kings. After we had acquired our tickets, one of the guides darted our way and tried to size us up by speaking to us in a mixture of different languages: English, French and German. As the members of our group were fluent in these languages, we answered him in each one as he addressed us. To his amazement, he discovered that among these weird tourists there were also speakers of Arabic. The guide attached himself to us throughout our tour of the museum.

The museum is the fruit of planning by the greatest French archaeologists, who frequented the Land of the Nile in the nineteenth century and were the first to discover the lovely relics which are exhibited there. Among these treasures are gold and silver jewels, luxurious garments and the like. But above all there are the mumified bodies which look very much alive. Thanks to the eminent French archaeologists, Egypt gained an organized museum.

One could spend many days at the museum, but our schedule was already crowded. For instance, it is impossible to leave Cairo without having visited its wonderful bazaars. And though it was Sunday, we found many stores open and stocked full of the characteristic merchandise of Egypt. There were illustrated maps depicting the deeds of the Pharaohs, Egyptian-Arab clothing and much, much more. A graceful woman tended to us with great commercial verve. In response to my question, "Which ethnic group do you belong to?" she answered that she was of Armenian descent. This did much to explain her qualifications in the arts of persuasion and selling.

We arranged with our driver to fetch us from our hotel at four o'clock and take us to the pyramids; for how could one leave Egypt without seeing them? In my childhood I had studied Egyptian stamps depicting the pyramids in all their unique glory. The Sphinx which lie at their base were also depicted on postage stamps. When the British conquered Eretz Yisrael they brought with them an Egyptian garrison, traffic policemen and manual labourers to reconstruct the railway line between Eretz Yis-

rael and Egypt which had been destroyed during the war. We little children got many Egyptian postage stamps from the labourers and the clerks. This war was our first encounter with our southern neighbours.

Now the time had arrived to see the pyramids at first hand. In less than an hour we reached our destination. The pyramids are located in Giza, which is essentially an extension of Metropolitan Cairo. When you reach the area of the pyramids you get the impression that they lie on the border of the Egyptian capital.

The car parked a short distance away. Before we had managed to extricate ourselves from the vehicle, the expected surge of tourist guides fell upon us and commenced their songs of self-praise. They were dressed in black jelabiyas and held sticks in their hands which were to aid them in their guiding. Luckily, our driver enlisted one of his acquaintances and explained to the others that he had arranged with this guide prior to our leaving; we were thus able to rid ourselves of the others.

We could hardly absorb the constant flow of the guide's words, because our eyes were glued both to the pyramids that towered above us and to the general scene. Behold, right before our very eyes lay the Sphinx! It was already evening. We agreed that "If we don't hurry to see the pyramids from close up we'll miss everything". So we began to walk up the paths leading to the pyramids. Two of our comrades succumbed to the wishes of the guide to ride upon a couple of animals. There were camels and mules lying about. Dr. Issachar Ben-Ami darted over to ride a mule while Arieh Mishori mounted a camel and began to gallop about the area. I said to Aharon Uzan: "Let our friends play as much as they please, but let us hurry to the pyramids".

He agreed and we lost no time to move on.

And as we drew nearer, we were able to appreciate the labour of the thousands of slaves who had been mobilized for the task by the Pharaohs; who had laid course upon course and constructed the pyramids which are a miraculous artistic feat. In this way the Pharaohs demonstrated their power.

Our friends, Issachar and Ariel, soon realized that they might miss seeing the pyramids before dark, and so they abandoned the animals and rushed to the site. At the base of the pyramids we were overwhelmed by young boys selling jewels and statuettes. But if these lads had been dependent upon us for a living, then they would surely have starved. We are stingy tourists who examine everything with the utmost care before we extract coins from our pockets.

Meanwhile, the evening shadows had begun to fall. We hurried back in order to visit Hart el-Yahud, which is the neighbourhood in which Jews

had lived for innumerable generations and where may still be found synagogues and institutions which had once served the community.

We entered the car and told to the driver: "Take us to Hart el-Yahud!"

— "Hader! Ala rahsi!" (I'm ready and willing) — he answered.

We arrived at Chan el-Khalil, which is the largest outdoor market in Cairo. The driver stopped near the entrance and said: "I can only drive this far. Go into the market and enquire of passers-by if they will show you the way to Hart el-Yahud. I'll be waiting for you here".

Now, many days after that night, I ask myself: Where did we acquire such confidence? Four Israelis enter the seething, overflowing Chan el-Khalil without guide or escort. They know neither the place nor the local residents. We marched forward with sure step and rambled about among the narrow alleyways. One passage after another. and when we asked the question: "Where is Hart el-Yahud?" we were rewarded with warm smiles and hands indicating the way to the place. "Go down that lane and well along the way you will come to where you want". They guided us along without making any attempt to identify us. But when we entered the passageway which leads to Hart el-Yahud the picture changed. Store owners and passers-by, some of whom were mothers and children, recognized us. They surrounded us and called out in joy, cheering: "Here! Israelis have come! Israelis are here!"

We sought their aid in getting to Hart el-Yahud. Just then a tall man introduced himself as a Christian and said: "I'll take you there". And so we followed him confidently to the neighbourhood where the synagogues are to be found. We reached a courtyard full of hanging laundry along its length and breadth and quickly picked out the synagogue when a Magen David caught our eye. We noticed a sign with the words "The Rabbi Haim Kapusi Synagogue".

An Egyptian entrusted with protecting the house of prayer from vandals lives in the courtyard.

Our escort told us that the remaining Jews are scattered all around Cairo. Attorney Dana takes care of the community's buildings: the prayer houses and other virtually abandoned structures.

What an amazing spectacle! Four Jews from Israel circulating freely without fear in dark alleyways while a group of curious onlookers surrounds them offering its services.

Israel! Israel! — the crowd chanted — Long live Sadat! Long live Egypt! Long live Israel!.

We responded gratefully. Yet we deeply regretted that we had not man-

aged to view the synagogue in daylight. Nonetheless, we did not hestitate to visit other synagogues. We asked the driver to take us to a very old synagogue, the Ibn Ezra synagogue. In the entrance flickered a flame from a candelabra, and a Magen David caught our eye.

"Here is another synagogue". The driver indicated. "And another".

I have forgotten to mention that before continuing our car tour we stopped at a shop for milk products. We ordered a cup of tasty yogurt. Arieh Mishori, who was born in Egypt, opened a conversation with the shopkeeper and revealed that we were from Israel. The proprietor called out cheers of "Hip hip hooray" Egyptian style.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome!" he intoned enthusiastically. "Oh, perhaps it will soon be our turn to visit Israel!"

And he was not alone in expressing the desire to visit Israel. Our driver expressed a strong wish to come someday to Israel after diplomatic relations are established, and find a source of income there. "With you people, the workers live like human beings. With us, earth and ash are our reward!" he announced.

Late that evening, when we returned to the hotel in order to pack our belongings in preparation for the flight next day, we strolled briefly about the lobby in order to rest from the strong flood of the day's impressions. I walked about aimlessly and sensed the presence of a well-dressed man who was following me around as if attempting to discover my identity. He turned to me and asked: "Do you belong to the delegation from Israel?"

I answered: "Yes", and asked: "And who, sir, are you?"

"My name is Avraham Mizrahi. I am a of a very old Egyptian family. I didn't join those who left Egypt; not even in the darkest hours! I knew how to get along and I remained..."

I thought to myself, here is our chance to study the condition of the last Jews of the community. And so I began to ask questions and Mr. Mizrahi willingly answered with this story: "I heard that you have come to check out the situation of the community's property as well as of the holy books which have survived. The synagogues in the city are on the verge of collapse because the leaders of the congregation are not giving them much attention. For example, the Rambam Synagogue, one of the oldest, is in terrible condition: the ceiling has collapsed and only the four walls have remained standing. The pews and the Holy Ark are falling apart.

"In the Ibn Ezra Synagogue, which is associated with the famous *Geniza*, there are still remnants of the *Geniza* and a few other books. In the back of the synagogue known as the Rabbi Haim Kapusi Synagogue are liturgi-

cal books which are ignored and neglected. There are additional books in the Sha'ar Shama'im Synagogue".

"The offices of the community council in Cairo in fact no longer serve the needs of the community. The bookcases in the offices are locked up and the guard who has the keys does not even open the doors in ordef to remove the dust which has collected there. There are numerous books as well as a wealth of documentation in the bookcases".

Mr. Mizrahi talked about the old age home in Heliopolis in which the Jewish community cares for ten aged people. We heard more about the remaining Karaite community of Cairo. The number of Karaites in Cairo is larger than the number of Jews and they are in control of the rabbinate. The Karaite children receive their education in government schools, but in addition the Karaite community conducts evening classes where Torah and the precepts are taught.

"If you really desire to aid in the restoration of the holy places" — said Mr. Mizrahi — "then you must make contact with the Egyptian government after the establishment of normal relations between the two countries, so that a campaign of rehabilitation can be planned. Perhaps it is possible to sell some of them and utilize the money to refurbish the other synagogues and tombs which have been damaged. By the way, the Egyptian Jews who live today in Israel have many relatives buried in the cemeteries and no doubt they will respond to the call to come and restore the graves of their dear ones. In this way we will fulfill our obligation to the dead, whose graves were damaged in those dark hours we have experienced here".

I parted from Mr. Mizrahi at a late hour and promised to pass his words on to the relevant authorities. In addition, I felt it my duty to publish them in order to bring them to the attention of our brethren who left Egypt for the peace and security of Israel. They will read these words and then proceed to the task of restoring the graves of their families. They must also aid the last of the Egyptian Jews with advice and guidance on restoring the ancient synagogues before they deteriorate completely. This can be done in conjunction with world Jewish organizations.

The Jews of Yemen

The Birth of Israel — Disappearance of the Yemenite Community

Just a few weeks after the silencing of the cannons on the fields of battle where war had been waged to prevent the creation of Israel, there began a mass migration of Yemenite Jews to Israel. This rescue operation known as "Magic Carpet" began in April 1949 and terminated in September 1950.

The operation to save our brothers from their painful and humiliating exile was quite unique. In those few months, close to 50,000 Jews made *aliyah* to Israel. They arrived in a whirlwind. The Yemenite Jews, living in their scattered cities and villages, had always directed their eyes and hopes towards Zion in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. And now, when the news spread that the hour of redemption was at hand, they rose up like one united spirit, liquidated and sold their scant possessions, and streamed in the thousands to the camps set up on the border with Aden (which was still a British colony) to embark on their long-awaited journey to salvation. It was no simple task for these Jews to reach the camps. They passed through the seven chambers of hell, on the tortuous route between Yemen and Aden, some riding, some walking. Whoever was fortunate enough to be able to purchase a beast of burden, loaded his few possessions atop the animal. He, his wife and children, travelled for many days and nights, their goods and lives at the mercy of bandits at all times. But these Jews were full of faith that they were bringing redemption to themselves and their loved ones, and would not be deterred by the fears or the trials of the journey. And after they finally reached the camps, they had to wait several more days for their turn to board the "Wings of the Eagle", the airplanes which were to fly them to Israel.

The two planes which arrived at the end of September 1950 at the airport in Lod marked the demise of the Yemenite Jewish community, and the vision of the prophet "And I shall bring you on the wings of eagles" was finally fulfilled.

Thus ended a two thousand-year-old history of exile for one of the magnificent tribes which had lived in semi-isolation in one of the remote lands of the Arabian Peninsula, and which had been cut off from the other branches of the Jewish people.

Word reaches Yemen of Jewish Victory in the War of Independence

In the winter of 1947-1948, while fateful battles were being waged between Arab gangs and the Jews over the destiny of Eretz Yisrael following the U.N. partition resolution, political changes occurred in Yemen. The Imam Yahya was murdered in February 1948, which caused an upheaval in the country and the imam's son, the Amir Ahmad, went to battle to retrieve rights to the royal throne. He laid siege to San'a for four weeks and succeeded in penetrating into it and restoring the regime to his own hands. The soldiers of the amir robbed the residents of the city including the Jews.

During the early stages of his rule, an attempt was made to propagate a blood libel against the Jews. In December 1948, the Jews of San'a were accused of kidnapping two Moslem youths and tossing them into a pit. Sixty Jews were arrested over a period of several months and were kept in gaol where they were tortured to make them confess to the crime. After considerable effort by the Jewish community, the slanderers were found and the innocence of the victims established. The authorities refused to officially exonerate the Jews, but the accused were nevertheless released. Four young Jews were held for additional imprisonment, but they too were eventually freed.

Meanwhile, word was received in Yemen of the establishment of the State of Israel and the defeat of the Arab armies. Theoretically, Yemen had participated in this war, though it had not taken an active part in the fighting. Reports of the flight of the Arabs before the advancing Israel armies terrified the Arabs of Yemen. Arab refugees from Palestine told of the defeat and their stories aroused great anxiety among the citizens. The Arabic language broadcasts of "Kol Israel" served as a reliable source of information for the Yemen Arabs on developments in Israel. The people quickly reached the conclusion that it was not feasible to rely upon Arab strength. The Jewish leaders in San'a turned to the Imam Ahmed and asked to be permitted to go and settle in Israel. He responded to their request and put no obstacle in the way of their departure. An envoy from Israel, Mr. Yosef Zaddok, was received by the Imam Ahmed and was asked if the Government of Israel was pleased with him. Apparently, the Imam Ahmad was apprehensive lest victorious Israel would demand compensation from him for the property which the Yemenite Jews had been compelled to leave behind. He therefore hastened to allow the departure of the remaining Jews.

Thus, the Jews of Yemen set out en masse for their historic land. Some left with the help of motorized vehicles owned by Arabs, while others employed pack animals. It is interesting to note that the last Jews to leave Yemen for Aden did so in airplanes of the Yemenite national airline,

which gave priority to Jews because they were willing to pay generously for the privilege.

At first the Yemenite Jews were placed in refugee camps set up for the purpose by the "Joint" near Aden. The number of persons in the camps grew steadily until finally Jewish Agency emissaries succeeded in speeding up the pace of *aliyah* by leasing six large planes which flew without pause between Aden and Lod; this operation became known as "Operation Magic Carpet". By the end of March 1950, all the refugees in the camps had been transported to Israel and thus ended the Yemenite *aliyah.*

Until just before the Six-Day War, it was believed that not one Jew was left in Yemen. But later foreign journalists who visited Yemen published information of encounters with Jews in remote villages. They estimated that there are about five hundred Jews still living in Yemen today.

History

The Yemenite Jews had always lived under tyrannical rulers, fanatic Moslems who persecuted and humiliated them, in an expression of blind religious hatred. Every "imam" who gained power set himself the task of proving his strength and might by the persecution of Jews, who were forced to pay taxes both to the ruler and to the head of the local tribe.

The history of the Yemenite Jewish community is shrouded in a thick haze. Because of the oppressive conditions under which they lived, there are no clear traces as to the exact date of their arrival in Yemen. Some conjecture that they arrived with the exile of the First Temple period. But there is good reason to believe that the first settlers came to Yemen after the destruction of the Second Temple. Others go so far as to date their arrival to long before both these. The Vice-Consul of France in Hodeida — a coastal city of Yemen — who had shown an interest in the condition of Yemenite Jewry during his service in that country, wrote a letter in 1881 to the foreign minister of France in which he fixed the date of the first Jewish presence in Yemen at 1451 B.C.E., in the days of Joshua Ben-Nun. He based his conclusion on the writings of the Arab historian Abu el-Fida. Other historians assume that they arrived after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. "They merged with the dwellers of the desert and became courageous and strong like them. In the interior cities of Yemen, the Jews fight amongst themselves as well as against the bedouin whom they afterwards rob. Both the Jews of the cities and the Jews of the mountains are well-read and well versed in the Bible and the Talmud. Something which does not hold true with regard to the desert Jews, who are knowledgeable in Bible alone". (Avraham Elmaliah, "Bema'aracha", issue 6, Heshvan 5726-1966).

The reports of a Jewish kingdom in Yemen at the end of the fifth and the

beginning of the sixth century C.E. abound with glory and Jewish pride. A dynasty of Jewish rulers established a regime there. According to Yemenite historians, the dwellers in the land were compelled to accept the Jewish religion. A fierce struggle was waged at that time between Judaism and Christianity, in which the Jewish rulers gained the upper hand. They endeavoured to spread Judaism among the people of the land who were pagans. But the Byzantine Christian kings did not rest. They encouraged the Ethiopians to conquer Yemen. The people of Himyar (Southern Arabia) revolted and crowned the Jew, Yusuf Dhu Nuwas, as their king. He organized a rebellion and commenced the conquest of large areas and districts in Yemen, until he succeeded in expelling the enemy from the interior of the country and reached the foothills. The information about this heroic king is scanty, and whatever little we have has come down to us through Christian sources which made efforts to belittle him and obscure his deeds and achievements. Dhu Nuwas was routed by the Ethiopian king who attacked Yemen with enormous marine and land forces. The tribal chiefs did not venture to the aid of the Jewish king, and his small army, which stood alone in the campaign against the huge forces of Ethiopians and Arabs, was defeated. Thus was the Jewish kingdom erased from the face of the earth.

In the opinion of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the rule of the Jews and the Jewish converts in Yemen lasted more than three hundred years. About fifty years after the fall of Dhu Nuwas, Mohammed appeared and united the Arabs around him. He set himself the goal of pushing the Jews out of the Arabian Peninsula, since he regarded them as an obstacle in his path. He persecuted them and demanded that they adopt the religion of Islam. When they refused, he pursued them to the point of destruction. Ultimately, some Jews adopted the Moslem religion; while others fled far from the Arabian Peninsula.

Despite the persecutions by Mohammed and his successors, who endeavoured to impose the religion of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the Near East, the Jews managed to preserve their own religion and to fortify themselves within Yemen. They continued to live among the Ziyadid Moslems (an offshoot of the Shi'ite sect) and also among the Sunni Moslems. Both these groups were fanatics and felt it a duty to pursue the Jews and maltreat them. But regardless of their troubles and the unceasing oppression, the latter preserved their religion, traditions and faith until the day of salvation.

Yemenite Jewish Links with other Jewish Centers

Although the Jews of Yemen were cut off from other regions because they dwelt amidst a people immersed in darkness at all times, it would be

erroneous to assume that they were completely isolated from the rest of the world and had no ties with other branches of the Jewish people.

In the archaeological excavations carried out in Beit She'arim, proof was found that the Jews who dwelt in Yemen during the period of the Mishna brought their dead for burial in Eretz Yisrael. In a Greek inscription found in Beit She'arim, reference is made to the *nagid* of Yemen. From this it was concluded that during the second and third centuries C.E., Yemenite Jews were eager to be buried in the Holy Land, a fact which testifies to the close ties between the Yemen diaspora and the Jews of Eretz Yisrael.

Study of Yemenite Jewish history has revealed that their rabbis and sages maintained contact with eminent Jewish teachers and scholars in the Spanish and Eastern diasporas as well as with those in Ashkenaz. These ties were a source of spiritual inspiration to them. The Yemenite rabbis possessed the abbreviated version of the Talmud by Isaac Alfasi, the essays of the Rambam (the basis of Yemenite religious teachings) and the books of Rabbi Joseph Caro, author of the *Shulhan Arukh.* They also possessed the "*Tag*" — the Five Books of Moses with the *Onkelos* translation — and the Arabic translation of Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, as well as the *Tahlal* which is a compendium of their prayers and customs. They delved deeply into the Kabbala and engaged in mystical teachings in the hope of bringing their redemption nearer. The fervour of their belief in these teachings led to the opposition of a group of learned men who viewed this intensity for the Kabbala as a rupture with the sources of Judaism. This resulted in a split between the adherents of the Kabbala and the believers in the simple and manifest meanings of the holy books — a controversy reminiscent of the split in Ashkenaz between the *Mitnagdim* and the *Hassidim.* The controversy continues to this day among the Yemenite Jews in Israel.

This community produced great scholars, poets, writers and historians. The greatest of the poets was Rabbi Shalom Shabazi (after the city Shabaz where he lived), who was born in 1619. He lived at the time of the notorious "*Muzah*", decree which caused the Jews indescribable suffering and sorrow, to which he gave expression. These poems were written at the age of sixty. Rabbi Shabazi wrote books on various themes: *Hemdat Yamin,* an interpretation of the Torah by way of the Midrash and the Kabbala; *Kitab er-Ramel* (the book of sand) on fortune-telling by tossing up grains of sand; *Kitab ez-Zig,* on astronomy and astrology and *Beit Tefila,* an interpretation of the prayers. But his genius was particularly conspicuous in his poetry. He wrote thousands of poems, of which only a few hundred have survived and were handed down to later generations; they are today included in anthologies of poetry. Like other great Jewish sages of the Middle Ages, Rabbi Shabazi wrote in both Hebrew and

Arabic. He also had a command of Aramaic which he used in his poems and essays on Jewish tradition, the holy days and the Sabbath, Jewish events and the Jews, their vision of redemption and sufferings. He made a scant living and lived a life of want and deprivation. After his death, many legends arose around him. The Jews of Yemen, and even the Arabs, were wont to make pilgrimages to his grave to receive his blessing of their wishes. Even in Eretz Yisrael, these Jews considered it a duty to pay a visit to his tomb *(ziarah)* to request a speedy recovery for their sick or a child for the barren.

The burdens of exile and the harsh decrees issued by tribal leaders and Arab rulers against the Jews united them in the face of adversity. And despite their distance and isolation from large Jewish communities, they succeeded in maintaining regular contact with other communities. Obviously, many thirsting for Jewish knowledge and wisdom went to learn in the Babylonian *yeshivot.* In any event, the *geonim* in Babylonia fostered ties with Jewish leaders in Yemen and were well aware of the hardships suffered there. The Yemenite Jews made contributions to the Babylonian *yeshivot* and later they raised moneys for the maintenance of schools and *yeshivot* in Eretz Yisrael.

Edicts and Persecution

Of all the trials and tribulations which were the lot of the Jews in the diaspora, at least three guarters fell to the lot of the Yemenite Jews. Already in the first generations of Islamic rule, the Jews were subjected to poll taxes. And though such taxes were later abolished in other Moslem countries, in Yemen poll taxes were collected up to recent times. Jews were forbidden to raise their voices in the presence of Moslems, to touch a passing Moslem, to engage in commerce of the sort Moslems engaged in, to build houses higher than those of Moslems, to express a negative opinion about the Moslem religion, to curse the prophets, to debate on the subject of religion with a Moslem, to ride upon animals with spread legs, to wink or make hints at the sight of a naked Moslem, to engage in Torah studies outside the synagogue, to raise their voices when praying, to blow the shofar loudly, or to loan money at interest since the receipt of interest brings destruction to the world. Jews were also required to rise in the presence of Moslems and to show respect at every opportunity.

The Jews were forced to skin carcasses and to clean lavatories. In general, they were assigned to all menial tasks. However, the respectable crafts, such as jewellery-making, textile weaving and all other forms of handicrafts were also a source of livelihood for them since the Arabs looked down upon all forms of crafts and had no desire to learn them; they were by and large farmers.

There were also unofficial anti-Jewish decrees which were far worse than the official decrees. The Jews had no other choice but to accept their fate.

In 1872, the Ottomans conquered San'a, the capital of Yemen and became the new rulers of the land. Their rule lasted until the end of World War I, but was not a stable one. The tribal chiefs and imams rebelled against them and pushed them out of the interior so that in practice the Ottomans controlled only the large cities: the capital San'a and the port of Hodeida.

With the Ottoman takeover of San'a, the condition of the Jews took a turn for the better. About one year later, the Jews were given permission to build a new quarter south of the one where they had been living for generations, and where the houses were on the verge of collapse. The Turks also allowed them to build synagogues in their new neighbourhood. And for a short period the Jews were relieved of the task of collecting the carcasses of dead animals. But unlike in other parts of the Turkish Empire, the rulers continued to collect the poll tax imposed by the Yemenite rulers. The Jews tried to get the Turkish governor to reduce the amount of the tax, but failed. The Turkish governor in San'a compelled the people, particularly the Jews, to grind flour for his soldiers for a small payment. At the beginning of the Turkish conquest, when the number of Turkish soldiers was still small, poor Jewish women were ready to engage in the work of milling. But as the number of soldiers grew, the work became a burden for the entire Jewish community, but all appeals of its leaders to the governor to be freed from this obligation fell on deaf ears. The poll tax and the milling of flour were a bitter pill for the Jews. The persecutions and humiliations inflicted by the local Moslems also continued. Yemen has always suffered from drought due to the sparse rainful, and this brought many years of famine which took their toll of the Jewish community. They were weak and impoverished and barely able to survive under the difficult conditions.

The Arab rulers were finally successful in expelling the Turks, after which they increased their oppressive grip upon the Jews. In 1904, the Imam Yahya decided to cleanse Yemen of Turkish domination. He declared the Turks to be infidels. The uprising of the imams spread to all the cities where Zaydis, members of a fanatical Shi'ite sect lived. In 1905, an imam and his army put a siege on the town of San'a. The resultant hunger claimed many victims including many Jews. On Pesach 1905, the Turkish governor was forced to surrender, and the Imam Yahya entered the city as victor. The Jews expressed their loyalty to the new ruler and he promised to give them his full protection on condition that they fulfill their obligations towards him. However, the imam then issued a manifesto specifying anew all the injunctions and prohibitions in force prior to the Ottoman conquest. He demanded that the Jews abide by these because the heretical Turkish conquerors had abolished them.

The Imam Yahya himself insisted upon full implementation of the injunctions, and his first act after consolidating his rule in the city was to destroy some of the synagogues in San'a which had been constructed under the Turks. On the other hand, he made certain that no wrongdoing in contravention of Moslem religious law was committed against the Jews. But his control of San'a did not last long and the Turks soon reconquered the city. The iman returned to lay siege to the city in 1908 and, as before, many victims were claimed by hunger and disease.

In 1911, the Iman Yahya compelled the Turkish governor to grant him virtual government control, though officially under the jurisdiction of the Turkish authorities. In the event, the Turks were forced to accede to his demands and allow him to establish his authority in San'a. The iman held power until 1918, when the Turkish armies pulled out of Yemen following their defeat in the war. Thereafter Yahya became the sole ruler of all Yemen.

The Iman Yahya reinstated, in 1921, a terrible decree against the Jews which had first been issued by the Yemenite rulers, namely the "orphans' decree". Every Jewish orphan was taken into custody by the authorities and converted to Islam. Though there are few statistics regarding the number of children thus converted, it is known that the number was not small. As this decree caused more suffering than any other, the relatives of potential victims made certain to marry them off at a young age and thus save them from falling into the hands of the authorities. Others managed to smuggle orphans out of the country or hide them.

One of the most humiliating edicts was the "crown decree" dating back to 1667. The Jews were accustomed to wearing ample and respectable garments and of adorning their heads with crowns. The Yemenite rulers forbade them to wear crowns and even ordered them to go about bareheaded. This injunction was particularly degrading since it was considered a religious transgression to go without a head covering. The Jews pleaded with the governors to annul the decree and even bribed them. The governors responded to their importunities and sanctioned head coverings of "garments". This is the *talit* with which the Yemenite Jews wrap themselves and cover their heads to this day. In the course of time they were permitted to cover their heads with cloth kerchiefs. The "crown decree", like the other restrictions, was abrogated in 1872 when the Turks recaptured Yemen from the Arab rulers.

False Messiahs and the End of Exile in Yemen

The persecutions and torments inflicted on this community intensified their longing for redemption. They sought to bring the end of their exile nearer and anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah who would

redeem them and restore them to the Land of Israel and a life of liberty. Small wonder that prophets appeared in Yemen who proclaimed themselves Messiahs and tried to rally the Jewish masses round them and recognize them as saviours.

Word of Shabbtai Zvi, the self-proclaimed Messiah and harbinger of the Messianic era, reached Yemen. Writings and epistles arrived via Egypt declaring the advent of redemption. Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, who studied the poetry of Yemenite Jewry, suggests that the appearance of Shabbtai Zvi influenced Yemenite poets who described him as a saviour. Idelsohn points to indirect references to him in the works of Rabbi Shalom Shabazi. He is supported in this by the well-known researcher, Prof. Gershon Scholem in his book, *Shabbtai Zvi.* Such enthusiasm was engendered by the self-proclaimed messiah that many sold their possessions and readied themselves to go to Eretz Yisrael. But when they learnt that he was yet another false messiah, the high hopes of the Jews of Yemen like those of many others were dashed.

Not all the names of the messiahs who appeared in Yemen are known, but their advent is known to have profoundly shaken the community and to have had bitter consequences for them. One of the most conspicuous appeared during the lifetime of the Rambam (about 1172) and caused great confusion for the many who believed in him implicitly and flocked after him. In their distress, the Jews appealed to the Rambam for advice. He replied with a letter full of solace and encouragement, in which he tried to mitigate their grief. This is known as the "Yemenite Letter", which played an important role in the religious life of this community and did much to uplift their fallen spirits. From that time, the Rambam became the most popular Jewish leader in the community and even acquired an aura of sanctity in their eyes. The false messiah was caught by the Yemenite authorities and decapitated with a sword.

These Jews had always conducted themselves in accordance with the precepts of the Talmud and the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Alfasi. But the books of the Rambam, and in particular *Mishneh Torah,* were soon accepted by them as works of the first order. Their prayer service was based on *Mishneh Torah,* and up to the last generation the *Mishnah* was studied with the aid of the Arabic commentary of the Rambam. His *Guide to the Perplexed* is the only philosophical work which has occupied a high place in Yemenite Jewish thought and scholarship. The Rambam is thus referred to as "*Rabeinu*" and "The Great Eagle."

The false messiah, Shofer Kohil, also made a tremendous impact on Yemenite Jews. He was one of the sages of San'a and was well-versed in *Torah, Aggada* and *Halacha.* One day he separated from his wife, began a regime of abstinence and preached to the masses to prepare for the immi-

nent day of redemption. He moved among the Jewish centers in Yemen, declaring himself to be the Messiah who had been sent to redeem them from their exile. Many put their faith in him and began to follow him. Word of the appearance of a messiah among the Jews, however, worried the Yemenite authorities. Mercenaries of the king captured him at the end of 1863 and his head was brought to San'a. But his followers and disciples continued to believe in him, and expressed the hope that he would soon return to life. This faith led to the rise of a second self-styled messiah some years later. This man was unlearned, a trickster and greedy for profit. He collected contributions from the local Jews and even sent envoys and despatches to Jews in other Eastern lands in the hope of eliciting donations.

It seems that the last messiah whom the community recall appeared in 1893, namely, Yosef Abdallah. He too engaged in deceit and charlatanism and it was mainly the village people who flocked to him, not the city-dwellers. The Turkish authorities eventually apprehended him and expelled him to the Island of Kamaran. But when the Imam Yahya took over the government, Abdallah was returned to San'a with other political prisoners, and with the aid of bribes which his followers gave officials, this false messiah was spared trial and imprisonment. He died during the first world war.

Oppression and the belief in a messiah who would bring the New Kingdom impelled the Yemenite Jews to make their way to Eretz Yisrael. In fact, they continued to do so over the centuries individually and in groups. Among the distinguished personalities who settled in the land was Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, who gained fame as one of the spiritual giants in Jerusalem as a scholar in the well-known Kabbalistic *Yeshivat Beit El* founded by Rabbi Gedalia Chiyun. Rabbi Sharabi arrived in Eretz Yisrael from San'a in the middle of the 17th century, married a Sephardi woman and lived among the Sephardi community of Jerusalem. Within a short time he became one of the most celebrated authorities on the Kabbala. When his last days were upon him, the learned Rabbi Chiyun commanded the sages of the yeshiva to appoint Rabbi Sharabi as his replacement as head of the *yeshiva;* and this was done. The latter wrote the book *Rehovot Hanehar,* which gives a kabbalistic interpretation of the prayers and benedictions, and he was known as the "Minister of Peace". He was buried on the Mount of Olives in the plot closest to the great sages of Jerusalem beside Avshalom's Tomb. According to Rabbi Avraham el-Nadad, in the booklet — *Seridei Teiman* — Rabbi Sharabi was born in 1720 and died in 1782. His son, Rabbi Yitzhak Sharabi, took his place at the *Beit El Yeshiva* after his death, and his grandson, Rabbi Raphael Shalom, was also a learned man who wrote a book called *Divrei Shalom* on the Kabbala.

Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael

Though information on early *aliyah* is scant, historians mention Rabbi Yehuda el-Harizi who journeyed in Eretz Yisrael at the beginning of the 13th century and who tells, in his descriptions of daily life in Jerusalem, of his encounter with a community of Jews from Yemen whose leader was a man named Sa'adia. Rabbi Obadia of Bartenura, interpreter of the *Mishna*, writes in 1489 in a letter to his Jewish brethren in Italy that he had found in Jerusalem some Jews from the land of Aden. He had also heard from an Ashkenazi rabbi of Yemenite Jews who had come to Jerusalem long before. Even then there were stories of how they stopped over in Aden en route to Eretz Yisrael.

In recent times, envoys to Yemen from Eretz Yisrael played an important role in the *aliyah* of Jews.

Moshe Zaddok writes in his book on the customs and history of Yemenite Jewry how, in the past four hundred years, twenty-three envoys from Eretz Yisrael visited Yemen, some to study Jewish tribes in Arabia and others to raise moneys for the *yeshivot.* We know of the first envoy who arrived in 1579 from Safed from the book *Sefer Hamusar* by Zecharia el-Tzahari. He was Rabbi Avraham Ashkenazi, sent to collect funds for the *yeshiva* in Tiberias. He brought with him Hebrew books for sale and, according to the researcher, Avraham Ya'ari, he founded the first Hebrew printing press in Safed, and for that matter in all Asia, in 1577.

Another envoy, Rabbi Barukh, a native of Pinsk, was sent in 1831 by Rabbi Israel of Sheklov, leader of the "*Prushim*" community in Safed. It was his task to trace people calling themselves "*Bnai Moshe*" and the "Ten Lost Tribes". Rabbi Barukh reached San'a and was received with great respect. During his stay, the imam took ill and the rabbi tended to him. Following the imam's successful recovery, Rabbi Barukh was appointed court physician and thereafter he steadily improved his position in the royal court. This increased the envy of the Moslems and led them to plot against him. At this time, Ibrahim Pasha, son of Mohammed Ali ruler of Egypt, invaded Yemen and conquered the city of Mucha. Rabbi Barukh asked the imam for a force of 10,000 soldiers to fight off armies of Ibrahim Pasha and expel him from Mucha. But his Moslem enemies accused him falsely before the imam of being a spy. The imam, out of fear for his own position, believed the accusers, and one day during a stroll together in his garden he shot and killed Rabbi Barukh.

Rabbi Amram Hama'aravi, an immigrant to Eretz Yisrael from North Africa who settled in Safed, was sent to Yemen in 1847 by the well-known historian Yehosef Schwarz and his colleagues to trace the Jews of Chaybar. He disguised himself as a Moslem pilgrim to protect himself en route. He wandered across the Arabian deserts without being molested, but on

the way from San'a to Hedan he was robbed by bedouin and returned to Safed without accomplishing his mission.

Yet another envoy was Rabbi Yaacov Sapir, an eminent historian. He was sent by the *Prushim* community in Jerusalem in 1858 to raise funds in the countries of the East for that community. He first journeyed to Egypt and from there intended to continue to India. But after a sojourn of six weeks in Egypt he fell into the clutches of an evil-doer who robbed him of most of his money. So he decided to alter his destination to Yemen. His travels in Yemen brought him much satisfaction for he learnt much there. He was the first to study the lives of the Yemenite Jews and his findings were published in a book entitled *Even Sapir* (in two parts), in which he described his journeys in detail, as well as the economic conditions, customs religious and secular practices of the Yemenite Jews. He brought back with him to Eretz Yisrael manuscripts of this community and opened the way for the study of their literature. There is no doubt that Rabbi Sapir's visit gave impetus to the Yemenite Jews to settle in Eretz Yisrael some years later.

The Aliyah of 1882

1882 is a fateful year in the annals of Yemenite Jewish *aliyah*. It is an interesting coincidence that this year too was decisive for the *Hibat Zion* Movement in Russia, when the first of the *Biluim* set sail for Eretz Yisrael.

After centuries of persecution, rumours that a wealthy and generous Jew, Rothschild, was purchasing land in Eretz Yisrael and that the Turkish authorities were opening the gates to the entry of Jews provided further incentive for the Jews of Yemen to pack their belongings and set out for the Holy land. Two families left San'a in 1881. Upon reaching Jerusalem two months later, they wrote to their compatriots confirming their safe arrival. This letter led to the organization of a caravan which included about fifteen families who set out immediately and arrived in Eretz Yisrael four months after the first two families. The members of this second caravan also wrote back letters of encouragement to Yemen. A mass *aliyah* movement began to take shape. The emigrants made their way on foot or upon animals (from San'a to the port of Hodeida). From Hodeida they sailed by ship to Suez. From Suez they once again took up their journey on land to Alexandria, whence they sailed by steamship to the port of Jaffa. From there they went to Jerusalem on foot. In the month of Heshvan 1882, a group of 150 persons left Yemen for Eretz Yisrael. This group suffered many setbacks because of a cholera epidemic. The authorities quarantined them for two months in Hodeida. The burning heat which oppressed the city undermined their strength and claimed numer-

ous victims. Their scant resources soon ran out and it was only after eleven months of hardships that they finallly reached their destination.

The exodus of Jews from Yemen aroused concern among their Moslem overlords, who feared that the mass departure of Jews would drain the country of craftsmen. Hence, they appealed to the Turkish authorities to slow the immigration. Nevertheless, this *aliyah* continued throughout that year. By the end of 1882 the number of Yemenite Jews in Jerusalem had reached 116 families, a total of 450 individuals. The absorption pains were not light. But the fact that they were skilled trades- and craftsmen particularly in the building trade and jewellery crafts, enabled them to adapt fairly quickly to their new conditions. Furthermore, the wives and daughters also went out to work as helpers in other people's homes, and thus augmented the family income.

During the initial stages, when they were just beginning to strike roots in Jerusalem, the Yemenite Jews were the first to learn the trade of stone-cutting. And when the "Kol Yisrael Haverim" organization built the first trade school, about fifty Yemenite Jews were accepted to study various methods of construction. Professor Boris Schatz, founder of the Bezalel Academy for Art, enlisted the Yemenite Jews as the basis of the crafts department, where they played a leading role in establishing the jewellery and weaving sections.

Moshe Zaddok in his book, *The Jews of Yemen,* writes that in 1913 the number of Yemenite Jews in Jerusalem was about 2,874. At that time they already had twenty synagogues, abattoirs and cemeteries.

Yemenite Jews in Jaffa

Before the Yemenite immigration of 1882, which brought settlers to Jèrusalem, there had already been Yemenite settlement in Jaffa. From 1893 about ten Yemenite Jews made their way to Jaffa every year, so that by 1905 the size of the community was 292 individuals of whom 72 were native-born. At first, they earned their livelihood as silversmiths, embroiderers and scribes, crafts which they had brought from Yemen. But by 1902 they were also engaged in manufacturing and construction, in public and in private services, in shopkeeping and peddling.

Mention is made in *The Jews of Yemen* that Dr. Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl displayed an interest in the fate of the Yemenite Jews just as he had in the condition of "our brothers from Morocco, Persia and Afghanistan etc., who are in a bad situation." Dr. Herzl mentions the generous proposal of the British government to allocate an area of land in Uganda for the settlement of Jews. Until the preparations were completed, the oppressed Jews would just have to brace themselves with patience.

Settlement on the Land

Twenty-five years after the first mass *aliyah* in 1907, a large caravan set out from the districts of Hedan and San'a in northern Yemen. This brought a different type of immigrant from the first who were urban dwellers, craftsmen and merchants and had set up home in Jerusalem; they were rural people attached to the soil, men of courage who had been permitted to arm themselves in Yemen.

These immigrants were the first Jewish settlers in Rehovot and Rishon Lezion, and they later founded the first agricultural settlements of the Yemenite Jews in Eretz Yisrael. Acclimatization to their new village surroundings was not easy. From morning to night, men, women and children laboured at the back-breaking work. The environment was strange to them and the land often denied them its rewards. The sense of isolation too lay heavily on them. But three years after their arrival in the villages — in 1910 — the first two Yemenite neighbourhoods had been established in Rehovot and Rishon Lezion. Bordering on Rehovot the Yemenite village, Sha'arayim, was founded.

Shmuel Yavni'eli's Work in Yemen

The successful settlement of Yemenite Jews in the agricultural villages raised hopes among the local Zionist leaders that these Jews might fill the ever-growing vacuum in the agricultural sector, created by the emigration from the country of *olim* from Eastern Europe. The leaders realized that only idealists like the "Yemenites" would have the dedication to work the land and would eliminate the necessity for hired Arab labour. To encourage more massive *aliyah*, it was decided to send a special emissary to Yemen — Shmuel Yavni'eli, a *chalutz* (pioneer) of the Second Aliyah, who had come from Russia.

Embarking on his mission, Yavni'eli presented himself to the Turkish authorities as an envoy of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook, Chief rabbi of Jaffa and the villages. He explained that he was going to Yemen to study the religious customs of the Yemenite Jews. Rabbi Kook provided him with a letter containing twenty-six religious questions directed to the spiritual leaders in Yemen, and requested information regarding the origin of their customs.

Shmuel Yavni'eli sailed in Kislev, 1911 from Jaffa to Aden. Over a period of four months, he visited four communities in southern and central Yemen, and in the end he came to San'a. In each village, he assembled the local Jewish population and told them about Eretz Yisrael: about the *aliyah* movement, the upbuilding of the land and the agricultural colonies already founded. He encouraged them to come and join in making the wilderness bloom. Yavni'eli's mission bore fruit and by 1912 about 1,500

individuals had settled in the villages of Judea, Samaria and the Galilee. When the First World War broke out, this *aliyah* ceased. At that time, there were 4,500 Yemenite Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

Aliyah during the British Mandate

Large numbers of Yemenite Jews streamed into the country during the mandatory years in the face of many obstacles. The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, who filled the role of tormentor and trouble-maker, endeavoured to put a stop to the *aliyah* of Jews from the Islamic lands. After the many riots his men instigated against the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, the Mufti turned to the Imam Yahya with the request that he curtail the emigration of Jews. His solicitations succeeded, for the imam issued orders prohibiting the exit of Jews from Yemen, since it was clear that their destination was Eretz Yisrael. This is what happened after the violence of Passover 1920, the riots of Av 1929 and the bloody disturbances of 1936-1939. Yet, despite these probibitions, Yemenite Jews risked their lives to make their way to Aden where they awaited an *aliyah* certificate.

During the last years of British Mandatory rule, Aden served as a transit center for thousands of Jews; and when their route was blocked by British restrictions, a refugee camp came into being near Aden where the Yemenite Jews stayed for lengthy periods awaiting the opportunity to move to their destination. In the thirty years of British rule, between 1918 and 1948, 15,380 Jews arrived from Yemen. At the outbreak of World War II, there were 28,000 Yemenite Jews in Eretz Yisrael: 8,000 were in agricultural settlements, 7,000 in Jerusalem and 13,000 lived in Tel Aviv.

The Number of Jews Who Lived in Yemen

Since there was no organized census in Yemen, it is impossible to determine accurately how many Jews lived there. As stated, by the end of the British Mandate in Palestine, there were already about 28,000 Yemenite Jews in the country. After the inception of the state, another 50,000 arrived. Some emigrants also made their way to other countries, and it may therefore reasonably be estimated that about 90,000 — 100,000 Jews had formerly lived in Yemen, most of them in the large cities. In the capital, San'a, for example, with a total population of 50,000, the Jews numbered about 8,000 — 10,000. Historians believe that there had been periods when the number of Jews was even larger.

The Kol Yisrael Haverim Association took an interest in Yemenite Jewry and attempted to found a school in San'a in 1903, but the Imam Yahya Government did not permit the institution to open. In a letter from the

community to the association written on February 26, 1899, they describe their suffering: "They compel us to engage in the most menial tasks. Take pity upon us, our shepherds, because our troubles and pain are beyond estimation. About 70,000 Jews are abandoned here in Yemen. The rain of contributions has dried up for eight years running. Prices of food necessities are increasing, workers and craftsmen are without employment, merchants are becoming impoverished and everything is collapsing by stages." (Avraham Elmaliah, Bama'aracha, issue 6, Heshvan 5726-66).

In view of the above estimate of the Jewish leaders of 70,000 Jews in Yemen at the end of the 19th century, 100,000 towards the middle of the 20th century does not seem exaggerated.

One of the new communities established by the Yemenite Jews was in Eritrea which was annexed to Ethiopia at the end of World War II; some of them wound up in India. In the 'twenties, Jews from Yemen and some Yemenite Jews from Eretz Yisrael were permitted to enter the United States in accordance with the quota set for Yemen. A large Yemenite community was thus formed in New York.

Those who came to Israel after the creation of the state were successful in a short time in becoming integrated into the country. In 1956, the Yemenite Jews comprised 24% of the agricultural sector, though they constituted only 6.5% of the total *aliyah* during the 'fifties. Their villages are scattered throughout the country: in the mountains of Jerusalem, in Galilee and in the Negev. It is obvious that the Jews of Yemen have given more to the state than they have taken.

The Jews of Aden

The British Government, under pressure by Arab terrorist organizations supported by the Egyptian rulers, announced its intention to evacuate Aden by January 1968. The evacuation of the British army and the dismantling of British rule in the Arab Federation of Southern Arabia and its colony in Aden spelled the demise of the Jewish communities in Aden and in the Arab emirates of Southern Arabia. The remaining community of about 150 Jewish families, including Jewish officials who had worked for the British Government in Aden set sail from the port of Aden, together with the last British soldiers. The Jews of Aden, particularly the well-to-do, emigrated mainly to Britain and only a few of the poorer families came to Israel.

With the intensification of terrorist attacks against the Jews and the deterioration of the security situation in Aden, Mr. Barnett Janner, President of the Council of Communities in Britain, called upon British Jews to come to the aid of this community and ensure their speedy integration in England. In the event, those who had acquired British nationality after the consolidation of British rule in Aden rapidly and succesfully adapted within the London Jewish community, which included earlier immigrants from Aden. Others went to Australia, India and the Far East: Hong Kong and Singapore — places with which these Jews had long maintained trade relations.

The disintegration of the Jewish community in Aden ended under tragic circumstances. Despite the many victims of Arab terrorist attacks carried out with the complicity of the British, the Jews did not in the end succeed in salvaging their property and assets in time. As in other Arab countries, the Arabs of Aden conducted a methodical campaign of incitement to prevent the Jews from selling their property. They insisted that the Jews had enriched themselves at the expense of the Moslems and hence the purchase of their property was unacceptable; moreover, such moneys would in any case be transferred to Israel and would only serve to strengthen the Jewish state.

Violence of December 1947

The fate of the community was sealed with the Arab riots a few days after the U.N. partition decision of November 29, 1947, which favoured the

establishment of a Jewish state. Seventy-three Jews were killed in these riots and another sixty were wounded. The community's schools were set alight; their shops were looted and their economic position was completely undermined. The violence spread to regions and principalities of southern Arabia where small Jewish communities had existed continuously for two thousand years. In the town of Shakh Uthman, 17 Jews were massacred before the eyes of British officers and soldiers, just as in Aden, and the community utterly destroyed. All the shops, homes and businesses were plundered by the rioting fanatics, and some were burnt and razed. The Zikaron Tov Synagogue was looted. The rioters desecrated the Torah Scrolls and tore them into shreds or trampled upon them. They had apparently forgotten the commandment of the fathers of their own faith which recognized the sanctity to Islam of the "Book of Books" of the prophet Moses. There were also valuable manuscripts which had been guarded carefully for many generations in the hope of bringing them to Eretz Yisrael; these were stolen and their fate is unknown to this day.

Immediately after these riots, the Jews totalling about 8,000 began to emigrate, and within a few years about 6,000 Jews had left Aden.

About nine hundred Jews who lived in Shakh Uthman, some of whom were refugees from Yemen in transit to Eretz Yisrael, sought shelter in the refugee camp before the rioters could lay hands on them. This camp had been set up by the British in the middle of the desert in 1944 following the outbreak of a typhus epidemic among the Jewish refugees arriving from Yemen. In this way they put them in quarantine. At first there were 1,600 persons in the camp, and non-Jewish doctors and nurses from Somali tended to the sick. But with the growing stream of refugees from Yemen, the Aden government appealed to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the "Joint") to take the camp under its wing. The "Joint" agreed to do so, and a medical delegation from Eretz Yisrael soon arrived in the camp where it took urgent measures to heal the sick. Thereafter, the camp was nicknamed "Camp of Salvation", and it served as the half-way station for "Operation Magic Carpet". After the violence perpetrated against the Jews of Aden, the British authorities set up a royal commission of enquiry to investigate the cause of the riots.

One of the commission's members was Norman Bentwich who, during the early days of the British Mandate in Palestine, had been the administration's legal adviser and was wounded during the Arab riots of 1929. The commission put the blame for the violence in Aden and its environs upon the Arab nationalist organizations; but the rioters went unpunished and continued their unruly incitement against Jews. As a result, the thousand Jews who had hesitated to depart for fear of losing their personal property had to seek a home elsewhere. They were also under perpetual siege

because of the fanatical Moslems' economic boycott against them, which undermined their sources of income.

In a report sent to the World Jewish Congress in the United States in 1968, the President of the community, Mr. Bentov Masa, expressed the concern of the community for the fate of the four last synagogues which were to be virtually abandoned in the following months. They had luckily managed to transfer most of the Torah Scrolls and books to Israel. The other institutions, such as the Hebrew schools, rabbinical court and the Jewish hospital had long since been dismantled. In the circumstances, the Jews had no choice but to abandon the four synagogues to the whims of the local Moslem fanatics.

History of the Community

The Jewish community of Aden, like that of Yemen, was one of the most ancient in the Middle East and it had its roots in the destructions of the First and Second Temples. It is difficult to ascertain when the Jews first settled in Aden. Until the British conquest of 1839, Aden had been but a small village. There is no record of the way of life of the Jews who lived in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. But ancient tombstones, as well as documents in the government museum of Aden, indicate that Jews lived in Aden in the earliest of times. The tombstones, inscribed in the Assyrian script, testify to the antiquity of the community. The question is why would anyone, Jew, or non-Jew choose to dwell in a place whose lands are arid and whose soil is not arable; where desert animals and marauders had little mercy on those who attempt to settle there?

The answer is obvious. Aden serves as a stronghold overlooking the routes of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Every conqueror, ruler, empire or kingdom which sought to gain control of the lands and states in the Far East could not assure its rule without control of Aden. He who ruled Aden was assured control of the lands and continents of the Far East. Just as Gibraltar and the Dardanelles were of key importance to all the major empires that arose in Europe.

Aden and the Federation of Southern Arabia, established by the British, were officially proclaimed a single political unit in 1962. The latter had in fact been established in 1959, but in 1962 the crown colony of Aden was appended in order to strengthen its economy and also to weaken the control of the professional unions recently formed in Aden and subject to the influence of the regime in Cairo. But even today, after the complete withdrawal of Britain from Aden and the Federation, there is still grave concern over the future and fate of Aden. For it remains an important strategic point which is naturally fortified, and whoever controls it has the

power to hamper the free movement of commercial shipping between the continents of Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.

The rulers of Yemen regarded the peninsula of Aden as an inseparable part and a natural extension of Yemen itself. They had always asserted that their country extended as far south as the Indian Ocean. Powerful and even distant rulers had attempted at various times to conquer the gulf. Some succeeded in holding on to the area for lengthy periods while others were quickly supplanted by new claimants. The Romans aspired to conquer the Gulf of Aden in order to reach "Happy Arabia" — the Kingdom of Sabea and Hadramawt, a land famed for its perfumes, gold and wealth, thus opening the route to India. The military campaign of the Roman caesars in Southern Arabia and Aden was undertaken decades before the destruction of the Second Temple. Even Herod, King of Judea, participated in the venture with a force of about five hundred men.

In recent times, a number of European rulers have aspired to conquer the Gulf of Aden. Portugal which, during the 15th and 16th centuries, was a great sea power, embarked upon a program of conquest on the African and Asian continents which took it as far as India and China. During its eastward march, it took control of Aden and suroundings which it held for some time. Similarly, France and Holland, whose conquests in the Far East led to the establishment of colonies which served their direct interests until the end of the Second World War, also repeatedly tried to annex Aden. Even Denmark and Sweden, not basically imperialistic states and without any far-flung colonies, nevertheless attempted to penetrate Aden in order to consolidate trade connections with the Far East which had been established hundreds of years earlier. The Ottoman Empire, which had extended its influece over the entire peninsula and which ruled Yemen for about four hundred years, did not succeed in gaining domination in Aden. In fact, the Turkish regime in Yemen was marred by constant bloody confrontations and there was a continuous need to contend with powerful and rebellious rulers.

But where mighty conquerors failed, the British finally succeeded. They conquered Gilbratar after a political and military struggle with Spain, and they viewed the conquest of the "Gibraltar of the East" as a vital necessity for complete control of the maritime route to the Far East. Hence, the British strove to conquer Aden by various means. Initially, they sought to capture the gulf by cunning. They reached an agreement with Sultan Lahaj, a member of the large Abdali tribe, whose kingdom extended west of Aden and who controlled the Gulf of Aden. Indeed, he formally recognized the sovereignty of the Imam of Yemen, who was considered the supreme ruler of the entire Arabian Peninsula; but in the 18th century he rebelled against the imam's rule and himself became ruler by force over Aden. Thirty-seven years before conquest by the British, envoys of the

British Government made a commercial agreement with the ruler Lahaj. But in the ensuing twenty years, British shipping continually suffered at the hands of pirates, a fact which led to British military action and conquest.

In 1839, warships arrived and opened fire upon the village of Aden. The number of residents in those days was less than a thousand mostly bedouin who lived from robbing wayfarers in their region. Alongside them lived about five hundred Jews. The British forces had little trouble taking control of the city, which they afterwards converted into a maritime and army center. Thereafter it developed by leaps and bounds until the population reached 100,000. The population of the entire federation in the Arabian Peninsula grew to one million. The number of Jews residing in Aden and surroundings at the end of the Second World War was 8,000.

The waves of conquest by foreign armies introduced settlers from different races and peoples to southern Arabia. Among them were people of white, yellow and black complexion: Europeans, Africans and Asiatics. Amid this diversity of population were Jews some of whom took to the open road and wandered far away, while others attached themselves to the most recent conquerors and achieved great financial success. It is only natural, therefore, that along with the conquerors (first Romans, then French, Portuguese, Dutch or English in the early 19th century) came also Jews, who engaged in trade by means of caravans of camels or with ships arriving from Europe, Africa and Asia.

Over the centuries, Yemenite Jews en route to the Holy Land were compelled to pass by way of Aden. They would sometimes board ships in the harbour without quite knowing in which direction they were headed. Some remained in Aden itself, others ventured to the distant lands of Asia. Only a few lucky ones reached Eretz Yisrael.

Despite the constant migration of these Jews to Aden and the emirates of southern Arabia, the newcomers did not have much impact on the way of life of the Aden community. Their customs, language and specific dialect remained essentially different. Even among the Jews of Yemen there were fundamental differences between city dwellers and villagers, not to mention other regional variations. There is a basic cultural difference between the Jews of Yemen and those in Aden. The former were known to be courageous and fearless, blessed with natural tolerance and a spirit of wisdom in Jewish matters. They were steeped in Talmud, Midrash and Zohar. The latter however, most of whom were engaged in commerce, were estranged from the well-springs of Judaism. Though they adhered fastidiously to the commandments and educated their offspring in the spirit of the Torah, the conditions of their lives made them timorous, short-tempered and shy.

Jews in the Southern Arabian Emirates

Jews living in the Arabian emirates also differed from those of Aden and Yemen. A few hundred miles from Aden was the Emirate of Lahaj, where there had long existed a small Jewish community. It differed in temperament, mode of speech and dialect from the Aden community. Far from Lahaj is the city of Abian where there was also a Jewish community whose customs, temperament and speech sometimes resembled those of Lahaj and sometimes those of Aden. In the city of Bidda, in one of the southern emirates, there is a Jewish community vastly different from the other communitties in the region. The Jews of Haben were fierce and heroic and spread terror among their Arab neighbours. This proved that these Jews, by contrast with those of Aden who had lived there for generations, had absorbed the customs of their neighbours and were capable of defending themselves with arms. They had preserved their Jewishness and were also unafraid of going to war. At times, they would throw in their lot with one camp of tribes and at others with another; thus, like their Arab neighbours, they were considered masters of their own fate and were admired and honoured for their courage. The population of southern Arabia, including the Jews, lived on cattle and sheep farming. Some also engaged in agriculture, though this was limited by the shortage of arable land.

The Moslems of Aden and Southern Arabia are of the Sunnite sect, while the Yemenite Moslems are Shi'ite-Zaydi.

Geographic Location of Aden

Aden is a city with an extraordinary landscape: it lies on a dark high mountain of volcanic rocks. These rocky precipices are almost completely surrounded by the sea and link up with the desert. Within the giant crater of the mountain, houses crowd together as if piled one upon the other; here is the ancient quarter known as the "Crater". Next to the port, which has grown vastly during the last few decades, one finds the commercial quarter of the city which is called "Steamer Point". Here are government offices and numerous shops as well as modern and luxury high-rise homes.

The two neighbourhoods, the "Crater" and "Steamer Point", are worlds apart. The physical link between them is by a mountain tunnel. The Jewish shops were located in the Steamer Point Quarter, while the homes of the Jews were in the Crater, next to the homes of their Moslem neighbours. The petroleum refineries are located in a district of the city called Ma'alah.

The climate in Aden is oppressive. In the summer the high humidity is

almost unbearable. The city becomes a virtual ghost town in the afternoon when no one ventures out on the streets. The inhabitants spread their mattresses in the shady courtyards or up on the roofs of the houses and sleep out of doors. It rarely rains in Aden and it was therefore necessary in the past for water to be brought from great distances by camel. In the high mountains of Aden, however, there are natural God-given pools. On the rare occasions when rain does fall, the pools fill up and supply the needs of the city. But when the waters in the pools have been used up, fresh water must be brought in skins on the backs of camels once again. With Aden's transformation into a British naval base, the authorities made arrangements for the regular supply of water to the city's residents, and in particular for the needs of army personnel stationed in the city and its environs.

When the British conquered the city in 1839, there was no adequate housing for the army, so they had little choice but to build huts for their immediate use. The Jews, highly skilled in the building of huts, undertook the project of construction of the army camp. It took these experts little more than two or three hours to construct a hut which could withstand the onslaught of wind and cold. Bamboo and reeds were brought to Aden from afar for this project by industrious Jewish traders. Even after the construction of stone houses in Aden, the British authorities continued to build huts in the mountains which served as resort sites for the soldiers. The houses in Aden are built to meet the needs of the climate; that is to say, the rooftops are flat to enable the dwellers to sleep outside under the stars.

Jewish Trades in Aden

Jewish tradition has it that the city had served as a commercial and trading center for spices and perfumes from the Far East, especially India and China. This trade had been concentrated in the hands of Jewish traders, mainly the community leaders. It was largely thanks to the British, who declared Aden to be a free port, that regional trade became concentrated in Aden. For while the Turks in Yemen and rulers in other countries of the region imposed customs duty on trade through their ports and thus hampered the easy flow of goods through the areas under their control, Aden, by contrast, imposed no levies and quickly attracted traders from the ports of Hodeida and Mucha in Yemen. These traders therefore channeled their merchandise through Aden.

After the British conquest and with British approval of the sale of alcohol, the liquor industry fell into Jewish hands. Until then, the sale of intoxicating beverages had been strictly prohibited because of the Islamic injunction against the intake of such spirits, and as long as Moslems were the governors of Aden, Jews would not dare defy such prohibition.

The Jewish religious authorities were quick to realize that this trade might prove an important source of income for the maintenance of the community's institutions and religious functionaries. They therefore insisted that it come under the jurisdiction of the community leadership in the same way as the ritual slaughter of animals. Thus the first distillery was established by the community. When a Jewish businessman tried to break the community's monopoly by opening a private distillery, the rabbinate declared a boycott against his products and compelled him to close up shop. The supply of liquor to the Jews of the city remained thereafter the sole prerogative of the community as a whole.

Customs and Lifestyle

As already mentioned, the customs of the Jews of Aden differed from those of the Yemenite Jews, but not from those of the Jews of the East. Most of those who maintained trade with other lands found themselves wives in faraway places. The males of the more respected families found spouses from among the Jews of Iraq, particularly those of Baghdad, who had come to live in recent centuries in the larger cities of India where they conducted trade with the Jewish merchants from Aden. The women who came from those parts to Aden brought with them the customs of their fathers, which were often a blend of cultural trends native to neither India nor Iraq.

The frequent contact of the Yemenite Jews with the Aden community also led to the adoption of some of their customs and lifestyle. Thus the Jews of Aden generally knead and bake their bread at home; their ovens, like those of the Yemenite Jews, are built of clay about one meter high and one meter wide and are circular with a railing around them.

Throughout the ages it was not unusual for envoys to come to Aden from distant lands. Many of them arrived from the Spanish communities and from North Africa. Some came from Jerusalem, sent by its Sephardi community. These visitors too left their mark on the lifestyle, customs, food and dress of the local Jews. The Aden community maintained stronger ties with the Sephardi rabbis in Jerusalem than those of Yemen. They turned to them with questions of Halacha and *mitzvot.* These Jews did not establish a separate community in Eretz Yisrael after their *aliyah.*

This community has a unique text for its *ketuba* (marriage contract), each of which is identical, whether the bride be rich or poor and no matter what her social standing. The ancient *ketubot* which were found in Aden have the same text as those of the present day. These contracts are unique in content and use of language and differ from those of the Jews of Yemen. In the Book of Songs and customs which the *Shoshveen* inherited from his forefathers, it is not written who composed the text. But those

familiar with the style of the *ketubot* of the Spanish Jews will easily recognize the text which was current among the religious sages of Spain.*

The Jews of Aden have their own particular version of songs of praise and *Hoshannot* (Hosannas), which according to tradition may be attributed to Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon. *Megilat Esther* is read by bridegrooms, for only they have the first privilege of cursing the wicked Haman and praising the Jew, Mordechai.

Rabbis and Institutional Leaders

The Aden community developed only after the consolidation of the British administration, which encouraged them to promote commerce and trade in Aden and provided protection from hostile elements. Before long Jews were earning large profits from trade encompassing near and distant lands. The community was united by strong ties and set up the institutions necessary to ensure an organized Jewish communal life. A president was chosen from among the eminent well-to-do families, who had to be acceptable also to the British authorities. It was customary for the president to regard the community as his direct responsibility, and he considered the poor and the underprivileged as wards in need of his aid. Synagogues and schools were built; courts (Batei Din) were established with the requisite judges to adjudicate in matters of matrimony and other matters.

One of the most illustrious presidents was Menachem Moshe Binyan, known for his extensive influence upon his community as well as upon the British authorities. He engaged in the import of general goods into the city and was considered the chief supplier of the needs of the local residents. Both Jew and Arab relied on him in their business dealings since his word was sacred. Those who did business with him were also successful. Menachem Binyan maintained vast commercial relations, but was always sure to include Jews whether they were traders in Europe, Africa or Asia.

Two other families recently resident in Aden, the Hanoch Halevi and the Giat Families, came from Izmir. The heads of these families arrived in the course of their wanderings at the city of Ta'izz in Yemen, where the poet Shalem Shabazi is buried. But over the years, their descendants moved to Aden. There they maintained a separate way of life from the local Jewish community. They spoke Spanish among themselves and preferred European dress; they educated their children by western methods and prepared them for high government office. They too engaged in commerce and trade and controlled a wide commercial network in the lands of the Far East and Europe.

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*"Bein Aden Le'teman" (Between Aden and Yemen) by Mehalel Ha'edni, p. 34.

The Giat family was known until the last generation as being seclusive and isolating themselves from the Jewish community. They were called the "Izmerers". The family built itself a special synagogue where the Izmir style of prayer was conducted.

The Halevi family chose to live within the local community. But since the father felt that he was not fulfilling his personal obligation in praying with the rest of the community, and had some difficulty in comprehending the dialect of the prayer leader, he built himself a private synagogue in his home. He invited a private *minyan* and personally conducted the service in the Izmir style. In this synagogue, all those visiting Aden from India, Baghdad, Egypt and Izmir would come to pray. Towards the end of his life, Moshe Hanoch Halevy moved to Jerusalem and built a large house in a residential neighbourhood, known to this day as "Beit Hanoch", containing a synagogue for his community.

One of the Halevi ancestors performed a great deed two generations ago. He brought to Aden Torah books, prayer books, *Gemarrot* and copies of the Zohar which had been printed in Livorno, Italy. Until the arrival of the father, the Aden community had been accustomed to learning from handwritten religious texts. Halevi subsequently became the main supplier of printed books to the Yemenite Jews too. Just prior to World War I ties between the Jews of Aden and Yemen with the heads of the *yishuv* in Eretz Yisrael strengthened, the Jews of Jerusalem decided to print the poems of Shabazi and Sa'adia Gaon's translation of the Five Books of Moses. The books were printed in Jerusalem in Zukerman typeface and sent for sale to Yemen and Aden.

The Community in Aden and the Jews of Yemen

Jewish leaders in Aden played a crucial role in the *aliyah* of Yemenite Jews to Eretz Yisrael, particularly in recent times when Aden cosnsituted an important half-way station en route to the Holy Land. The former helped the refugees from Yemen and kept them until the time was ripe for them to continue on their way. This well-organized community enabled the *aliyah* of thousands. For Jews were forbidden to leave Yemen and many faced certain death if caught. Frequently, dozens of Jews had to be ransomed from robbers who set upon their caravans intent upon murdering them. But the bandits soon learnt that it was worth their while to preserve the lives of their prisoners who could be exchanged for a ransom from the Jewish community in Aden.

The aid of this community was invaluable to the Geulah Transit camp, which housed thousands of Yemenite refugees. The British authorities, in cooperation with the mandatory powers in Palestine, sought to return the refugees to Yemen where they were without a doubt in mortal danger, for

the Imam Yahya was under the influence of the Supreme Arab Council in Palestine. But the Aden Jewish leaders wielded their not inconsiderable influence upon the authorities in Aden and even in London and succeeded in having this decision rescinded. Thus thousands of Jews were placed in the Geulah Transit Camp until Israel opened its gates and the refugees were able to immigrate to the Jewish state en masse.

Meanwhile, the Arab leaders incited the Aden Arabs to hostile acts against the local Jews. They accused the Jews of encouraging the Yemenite Jews to immigrate to Israel. This incitement intensified and led to the disturbances of early December, 1947. At first, the inciters declared a protest strike in Aden against the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. But this quickly erupted into violence against the Jews. The first riots began in the Jewish Quarter in Crater and spread to all Jewish residential districts, particularly to Sheikh Uthman, Ma'alah and Tawahi. The fate of the Jews of Aden was no different from that of the communities in the Islamic lands. The granting of indpendence to Aden and the Six-Day War merely accelerated the process of disintegration of this community.

The Jewish Community of Libya

Part I

Modern History of Libya

Libya lies on the Mediterranean Sea. In the east it borders on Egypt, in the south-east with Sudan, in the south with African states and in the west with Tunisia and Algeria. It is largely a land of deserts with many oases; along the coast, lies a narrow and fertile lowland. The population is no larger than one-and-a-half million.

Prior to its independence in 1951, Libya was divided into three provinces: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. After the defeat of the Axis armies by Britain, the latter took control of the first two provinces which are situated on the coast, while the French assumed control of the third province, Fezzan. The two main cities, Tripoli and Benghazi, served alternately as the capital. When the Untied Nations' Assembly proclaimed Libya's independence, British rule came to an end. The new regime was headed by King Idris as-Sanoussi, who was considered the religious leader of the Sanoussi sect, an offshoot of Islam.

Until the discovery of oil in 1961, Libya was a poor land and its people went hungry. Only in a few limited areas, along the coast and in the oases, were the fellaheen able to cultivate the soil. But as oil production increased, so did the state revenues, and today they total billions of dollars a year. In September 1969, a group of junior oifficers in the Libyan army took advantage of King Idris' journey abroad (for medical reasons) to carry out a military coup and establish a revolutionary military regime. At its head was Col. Muammar al-Gaddafi, an ambitious officer and zealous Moslem with unlimited pretensions and aspirations for expanding his personal influence beyond the borders of Libya proper.

A short while after the military overthrow in Libya, Gamal Abdel Nasser passed away in Egypt. Since Nasser's death, Gaddafi has regarded himself as Nasser's disciple and heir and has striven to impose his authority on the entire Arab world. He hoped that the unification of Libya with Egypt would give him control over such federation. He planned to utilize the vast oil wealth at his disposal to consolidate his control. With the help of large payoffs, he has bought the loyalty of African leaders and has compelled them to break off diplomatic ties with Israel. His adventures have

led to instability in the Arab world. He has given support to terrorist organizations which have not confined their activities against Israel alone. These organizations have carried out most of the hijackings and sabotage acts in Europe, and are doing their utmost to undermine the character of certain Arab regimes. Gaddafi has made efforts to undermine the rule of Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt; he has sought to topple King Hussein in Jordan, Numeiri in Sudan and has incited Moslem fanatics against Hafez al-Assad in Syria.

Against this turbulent background, the Jewish communities found themselves time and again the victims of religious and national persecution. After the second World War when Libya passed from Italian to British rule and back again, the Jews were the scapegoats. Under pressure by Hitler, Mussolini (fascist ruler of Italy) introduced discriminatory laws against the Jews of Italy, and in Libya which had been wrested from Turkish domination in a war in 1911.

The mass movement of Jews to Israel began soon after the establishment of the state in 1948, at first in small groups under the auspices of the illegal "*Aliyah Beth*" Movement, reaching its peak in 1949-50. Apart from the majority who went to Israel, about 2,000 settled in Italy, mainly in Rome because of their familiarity with the language and way of life and their commercial relations with Italy.

An Ancient Jewish Community Living under Difficult Conditions

This community, the most ancient in the Arab lands, came to an abrupt end after the Six-Day-War. Before the establishment of Israel, the number of Jews in Libya was 38,000 many of whom engaged in commerce and trades and were goldsmiths, silversmiths and metal producers. The earliest presence of Jews in Libya is obscured in the mists of the past. There is information of such presence in the time of Roman rule, when the Roman armies defeated the Carthaginian forces. Excavations in the ruins of ancient cities in Libya have unearthed fragments of Greek inscriptions as well as emblems and coins from the time of the last kings of Judea.

In the Talmud and Midrash, mention is made of exiles who were deported to Barbary and Mauritania. They were known as the Barbarian tribes. It is believed by Libyan Jewry that after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, one of Titus' generals brought 30,000 Jewish exiles to the region. From that time, the descendants of these exiles remained in Libya. We learn from historians of a Roman-Jewish colony in Libya during Roman times called "The Imperial Jewish Village".

When the Arab invaders reached the borders of Libya in the 7th century C.E., these same Barbarian tribes of pagans, Christian and Jewish farmers came out to repulse them. It is also known that within the con-

quering Arab armies were Jews who had come from Arabia and Syria. Following their conquest of Libya, the new overlords imposed the Moslem religion and the Arabic language on the local tribes. Another outcome was the strengthening of ties between the Libyan Jews and their brethren in Eygpt and Italy.

Before the expulsion from Spain, there was an important Jewish community in Tripoli including eight hundred property owners among them Torah scholars and sages. In 1510, the King of Spain conquered Tripoli and its environs and took all the Jews into captivity. With the Ottoman conquest, the Spanish armies were expelled and the Jewish presence reestablished in Tripoli. Here too, as in other land annexed to the Ottoman Empire, the Jews enjoyed better living conditions; they were involved in trade and commerce and served as a link between the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. They did not enjoy the protection of the authorities at all times, however, and they too were victims of Moslem fanatic evildoers.

Changes in the Life of the Jews

In ancient times, Jewish tribes dwelt in caves in the heart of the Libyan desert. These were fierce people who were hardly different from their barbarian neighbours. Though the cave-dwellers were cut off from their brethern in the large cities, they did not forget the religion and traditions of their forefathers: they strictly observed the commandments of Judaism and established cultural restraints to prevent their assimilation within the surrounding peoples.

The well-known researcher, Professor Nahum Slouchz, tells in his book on the Jews of Libya of his visit to the Grian Mountains in 1906, where he found no constructions except for a Turkish fortress which stood atop one of the mountains. Only tombstones were scattered about the slopes. As he wandered about the fields adjoining the village of Al-Abas, people attired like bedouin came out to greet him and led him towards their odd dwellings, the likes of which he had never seen elsewhere. They presented themselves as Jews who kept the faith of their ancestors and obeyed the Jewish commandments.

As he strolled about among the caves, he heard sounds from beneath the ground: the bleating of sheep, the braying of donkeys, the wailing of babes and the shouts of women. And as he continued inside, he discovered interior rooms excavated in the soft soil. Passage-ways linking up with one another constituted a sort of subterranean village. The professor believes that such settlement was originally excavated by permanent residents who were seeking protection against desert marauders. They concealed the openings of the caves by placing the stables and workshops out

in front. According to him, in earlier generations all the cave-dwellers were Jews, while in the fortress on the hill lived a valiant man of the Hajaj family. But in the course of time, most of these cave-dwellers moved to the city of Tripoli. Only two villages remained in which Jews were still to be found: in the village of Al-Abas there were about 1,000 Jews at the time of Prof. Slouchz' visit.

The Jews who live in the caves are white-skinned and they are all tradesmen, metal workers, blacksmiths and peddlars who wander over the entire desert region. The women and children tend to the vinyards and fields in the immediate vicinity. To Prof. Shlouchz' surprise, he chanced upon a community which boasted an admirable spiritual life. There were synagogues which had been constructed in subterranean chambers. The men could read and the children studied in a *"kutab"* which was located in the corridor of the synagogue. There were ritual slaughterers and a sage who headed the community — a rabbi known by the Turkish title of "Haham Bashi of the Village of Grian". At the time of the professor's visit, the Haham Klifa Hajaj served as "Haham Bashi"; he was a man of much wisdom and offered cures for the ailing. He was also a religious poet who wrote in Hebrew and Arabic.

During the period of Italian rule, al-Abas was abandoned by its Jews. At the time of the professor's visit, there were Jews only in the village of Tighranana — about three hundred.

The first real developments in formal education came at the end of the 19th century. This applied also to other North African countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) as well as the Near East up to Persia. For it was at that time that the Kol Yisrael Haverim Organization opened schools. This organization was established by benefactors in France who had studied the conditions and backwardness of the Jews in Islamic countries, and set up a network of schools to introduce learning into the lives of the Jews, raise their standard of living and strengthen their position among their neighbours. The first school, inaugurated in Tripoli in 1890 did indeed bring about a revolution among the Libyan Jews. At this time too, some generous members of the Nahum family opened a Talmud Torah. These two institutions trained and educated thousands of young people who acquired, among other things, a familiarity with the Torah and the Hebrew language.

Research into the history of the Libyan Jews has established that they supplied agricultural implements to Libyan and Sudanese farmers. As indicated, they also engaged in the crafts. During the Middle Ages, Jews supplied jewellery to the families of the governors. They minted coins in honour of the "pashas" and other rulers of the time. The Italian rulers too acquired adornments for their wives from these craftsmen.

At all times the Jews were careful to impart their particular craftsmanship to their descendants; these fields thus became the prerogative of the Jewish craftsmen. Names of families attest to the connection between the Jew and his trade. Hadad (metal worker), Tzaig (jeweller), Nahasi (coppersmith), Fellah (farmer), Laban (plasterer), Hawat (fisherman), Sabag (painter), Hiat (tailor), Najar (carpenter) and so on.

Scholars and Eminent Leaders

The history of Libyan Jewry is full of heroic episodes and glory, but very little has actually been recorded. But from the few tidbits of information passed down to the present, it is known of outstanding men of wisdom and Torah learning. There were also leaders who governed in areas of Libya. The Jewish Queen Fanana ruled over the Urshfana tribes in Tripolitania. The local Arabs tell of the rule of the Jewish queen and boast to this day of being the cousins of the courageous and fierce Jews who ruled in ancient times.

Over the past three hundred years, a communal structure emerged among Libyan Jewry. The community was led by a rabbi and Kayid (president or noble). The latter was appointed by the authorities and represented the community. He collected taxes, maintained discipline and law within the community and had the authority and official sanction to punish Jewish offenders by the imposition of fines. The *kayit* was, however, under the authority of the rabbi who tooks his own direct authority from the *Halacha* alone. The *kayit* could not deviate significantly from the rabbi's decisions.

The Periods of Turkish and Italian Rule

During the rule of the Ottoman Dictator Sultan Abd al-Hamid, Tripoli was transformed into one large detention camp to which were sent all those suspected of subverting the tyrannical authority. At that time, Tripoli was inhabited by diverse racial and national elements, mainly Arab-Moslems and Berbers, Maltese, Armenians, Yemenite Jews and many dozens of foreign nationals. These latter were from France, England, Italy and Holland, most of them Jewish.

The governors of the city were native Arabs who pursued a life of luxury and financed their pleasures in part by extorting bribes. The corruption rampant among the ruling echelons brought about the degeneration of the population as a whole. The Jews, who fastidiously preserved the tradition of their forebears, provided a convenient target for the malicious and malevolent instincts of the rulers and others.

When the Italians conquered Libya, a new era opened for Libyan Jewry, and it was hoped that they would be left to live in peace and quiet. A glimmer of light penetrated to their dark corner with their new and unrestricted contact with the progessive world. Well-to-do Jews who had been living in Italy for generations were now able to exert a beneficial influence upon the Libyan communities, particularly the youth of Tripoli. Italian Jewish leaders who were proud of their Jewish heritage and suffered no feelings of inferiority, instilled the Tripoli youth with the same pride and self-respect. The rise of the fascists in Italy, however, led to similar racial discrimination and persecution of Jews on the part of Libya's Italian governors.

The Zionist Movement in Libya

This influence led to an awakening of Zionist interest in Libya. Italian Jewish newspapers reached the Jewish community in Tripoli and their Zionist preachings had an important impact on Libyan Jewish youth.

In 1914, some young Jews in Tripoli set up the first Zionist organization in Libya. The Zionist leaders, Rabbis Mordechai Cohen and Hanato Lagzeil, instituted free Hebrew classes for adults in the *Talmud Torah.* Later the Zion Association was established whose goals were to spread knowledge of Hebrew and the Zionist idea particularly among the youth. Libyan Jews began to show a great interest in the happenings among other Jewish communities. Reports of the progroms in Russia towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th had an effect on this community and confirmed their belief that the Jewish people would only be saved through national renascence and the creation of a Jewish state. The Zionist leaders in Tripoli were active in disseminating Zionist ideology throughout Libya. Hence, Zionist stirrings were also felt in Cyrenaica: the Jewish inhabitants of Benghazi, its capital, sent contributions to the national funds in Eretz Yisrael.

The Zionist Movement in Benghazi was the work of Rabbi Mordechai Cohen, author of the book *Higid Mordechai,* in which he depicts the customs of Libyan Jewry. As in Tripoli, he organized Hebrew classes in Benghazi for adults in which 250 students studied. It was from this core of Hebrew students that the Zionist Movement emerged and grew steadily. With the creation of the State of Israel, thousands of these Jews went to Israel.

Anti-Jewish Legislation based on Racial Prejudice

Mussolini's racist legislation against the Jews of Italy was imported into Libya in 1937. The Italian fascist press, receiving its inspiration from the centers of Nazi propaganda in Germany, began to publish anti-Semitic

articles openly requesting the public to discriminate against the Jews. At public gatherings fascist propagandists called for direct action against Jews.

One of the discriminatory laws was the removal of Jews from membership in the Benghazi and other municipal councils in Libya. Jews were expelled from secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. To still further humiliate them, Jewish public schools were allotted isolated buildings and education inspectors ignored them. The government took a series of measures to disrupt the economic basis of the Jewish community; those engaged in commerce were compelled to obtain a licence for each activity while passports of Jews as well as all other official documents issued to them were stamped with the words "Jewish race".

The Italian governor in Libya issued a decree compelling the Jews to open for business on the Sabbath and on holy days. This measure deeply hurt the religious sense of the community and undermined its self-respect. Those who were unable to come to terms with this injunction sought ways of bypassing it. But the Italian governor, Marshal Italo Balbo, was adamant and forced shopkeepers to comply with this decree.

The fascist authorities strove to disrupt the normal good relations between Jews and Italians residing in Libya. Nevertheless, the Jews bore their suffering and humiliation in silence, and with great forbearance they awaited the day of salvation.

With the outbreak of World War II, Libya became the focus of fierce battles between the armies of the Axis Powers and Great Britain. The municipality of Benghazi was drawn into the fray, and control of the city passed from one side to the other. Occasionally, for days on end, the city was without any sort of government. In the midst of the chaos, in order to prevent outbursts of violence and to help keep the peace, the Jewish community leaders tried to persuade the heads of the Arab population to act jointly with them for the common good.

After the British withdrawal and the restoration of Italian control of the city, there was concern that the fascists might take revenge against the Jews. And, indeed, after the second British retreat from Benghazi, the fascist authorities planned a cruel pogrom against the Jews of Cyrenaica. All Jews who were in possession of French nationality were deported to Tunisia and Algeria. The British nationals were deported to Italy and from there to concentration camps in Germany. These actions commenced in April 1942 and continued right up until the final British conquest of Libya and defeat of the German forces under the command of Rommel.

During this period, Jews were also expelled from other districts in Libya. The Libyan nationals were sent to camps in the heart of the desert where

they were held for lengthy periods under humiliating conditions and denied their basic needs. The weak among them died in captivity from starvation and disease.

At the same time, the fascist authorities staged a show trial of three innocent Jews. They were accused of the theft of Italian property during the period of British occupation. The defence lawyers made futile attempts to compel the judges to confront the blatant libel against the accused; they met with a wall of resistance to the truth. The victims were sentenced to death in June 1942 and were executed by firing squad.

The exiles of the Italian period returned to their homes with the final British conquest of Libya. In one Italian concentration camp alone, by the name of Jiado, five hundred Jews died.

Soldiers of the Jewish Brigade did much to instill in the Libyan Jews a spirit of hope during the war. The Jewish soldiers who arrived with the British armies performed an important educational role among the local Jewish youth. They conducted evening classes in Hebrew as well as cultural and educational activities for adults. There is no doubt that the work of these soldiers influenced the large *aliyah* of Libyan Jews after the declaration of Israel's independence.

Part 2

Violence Against Jews in 1945

For centuries the Libyan Jews had lived in tranquillity alongside their Moslem and other neighbours. Relations based on mutual respect and admiration had developed. The proud and strong-spirited Jews of Libya had always known how to defend their religious beliefs. The discriminatory laws of the Italian fascists, however, disrupted the peaceful relations between Jews and Moslems, though the leaders of the Sinnusi sect also struggled against the Italian conquerors. They demanded the complete withdrawal of the foreign forces from the country and the granting of self-rule. But the Jews, unfortunately, also served as a target for their attacks. Following the takeover of Libya by the British army, the situation worsened because uncontrolled incitement, characteristic of the anti-Zionist campaign in all Arab and Islamic lands, was becoming common in Libya. The Libyan Arabs were fed propaganda by foreign Arab radio broadcasts and by Arab emissaries from Eretz Yisrael and the Arab countries. All this spurred them on to violence against the local Jews.

On November 3 and 4, 1945 the Libyan radio stations reported anti-Jewish demonstrations in Egypt and the Egyptian newspapers told of looting and arson against Jewish property on November 2, the anniver-

sary of the Balfour Declaration. These reports served as a signal to the inciters in Libya who called for reprisals against the Jews, who were allegedly stealing the Holy Land from the Moslems and desecrating the Islamic holy sites.

And so between November 4 and 7, 1945, frenzied mobs broke into the Jewish quarter of Tripoli and massacred Jews before the very eyes of the British occupation authorities, who adhered to their traditional policy of non-interference in violence between religious factions. These were cruel and terrible pogroms and more than one hundred and fifty Jews were murdered in Tripoli and in the villages of Suk al-Jumah, Misratah, Zanzur and Zawiyah. The Jews, caught unawares were unable to organize any resistance. In addition to the dead, there were many seriously injured. Shops and houses were looted and burned. The five synagogues in the city were set upon by the rioters and set alight. Extensive damage was caused to the villages near the city. In Suk al-Jumah two synagogues were burnt down and synagogues were set alight in both Zanzur and Tajora.

The Jewish community leaders asked the British authorities to dispatch army and police to the Jewish quarter to quash the violent attacks, but the British ignored the plea. Finally, forty-eight hours later, after continuous murder and looting the British at last decided to declare a curfew, to arrest a number of Arabs who had been involved in the violence and, in the name of evenhandedness, arrested a number of Jews carrying sticks and guns in an attempt to defend themselves.

The funeral for the dead was held on November 7 and 8 during the hours of the curfew; a guard of British soldiers provided protection for the Jews in attendance. Only leading Jews and the *"Hevra Kadisha"* participated in the funeral services. The British army command and representatives of the government were also present. All the dead were buried in a common grave which was located in a special plot of the Jewish cemetery in Tripoli.

Entire families fell victim to the murderers and some lost most of their children. There were cases of rape in the village of Misratah. Fifty women were widowed, ninety-two children orphaned, and more than thirty individuals permanently maimed as a result of the pogroms.

The Local Mufti Expresses Sorrow over the Attacks

On November 15, eight days after the bloody riots the Mufti of Tripoli publicly expressed his sorrow over the tragic attack upon the Jews, and he appealed to the "believers" of his community to return the stolen property to its rightful owners. The appeal was given the force of a religious injunction. He further stated that the Moslem religion prohibits believers from holding or selling stolen property; the Lord even sets the punish-

ment of amputation of the hands of any Moslem who steals or robs, whether it be from a Moslem or from another.

The next day, November 16, the British Commander also appealed to the Arabs to return the loot. He gave a period of three days to fulfill the demands; but the call went unheeded.

The British in Libya followed the same policies adopted in their other colonies regarding rioters and vandals from among the different ethnic communities. Of the 550 Arabs arrested only 289 were actually tried in court, the majority being set free several months later. Of those who stood trial, almost all received short prison terms; only two were sentenced to death; one on the charge of murder and the other for possessing hand grenades.

The British had also arrested ten Jews for the crime of daring to defend themselves from their attackers. Four of them were severely punished for "having caused a public disturbance", and another because he had resisted police attempts at arrest.

The Jewish community council convened an emergency session on November 11, 1945 to discuss the bloody events and the tolerant attitude of the British towards the Arab rioters. It decided to demand that the British authoroities set up an impartial enquiry commission to study the causes of the violence and to appraise the resultant damage, destruction and death.

The council sent telegrams to the chief rabbis of England and Eretz Yisrael, to Dr. Stephen Wise, President of the World Jewish Congress, to Professor Selig Brodetsky, President of the British Board of Deputies and to other Jewish organizations, such as Alliance and the leaders of the South African Jewish community. They were requested to join in condemning the perpetrators of the pogroms and to insist that the British authorities punish them with the utmost severity.

Organizing Jewish Defence in Tripoli

The events of 1945 taught the Jews a lesson. They realized that in order to prevent a repetition, it was the duty of the youth to train in self-defence so as to be prepared to ward off any future attacks.

A *Hagana* organization was quickly established at the initiative of Yisrael Gorilik, the *shaliach* from Eretz Yisrael to Libya, whose members were trained in the use of firearms. Immediately upon his arrival in May 1946, he organized a number of dedicated youths to enlist members, and within a few days the foundations of the *Hagana* had been laid. Groups of four or five young men would go out of the city for training exercises under-

ground in the use of light weapons. They knew nothing of the scope of the mother organization nor of the existence of fellow groups and members. The *Haganah* leaders purchased at great cost large quantities of weapons for use in time of need — from criminals, Arabs of the underworld, and the British Army. About 100 retired Jewish policemen were among the *Haganah* members, and they helped to train their comrades in defence tactics.

Bloody Violence in June 1948

Three years after the first riots, anti-Jewish attacks again broke out. It happened on a *Shabbat* in June 1948, the eve of the *Shavuot* festival. The local Arab population received reports of the war being waged in Israel after the establishment of the new state. Moroccan volunteers en route to Israel to participate in the war arrived in Tripoli and joined in the attacks on Jewish homes some distance from the center of the city. But this time, the *Hagana* members were ready for battle, and they repulsed the attackers in only two hours causing heavy casualties. When the British authorities realized that the Jewish fighters had gained the upper hand, they mobilized forces to prevent the violence from spreading.

The distinguished writer and community worker, Fritz Zvaretz, who is leader of the Association of Libyan Jewry and was a member of this *Hagana* organization, has written a book on Libyan Jewry. He states that the costs of maintaining the organization were covered by the Jewish Agency Aliyah Department in Italy and the Aliyah Department in Israel. Later emissaries of the latter arrived in Tripoli to organize the *aliyah* of Libyan Jews to Israel.

The British authorities soon became aware of the existence of this organization and began investigations and undercover activities in order to locate its members. Some of these were arrested and cruelly tortured. One young person, unable to bear the tortures, attempted suicide by jumping from a third floor window of the police station; he was seriously injured and was transferred to the hospital for treatment. After his recovery he was tried and sentenced to seven years imprisonment, but was pardoned on the occasion of Libya's independence by special order of King Idris as-Sunoussi; upon his release he left for Israel.

The success of the *Hagana* organization in mobilizing for the defence of the Jews in Libya was due largely to the youth organizations which had come into being years earlier, such as *Ben Yehuda, Hamaccabi,* the Youth Movement, *Gedud Meginei Hasafa, Maccabi Hatzair* and the scout movement. These movements had for long engaged in physical and cultural education, and they proved an ideal source of manpower for the *Hagana.* It is worth noting that about twenty-five per cent of the two hundred

members of the *Hagana* in Tripoli were women. This testifies to the great social change in Libya since the founding of the local Zionist Movement.

The Libyan Diaspora immigrates en masse to Israel

The establishment of the State of Israel followed by the pogroms of 1948 had a revolutionary effect on the lives of the Libyan Jews. Their *aliyah* to Israel was not a new trend. They had often risked their lives in past centuries to realize their ideal of joining their brethren in the Holy Land. Chroniclers of modern *aliyah* from Libya record three major periods:

(a) Illegal immigration before the creation of the state;
(b) Illegal immigration after the creation of the state;
(c) Organized mass *aliyah* of the majority of Libyan Jewry.

During British Mandatory rule, there had been some migration from Libya to Eretz Yisrael, but this was relatively small due to the limited number of immigration certificates. The Jewish army units in the British Army stationed in Libya were the main organizers of *aliyah* during World War II; by their efforts, groups of youth were transferred to Eretz Yisrael in 1943. After the anti-Jewish rioting in Tripolitania in 1945, *aliyah* from that region increased. The route to Eretz Yisrael was through Italy.

After the creation of the state, hundreds of young men and women set out for the Holy Land undeterred by the risks and obstacles. For days and nights these illegal emigrants were compelled to live in caves along the coast awaiting the boats which would bring them to Italy. It is estimated that 1,100 young people arrived in 1948, some of whom fought in the War of Independence; some were killed on the road to Jerusalem and in battles in the open spaces of the Negev.

Suddenly, on January 26, 1949 the British Deputy Foreign Minister announced in the House of Commons that the British Government had decided to permit the emigration of Jews from Libya to Israel. The British occupation forces in Libya were notified and officially informed the chairman of the Jewish community council in Tripoli. They were now willing to issue passports to all Jews wishing to go to Israel; thousands immediately presented themselves at the government offices to apply for the necessary documents.

Within a few weeks, mass *aliyah* to Israel was in full swing. The Jewish Agency Aliyah Department leased ships to bring the Libyan Jews to Israel. The British not only issued passports to all those desirous of leaving, they also facilitated the withdrawal of capital from the country and the transfer of belongings to Israel.

A few months later, the Jews of the interior towns also began to leave. The Jews of Cyrenaica were evacuated and were followed by the Jews of

Tripolitania. Town after town was emptied. The Jewish Agency envoy, Mr. Baruch Duvdevani, dedicated much of his time to organizing the mass emigration and ensuring that the emigrants arrived safely in Israel safely.
A total of 31, 359 Libyan Jews arrived in Israel between April 1949 and January 1951.

Distintegration of the Jewish Community after Libyan Independence

When Libya attained independence in 1951, 6,000 Jews still remained in the country, 4,000 in Tripoli and a few hundred in Benghazi. They were living under conditions of terror and oppression. Nationalist propaganda of incitement against the Jews intensified. The Libyan press presented the Jews as Zionist agents and explicitly demanded that they be expelled from their jobs.

When reports of the outbreak of war between Israel, Egypt and Syria reached Libya in June 1967, the Jews were again at the mercy of the lawless mobs. Half of the 4,000 Jews living in Tripoli were compelled by police order to leave their homes and hand themselves over to the mob. They were herded together in an old Italian military camp about seven kilometers from the capital. The remaining Jews, mainly professional people who lived in the newer part of the city, locked themselves in their homes in an attempt to protect themselves.

When word of the Egyptian and Syrian defeat reached Libya, a new wave of incitement broke loose and Moslems stormed Jewish homes, killing, looting and plundering. At least eighteen Jews were murdered. Those holding foreign nationality found sanctuary in the embassies of their respective countries. For thirteen days the Jews dared not leave their homes even to obtain food with which to ward off hunger.

In a letter sent by a Jew in Tripoli to his relatives in Israel during those dark days, he writes that it was a horrendous pogrom. All the Jewish shops were burned down, Jews were murdered and many injured. He adds: "Please understand, my relatives, that our large shop too was completely burned down and you know that it was worth tens of thousands of pounds sterling. We have been left penniless and have become destitute; our only hope now is that they will grant us passports to leave Libya for good. Many Jews were transferred to closed camps after their property was plundered, destroyed and completely burned down. In fact, all the Jews are now homeless and without any source of income."

Several weeks after the pogroms, the Jews began to leave. Four hundred flew to Italy in special planes and were allowed by the Italian Government to settle there after "HIAS" (Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society) had given a commitment to support them until they became self-sufficient.

Every week an increasing number of Jews left Libya, thousands of them for Italy. They were hopeful that with the calming of the storm they might return to Libya and salvage their remaining assets. When they left, the Libyan Government permitted them to take no more than twenty Libyan dinars. Their passports indicated that they had been granted an exit permit for three months. At the end of this period, they applied to the Libyan embassy in Rome for an extension of the travel permit, but their requests remained unanswered and they too became refugees in Italy.

With Muammar Gaddafi's rise to power following the military coup of September 1969, the revolutionary council adopted an official anti-Jewish policy. Jewish property was seized and Jews were stripped of their civil rights. The situation of those who remained deteriorated daily and they tried all possible ways to escape.

According to reports received early in 1973, twenty Jews were left in Libya. The Gaddafi Government refused to allow them to depart. Early in September 1973, a Jewish woman named Halifi received permission to leave Libya with her son thanks to the intervention of the French Government; they were French nationals and received exit permits directly from Gaddafi himself. French newspapers stated that the French ambassador to Libya was trying to persuade Gaddafi to allow the remaining Jews to leave. It may be stated that the Libyan exile, which had existed for thousands of years, has also come to an end.

Departure of the Last Jews from Morocco

The fate of the once magnificent Jewish community of Morocco, with a two thousand-year-old history during which they were often subjected to humiliation, was decided with the attainment of independence by Morocco in 1956. The Jewish community, which at its peak had numbered close to 400,000, suddenly felt its security slipping away. As the Istiklal (independence) Movement strengthened, the Jews' confidence in the future receded.

There had always been a flow of Jews from Morocco to Eretz Yisrael, and it seems that no other Jewish community could compare with the Moroccan in the depth and closeness of its ties with the Holy Land. The Jewish communities in Tiberias, Safed, Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem were continually reinforced with *olim* from Morocco. With the creation of the state, there began a mass *aliyah* of Jews from Morocco which continued for years and resulted in the largest Jewish ethnic community in the country. This community has left its mark on all facets of life: in the villages, the *moshavim* and *kibbutzim.* In every walk of life one encounters Moroccan Jews participating in the upbuilding of the state. Cities, *moshavim* and development towns would not have come into being if not for this mass immigration. Together with *olim* from Tunisia and Algeria, they constitute an important factor in the advancement of the state.

The Yom Kippur War of 1973 sealed the fate of the remaining Jews in Morocco. Following the two assassination attempts upon King Hassan II in the summers of 1971 and 1972, the remaining Jewish communities in Casablanca, Fez and Marrakech sensed the urgency of liquidating their businesses and property and escaping from the renewed threat.

Initially, King Hassan II followed a pro-Western foreign policy, dependent mainly upon the United States, in order to gain that country's military support. But after the attempts on his life and subject to the pressure of extremist nationalists, he was compelled to alter his policies particularly with regard to the Middle East. His relationship with France had reached an ebb in the wake of the assassination of a leader of the opposition (Ben Barka) in Paris, carried out by agents of the Moroccan police minister, Oufkir, in 1963.

Hassan began to look for an ally elsewhere, and he finally responded to Soviet overtures and accepted vast quantities of arms from them. In this

way he sought to balance his policy with the United States.

Morever, the king's relationship with the military commanders deteriorated steadily due to his and his court's extravagant lifestyle. The king was surrounded by corrupt ministers and businessmen (including some Jewish magnates), and he wasted much of the country's vast resources on dubious business ventures. The high military commanders, who were evidently supported by external agents such as the Algerian ruler, Houari Boumedienne, and the Libyan ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, made several attempts to remove him from power. In the 1972 assassination attempt, Minister of Police Oufkir himself was also involved; hitherto he had always been considered one of the mainstays of the royal house and among the trusted associates of the king. The exposure of this plot completely undermined the king's status and he was compelled to assume an extreme stance with regard to the Middle East.

In the winter of 1973, Hassan joined the chorus of condemnation of Israel and announced his intention of sending military battalions to Syria to aid that country in its conflict with Israel. The Moroccan battalions were equipped with the most advanced Soviet weaponry and they arrived in Syria on Soviet ships in time to take part in the Yom Kippur War. Political commentators tend to interpret this step as part of the struggle between the Arab states themselves. Hassan II is a target of the subversive activities of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, as is Hafez al-Assad, President of Syria. The latter is in the sights of Gaddafi's guns because of his connections with Moscow. The alliance of these two rulers, therefore, is seen as a direct result of Gaddafi's hostile schemes, and King Hassan saw his shipments of troops and weapons as a way of demonstrating pan-Arab solidarity in the struggle against Israel. Others say that Hassan sent to Syria only those soldiers who were suspected of undermining his regime; by using the slogan of pan-Arab solidarity he was able to rid himself of adversaries who constituted a personal threat. But even if we accept such interpretations, this demonstration of solidarity by Hassan II served as a pretext for inciters in Moroccco to protest against the State of Israel and against the Jews in their own country.

According to Western sources, it was the Moroccan and Iraqi soldiers who most frequently molested captives who fell into enemy hands, and who then often summarily executed them. The death of dozens of Moroccan soldiers on the front, who were brought for burial to Morocco, did much to inflame hatred against the remaining Jews, threatening their very existence.

The Remaining Jewish Communities in Morocco

Mr. James Kraus, a Jewish journalist who visited Morocco for the *Western Jewish News* in Winnipeg, published his impressions of his sojourn

there after the Yom Kippur War. It cannot be definitely ascertained how many Jews remained in Morocco after that war. But according to estimates by community leaders, the number is around 20,000-25,000 persons: about 17,000 in Casablanca; the remainder scattered throughout cities formerly the centers of major Jewish communities, such as Marrakeeh (today about 3,000 Jews), Meknes (about 1,700) and Fez (about 1,000). The cities of Tangier, Tetuan and Assouria in Spanish Morocco, once regarded as safe havens for Jews, have become steadily emptied of its Jewish population, and barely a few hundred remain.

Almost all the poorer Jews left the country in the '50's and '60's. Some came to Israel, others joined the new communities elsewhere, mainly in France and Canada. Still others went further afield to the United States and to Latin America where they had relatives who welcomed them. Those who remained in Morocco were businessmen, academicians (chiefly physicians) and men of property. These are trying to sell their property, but their Moslem neighbours are well aware of their imminent departure, and are therefore in no hurry to purchase knowing that eventually they will be able to buy at very low prices.

Today, writes the journalist, you can still see Jewish shoe shops and clothing stores in the commercial center of Casablanca. There are even kosher butcher shops and restaurants.

The large number of Arab migrants who flooded Casablanca spread out into the former Jewish neighbourhoods and converted them into slums. Of the dozens of synagogues which had once dotted Casablanca, only two remain open. But the Jews prefer to conduct prayer services within their own homes for fear of being molested by the undercover police who converge on the Jewish neighbourhoods, especially on the Sabbath, in order to spy on and monitor their activities.

The Jews live in constant fear; they avoid talking to foreigners and make special efforts to steer clear of political discussions. Incitement against Israel in mosques and in the nationalist press is on the increase, and the feeling of insecurity has made it imperative for the Jews to finalize their departure. Special taxes were levied on theater tickets and other entertainments to support the Arab terror organizations. The Jews lock themselves in their homes in the early evening and do not dare walk in the streets at night. The residents of the"Mellah", the poorer Jewish quarter, engaged a special guard to protect the ghetto. The Moroccan Jews had no illusions of surviving the violence should the plotters succeed in deposing King Hassan II.

Today, the Jews of Morocco, particularly those in the towns and villages (like Meknés) far from the capital, have no protection from the authorities. They cannot conduct their affairs in a normal fashion. If an Arab

debtor refuses to pay, a Jew would not dare to bring charges against him knowing full well that he will not receive any legal protection and that the judge will never decide in his favour. If a Jew is assaulted by an Arab and takes him to court, the Arab judge would not dare convict the Arab and will moreover require the Jewish victim to cover the costs of the trial.

If the Jews do not hasten their departure, they may be trapped, for the authorities are now putting obstacles in the way of those seeking to leave. The Meknés Jews are compelled to pay $125 for a passport: many are thus unable to leave because they do not have sufficient funds to pay for both a passport and airplane tickets.

The Glorious Past of Moroccan Jewry

It is not our intention here to describe in detail the age-old history of the Moroccan Jewish community, but to refer in general to their magnificent past. There is evidence of a Jewish community in Moroccan as far back as the 3rd century C.E., and some believe that Jews were present even earlier. The more important of the early communities were in Fez, Meknés and Marrakech. In the course of time, the Jews scattered throughout Morocco.

In the archives of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem may be found documents given to emissaries who had travelled to Morocco to collect funds for the upkeep of educational and welfare institutions in Jerusalem. These documents contain the names of Moroccan towns, cities and colonies where Jews resided. The dozens of communities mentioned did much to maintain the Jerusalem Sephardi institutions as well as the Sephardi and western institutions in the "four lands", namely, Jerusalem, Tiberias, Safed and Hebron. They contributed generously, for they felt it a sacred duty to help the Jewish communities of the Holy Land. Casablanca, in fact, became the largest Jewish center in the Middle East after the First World War.

The history of Moroccan Jewry is filled with suffering, humiliation and persecution inflicted by their Moslem neighbours. Oppression became particularly intense in the 11th and 12th centuries, and those finding it intolerable moved to Spain. Some who remained were compelled to convert to Islam and many were martyred. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, one of the leading lights of Spanish Jewry in the Middle Ages, wrote that twenty-three Jewish communities in Morocco were destroyed by Moslem persecution. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, however, the picture was reversed and Morocco became a haven for Jewish exiles. They came in the thousands and left their imprint upon the old and the new communities in their adopted land. These exiles played an important role in the development of trade in Morocco. They used their connections with world commercial centers to transform Morocco

into the focus of a network of commercial links. They also introduced new methods of credit, and at times played a crucial role in the courts of the Moroccan rulers.

The situation of Moroccan Jewry improved greatly from the penetration of the European powers into the region in the 19th century. They enjoyed the consular protection of these powers and a thin stratum of well-to-do families appeared; but the vast majority continued to live a life of want and poverty. In the days of the Sultan Muhammad Moulay, Moses Montefiore visited Morocco (1864) and requested him to grant equal rights to the Jews. The Sultan promised to do so but failed to keep his promise.

The imposition of French rule in Morocco in 1912 did little to change the status of the Jews. Though they enjoyed autonomy in internal affairs and in the capital city of Rabat there was even a central rabbinical court, there was little other improvement.

After World War II, the Organization of Jewish Communities was formed which claimed to control the various communal institutions. But it did not exist for long and in 1962, it ceased to function as the result of internal dissension.

The Jews also filled an important role in the Moroccan national movement, and after the exile by the French of Muhammad the Fifth, father of King Hassan II, to Madagascar, several eminent Jews attained prominent positions in the Istiklal Party. This party fought to end Morocco's protectorate status and gain full independence. Upon the attainment of independence and the establishment of a national government, King Muhammad V appointed Dr. Ben Zaken postal minister in the first government. But soon the fanatic nationalists gained the upper hand and the Jewish politician was expelled from office.

Undoubtedly, the mass exodus of Moroccan Jews, most of whom left for Israel in the first years of its existence, greatly depleted the ranks of the community and obviously reduced their public impact in Morocco. The "Kol Yisrael Haverim" schools, which had been so important in community life in recent generations, were closed down; many were nationalized by the government. As mentioned, many thousands immigrated to France and Canada, where they established important industries and businesses. Even the poorer immigrants to France succeeded in improving their economic situation.

With the intensification of nationalist anti-Jewish propaganda, leaders of the French Jewish aid organizations began to prepare to take in the last remnants of Moroccan Jewry. These institutions, which together with the French Government had played so admirable a role in the absorption of 120,000 Algerian Jews, now gave their assistance to the new Jewish immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia. The latter do not enjoy the same

benefits accorded to the Algerian immigrants. The aid organizations however vested much effort in helping the new immigrants to establish themselves. After a few years, these immigrants were entitled to acquire French citizenship and benefit from the rights extended to large families.

The Days of the Tunisian Jewish Community are Numbered

Tunisia attained independence together with Morocco, and from that moment the fate of its Jewish community was sealed. Habib Bourgiba heads the regime and has declared himself to be a defender of the Jews. But with his entry into the intra-Arab conflict in recent years, he has endangered the Jews of his own country.

Of the 70,000 Jews living in Tunisia after World War II, there remain less than 5,000. This community, with an equally glorious past as that of the other North African communities, is rapidly disntegrating. In the wake of the Six-Day War, incensed and frenzied rioters fell upon the Jewish quarter, killing and wounding its residents and looting and destroying Jewish property. The acts of murder were harshly condemned by Habib Bourguiba. He even took stiff measures against the rioters; but the Jews' sense of insecurity persisted and grew. The Yom Kippur War brought even greater dangers, and those Jews still remaining took steps to hasten their departure.

The Tunisian community too emigrated en masse to Eretz Yisrael after World War II, and established *moshavim* and towns. Many others settled in France and in other Western European countries and America. In the Belleville quarter of Paris, 6,000 Tunisian Jews live in conditions of poverty and deprivation. Large numbers of these immigrants also settled in the south, namely, in Marseille and its environs because of the hot climate, which is similar to that of Tunisia. They have been more successful in establishing themselves economically and socially.

North African Jews Set Up New Communities in France

Part 1

The mass emigration of Jews from North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) to France began when these states attained independence and adopted policies of persecution of non-Moslems. The Jewish population of France today is more than 500,000, over 300,000 of whom are from North Africa. The French Jewish community is one of the largest in Western Europe, and the third largest in the Diaspora after those of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Since emancipation in 1791, France has been a refuge for oppressed Jews, particularly from Eastern Europe. From 1881, a large wave of Eastern European Jews entered the county, and since 1910, thousands fled there from Turkey and the Balkan countries. These lands had been under the yoke of the Ottoman empire, and when the nationalist movements became stronger rebellions broke out against the Turkish overlords impelling the Jews to seek other havens. Some crossed the ocean and established communities in the east and west of the United States.

A renewed wave of immigration from Eastern Europe began in 1920. Dr. Arthur Ruppin estimated that several hundred thousand Jews arrived in France from Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1930. In 1934 after Hitler's rise to power in Germany many German Jews fled to France. On the eve of World War II, there were 240,000 Jews in France. After Nazi accupation thousands were deported mainly from the north which was under Nazi control and not from the south which was under the Vichy regime. The return of survivors from Nazi concentration camps after the German defeat of 1945 enlarged the French Jewish community — and in 1957 it numbered between 300,000-350,000.

As mentioned, upon the outbreak of the Algerian rebellion in 1954, Algerian Jewry streamed to France, the numbers reaching a peak in 1962 when Algeria gained its independence. In that year began the general exodus of all the European nationals from Algeria, around one million people who left in a panic; men, women and children sailed for France with only the clothes on their backs. Among these one million Europeans,

120,000 were Jews. Only 4,000 Jews remained behind mainly in Algiers and Oran. Today there are still about 2,000 left, scores of whom emigrate each year.

With the independence of Morocco and Tunisia in 1956 and following the joint Anglo-French military venture of that year, large masses of Jews left these countries for France.

Sociological research conducted by Jewish institutions in Paris found that between 1956 and 1961 about 100,000 Jews made their way from North Africa to France. About 25% were from Morocco, 33% from Tunisia and 42% from Algeria. Moreover, the natural increase of the North African Jews preserved the size of their communities in North Africa, and they totalled even after the large emigrations between 120,000 and 130,000. Nevertheless, the flow of these Jews to France brought about a major demographic shift in the distribution map of the Jewish population.

Part 2

The large-scale immigration created serious economic, social and cultural problems among French Jewry, particularly in regard to immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia; for while the Algerian Jews were deemed French nationals and were French-speaking, the Tunisian and Moroccan Jews were considered refugees whose fate was not the responsibility of the French Government. The French language was not familiar to most of them.

The first large immigration to France consisted of 6,000 Tunisian Jews who fled during the period of tense relations between Tunisia and France in the summer of 1961, due to a disagreement over the port of Bizerte. On arrival they encountered harsh difficulties due to a lack of aid from the French Government. Most of them had been white-collar workers with a high standard of living; now they were compelled to engage in all sorts of menial work in order to subsist. They also had problems with housing and were forced to pay exorbitant prices for apartments.

As a result, the Jewish aid organizations undertook to assist in their absorption. A special fund was established by the "Joint" and the Fonds Social (fund of the Jews of France) to aid North African Jews. The Central British Fund also extended aid.

The Tunisian immigration was followed by a Moroccan Jewish immigration of 25,000.

Although in the 'fifties, hundreds of thousands of North African Jews streamed into Israel, organized through the risky underground activities of Jewish Agency emmisaries and the immigration institutions in Tunisia,

Morocco and Algeria, the majority of the well-to-do, educated and intellectuals headed for new diasporas and are today scattered throughout the countries of Western Europe and particularly France.

Part 3

The Algerian Jews, who today number more than 130,000 in France, had formerly been distributed over ninety cities and villages in Algeria. They belonged to two distinct social streams: Arabic speaking and French. About twenty per cent lived in the interior of the country among the Moslem populace. They dressed like their Arab neighbours and their lifestyles were similar. These Jews eventually emigrated en masse to Israel.

One hundred thousand Jews living in the coastal cities belonged to the second cultural trend. They constituted the majority of this community. They had been educated in French schools and spoke French in their homes. Because they were considered to be French nationals (since the granting of citizenship to the Jews of Algeria by Carmier) they resolved to throw in their lot with the million French citizens who were uprooted from Algeria and moved to France and only a small percentage immigrated to Israel. They had earned their livelihood in Algeria from trades and commerce; some were merchants, some craftsmen, and others government officials, professionals, or executives in French and Jewish firms. They regarded themselves as Frenchmen in every respect though their ancestors had settled in Algeria before the Arab conquest in the 7th century C.E. When they arrived in France, the government accorded them the same treatment and respect as was accorded to all other French nationals returning from residence abroad. In 1962 the French government budgeted 234 million dollars for absorption schemes.

Like the Moroccan and Tunisian Jews, the Algerian Jews established new communities in France. Today there are more than 230 Jewish communities throughout France. The largest are located in the big cities. A quarter of a million Jews live in Paris; 60,000 reside in Marseille, and another 30,000 live in Lyons. There are many communities which number between fifty and one thousand persons. Marseille, which is on the sea, now contains the second largest Jewish community after Paris. In some cities there had once been ancient Jewish communities which were destroyed; the new immigrants, revived these communities. They re-opened synagogues which had long been closed, and received control of public edifices which had belonged to the former communities; they established a communal life patterned on the life they had led in North Africa. Compared with the Jews from Eastern Europe, the North African Jews, and particularly the Algerian Jews, adjusted more quickly to their new surroundings because

of their familiarity with the French language and culture. Much asssitance was extended to them by the French governmental and public institutions. French Catholic leaders offered them the use of clubs and buildings in which they might establish *Talmudei Torah* for the education of their children.

The French Jewish organizations speedily set up new educational institutions: "ORT" and "Alliance" strove to train immigrant children to become proficient in the fields of French industry and crafts. Alliance opened several secondary schools, which differed from those established in the previous century in North Africa, both in educational standards and in the curriculum of study. The latter had aimed at providing Jewish youth with a broad education, while the former were specifically designed to train the youth to fit into the economic and social life of their new home.

Part 4

The intervening years since the mass immigration of North African Jews to France first began have brought far- reaching changes in their patterns of life. After the initial difficulties of adjustment they eventually adapted to the new environment. The economic boom in Western Europe after the setting up of the European Common Market has facilitated the absorption of millions of additional working hands in industry, commerce and the services. However, in the spiritual and cultural sphere a dangerous trend has manifested itself among the younger generation of those communities in the towns and villages who are completely cut off from the major Jewish centers, a trend that presents a threat to continued Jewish existence.

The Jews of Morocco and Tunisia, who had lived for many generations in a Moslem world, had built a protective wall around themselves as a buffer against adverse and destructive alien influences. They established their own educational institutions, *Talmudei Torah* which ensured a Jewish education for their children, and they devotedly preserved the traditions of their parents. Even the Alliance schools, established in the 19th century and which provided a general education, did not sever ties with deep-rooted Jewish tradition. The situation with the Algerian Jews was different particularly with regard to the 100,000 Jews who dwelt in the coastal towns. They were educated in French schools and were known for their outstanding scientific and cultural attainments; but in the course of time they severed their connection with the traditional Jewish way of life. A new generation grew up under the influence of their surroundings and French culture. The move to France gave impetus to further alienation from Judaism, for it was as though the last barriers between them and the

French world were completely removed, and those young people who had not received even a rudimentary dose of Jewish learning became totally estranged from their ancient traditions and even broke off relations with their own families.

The new environment impelled the adults too to remove accepted barriers. Though they in the past observed the Sabbath in North Africa and had fastidiously refrained from doing business on that sacred day, they now felt that they must remove this one last distinction between themselves and their neighbours if they were not to be thought of as aliens in their new world. The desire to acclimatize to the new environment led the young generation to imitate the ways and customs of their neighbours. Mixed marriages became widespread and more than 40% of the youth who grew up in France in the last decade has entered upon marriage with Christians. Young girls too have broken down the old taboos, have alienated themselves from their traditions and have come to accept "marrying out".

The threat of assimilation has become a reality which is likely to bring tragic consequences to Judaism. It is essential that we do not treat this problem as unique to North African Jewry alone. This is a universal Jewish problem and it is incumbent upon the Jewish institutions, and particulary the Zionist Movement and the State of Israel, to take steps to curb this trend which can lead to the loss of a large proportion of our people.

Upon their arrival, the immigrants began to shape a new communal life and to maintain educational institutions where the children receive at least a few hours of Jewish education each week. But the actual influence of this learning on the pupils is small. For the pressures of the surrounding society are stronger. Nevertheless, the native French are somewhat hesitant to accepting fully the recent arrivals.

The disparaging remarks made by General de Gaulle after the Six-Day War regarding Jews and the State of Israel came as a great shock to the French Jews. The deepest shock was felt by the North African Jews. A new spirit suddenly gripped them, and even those who had begun to lead an assimilated way of life began to search for paths back to Judaism. There was hope in certain circles that this profound shock might ultimately lead to large-scale *aliyah* to Israel. In fact, during the first years a few thousand did indeed come to Israel. Then the stream rapidly dried up. The reasons for this are mainly material: these Jews often have large families and they enjoy generous assistance from the French Government. Education is free at all levels, beginning with elementary schools and extending to institutions of higher learning. Moreover, the breadwinner in each family benefits from monthly allowances which ease the burden of raising a family. One major benefit is the free and unlimited medical care

for all ages. Large family units receive reductions in the cost of urban transportation which range from 30% for families with three children to 75% for families with six. Families with five children receive government support of up to a complete salary which assures a respectable standard of living for the whole family. Child allowances begin with the birth of the second child and are available until the age of eighteen. If the child wishes to continue his or her education after secondary school, the period of the allowance is extended to the age of twenty. In addition, the head of the family is eligible for an allowance for his wife if she does not work, the amount varying according to the number of their children. There is also a housing allowance which covers a portion of the rental costs; this also varies according to family income, number of rooms and rental rate.

These social benefits have radically improved the living conditions of North African Jews and their educational level. There is less and less concern for their material security, but the effect of this affluence has been to curtail any aspirations for making *aliyah* to Israel.

At the end of the 'sixties the Zionist institutions and the Israel Government made efforts to encourage North African immigrants to continue their education in Israel in order to combat assimilation. Professor E. D. Bergmann, one of the great Israeli scientists, visited France several times on behalf of the Israel Government and the Zionist Organization and met student leaders. He tried to persuade them to continue their studies in Israel academic institutions. According to estimates there were 1,500 Tunisian and Moroccan, and an equal number of Algerian students. Prof. Bergmann found scores of Jewish professors and scientists on the staffs of the different faculties, including the faculty of natural sciences.

The Moroccan and Tunisian students responded with enthusiasm because many of them had relatives and immediate family in Israel. A drive was initiated and hundreds of students were organized in a movement called "Oded", whose aim was *aliyah* and the continuation of study in Israel institutions of higher learning. The absorption authorities allocated a special budget to help these students, but apparently the desired objective was not attained. It seems that apparent discrimination in Israel particularly against North African Jews deterred this *aliyah.*

A new Zionist movement sprang up in the 'seventies among North African Jews, which aimed to encourage *aliyah* as a means of combatting assimilation. It is called "Ziona" and requires its members to prepare themselves for *aliyah* within a number of years.

In conjunction with the activities of Ziona there has been a reassessment of priorities within the Zionist Organization itself, which calls for increased Zionist activity among North African Jews in France. The Sephardi Federation too set up an umbrella organization to encompass

all the Sephardi Jewish organizations and the North African Jews play a leading role on its executive in France. It can only be hoped that the establishment of this organization will strengthen community activity among these Jews and deepen their national sentiments.

It is also hoped that the Zionist Organization will make an effort to increase educational activities and strengthen Jewish national consciousness among these Jews; and in this way help save them from spiritual alienation and assimilation.

The Jews of Iran

Economic Prosperity and Migration

The creation of the State of Israel brought about a radical change in the demographic structure of the Jewish communities of Iran. Since the establishment of the state, about 40,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel from Iran.

But the first *aliyah* of Persian Jews to Eretz Yisrael was in the 19th century. Caravans of *olim* wound their way along tortuous paths en route to the Holy Land, to grace its soil and join in its upbuilding. The majority settled in Jerusalem and founded a number of new neighbourhoods in the west of the city. In due course, some of them began working the land and others learned trades or engaged in commerce or industry.

Prior to the foundation of the state, about 40,000 *olim* had already reached Eretz Yisrael from Persia, making a total community of about 80,000 by the time of this writing. The majority of recent immigrants hail from rural towns and villages. Cities such as Hamadan (Shoshan, the ancient capital), Isfahan, Kermanshah and Shiraz are also being progressively emptied of their Jewish residents. Some have moved to Teheran, the capital, but the majority have emigrated to Israel.

Since the Second World War, Teheran has become the gravitational center in which all those seeking a "break" for their families find refuge. Prior to the war the city was of medium size; today the population approaches two million This trend is characteristic of all the Middle Eastern countries and is the result of economic changes in the region. The standard of living is on a continuous upswing. The Jews have always engaged in commerce, thus in Teheran, they obviously found endless opportunities and occupy a prominent position in the commercial world there. They are mainly importers and maintain links with lands all over the world. Their economic sway came as the result of establishing "colonies" in the commercial centers of Europe, America and the Far East. Today there are communities of Persian Jews in London, Paris, Geneva, New York and in Latin America capitals. They have also gained economic footholds in India, Japan and other regions of the Far East, and thus occupy a high position in international commerce and trade. Indeed, until the rise of Arab nationalism, the Persian Jews filled an important role in commercial links between Iran and the Arab lands. However, since

the cessation of their business activities there, those residing in Iraq, Egypt and Syria were compelled to uproot and seek out new homes elsewhere or return to Iran.

Spiritual Decline

Concomitant with the economic good fortune of these Jews, there has been a dangerous spiritual decline that threatens the very existence of the community. Up until the last generation, Jews lived in ghettos and succeeded in preserving their Jewishness despite the general spiritual impoverishment. But, since the revolution of Reza Pahlavi (father of the Shah Muhammad Reza) the walls of the ghettos came down and the Jews earned equal citizenship rights. The behaviour towards them as unclean fundamentally altered and they enjoy all the rights of fully enfranchised citizens. But the exodus from the ghetto brought about a basic change in the attitude of the younger generation towards Judaism.

Over one hundred years ago "Alliance" embarked on its great educational enterprise in Persia and in other lands of the Near East. Its schools educated an entire generation of learned people in Teheran and in the villages, most of whom became estranged from religion and tradition; some have broken all ties with the Jewish faith. This rupture has led many Jews to adopt the Bahai faith which frees its adherents from any religious restrictions or prohibitions. A young generation seeking personal reform has found "salvation" in this new faith which has extended its influence within the alien surróundings. In recent years, thousands of Moslems have also passed over to the Bahai faith. The fear of religious persecution which had characterized Persian life before the revolution of Reza Shah, when the authorities were under the sway of the fanatical mullahs and Shi'ites, disappeared and opened the field to the new faith.

Except for a rudimentary knowledge of the High Holy Days, the youth know nothing of Judaism. They are always engaged in commerce and in the race after profit. The Jews occupy businesses on the main thoroughfares of Teheran and do not hesitate to open on the Sabbath. It is only in the bazaar (the central market) that the Jews do not open their stores on *Shabbat*; there they close two days a week, on Friday and Saturday.

The creation of the State of Israel in fact rescued Persian Jewry from spiritual annihilation. The awakening which sent tremors through the people aroused strong feelings of identification among the youth. They were well on the way to total assimilation when the new feelings of attachment began to pulse through their veins. Thereafter they commenced their search for the path back to Judaism.

Educational Activities of "Ozar Hatorah"

During World War II, emissaries of "Ozar Hatorah" (an organization of

Sephardi Jews from New York) came to Iran to examine the situation and take steps to rescue the Jewry from estrangement from its roots. The delegation was headed by Rabbi Yitzhak Levy, a Jew from Eastern Europe who had set up a series of *yeshivot* where the youth might receive a Jewish religious education. After studying the conditions and recognizing the serious spiritual state of the youth in Iran, Rabbi Levy proposed that "Ozar Hatorah" set up a network of public schools to help save them from the alienation of the previous generation. Mr. Isaac Shalom was engaged for this task. He was an immigrant in New York from Syria and devoted his energies to education in the countries of the East. On the basis of the success in Morocco where a series of schools had been established by "Ozar Hatorah", it was decided to establish a similar network of primary schools in Iran.

According to Rabbi Levy, "Ozar Hatorah" maintains some twenty-six elementary and secondary schools in Iran at present. The pupils study Hebrew, *Torah, Mishnah* and *Talmud.* Some years ago "Ozar Hatorah" opened a seminary for the qualification of women primary school teachers. Two years later 18 teachers were studying in the seminary; these women completed sutdies in general elementary schools and studied Hebrew as well as religious subjects. At the head of the seminary was a teacher from Israel, Mrs. Sapir. These teachers commenced instructing in the lower grades of the schools. "Ozar Hatorah" also opened a seminary for males.

A great deal of criticism has been levied at Rabbi Levy for offering an education characterized by a religious zeal reminiscent of the attitudes of Neturei Karta. Moreover, Rabbi Levy did not enlist teachers from Israel in his program; Israeli instructors would have instilled his schools with a living spirit. Apparently, he is determined that "Ozar Hatorah" schools be closed to any influence likely to raise the standard of instruction and increase the pupils' store of knowledge.

The network of "Ozar Hatorah" schools is maintained in practice by the "Joint". The budget of "Ozar Hatorah" is covered by the following sources: half a million dollars a year from the "Joint"; 24% of the budget by the government education department; and 13% from the local Jewish communities.

"Alliance" continues its educational activity begun one hundred years ago. However, the pupils now also study Hebrew, bible and history of the Jewish people, in addition to general studies.

Communal Organizations

The Jewish community in Teheran has official status. The general council is chosen and approved by the authorities. The council is headed by Mr.

Aryeh, who is the only Jewish representative in the "Majles" (parliament). Apart from the assets which the council has acquired, this body has little influence upon community activity. The council has one elementary school called "Koresh". Because of the inefficacy of the council, the wealthy Jews in Teheran do not bear the burden of the upkeep of the communal institutions and there are no signs of possible improvement in this respect in the future.

A group of youth united around Mr. Karmanyan, who also serves in various public roles, tried to bring about change and reform but failed. This group maintains the club "Koresh the Great"which aims to give the local youth a Zionist education. There is also the "Hechalutz" organization which educates the young people in a Zionist spirit. The death of Mr. Moshe Tov, who had served at the head of the Zionist Organization for many years, was a great loss to the Iranian Jews. Mr. Tov did much to attract wealthy Jews, who had drifted away from Judaism, to the Zionist movement and to activities connected with the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael. Since his death two years ago, however, no replacement has been found. The most eligible candidate for the office of President of the Zionist Organization is Mr. Jamshid Kashbi; but due to dissension among the community leaders he has not yet been elected.

The "Joint" is responsible for the upkeep of the Jewish obstetric hospital situated in the vicinity of the ghetto in Teheran. The head of the hospital is a physician from South Africa, and the head nurse is from Israel.

The hospital was founded fifteen years ago by Dr. Sapir, a dedicated doctor of the community who undertook the methodical abolition of infectious diseases among the Jews of the ghetto. He died while treating a typhus epidemic which struck Teheran. The activities of the hospital are apparent among the residents of the Jewish ghetto, and most particularly among the children who are under the constant supervision of its staff.

There is a women's organization under the auspices of the general council, which engages in charitable work and maintains two kindergartens also in the vicinity of the ghetto. Hundreds of children receive admirable education and care. The organization engages in all the social tasks of the general council and tries to educate the public to help the needy and underprivileged of the community. The organization is headed by Mrs. Hochmat and Mrs. Kashbi assisted with dedication by Mrs. Somekh, Mrs. Moreh and Mrs. Zargarian.

Rabbi Yedidia Shofet heads the rabbinical court; but there is no organized office of the rabbinate to tend to matrimonial affairs and give some order to the religious life of the community.

Persian Jewry is in need of our assistance — of group leaders, educators, spiritual leaders and young rabbis who will be able to improve the com-

munity life in Teheran of its 40,000 Jews. The rural communities with a total also of about 40,000 Jews are in equally bad shape. Organized educational activity among the youth and a general organization of the communities are the means to restore vigour to Iranian Jewry and rescue it from total alienation from its traditions. The rewards will be great, for most of this community is potential material for *aliyah*. From their *aliyah* we shall reap the benefits of the effort invested in the *Galut* community.

(1960)

Under the Ayatollah Khomeini

Throughout the reign of the Shah Reza Pahlavi in Iran, the Jews enjoyed complete protection. All attempts at incitement by extremist circles in Iran, including religious leaders of the Moslem-Shi'ite religion, were forcefully suppressed by the Shah's government. The Jews took advantage of the prosperity in Iran over the past fifteen years to establish themselves economically. In commerce and industry they became an important economic factor. In the last decade many also moved into the construction trade where they invested much energy and funds in the development of Teheran, the capital city. Some of the wealthy Teheran Jews were involved in the export of petroleum, which was Iran's most important economic sector. The economic relations which developed between Iran and Israel and the entry of Israeli firms into development work in various regions of Iran gave Iranian Jews a sense of security. Nevertheless, the community leaders and many others were well aware of the precarious situation of the Jews if the Shah should be deposed.

Indeed, as the struggle of the extremist religious circles and the Moscow-supported leftist factions to undermine the rule of the Shah intensified in the summer of 1978, the conflict began to take on a distinct anti-Jewish and anti-Israel character. The Shi'ite religious leaders incited the people against the Jews and other minorities, such as the Bahai sect. Pamphlets were circulated in Teheran threatening the Jews who had reputedly "robbed" the country of its resources. Threatening letters were also sent to the Jewish leaders, and the houses of Jews in Teheran and other cities have been singled out for future harrassment. Rich Jewish merchants have been compelled to leave Iran because the day of revenge is near. Slogans have been painted on the walls of synagogues and other Jewish institutions calling for "death to the Jews". In demonstrations organized by religious leaders and leftists in a number of cities, protests were voiced against the links between Iran and Israel.

As long as the Shah was in control, the Jews did not pay any serious attention to this incitement. They were secure in their belief that the Shah had sufficient means to suppress any attempts to harm them. But the repeated incitement has now produced the desired effect and Iranians have began to boycott the Jews and have ceased having any commercial dealings with them. The Iranians, who had for years maintained close relations with their Jewish neighbours, now begun to display open hatred,

and warily keep their distance from them. The new feeling of insecurity has compelled the Jews to try to sell their property and leave Iran; but they are met with outright hostility. The Moslems avoid purchasing Jewish property since they feel sure that it will eventually fall into their hands without any need for payment.

Conscious of the imminent danger, the Jews made several attempts to confer with the Moslem religious leaders and requested their protection of the Jewish community. After the Ayatollah Khomeini moved from his place of exile (Najaf in Iraq) to Paris on October 3, 1978 and the pilgrimage began to the residence of the religious leader, there appeared in his home, among others, a delegation of Jews who asked for his protection from the inciters. Khomeini promised them his full protection and emphasized that the Jews would live in peace and security and that the fanatics would not harm them.

With the Shah's exile on January 16, 1979, the Jews' concern deepened. International Jewish institutions led by the Jewish Agency intensified efforts to encourage their *aliyah* to Israel.

The elderly rabbi of the community also sought to encourage their *aliyah*. In November 1978 Rabbi Yedidia Shofet anounced a special day of prayer and fasting for the peace and well-being of the Iranian Jews.

On February 1, 1979 Khomeini arrived in Teheran. One million inhabitants gathered at the airport to welcome him. Among them were five thousand Jews led by Chief Rabbi Shofet. The Jews bore aloft a picture of Khomeini with the slogan: "Jews and Moslems, brothers".

Khomeini's arrival in Teheran signalled the dangers which awaited the Jews. The Jewish Agency directors intensified their efforts to speed up their departure. Special envoys arrived from Israel to warn the community of anticipated perils. On February 4, 1979, three days after Khomeini's arrival, Mordechai Ben Porat reached the capital city and launched a campaign to persuade the Jews to hurry up and leave. Thanks to the special efforts some four thousand Jews managed to depart within the span of one week on El Al planes, which continued their scheduled flights despite the changes in the government.

Some weeks after Khomeini's takeover of the government, the head of the Jewish community in Teheran, Habib el Kanayan, was arrested. He was held in custody for 43 days and was executed on May 9, 1979, only a few hours after the Moslem religious authorities read out the death sentence in court. The accused was not given the chance of a legal defence.

After his execution the newspapers in Teheran wrote that the hanging of Habib el Kanayan was the finest gift that the Iranian revolution could have bestowed upon the Palestinian revolution.

The remaining Jews have persisted in the illusion that they will be able to adapt to the new conditions and the theocratic regime. Some of the educated Jewish youth have begun to write articles against Zionism and the State of Israel in order to win the trust of the new rulers. But Jews continue to be subjected time and again to trials in the presence of Islamic religious judges. They are being sentenced to death and executed. At the time of writing, the number of cases of capital punishment had reached ten. The sentenced men have been men of property and standing in the community, among them the editor of a Jewish newspaper.

Though not all the 80,000 Jews of Iran tried to flee, there has been an organized and continuous departure. And today, the community which has been steadily depleted contains only 30,000-35,000 Jews. In the past two years about 40,000 have left Iran. The majority emigrated to the United States and Western Europe; 19,000 *olim* had reached Israel by January 1981.

Ups and Downs in the History of Iranian Jewry

The very old Jewish community in Iran has experienced many turns of fortune. Its history began some 2,500 years ago. The situation of the community first became critical in the 16th century when the Shi'ite Moslems intensified their religious persecution of this community. This took place in 1586-1629, and 1642-1666, when the rulers Abbas I and Abbas II respectively were in power. Synagogues were burnt down or converted into mosques and many Jews were forced to become Moslems. The Jews of Isfahan were compelled to wear a special sign of identification. According to the claims of Safavid religious men, the inhabitants of 300 Jewish villages were force to convert. Their Moslem neighbours of the Shi'ite sect called them "Jedeed", or "new Moslems".

There was some improvement during the reign of Nader Shah in the 18th century. He allowed Jews to reside in his capital city, Mashad. But after his death their condition again deteriorated, and in 1838 some Jews were executed while others were forcibly converted. The Jews of Mashhad lived a double life for generations. Outwardly, they appeared to be zealous and faithful Moslems, but in their homes they continued to follow the precepts of the Jewish faith. A portion of the Jews of Mashhad came to Eretz Yisrael at the end of the 19th century and even established a special quarter in Jerusalem.

During the reign of the Shah Reza Pahlavi, a cultural awakening took place among the Jews. The schools of Alliance and "Ozar Hatorah" provided Jewish education. In March 1950, the status of the Jewish woman in Iran changed. In place of a full covering for the body and face, the latest Western fashions began to be worn.

The *aliyah* of Persian Jews to Eretz Yisrael began generations ago. They travelled by caravan in the 19th century to the Holy Land where they settled in the sacred cities, especially in Jerusalem. With the independence of Israel, there began a mass *aliyah*. Between 1948-1978 more than 55,000 Jews came to Israel from Iran. The total number of Persian speakers in Israel today approaches 100,000.

In 1950, the Shah gave de facto recognition to the State of Israel. But in the years following, the Iranian Government refused to accept an Israeli representative in Teheran of the same status as the Iranian representative in Israel. When Mosaddeq gained power in 1951, the Iranian representative in Israel was recalled and attacks against Jews and against Israel were renewed. But when the Shah returned to Iran and Mosaddeq fell from power, a representative was once again despatched to Israel and the anti-Jewish attacks ceased.

Ten per cent of Iran's 80,000 Jews had been exceedingly rich at the time of Khomeini's takeover of the regime. Eighty per cent were middle class and only ten per cent were poor and in need of aid.

The most conspicuous change in their status was in the fields of education and know-how. Two of the eighteen members of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Iran were Jews: Professor Iraj Lazari and Professor Shmuel Rakhbar. More than 4,000 of the total 100,000 students were Jewish. Eighty of the 4,000 university lecturers were Jewish. Of the 10,000 physicians in Iran, 600 were Jews. About half of the Jewish children of elementary school age attended Hebrew schools or received lessons in Hebrew. But the ever-growing Jewish intelligentsia took no interest in Jewish affairs and did not long for Zion. Most of them were of the radical left.

As mentioned, ten Jews have been executed while the number of detainees is large and cannot be ascertained. The religious authorities have adopted a special method of gaining control of Jewish property. The Jews must pay a ransom in order to stay out of prison, or to be released from prison; but the authorities often take payment without releasing the prisoners.

In the summer of 1980, the Iranian authorities announced the closure of schools which were not under government supervision. In this way they stopped the activity of educational institutions belonging to other religions: to the Jewish and Catholic denominations among others.

They have also compelled the principals of the "Ozar Hatorah" schools to accept non-Jewish students into the classes. The Alliance schools have long since lost their Jewish character and have become general schools.

Distribution of Iranian Jews

As a result of their commercial connections, particularly in the carpet and

rug trade, Iranian Jews found their way to many different countries. Many established small communities in the United States, England, Italy and France.

With Khomeini's rise to power and the beginnings of a mass exodus, thousands arrived in the United States, Estimates put their number at 20,000, 10,000 of whom live in Los Angeles. More than 3,000 settled in New York and the remainder in other cities.

The process of immigration and settlement of Iranian Jews was carried out quietly and with few problems. Those who arrived in the U.S.A. were of the middle class. The charitable Jewish organizations in the United States were not requested to aid these immigrants since they were assisted by other organizations. The main assistance given by the Jewish organizaitons to the new immigrants is in the form of instruction in attaining citizenship so that they will not be required to make use of their Iranian passports.

In the countries of Western Europe too, the settlement of Iranian Jews has not created any special problems. Usually, immigrants joined their families who had arrived earlier, and were thus easily absorbed.

The Jews of Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a population of about fifteen million Sunnite Moslems. The country has always been solated from the rest of the world culturally and politically because its rulers feared foreign influence. Afghanistan borders on Russia, Iran and Pakistan and to ensure the country's independence, its leaders followed a policy of neutrality. At the end of the 'twenties, King Amanollah, under the influence of the revolution and reforms carried out by Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, attempted to institute a series of reforms in his own country, including the liberation of the Afghan woman from the subservience of generations. However, Amanollah did not remain in power for long but was ousted by religious zealots who replaced him with a king more committed to a religious and conservative way of life.

Throughout the centuries, the Afghan leaders adhered to a neutral stance and exploited the differences among the rulers in the neighbouring countries so as to assure their own independence. This was especially conspicuous in the 19th century when an intense struggle was waged between Czarist Russia and Britain (which then ruled in India) to extend their influence into Afghanistan.

In the summer of 1973 there was a coup d'état in Afghanistan which led to the end of the monarchy. Mohammed Daud Khan (an army general) ousted his cousin Mohammed Zahir Shan, who had reigned for forty years, and the conservative country became a republic.

Within this religiously fanatic and politically conservative atmosphere, a Jewish community had existed for thousands of years. The community knew how to preserve its traditions and guard against assimilation into the surrounding culture. According to local tradition, the first Jewish settlers in Afghanistan were people who had been exiled by the King of Assyria. Later arrivals who joined the community were mainly Jewish traders hailing from Persia and Babylonia. The Moslem conquest of Afghanistan, like the conquest of the other lands of middle Asia, led to the conversion of the inhabitants to Islam. But, whereas the Shi'ite Moslems had gained the upper hand in Persia, the Sunnite Moslems gained precedence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Jews, generally traders by profession, resided in the larger cities: Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Baghlan, Andkhvoy, Mazar-e Sharif, Meymaneh and others.

Until only a few years ago the Jews, like those of the other Islamic lands, were compelled to pay a personal tax (*Jesia*). In addition, the rulers issued a decree ordering the Jews to supply 300 men for military works; and a heavy tax was imposed upon those who sought to escape this enforced labour. Another order compelled the Jews to wear a black ribbon on their headdress for indentification purposes. Such restrictions aroused concern among the Jews, and they began to leave Afghanistan when they realized that their future was no longer secure. Some left for Persia and others for Bukhara. At that time the first of the Afghan *"chalutzim"* began to make *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael.

During World War II the stream of Afghan Jews to Eretz Yisrael grew. But when the British closed the gates to further immigration, many were stranded in Persia and India. Only after persistent solicitations by world Jewish organizations did they gain permission to enter Eretz Yisrael.

At the time of the declaration of the state in 1948, there were about 5,000 Jews in Afghanistan. In 1950, the government in Afghanistan authorized the departure of Jews and 3,500 took advantage of this official sanction to leave. The majority came to Israel. Today there are only a few hundred Jews left and they live mainly in three cities, Kabul, Herat and Baghlan.

At the end of the 19th century, some of the Jews who had been forcibly converted to Islam in Mashhad, Persia, fled to Afghanistan and found refuge there. The Afghan Jewish community received them warmly and helped them to settle down.

After the Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917, the Jews of Afghanistan received still further reinforcements in the form of refugees from Bukhara and the surrounding regions.

Although these Jews lived on the outskirts of Asia, they maintained strong links with other Jewish communities. The Afghan Jews speak a particular Persian dialect while the Bukharan Jews speak another. But they pray according to the Sephardi Jewish manner, though with their own melodies. The Afghan Jews have always kept the Sabbath and observed the Jewish holidays. They studied assiduously Rashi, *Mishnah, Halakhot, Zohar, Kabbalah* and even delved frequently into the work *Ein Yaacov*. The synagogue has always served as a spiritual center. It is customary for the father of the family to translate the prayers, the Zohar and *Pirkei Avoth* for the entire family, including the women. As in other Eastern lands, the children were educated in *Talmudei Torah* maintained by the rabbis and the religious scholars.

The Jews of Afghanistan dressed differently from the other inhabitants of the land. But the women, when outside the precincts of their own homes, veiled their faces like the Moslem women.

Although the Afghan kings were generally tolerant towards the Jews, there were nevertheless numerous incidents of robbery and looting of Jewish property by fanatical mobs stirred to violence by Moslem religious leaders. In general, the Jews served as a target for harrassment when the regime was unstable, or when changes were taking place in the royal court.

When the Nazis came to power in Germany, they dispatched their agents to Persia and Afghanistan to win the hearts of the local rulers. At the same time, they took steps to incite the local masses against the Jews by presenting them as parasites who were emptying the land of its riches. As a result of these Nazi activities, the Jews were removed from the border areas for fear of their spying against the state. They were also ousted from the economic positions which they occupied.

As Nazi influence grew, many Jews began to leave. And when they received word of the creation of the State of Israel the last of the Afghan Jews, who for centuries had eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer, were so inspired that they packed their bags and joined their brethren who had preceded them to Eretz Yisrael.

Although the majority of these Jews came to Israel, there are communities elsewhere of those who settled in Asia, in Western Europe and the United States.

Eastern Jews in Soviet Russia

Immediately following the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Georgian Jews commenced their struggle to be allowed to leave for Israel. It was this struggle which brought the existence of this magnificent community to the attention of the public. The Georgian Jews had long been linked to Eretz Yisrael, and families had immigrated to the Holy Land in the 19th and early 20th centuries. But since the Communist Revolution in Russia, it seemed that these Jews had been completely forgotten. The history of the Georgian Jews dates back more than 2500 years. According to tradition, the community has its roots in the offspring of the ten tribes exiled by Shalmaneser in 724 B.C.E..

Over the generations, waves of Jews streamed to Georgia. This province, which is part of the Caucasus, became a center for strong-spirited Jews who preserved their Jewishness in the face of persecution and oppression by neighbouring peoples. First Christianity spread among the peoples and then came the influence of the Islamic faith. But the Georgian Jews, like the other mountain Jews, knew well how to preserve their Jewish character and not to submit to the pressure of their Christian and Moslem neighbours to convert. But the growing persecutions and harrassment under Christian and later Moslem rule, took its toll and thinned out the ranks of the Jewish communities.

In due course, two distinct Jewish communities took shape in the southern Caucasus: the Georgian Jews in the west, and the Jews of Dagestan in the east. The center of the Dagestanian Jews was located in Derbent which lies along the coast of the Caspian Sea. It is interesting to note that until the present time the two communities maintain different ways of life and the national and cultural ties between them are weak. It is not surprising that there was little intermarriage between them. Apparently, the differences stem from the fact that these Jews hail from two separate tribal entities. While the mountain Jews (the "Tetim" as they are called) came originally from Persian Azerbaijan, the Georgian Jews, who arrived earlier, dwelt among the native Georgian people who had adopted Christianity. The mountain people of Dagestan had adopted Islam as their official faith in the 8th century. The religious and cultural disparity between the two regions had an effect upon the character of the local Jews. Though the two groups maintained their Jewishness, they are little different from their neighbours in lifestyle and language.

The infiltration of Islam into Dagestan seriously affected the position of its Jews. Many were forced to adopt Islam in order to escape certain death. Others who resisted conversion were subjected to conditions of slavery; their fanatic Moslem overlords maltreated and humiliated them as punishment. Many of the Dagestan Jews migrated westward to seek refuge among the Georgian Jews who lived under the rule of the native Georgian Christian population. But the lot of the Georgian Jews was not without its hardships They too were subservient to their Christian neighbours. These conditions persisted from tne 11th century until the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century.

The condition of the Dagestan Jews worsened when the Russian Czars made their first attempt to conquer the region of the Caucasus. The Moslem rulers demanded that the Jews convert to Islam and join forces with them against the Russian invaders. The Moslems were not satisfied with these conversions alone, but also assaulted the Jews and robbed their property.

The Russian conquest of the Caucasus did not improve the Jewish lot though, according to law, Jewish inhabitants were considered to have equal rights with the other inhabitants. In 1804, the Russian authorities set restictions upon Jewish habitation in the Caucasus just as they had done with regard to Jews in European Russia. These limitations led to the settlement of Jews from various regions of Asiatic Russia in Georgia. But it was not long before Georgia was officially declared to be out-of-bounds for Jews. This was in 1835, and thereafter Jews from the European part of Russia were forbidden to migrate to Georgia, and more specifically to the Caucasus region.

As in the days of the Moslem rulers, the Moslems of Dagestan did not hesitate even during the period of Russian rule to incite to riots against the Jews and to loot their property.

The Georgian Jews, like those in other Christian lands, were the victims of blood libels. On the eve of a Passover holiday (April 4, 1878) a Georgian girl walking home in a local village near Satzkhari, suddenly disappeared. Her body was found the following day. Nine Jewish peddlers who were returning home in a cart were arrested on suspicion of committing the crime. Some of the local residents even testified that they had personally seen the Jews lift the girl into their cart. The rumour quickly spread that the Jews had taken the girl's blood and murdered her. Georgian youths went on a rampage in Satzkhari and a number of Jews were harmed and their shops looted by local Christians.

The trial of the accused raised a storm among the Jews of Russia, and the community leaders, at the initiative of Baron Guenzburg of St. Petersburg, were called to the aid of the victims. Lawyers were hired who

successfully refuted the charges. Some witnesses testified before the jury that it was a well-known fact that Jews kidnap Christian children on Passover eve in order to drain their blood for ritual purposes. But the judges did not accept the testimonies and dismissed charges.

This blood libel perpetrated by the Christians aroused enlightened public opinion in Russia, and numerous gentiles entered the controversy on the side of the Jews in order to help disclose the lies of the troublemakers. It was as a result of this trial that the general public first became aware of the existence of the Georgian Jewish community.

With the Soviet mastery of the Caucasus after the revolution, its Jewish communities were cut off from other Jewish communities. Nevertheless, they continued to preserve the faith of their forebears, and with the awakening of national sentiment they began a struggle to gain permission from the Soviet authorities to immigrate to Israel. Once the dam was breached, the Jews of Dagestan and Bukhara joined the outflowing stream.

The Jews of Bukhara

In Uzbekistan, one of the Soviet republics of Central Asia, there is a very ancient Jewish community known as the Bukharan community. The Communists took control of this region, one among several formerly ruled over by Bukharian amirs, in 1925. Islam which penetrated into Northern Asia, also spread its influence over this area.

Various legends tell of the arrival of the Jews to the Uzbekistan destrict. These Jews, like those of Bukhara, also believe that they are the descendants of the ten tribes who were exiled by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria. The exiles wandered through the cities of Persia and Medea and finally arrived in Bukhara, which at that time was called the land of Sogdiana. According to another legend the Jews came to Uzbekistan during the rule of the Persian king, Firuz (459-484 C.E.). Firuz persecuted both the Christians and the Jews. He closed down the *Talmudei Torah* and put an end to Jewish legal autonomy. The Jews of Bukhara speak a special Persian dialect.

The fate of these Jews was no different from those in Central Asia. This region too fell victim to numerous conquerors, each of whom vented his wrath on the Jewish inhabitants. The death knell of this community came with the conquest of the Mongolian invaders under the leadership of Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk. The cities of Bukhara and Samarkand were conquered by Genghis Khan in 1220 and he razed them to the ground. The city of Balakh was conquered two years later and all its inhabitants were murdered.

In 1966 a Russian researcher, Silarova, who published her findings on the history of the Asian people living under the Soviet regime, tells that the Jewish elders of Bukhara claim that their people arrived in Bukhara during the rule of Timur Lenk (1336-1407). The conqueror brought ten families from the city of Shiraz in Persia. Others related, that Timur Lenk brought the Jews from Baghdad who hailed originally from Eretz Yisrael and had apparently passed through Babylonia and Persia before settling in Bukhara. The researcher also found that the local inhabitants regarded the Jews as infidels because they did not believe in Mohammed, and hence were not allowed to live in the vicinity of Moslems.

Emissaries from Eretz Yisrael also came to Bukhara to collect funds for the maintenance of the Jewish community in the Holy Land. In this way the Jews were kept informed of developments in the Jewish the world and in Eretz Yisrael. It seems that an emissary from Safed, Rabbi Joseph Maman, (also known as "Hama'aravi"), arrived in Bukhara at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He learnt of the lack of spiritual life and decided, to settle there to teach the ways of Judaism. Rabbi Joseph succeeded in bringing the Jews of Bukhara back to the *Torah* and the Jewish precepts. Another emissary, Joseph Wolf, who visited Bukhara in 1832 related how the Jews of Bukhara and the surrounding areas Balakh, Samarkand, Tashkent, Kokand etc. — were wallowing in utter ignorance. They had forgotten the Jewish commandments and customs, and even ate the meat of animals slaughtered by Moslems. Until the arrival of Joseph Maman there was no rabbi among them to give instruction in *Torah*, and guide them in the distinctions between ritually pure and unclean.

A third emissary who followed in the footsteps of Rabbi Joseph Maman, was Rabbi Raphael Uhana of Tiberias. He came to Bukhara in 1881 and established charitable funds in honour of Rabbi Meir Baa'al Haness to aid the scholars of Tiberias. He urged the Bukharian Jews to make pilgrimage to the holy sites in Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed.

An emissary from Tiberias, Rabbi Ephraim Neumark, who undertook a series of visits to Middle Eastern Jewish communities, arrived in Bukhara in 1883. He spoke of the good work of Rabbi Joseph Ma'aravi. He also noted that when the way to Russia was opened to the Bukharian Jews, they began to cultivate trade with the Moscow inhabitants and brought back to Bukhara many books to satisfy their thirst for literature. In Moscow there were Bukhari Jews who had studied the Talmud and reached an intellectual level which elevated this community to one of the important ones among world Jewry.

The mission of Rabbi Jacob Meir, one of the sages of Jerusalem later appointed Chief Rabbi and Rishon LeZion, brought much benefit to the community. He arrived in 1882 under the aegis of the Council of the

Sephardi Community in Jerusalem; he promoted learning among his hosts and spurred them on to make *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael. He also used his good offices to enable the new immigrants to Jerusalem to acquire a tract of land in the north of the city where they established a pleasant neighbourhood which became known as "The Bukhari Streets".

Another emissary from Jerusalem, Rabbi Avraham Filosof, on behalf of the Misgav Ladach Hospital in the Old City of Jerusalem sojourned in Bukhara in 1891-1892. Thereafter various other emissaries visited these Jews and worked towards strengthening the bond between that community and Eretz Yisrael. There were also Bukhari Jews who became citizens in the Holy Land and were afterwards sent to the land of their origin to raise funds for the community in Eretz Izrael.

The economic situation of the Bukhara community at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the twentieth was good. They engaged in commerce and developed strong commercial ties with European and Asian countries. But in the wake of the Communist Revolution in 1917 a struggle began to wrest control of Uzbekistan from the Moslem rulers. After several attempts by the Red Army to conquer the region, Uzbekistan was finally subdued in 1925 and became a Soviet republic. A census conducted in the Soviet Union in 1939 revealed that 50,809 Jews were living in Bukhara. Twenty years later the census showed that the Jewish population had doubled to 94,344. This remarkable growth has been attributed to the fact that many Jews who had formerly resided in Soviet areas which were conquered by the Nazis, such as Poland and other lands, found sanctuary during the war years in Bukhara and other Asiatic Soviet republics. But natural increase also contributed to the larger Jewish population.

During the fifty years of Soviet rule in Uzbekistan, the authorities have adopted a policy of suppression of the Jewish spirit. Hebrew lessons are prohibited and the committee for religious matters has had its powers curtailed. Nonetheless, the Jews have succeeded in preserving their traditions and customs. Only very few have been active in the Communist Party.

In an interview with a new immigrant from Bukhara (published in the Jerusalem monthly "Bama'aracha", no. 136, June 1972) many new details regarding the life of the Bukharian Jews were revealed. The immigrant is a dentist named Shevia Yagodiof who comes from Samarkand. She claims that the number of Bukharian Jews today is somewhere around 150,000. Many are university graduates. Despite the advance in their secularization, the community has not forsaken its religion. Except for a few isolated cases there are no mixed marriages. The children undergo proper circumcision. The synagogues are full and the members of the community pray on the Sabbath and holy days.

The flow of Georgian Jews to Israel has given impetus to the Bukhari Jews some of whom began to organize themselves for the move. If *aliyah* from these countries persists then we might expect to absorb one-quarter million Eastern Jews from Soviet Russia, and this will indubitably lead to the end of these communities.

SECTION II:
TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS — EUROPE

Contemporary Jewish Communities in Spain

A Jewish Museum and an Institute for Ladino Research in Madrid

A few weeks before our visit a special ceremony was held in the magnificent synagogue of Toledo, Spain. The ceremony marked the inauguration of a museum for Jewish religious artefacts located in a hall adjacent to the synagogue itself. This house of prayer was founded by Shmuel Halevy, who had served as minister of the treasury for, and who was a close companion of, King Peter the First of Castile. King Peter ruled in the 14th century and was known as "Peter the Cruel" because of his many wicked acts and crimes. The fate of the Jewish treasurer was no happier than the fate of the other Jewish inhabitants of Spain. But while he was still in the good graces of the King and had his full trust and support, Shmuel Halevy established the lavish synagogue in Toledo and hoped to transform it into a center of spiritual life not just for the Jews of Toledo, but for all the Jews of Spain. Some have suggisted that it was Halevy's desire to accord the synagogue a holy status comparable to that formerly held by the Temple in Jerusalem.

Since the Inquisition, the synagogue underwent many transformations. Like many other others, it was converted into a church by order of the Catholic Church. On one side is an Ark in which the Torah scrolls had once been kept, and on another wall there is the church emblem. General Franco and his administration adopted a policy of reconciliation towards the Jews and he decided to re-endow the synagogue with its former identity as a Jewish historic site. He therefore had a museum for Jewish religious artefacts established in the adjoining hall.

At the side of the entrance into the museum hall there is a map illustrating the magnificent communities established by Spanish Jews over the generations, which were the foci of their spiritual life during the golden age of Jewish literature and culture. Historians in Spain are assiduously studying the past in order to publicize the giant contribution of Spanish Jewry to the economic and cultural development of Spain during the Middle Ages. There is much harsh criticism in this research of the criminal policies adopted by the Spanish rulers towards their Jewish subjects five hundred years ago and of the wicked deeds of the Church and of the Inquisition, which remains a dark blot on the history of Spain. The present Spanish Government is expending much effort to prove its toler-

ance of other religions, including Judaism. In fact, two years ago the government passed a law entitling other religious sects to build houses of prayer and to organize communally. In accordance with this legislation, new Jewish communities were formed in Barcelona, Madrid and Malaga. Even where the number of Jewish residents is too small to merit a viable communal structure, synagogues were nonetheless opened and rabbis appointed to lead the congregants.

The above-mentioned map also indicates the distribution of the Spanish exiles as the new communities they established around the world, beginning with the flourishing ones in Holland, North Africa and Turkey, and including those founded in South America and later in the United States. Spanish exiles even found their way to the Far East where they set up Jewish communities. But these did not last long. The fate of these Jews was similar to that of many Spanish immigrants in South America, namely, that they were lost to their alien surroundings. Only a few tombstones here and there testify to the widely scattered Jewish people of former times.

Historians have recorded that the Jews came to Toledo in the first centuries C.E. They reached the peak of their splendour and strength in the Middle Ages. At the entrance to the city of Cordoba is a statue of the Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon). Maimonides and his parents left Spain because of Christian persecution. But he did not find peace in North Africa due to hardships suffered under the rule of the Arabs, and he was compelled to resume his wanderings until he reached Egypt, where he wrote his great works on Jewish law and philosophy. Spanish researchers and statesmen are filled with admiration and wonder that the Spanish Jewish exiles who settled in the Balkan Peninsula, in Turkey, in Yugoslavia and even in Eretz Yisrael continued to converse in the old Spanish called Ladino, which had been their daily language in Spain. Ladino absorbed many foreign influences over the centuries including idioms, names and expressions. But it is basically the same language, Spanish, which was spoken by the native people at the time of the Spanish expulsion.

I, myself, come from a family which has been living in Jerusalem for the past two hundred years, and with little difficulty I was able to use the knowledge of Ladino acquired from my parents during my travels in South America and Spain. Granted, the Castilian dialect which has become the standard of Latin America and Spain is indeed different from Ladino, but in speaking to merchants and vendors of newspapers I was quite able to make myself understood.

The Spanish government has established a unique institute in Madrid known as Arias Montana. The linguists and researchers employed there

are engaged in the study of Ladino and the history of Spanish Jewry during the Middle Ages. They maintain contact with other researchers in this sphere, and were delighted to learn that the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem had decided to establish, in conjunction with the university (and with the aid of the World Sephardi Federation) an institute for the study of the Spanish Jewish heritage. This institute will eventually be housed in the Old City of Jerusalem at the former site of the first Jewish hospital in Jerusalem, Misgav Leadach, established in the 19th century. The directors of Arias Montana expressed the hope that the two institutes, the one in Madrid and the one in Jerusalem, would collaborate in advancing research into the legacy of Spanish Jewry.

The New Jewish Community of Spain

When did the Jews begin to come back to Spain? It had long been customary for the Spanish exiles to swear that they would never return to reside in the land of the Inquisition. The Jews of North Africa, who according to tradition are the descendants of Spanish exiles, would reiterate in every generation the self-imposed prohibition against returning to live in Spain.

Nevertheless, itinerant Jews were not deterred from visiting Spain and even from setting up house there. But they concealed their Jewishness from their Christian neighbours. During the First World War, Professor Avraham Yehuda of Jerusalem taught at one of the Spanish universities. Prof. Yehuda, who was a celebrated Orientalist and was close to the King of Spain, did much to prevent the Turkish destruction of Jewish society in Eretz Yisrael. He also interceded with the Allied Powers to persuade them not to bombard the coastal cities of Eretz Yisrael with their heavy guns lest the Jewish residential areas be destroyed. Under Turkish rule in Eretz Yisrael, it was not unusual for Jews, including those in Eretz Yisrael, to acquire Spanish nationality; for possession of foreign nationality, and particularly that of a neutral country like Spain, made it possible to be exempted from military service and to benefit from the immunity of the adopted country.

The Franco Government played a major role during the Second World War in saving thousands of Jews from the countries of the Balkans. These were descendants of the Spanish exiles whom General Franco considered to be Spanish nationals. Some of those rescued were at the very threshold of the crematoria. The representatives of General Franco insistently demanded the prisoners' release, who were subsequently transferred to Spain. With the termination of hostilities many of them moved to Eretz Yisrael.

Many Jews from Turkey and the other Balkan countries emigrated to Spain during the 'twenties. Mr. David Ventura, President of the Jewish

community of Barcelona, arrived in Spain in 1923. He acquired a respected position in the eyes of the authorities and performed an important role in assuring tolerance towards the Jews in the period before the community, like other communities and religious sects, was finally granted the right to organize and establish its own houses of worship.

Right after the First World War, Jews from Eastern Europe (including Poland and Russia) began to arrive in Spain. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, thousands of Jewish refugees appeared in Spain seeking sanctuary. The majority resumed their journey as far as Latin America for fear that the Nazi arm would reach them with the outbreak of war.

About 8,000 Jews live today in Spain. The two largest concentrations are to be found in Barcelona, the largest port in Spain, and in Madrid, the capital. In the former there are about 3,500 Jews and in the latter about 3,000. However, not all the Jews formally belong to the congregations. Some appear in the synagogues only on the High Holy Days and during the rest of the year avoid paying fees to the community funds. Others conceal their Jewishness throughout their lives; but when they die a relative appears and reveals that the deceased was a Jew and prior to his death requested that he be brought for Jewish burial.

These two Jewish communities established educational and cultural institutions. They also built two magnificent synagogues. Mr. Sam Ben Sa'adon is the head of the Madrid community; the rabbi is Barukh Garzon. As stated Mr. David Ventura is the head of the Barcelona community whose rabbi is Shlomo Ben Shabbat. The Madrid community maintains an elementary school, and the the next school year the first grades of a secondary school will be opened. The Jews of Barcelona also have an elementary school; the community leaders urgently appealed to the Jewish Agency Department for Education in the Diaspora for assistance in establishing a secondary school for the local youth, to help them cope with the threat of assimilation. There is also a branch organization of WIZO in Barcelona.

A licence was only recently granted to the Jews on the island of Majorca to organize themselves in an official community in accordance with government legislation. A kosher restaurant has been opened on the island. Thousands of Marranos dwell on the island; they are the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity to avoid exile. To this day they preserve and carry on certain Jewish traditions handed down by their Jewish forebears. The setting up of a kosher restaurant was made possible because of the thousands of Jewish tourists, many from the United States, who request kosher food. A kosher restaurant had been opened in Madrid too, in the community building on Balmes Street. But the proprietor complained to me that the number of customers was very small indeed. Possibly, if the thousands of Jewish tourists who visit Spain every year

were informed of the existence of the restaurant, they would come to enjoy its delicacies.

The two rabbis in Barcelona and Madrid do the work of ritual slaughter so as to supply the local meat requirements. Religious courts are maintained under the guidance of the rabbis, which attend to matrimonial issues. The chief rabbis perform marriage rites. Special Jewish burial plots are to be found within the boundaries of the general cemeteries. By municipal decree certain plots were set aside for the burial of the Jewish dead. In Barcelona, however, available plots have been filled and the community leaders are making efforts to acquire additional space.

Apart from these two large communities, hundreds of Jews live in other towns. In the southern coastal town of Malaga there are about three hundred Jews, and this community supports its own synagogue and rabbi-cantor. The synagogues in all the communities conduct daily prayer services. In Barcelona and Madrid there are several *minyanim* for the three daily prayer sessions. On the Sabbath the number of *minyanim* is larger. The majority of Spanish Jews today are adults who came from North Africa, some from the colonies maintained in North Africa by Spain to this day. These colonies, formally annexed to Spain and considered to be Spanish territory in every sense, are mainly settled by Christians. The number of Jews living in the large cities (Tangier, Tetuan, Ceuta) is close to 1,500. Because of the insecure situation, many Moroccan Jews are preparing to leave for Spain, Israel and France — despite the hostility in the latter to new and mainly Jewish immigrants.

Reports of the "Black Panther" demonstrations in Israel have possibly also had an effect on the decision of prospective emigrants to seek a haven outside Israel. Many North African Jews whom I met in Spain spoke enthusiastically of Israel, but they felt that if it is true that there is discrimination, then it would not be easy to solve their problems by immigration to Israel. This situation demands a special effort on the part of all those concerned about *aliyah* from the Eastern countries. All possible means should be employed to convince these loyal Jews that they will find their proper place in Israel and will benefit from all the privileges due to *olim*.

(1971)

Jewish Communities Reorganize in Spain

In the autumn of 1977 a forty-strong delegation of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem visited Spain. It consisted of writers, journalists and public figures. They spent three weeks in Spain in an attempt to understand the problems confronting the Jewish community there.

The Spanish Jewish communities number about 12,000 and are concentrated in the three large cities, Barcelona, Madrid and Malaga. There is also a small community of fifteen families in Seville and several Jewish families are scattered throughout other cities.

The Jews first arrived in Spain together with the Phoenicians and established towns with Hebrew-sounding names. They began their work and founded Malaga (in Hebrew "*malacha*" means "work"); also Toledo ("*toldot*" means "annals" in Hebrew) and Seville ("*shefayla*" means "lowland") Granada was regarded as a "Jewish" city in the past because of its large Jewish population.

The prevalent notion is that since the expulsion of 1492, Jews have steered clear of the country; but despite the generally unfavourable atmosphere, Jews apparently did make attempts to settle and become a part of Spanish society though not as a distinct Jewish community. Indeed, during the two world wars of 1914 and 1939, Jews found refuge in Spain. During the first, for example, one of the great intellectuals in Jerusalem, Avraham Shalom Yehuda, a celebrated orientalist, taught at a Spanish university. Prof. Yehuda made use of his influence in official circles to take advantage of Spain's neutrality to rescue the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael from annihilation at the hands of the tyrannical regime of the Turkish Pasha Jamal, who viewed the *yishuv* as a hostile element because of Zionist aspirations. Thus, the Spanish government appealed to the authorities in Istanbul to remove the restrictions imposed on Jews. Prof. Yehuda also appealed to American Jewish leaders (the United States had not yet joined the war) to do everything in their power to aid the rescue effort. He also requested funds to buy food for the Jews who were facing starvation in Eretz Yisrael.

But it was during the second that there was a considerable influx of Jews into Spain. Jews from various parts of Europe, seeking to escape from Hitler's death machine, found sanctuary in Spain and Portugal. General

Franco, leader of Spain, maintained close ties with Hitler and was considered to be an ally of Germany in the war with the western powers and in particular against Soviet Russia. Russia had played a major role in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, in which Franco defeated the Socialist Government of Spain and established his regime. However, despite Franco's sympathy for Hitler's war, he remained neutral and offered succour to thousands of Jews threatened by the Nazis. Many of them were from the Balkan Peninsula (including Salonika) whom Franco considered to be "Spanish", since they spoke Spanish and preserved the traditions of their ancestors exiled from Spain centuries earlier. Franco claimed that these Jews were in fact Spanish subjects and he insisted that they be allowed to take refuge in Spain. Not all the survivors remained in Spain, however, for many subsequently moved to the U.S.A. and Latin America.

The small Jewish communities of Spain were reinforced during the 'fifties and 'sixties by the Jews of North Africa.

As described in previous chapters, when Morocoo, Tunisia and Algeria gained their independence from French control, thousands of Jews began to stream to Israel, Western Europe (including Spain) and South and North America. Many of those who settled in Spain had lived in Spanish Morocco, Tangier and Tetouan. These Jews spoke a fluent Spanish and had cultivated connections with Spanish Government officials while living under Spanish rule in North Africa — thus facilitating the move to Spain.

The Jewish community of Barcelona numbers about 3,500, and that in Madrid about 4,000, which is the best organized. The head of the latter is the young and dynamic Rabbi Baruch Gershon (or Benito Grasio, as he is known among the non-Jews), who is a native of Tetouan. He has organized communal activities and successfully established educational facilities for children and adults. We spent a Sabbath with him and were struck by his personal dedication to maintaining the community and preserving the Jewish way of life. In a discussion between him and the delegation, he pointed out that many of his community had not yet decided if they would settle permanently in Madrid or move elsewhere. Every year he organizes groups of youth who participate in a seminar in Israel sponsored by the Zionist Organization. Rabbi Gershon became something of a celebrity in the Jewish world when he was engaged to instruct Queen Sophia in Jewish thought and Judaism. One Sabbath eve the Queen paid a visit to Rabbi Gershon's synagogue and took part in the service. The Queen is one of the rabbi's admirers and his instruction to her has gained for him a preferred status.

The communities of Barcelona and Malaga also maintain communal institutions and Jewish schools. We were pleasantly surprised during our visit to the synagogue in Malaga, for despite its small size the community

maintains diverse institutions and a Hebrew school. I first visited Spain in 1971 and found the Malaga community quite unorganized. But now we discerned a great change. The leaders had erected an attractive synagogue and had a number of other achievements to their credit.

The few families in Seville totalling fifteen persons made a dreary impression. One of the leaders set up a synagogue in his own house; but because of the smallness of the community, they have not found it possible to establish other communal institutions.

Two Sabbaths in Spain

When planning our journey to Spain, we decided to spend two Sabbaths in Jewish communities so as to observe to what extent they had remained faithful to their ancient customs and traditions.

The first *Shabbat* was spent in Madrid and the second in remote Malaga. From Rabbi Gershon we learned that the Sabbath eve prayer was to commence at 8 p.m. This hour was chosen in order to allow the congregants sufficient time to close their businesses and prepare for the synagogue. The *shaharit* prayers begin on the Sabbath at 9 a.m. and terminate with the *musaf* prayers at about noon. Then the rabbi gives a lesson in the weekly *Torah* portion, and those who are most earnestly observant do not return home before one o'clock. There is a kosher kitchen in the synagogue which provided us with tasty and warm food for three meals: on Sabbath eve, the Sabbath day, and also on the Sunday following our impressive visits to Toledo, the cradle of Spanish Jewish culture in the Middle Ages.

Both on Sabbath eve and on the following day, our group left the hotel and walked the three-quarters of an hour to reach the synagogue. Even the frailer ones among us had resolved to walk the distance to the synagogue and not desecrate the Sabbath. The prayers were conducted by the cantor who had a most pleasant voice (in the style of the Tangier Jews) in accordance with the correct ceremony. The number of participants was larger on Sabbath eve than on the Sabbath day. This is because only a few do not open for business. A variety of local customs caught my attention: families in mourning sit apart from the other congregants; during the course of the service, they recite a number of rabbinic "*kaddishim*", even those which according to our tradition are recited only by the cantor. The *Gabai* (chairman of the congregation) holds the book of *Nahala* wherein is inscribed the *yortzeit* (anniversary of death) of relatives of congregants. In this way, they ensure that a congregant will be called up to recite the "*maftir*" on the memorial day. In order to ensure fairmess in the distribution of calling up to the Torah, lots are drawn.

On the Sabbath, the rabbi delivers a sermon on the Torah portion of the week in Spanish, since nearly all the congregants are originally from Spanish Morocco and know Spanish. But there are also a number of Ashkenazi Jews who have become absorbed within the Sephardi com-

munity. In its early stages, the Madrid community was an Ashkenazi one consisting of refugees from Eastern Europe who came before World War II.

At the Sabbath service we were informed that the *Brit Milah* was be performed that day on a boy born to an Ashkenazi member. So our stay was extended until after the *"Brit"*. At 2 p.m. we finally went down to the dining room and partook of our meal. Rabbi Gershon kept us company at the two meals — on Friday night and on the Sabbath. On Saturday night the rabbi visited us at our hotel and told us a great deal about his community problems. He emphasized that some Jews had not yet decided where to settle permanently and were still living out of suitcases and investigating a new destination. A few were on the verge of departure for Canada or another country, while others were considering moving to another locale in Spain which offered a better source of livelihood.

The Madrid community maintains a Jewish school with 150 pupils aged four to fifteen. It has recently begun construction of another school for 450 pupils. The school program's main emphasis is on prayer and history — in particular the Golden Era of Spanish Jewry. There is also an active youth movement with 400 members; they are divided into groups which meet once a week. The community has had official recognition since Franco first granted minorities the right to maintain separate institutions outside the purview of the Catholic Church. This enabled the Jews and Protestants to foster their own communal institutions.

According to Rabbi Gershon there are not many mixed marriages. If a young man desires to marry a gentile girl she as a rule converts. However, Rabbi Gershon is not willing to perform the conversion and the couple has to travel to France, Morocco or Israel, where the girl undergoes a conversion in accordance with the *Halacha*. On the average there is one conversion each year and there have been three mixed marriages in the past twelve years. Rabbi Gershon and his assistants make a point of visiting every Jew who comes to settle in Madrid so as to draw him into the community. In this way he hopes to strengthen their sense of Jewishness.

What relations are there between Christians and Jews? Does anti-Semitism exist in Spain? The rabbi replied that Catholic education had instilled a blind hatred of Jews in Christian hearts. The child grows up with prejudices in regard to Judaism and Jews. Our guide from Madrid to Cordoba told us that until five years ago, when she first began to work as a tourist guide (also with Israeli tourists), she had felt a hatred of Jews. But as soon as she came into contact with Jews, she discovered that they were simply human beings and even nice ones. We also met an enlightened journalist who told us that until he grew up all he knew about Jews

and their culture he had learnt from history textbooks full of distortions. But now the history books have been re-examined and the authorities have instructed that all hate material be expunged.

In 1961, an association for Christian-Jewish friendship was set up in Madrid. Furthermore, a center for Judaic studies was established headed by an archbishop. For some years there has also existed an institute for the study of the Spanish Jewish heritage in Madrid — Arias Montano.

The second Shabbat we spent in Malaga which is situated on the sea. Its Jews engage mainly in commerce. The community is no more than 1,000 strong. But the city is surrounded by holiday resorts and many Jews reside there. The Malaga community is largely from North Africa, especially Spanish Morocco. They are attempting to foster Jewish communal activity. Since my last visit a synagogue has been built and like in Madrid many come for Sabbath eve prayers. But on the Sabbath the number of worshippers is only sufficient for two *minyanim* (quorum). Due to the small number of pupils, the community has only established a school for the early grades. The synagogue serves as an educational center for adults and children.

There is no kosher restaurant or kitchen in the Malaga synagogue. So the Jews who keep kosher must bring kosher meat from Morocco. The community gave us a reception in the afternoon following the *minha* (afternoon) prayers, and we were able to taste delicacies prepared from kosher meat after abstention, during several days of travel, from eating any meat.

Mr. Benfila, one of the leaders, proudly related how he scrupulously observes the Sabbath. He owns a garage and has a Christian partner. When they went into partnership, he insisted that he should not work on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays. His partner accepted this condition. On the Christian holidays, Mr. Benfila fills in for his partner. Thus the partnership has lasted for years without any mishaps.

The Marranos on the Island of Majorca

Majorca is an island lying in the azure waters of the Mediterranean Sea 132 miles from Barcelona. There are about 500,000 inhabitants more than a half of whom live in Palma. From the middle of the 17th century, the capital city, previously known as State of Majorca, was called Palma.

The ties between Jews and Majorca are ancient ones. Several historians assert that the Jews arrived in Majorca during the reign of the Emperor Claudius in 49 C.E., when they were expelled from Rome. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Jews came to Spain, many of whom settled in Majorca. They contributed much to the economy of the island. The second half of the 14th century, during the reign of Peter the Fourth of Aragon, was celebrated as the Golden Age of the Jews in Majorca. Thanks to the efforts of the Jewish cartographers, Abraham and Yehuda Cresques, Majorca became a commercial center and its ports attracted shipping from all corners of the globe. One of the streets in Palma bears Yehuda Cresques' name. Majorca also gained fame as a center of Jewish learning.

However, the Golden Age did not last long. In 1391 rioting against the Jews broke out in Majorca like elsewhere in Spain. Many were murdered and the Jewish quarter was destroyed. This marked the beginning of the end of Jewish life which was to vanish utterly from the island in 1495, namely, three years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

From that time onwards, until August 1971, no official Jewish activity existed on the island. On that date, the Spanish Government granted the local Jewish community permission to conduct its own affairs. Today about 500 Jews reside on the island, the majority of whom are immigrant pensioners from the United States. After protracted efforts on the part of community leaders land was purchased in Santa Aginia, about fifteen miles from Palma, which is set aside as a cemetery.

The great synagogue in Palma was expropriated in 1314 and converted into the Santa Fe Church. The present church, Monte Sion, was also once a synagogue. The Espania Bank on San Bartelome Street stands on the site of an early synagogue; from there the Jews set out to greet King James I. Some historians claim that even the San Muel Church had formerly been a synagogue, others claim it had been a mosque. The El

Templo Church (next to a cemetery) and the Santa Clara Church were both formerly synagogues.

After the conversion to Christianity of many Jews in 1435, and the closure of all Jewish buildings and the termination of Jewish life on the island, the candelabra of 365 branches which once adorned one of the synagogues was transferred to the cathedral of Palma where it hangs above the podium to this day. Among the cathedral's artifacts may be found *"rimonim"* from Torah scrolls, which date back hundreds of years and now serve as staffs that are borne aloft during church processions.

Thousands of descendants of the original Marranos live on Majorca. Most are involved in commerce and are concentrated in a particular section of the town. Though they view themselves as devout and practising Catholics, they are well aware that their origins are Jewish. Our delegation visited the commercial center and started up a conversation with these Marranos. They made no attempt to deny their Jewish origins but reiterated that they were devout Catholics. Some displayed sympathy towards Jews and expressed a willingness to visit Jerusalem, the Holy City, but retracted and restated their loyalty to Christianity and disavowed any connection with Judaism or Jews.

"Our ancestors received the Christian religion hundreds of years ago and we ourselves are simply devout Christians", they proclaimed.

Indeed, throughout Spain today there are numerous descendants of those Jews who converted to Christianity following the Spanish expulsion of 1492 and even today they continue to preserve the vestiges of their ancient Jewish tradition. Their forebears had no other choice but to accept Christianity if they wished to survive the Inquisition.

Turkish Jewry

Before World War I, the Turkish Jewish community was one of the most splendid in the Ottoman Empire both materially and spiritually. At that time, within the area of the present Turkish borders, there lived more than 300,000 Jews. Most of them were concentrated in Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Adana and other cities, But following the war, in reaction to the hostile stance of the Kemalist regime towards minority groups, there was a large-scale emigration of Jews.

Among the restrictions imposed upon the Jews were prohibitions against providing their children with a Jewish education and maintaining separate institutions. Some emigrants went to Europe and America, others came to Eretz Yisrael. Once the State of Israel was established, another 35,000 made *aliyah*. Today there are 55,000 Jews in Turkey, 40,000 of whom reside in Istanbul, 5,000 in Izmir, 2,000 in Ankara and the rest in the smaller towns of Edirne, Bursa, Canakkale and the surrounding villages.

But despite the fundamental changes in the status and structure of the Jewish communities, in Istanbul and Izmir they maintain educational, charitable and welfare institution, synagogues and rabbinical courts, and hospitals, as they have traditionally done for generations.

The Community in Istanbul

Though the constitution of modern Turkey does not recognize ethnic autonomy as in the days of Ottoman rule, the Jews like other minorities (Greek and Armenian), whose numbers have also declined since the Kemalist revolution, have their own institutions. Head of the Jewish community is the *"Haham Bashi"*, Chief Rabbi Raphael Saban, who is also at the head of the *Beth Din* (the rabbinical court). And though the chief rabbi and his fellow judges have no officially defined status, they are in practice recognized as the representatives of the community.

In addition to the *Haham Bashi* and the Chief Rabbinate, there is a council of communal workers (secular) which maintains the charitable and educational institutions. There are at present four Jewish primary schools, where in accordance with the law the language of instruction is Turkish. Six thousand boys and girls study in these schools, where Bible

and Jewish precepts are taught in Hebrew. The community also runs a secondary school.

But the pride of the community is the *Beit Midrash* (rabbinical seminary) which was opened five years ago. Up to World War I one of the most magnificent *Batei Midrash* for Sephardi Jewry was in Istanbul. But it was closed down with the decline of Turkish Jewry. Then a *Beit Midrash* for Sephardi rabbis was inaugurated on the island of Rhodes, where a complete generation of rabbis was educated who became the spiritual leaders of Sephardi Jewish communities in Europe, the Americas and Africa. This school was also closed down with the introduction of race laws by the facist regime in Italy.

Six years ago, when the Democratic Party began to adopt a more lenient policy towards the Moslem religion and even encouraged the establishment of schools to qualify Moslem religious leaders, the Jewish leaders appealed to the government for permission to open a *Beit Midrash* to qualify rabbis. Such permission was granted, in the same way as for the Armenian and Greek communities. The Jewish seminary is housed in the building of the Alliance School in Hesiki, the quarter which prior to World War I served as an important center for the local Jewish community. Today it is devoid of Jewish residents. The Alliance building is well suited to its new function and was therefore chosen for this purpose. Chief Rabbi David Asseo is the director of the seminary, which is recognized as a secondary school though its graduates are not accepted at the Turkish university because it does not teach mathematics and the sciences for the required number of hours. However, its matriculants enter the army as officers like matriculants from other secondary schools. In the first year fourteen students enrolled; today, five years later, more than sixty students are enrolled. The program of study is for seven years, and the first class will graduate in another two years. It includes all the pertinent religious subjects: *Mishnah*, Talmud, Bible, laws of ritual slaughter and cantorial skills. Two teachers from Israel give religious instruction and they have added much relevant material.

All the Jewish educational, medical and welfare institutions enjoy the financial support of the government — an important element in the community's budget. In addition, the Jewish leaders must enlist substantial sums from the community itself in order to maintain the institutions. As in other Diaspora communities, taxes are collected by means of the rabbinical courts, the synagogues and ritual slaughter charges.

There is also an extremist religious group which is not satisfied with the existing educational arrangements. They insist that religious education should exclude all secular subjects. They are spiritually akin to *"Agudat Yisrael"* (the ultra-Orthodox in Israel) and likewise advocate extreme

religious instruction, for which purpose they have set up the *Machzikei Torah* organization which conducts classes in the Bible and religious studies in various synagougues throughout the city. Five hundred boys and girls receive instruction two days a week, on Fridays and on the Sabbath. On other days the organization conducts evening classes. Most of the local children learn all week in government schools where they are educated in an alien spirit. Thus, *Machzikei Torah* is doing much to rescue these children and restore them to the Jewish way of life. But their leaders are not content with educational activity alone and they aim at imbuing all walks of Jewish life with a religious spirit. They are waging a fierce battle against the mood of reform which has led to such measures as the installation of electric amplifiers in synagogues, though these are operated by non-Jews.

The children educated in this organization are sometimes in serious conflict with their parents who desecrate the Sabbath by working on that day. The problem is that many of the parents are poor and have to work for non-Jews. On the other hand, they fear the directors of these schools may expel their children because of their own "unacceptable" behaviour.

Indeed, the clash between the leaders of *Machzikei Torah* and the rabbinate reached such intensity recently that the Turkish authorities felt it necessary to intervene and put a stop to the activities of the former. Its leaders undertook in writing to cease all activity otherwise they faced imprisonment. It is regrettable that an internal dispute has brought about the ruin of educational activity which was saving hundreds of children from losing touch with Judaism.

The Jews of Istanbul have long since lost their old standing in the country's economy. Like other minority groups, they have gradually been squeezed out of economic positions. The majority are today engaged in commerce and as a result of the controls instituted by the government they have lost their influence here too. Nevertheless, to this day the minorities constitute a prominent factor in the economic life of Turkey. The following saying is common: "Commerce to the Jews, precious stones to the Armenians, to the Greeks inimitable craftsmen."

The Turks have always been graced with a good measure of religious tolerance. Only during the short period at the beginning of the Kemalist revolution did the government adopt a policy hostile to religion and minorities. Now, after the bulk of Greeks, Armenians and Jews have emigrated has the Turkish Government changed its stance on minority groups. In a total population of 24 million, the minorities number only a quarter-of-a-million altogether. Thus they no longer constitute a special problem, as they might perhaps have done during Ottoman times.

The Kemalist revolution brought about a fundamental change in the

character of Istanbul and the other large cities, once distinctly cosmopolitan and today acquiring a marked Turkish appearance. The foreign languages once current in the large towns particularly in Istanbul and Izmir, are being forgotten. Only minority groups persist in their use of foreign tongues. The Jews generally speak Ladino, but it is customary for *bar-mitzvah* boys to give two speeches — one in Ladino and one in Turkish. This too is a sign of the times.

There is also a small Ashkenazi Jewish community in Istanbul set up by Jews who came from Russia and Rumania befor World War I. Today it numbers some 1,500 and the elderly still speak Yiddish. But the younger people have already adopted French. Some of the Ashkenazim have married into the Sephardi community and speak Ladino well. Ashkenazi communal workers play a prominent role in local Jewish affairs. The old age home was founded by Ashkenazi leaders. Dr. Rubin, an instructor in the seminary, serves as spiritual leader of the Ashkenazi Jews.

The Community in Izmir

Izmir Jews were celebrated for their rabbis and spiritual giants. Their *geonim* have continued the tradition of their forebears, the original Spanish exiles. The community maintains a library of books on the *halacha*, exegesis and other Jewish thought written by their religious scholars, who were recognized by Sephardi Jewry as legal authorities and intellectual giants.

Before 1914, some 70,000 Jews lived in Izmir. They maintained communal institutions worthy of emulation. Their rabbis and leaders conducted communal affairs and established a unique way of life. They founded *yeshivot* and *Talmudei Torah*, where the sons of the rich and poor alike received an education.

Like Salonika, Izmir was a great Sephardi Jewish spiritual center a generation ago. Today, the Jews of Izmir are concentrated in the "ghetto". Twelve abandoned synagogues (built in a Jewish-Eastern style) once the center of religious study attest to the decline of that community; congregants are in the custom of praying in each of the twelve synagogues as pre-arranged, so that all the synagogues may remain open. The *shamashim* (beadles) also open the synagogues once weekly to keep them clean. In one synagogue alone, the splendid "Beit Yisrael", hundreds of worshippers still come to pray on the Sabbath from all corners of the city.

The remnants of the magnificent past were revealed to me on my visit to the neighbourhoods in which Jews had lived for generations. The community numbers about 5,000. Most of the the former residents went on *aliyah* to Israel, though many settled in Europe and the Americas. The Jews of Izmir had provided *olim* for centuries and with the establishment

of the modern state, many thousands wished to participate in the upbuilding of the land. Those who stayed behind are little more than guardians of the ruins. The community is still in possession of assets generations old.

Despite the decline of the community, the Jews continue to maintain communal institutions, schools for boys and girls. At the forefront is Rabbi Moreno Rahamim da Shigura, great-grandson and grandson in a family of rabbis and *geonim* who built up the Izmir community. One of the scions of the family came to Eretz Yisrael in the last century and was appointed chief rabbi and the Rishon Lezion. Chief Rabbi Shigura's authority stems indirectly through the chief rabbi in Istanbul, and the city authorities generally turn to him as the representative of the local Jewish community. Working with him are two young rabbis, Rabbi Yosef Ashkenazi and Rabbi Nessim Ben Maimon, who are members of the rabbinical court (*Beth Din*) and possess the title *Shochetai-Matah* (ritual slaughterers of the city). But this community, like the one in Istanbul, is run by a general council of nine members, headed by Mr. Aharon Ben Giat and his deputy, Mr. Nessim Politi.

The last Jews of Izmir are people of great ability. Most of them are engaged in business and some in the trades. The community has two primary schools: a *Talmud Torah*, where 400 boys and girls study and the school sponsored by B'nai B'rith with 150 pupils. Two years ago the community made a special effort and opened a secondary school to enable the pupils to complete their schooling. This year the community has undertaken the repair and renovation of the neglected Alliance school building, in which the secondary and primary schools will be housed, to which end about 200,000 Turkish pounds were enlisted. The language of instruction according to Turkish law is Turkish; but as in Istanbul religious subjects are taught in Hebrew. The pupils are closely bound to Jewish tradition.

There is also a home for the elderly where about thirty people are accommodated. The maintenance of these institutions is traditionally covered chiefly by donations from generous local contributors.

The Jews of Izmir are known for their distinguished personalities and their hospitality. Should a Jew chance their way, particularly on the Sabbath and holidays, he will be given a hearty welcome and will not be permitted to depart until he has dined at the family table.

With moneys collected from the community, an Israeli pavilion was set up at the annual international exhibition. Thus the Jews demonstrated their solidarity with Israel. The simple but attractive exhibit is a joy to those who frequent the annual fair. The pavilion has gained a reputation throughout Turkey, and the many Turks who visit the fair every year make sure not to miss the Israeli pavilion. Israeli products are highly

esteemed in Turkey and even the most backward strata prefer Israeli products to those of other countries.

Many families, particularly those with girl children, long to settle in Israel. This is because in Izmir and Istanbul the number of young women is greater than the number of young men. There is also a serious problem regarding marriage dowries. If a young girl wishes to marry, then she and her parents must work for years in order to save the enormous sums required for the dowry, which amount to about 10,000 Turkish pounds. This problem worsens from year to year, and there have been instances where poor girls and even those of the middle classes have lost hope of ever acquiring such a vast sum and have married non-Jewish men: Moslems, Greeks and Armenians. The lot of these girls is indeed a miserable one, for they have children and often become separated from their husbands, which means that they are abandoned to a fate of helplessness. They want to return to Judaism and save their children, but they are unable to do that in Turkey. They yearn to go to Israel where they may find the succour they seek.

This sad situation is of grave concern to the Jewish leaders in Istanbul and Izmir, but they cannot find a ready solution. It is the duty of former members of these communities, who have established themselves financially in Israel and elsewhere, to come to the aid of these wretched victims of circumstance and help bring them to Israel. Furthermore, we must make an effort to help bring the young unmarried girls too to Israel. For here they will find the peace and well-being they long for.

(1960)

Since the above visit, I have again been to Turkey and found that though the Izmir community, now numbering about 3,000, has made a concerted effort to preserve the traditional way of life, the younger generation is gradually drifiting away from Judaism. Most do not attend the local Jewish school but receive their education in the alien atmosphere of the government schools.

With the death of Rabbi da Shigura last January, the community lost its spiritual leader and it is doubful whether a successor will be found. He was the last of the line and had striven to preserve the embers of Jewish life in a slowly disintegrating community.

(1963)

Istanbul — A Large Jewish Center in Turkey

The changes in the Turkish government resulting from the last elections to the parliament and the consequent rise to power of the Justice Party (1963) have brought little improvement in Turkey's policy towards Israel. This party is the natural spiritual successor to the Democratic Party, which was led by Adnan Menderes before his execution during the military coup d'ètat six years ago.

In fact, this Demirel Government took steps towards improving relations with the Arab states. Nonetheless, the Turkish Government behaves with restraint in regard to the Arab-Israel conflict. The movement of tourists between Turkey and Israel is on the increase; thousands of Israelis travelling abroad stop over in Turkey. Israel commercial enterprises operate in Turkey and trade relations between the two countries are stable. Turkey purchases Israeli industrial products and Israel imports Turkish agricultural goods.

The 40,000 remaining Jews in Turkey carry on their lives with a quiet modesty and observe the traditions of their ancestors. There is no doubt that the living bond between them and their relatives who settled in Israel is one factor which obviates the deterioration of this community and curbs assimilation. However, like the other minorities (Greeks, Armenians and Europeans), it has lost the status accorded it for generations.

Since the revolution of Kemal Ataturk, Turkish society has viewed its minorities as a nuisance which it would be best to eliminate. The population exchanges between Turkey and Greece following the Demalist coup apparently solved the problem of the Greek minority. With the intensificaiton of the crisis in Cyprus, and the deterioration of relations between Turkey and Greece, the Turkish Government adopted a series of measures whose aim was to despatch to Greece the remaining Greek nationals still living in Turkey . The Armenian community also emigrated and today there are few signs in Turkey of their past economic influence. The Jewish community too has shrunk, and the remaining Turkish Jews fill prominent positions in commerce and industry throughout the country.

Istanbul is still the main Jewish center in Turkey. About 33,000 Jews are left in the city. The community has shown alertness and vigour in the area of education and the maintenance of communal institutions. With the election of Rabbi David Asseo as chief rabbi in place of the elderly Rabbi

Raphael Saban, the community embarked upon increased activity. A number of Jews still lives in special neighbourhoods in order to continue observance of a Jewish way of life; but among those who have attained material success and have built themselves villas far from the Jewish centers, there has been a distinct trend towards severing ties with the rest of the Jewish community. However, there are still ten synagogues in Istanbul which fill with worshippers on the Sabbath. The four Jewish primary schools, the secondary school (which was set up by the B'nai B'rith Lodge in 1922) and the rabbinical seminary with 42 students (re-established in 1955) are supported by the community; they have a total of about 950 students. The well-to-do Jews prefer to send their children to non-Jewish schools: English, American and French. Those studying in such schools (most board there in a distinctly Christian atmosphere) are being completely cut off from their Jewish roots. Turkey has always been a bastion in the face of modern assimilationist tendencies, but today it is also being swept up in the powerful current of the times and mixed marriages are becoming more common. Educated young women who have gone out to work for Turkish commercial firms do not hesitate to marry non-Jewish Turks since they have little chance of finding a Jewish husband without a huge dowry, and they prefer to marry gentiles than face a future of spinsterhood.

Rabbi Asseo is gravely concerned over the ever mounting danger posed by missionary activity among the local Jewish community. These missionaries appear in Jewish garb and advocate apparent "reformist" ideologies; they belong to a Christian sect which is trying to attract Jewish youths to its beliefs, particularly those who have been cut off from their ancestral traditions. Most of the youth speak Turkish, though Ladino which the children learn from their parents serves to this day as a bridge between the generations. The *barmitzvah* ceremony is held in the synagogue, but the boy gives his sermon in Turkish, not in Hebrew or Ladino.

The *Machzikei Torah* Movement organizes special educational activity for the youth. The organization is led by Mr. Nessim Bahar, a learned man who devotes himself unstintingly to rescuing the young from the threat of assimilation. On my last visit to Turkey, I discovered that a fundamental change had occurred in his attitude to Israel. A few years ago Mr. Bahar was uncompromising in his extremist educational views: he opposed *aliyah* of young people to Israel, and the community presented him as a member of *Neturei Karta* (extreme ultra-Orthodox who do not accept the State of Israel). However, he has now come closer to the more advanced ways of thinking and his relations with the community leaders have therefore improved. Despite his extremism, his intensive and noble efforts in rescuing hundreds from assimilation must be acknowledged. Hundreds of

young girls received a Jewish education and were thus saved from marriage with non-Jews. Some of them made their way to Israel where they established families, while others set up model Jewish homes in Turkey itself.

(1966)

The Jews of Bulgaria — Full of Faith in Redemption

Among all the Eastern and Sephardi Jewish communities, the Bulgarian community has been considered the most loyal to the idea of national redemption. The love of freedom and the desire to put an end to exile had also been greatly influenced by the Bulgarian struggle for liberation from Turkish domination. The Turks subjugated the Bulgarian people for five hundred years. The Jews in other Balkan lands were also moved by this aspiration to rid their countries from foreign rule.

Indeed, it was these national aspirations which also inspired two proponents of the idea of Jewish national renascence. Rabbi Yehuda Bibas, a native of Gibraltar and rabbi of the Corfu community and Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, a native of Zamelin, Yugoslavia. They were the first to advocate the formation of a Jewish liberation movement to restore the historic homeland Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people, and an armed Jewish libertion force which would achieve this aim.

The pioneer of Zionism, Joseph Marco Baruch, who had dreamed of the return of the Jewish people to its own land, appeared on the public scene in Bulgaria in 1895 and created the first Zionist societies there.

Henceforward, the Zionist idea and the Zionist Organization served as a focus of Bulgarian Jewish communal life. In December, 1945 David Ben-Gurion, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency, visited Bulgaria and made an emotional appeal to the Jews to come on *aliyah* in large numbers. He told his audience about the substantial contribution made by the Bulgarian Jews who had already come to Eretz Yisrael. They were a creative element, had participated in the leadership and had contributed to the success of agricultural settlement.

Ben-Gurion's appeal fired the imagination of Bulgarian Jews and they gathered their entire families and boarded ships for Eretz Yisrael. The mass *aliyah* of these Jews — about 37,000 — began towards the end of 1947 and ended in May, 1949. A trickle continued to come thereafter and by 1952 another 2,000 had arrived.

There had in fact always been *aliyah* from Bulgaria. The historian of Eastern Jewry and a native of Bulgaria, Shlomo Rosanes (1862-1938) mentions in his monumental history of the Jews of Turkey the rabbis who

went to Eretz Yisrael from Bulgaria during the 16th century and later. In all probability, the *aliyah* included not only rabbis but also laymen. During the 19th and 20th centuries, elderly Jews came to die in the holy city, Jerusalem. Before the mass *aliyah*, there were already about 7,000 Bulgarian Jews in Eretz Yisrael, who were involved in everything from farming to industry and commerce.

A History of Thousands of Years

The Jews of Bulgaria are considered the most ancient of Balkan Jewish communities. They have a history dating back thousands of years. They are not a homogeneous community, being the descendants of immigrants from Hungary, Bavaria and France who merged with the exiles who came from Spain and Portugal in the 16th century. The Spanish Jews were a highly cultured people and they left their imprint on the local Jewish population. Spanish became widely used and in time became the language of all the different Jewish ethnic groups.

The historian, Chaim Kashaless, writes that it is clear from archaeological evidence and documents — in which the roman emperors offered their protection to the Jews — that the Jews had been present in Bulgaria many centuries before the common era and even before the arrival of the Slavs. They arrived from the south by way of Asia Minor and the Aegean Sea. Later Jews came through the plains of European Russia. Shlomo Rosanes goes even further and claims that Jews came to Bulgaria during the period of the First Temple (1200-586 B.C.E.).

Another Bulgarian-born Jewish historian, Eli Ashkenazi, claims that the Jews arrived in Bulgaria in the 5th century B.C.E. together with the Phoenicians. They reached the western shores of the Black Sea via the sea.

Hence it is evident that Jews were present in the Balkan Peninsula thousands of years ago. Immigration gained further impetus during the Babylonian exile and still later during the period of the Second Temple. Jews arrived by sea and by land; some accompanied the Phoenicians; Jewish merchants came on business and stayed on; some came as slaves, for the Romans had sold many Jews into slavery after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

The Turkish conquest of Bulgaria at the end of the 14th century came as a blessing to the Jews. Turkish rule lasted about 500 years. In the 19th century, a movement for liberation from the Turkish yoke spread throughout the Balkan Peninsula, whose influence was strongly felt in Bulgaria. The Czarist Russian armies arrived in 1878 to liberate the Bulgarians from the Turks. In this struggle, the Jews played a not inconsiderable role. Under the new regime, they enjoyed equal rights with other citizens. Most of them lived in the cities and engaged in commerce, indus-

try and the trades; they were not farmers nor did they participate in the machinery of government.

In 1929, the Jewish population totalled 46,530, half of whom lived in Sofia. They educated their children and about 70% were literate compared with only 45% of the general population. In the two wars in the Balkan Peninsula (1912-1913 and 1914-1918) some 867 Bulgarian Jewish soldiers and officers fell in action.

The Remaining Community

Of the 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria prior to the mass exodus only 5,000 have remained today. They are mainly old age pensioners, who were elderly people at the time of the emigration afraid to begin their old age elsewhere. In addition, there were also Jewish communists who resolved to stay behind and subsequently became an integral part of the ruling stratum. The situation of this community today is relatively good. Most of those not living on pensions hold eminent positions in government and political parties. Jews have also distinguished themselves as writers and film-makers.

More than 3,000 live in Sofia; the remaining 2,000 are scattered over various rural towns. At one time there had been communities in thirty to forty towns and villages in Bulgaria; they had been well-established communities brimming with life. Even today there are still Jews in many towns, but because of their small numbers they do not as a rule live as a community and do not have separate community status.

With the disintegration of the Jewish communities, many community centers, synagogues and other communal institutions were lost. The Jewish community councils had once been a sort of municipal authority which collected taxes and ran schools and cultural institutions. However, only in Sofia and Plovdiv can one still find synagogues today.

The remaining communities conduct their affairs by means of two official bodies: "The Organization for Jewish Social and Cultural Activity in the People's Republic of Bulgaria", which has branches and clubs which organize gatherings and conventions to mark important dates, holidays and other events in a spirit of communist propaganda; and "The Central Jewish Board for Spiritual Affairs", which is a sort of religious council to which is entrusted the synagogues, including the magnificent great synagogue in Sofia, with all the documents collected or left behind since the mass exodus. This material includes ancient religious treasures which attests to the thousands of years of interrelations between the Jews and the general Bulgarian population.

In every town where Jews still live there are a reading club and library. The Jews gather on the eve of holidays, organize celebrations, reminisce

and try as best they can to preserve their Jewish identity. One can hardly speak of an organized communal Jewish life. Nonetheless, the Jews are proud of their past and their roots, and they do not attempt to assimilate. They have kept their Jewish names, unlike Jews in many other countries, but like their brethren in Georgia and Bukhara, they have added the Slavic suffix "ub" to their names; for example, Yusub, Haimub, etc.

The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences published a book a few years ago entitled *Jewish Sources on the Economic and Social Development of the Balkan Countries,* a comprehensive work and invaluable source for research into Balkan Jewish history in general and Bulgarian Jewish history in particular. It consists of several volumes, the first of which appeared in 1958. It is the fruit of collaboration between the last chief rabbi of Bulgaria, Dr. Asher Hananel and the historian, Eli Ashkenazi, both of whom are associated with the Bulgarian Academy. Their research was based upon examination of Jewish books and documents, some quite ancient, which had been collected from all over the Balkan area. At the end of World War II, Dr. Hananel visited the main centers of the Balkan Peninsula and collected material from Jewish community archives.

These books contain letters and documents from such places as Salonika, Istanbul and other cities, which may be attributed to well-known rabbis and distinguished Jewish communal leaders. Some of the documents are written in Aramaic, others in Hebrew and Ladino; there are also translations into Bulgarian, French and Russian together with interpretations.

All the neighbourhoods which had once been the focus of Jewish communal life have today become the centers of Christian settlement. The original Jewish stores and homes in a typical Jewish street like Clementina, changed to Alexander Stamboleski, or in Piroteska Street later A. Zhidanov Street, have completely disappeared. Modern shops have replaced the old ones and all signs of the past Jewish life have vanished.

Dr. Salvatore Yisrael is the head of the religious council. He frequently visits Israel, and in Sofia he takes good care of the main synagogue, which took four years to build and was completed in 1909. It was designed by the architect P. Grinanger of Vienna, who preserved the spirit of the Old Sephardi synagogue in Vienna (destroyed during World War II). Upon completion of the synagogue, the Bulgarian Czar Ferdinand and Queen Elionora paid a royal visit which is commemorated by a plaque at the entrance.

Since the departure of the Jews there have been almost no services in the synagogue which holds 1,170 seats. The building shows the ravages of time. The Sofia Municipality authorized funds for renovation of the building but the work has been going on at a snail's pace for some twelve years.

At the initiative of Dr. Yisrael, the Bulgarian Government has agreed to convert part of the synagogue into the Jewish Department of the National Ethnographic Museum of Bulgaria. Thousands of ancient Jewish religious books from other towns and villages have been brought here, some from extinct communities. These works include rabbinic literature, thousands of questions and responses from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and *ketubot* (marriage contracts) in Aramaic written in the Rashi script. Also brought to the museum were another 450 religious metal articles, 50 Torah scrolls in excellent condition, 220 ark covers (including an 18th century one from Morocco and another most beautiful one from Nagasaki, Japan dating from 1900 and embroidered in Japanese style).

As stated, the magnificent synagogue no longer serves as a place of worship. Prayers are conducted in an adjacent room. The worshippers are all elderly, over 60-years-old; the youth do not come to pray. On the holidays, however, and particularly on *Sukkot*, the youth occasionally come out of curiosity to see what a *sukka* (tabernacle) is. A cantor, Chaim Meshulam, who is 73-years-old leads the prayers. Some time ago, the religious council sent two young men from Sofia to the rabbinical seminary in Budapest to train to be cantors. Before their departure, they learnt Hebrew. The Jewish religious council also renovated the Jewish cemetery and continues to maintain the tombstones of well-known personalities.

"Beth Ha'am" serves as the Jewish center. There is a Jewish cultural club there. Director of the center is Dr. Yosef Astrovsky who is a member of the Communist Party, a member of parliament and a retired colonel.

A Jewish bi-weekly appears in Sofia which is anti-Israel. Reports are based on Soviet sources or on representatives of *"Rakah"* (the Israel Communist Party).

For several years now a permanent exhibition on the theme "The Rescue of Bulgarian Jewry in 1941—44" has been showing at Beth Ha'am. It illustrates how the Bulgarian Jewish community was the only one in Eastern Europe under Nazi rule to be saved from extermination. I shall deal with this rescue operation in the coming sections. The inauguration of the exhibition was marked by the publication of an album (financed by the government) dedicated to the theme.

Origins and Ties

From ancient history records, we learn of the ties that existed between the people of Tyre and Sidon and the Jewish tribes who settled in the north of Eretz Yisrael. I refer to the tribes Zebulun and Asher and part of the tribes Naftali and Issachar. The Israelites and the Phoenicians of these cities had common Semitic origins as may be witnessed from their lan-

guage and writing. They differed in their religious beliefs: the citizens of Tyre and Sidon were pagans, the Israelites were monotheists.

Prof. Herzfeld, who researched ancient trade, claims that Jewish seafarers and traders took part in the founding of trading centers on the shores of the western Black Sea; from there the Jews moved into the interior of the continent and established permanent settlements. Philo of Alexandria, who lived towards the end of the Second Temple period, writes in his book "Glacus" that during the First Temple period many Jews lived beyond the borders of Eretz Yisrael, since the country was too small to contain its numerous inhabitants.

Jewish maritime trade continued during the period of the Second Temple. During the Hasmonean period the ports of Eretz Yisrael (for example Jaffa, Acre and Yavneh) flourished; they were part of the inheritance of the Hebrews. In the war between the Jews and the Romans, sea battles were waged between the Roman and Jewish fleets. Many Jews who were captured by the Romans were sold into slavery, some in Bulgaria.

From the above, it is almost certain that Jews inhabited the Balkan Peninsula in ancient times; they reached the region as seafarers during the period of the First Temple and also as emigrants from Eretz Yisrael and as slaves and refugees. Small wonder then that a Bulgarian historian stresses that the Jews should not be regarded as aliens, since they have lived there for countless generations on friendly terms with the Bulgarian people. They contributed vastly to Bulgarian cultural development particularly during the century known as the Golden Era; they also developed their own distinctive Jewish literature.

In 1185, the second period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom began. Jews from Venice, Dubrovnik and Genoa began to settle in Bulgaria; they were highly cultured and possessed a vast knowledge of commerce and economics. In the 14th century, the Bulgarian King Iban Alexander married a Jewish women named Sarah. During that century more Jews arrived and the Bulgarian Jewish population grew. In the city of Vidin a rabbinical seminary was founded by Rabbi Shlomo. At that time, many distinguished figures arose, such as Moshe Ben Dosa and the well-known physician, Yehuda Leon Ben Moshe. In 1393, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom was toppled by the Turks, who were expanding throughout the entire Balkan Peninsula.

A "Multi-Ethnic" Society

During the five hundred years of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, waves of Jews from East and West flooded the land. The first to arrive with the consolidation of the Turkish Empire were called "Romaniots" (from Byzantium)

and their language was Greek, which had been the common language of the Jews in Byzantine times and in the period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

During the final years of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, many Jews from Hungary particularly during the reign of King Ludwig I settled along the borders of Bulgaria (in 1376). Also during Ottoman rule in Hungary, Jews from that country continued to settle in Vidin, Nikopol, Pleven and later in Sofia. Eventually these Hungarian Jews merged with other Ashkenazi Jews.

In 1394, during the reign of Charles VI in France, French Jewish exiles reached Bulgaria via Germany. Jews also came from Italy and the nearby islands. But an important new factor during Ottoman rule was the arrival of Jews from Germany. The first of these had been expelled from Bavaria in 1470 and settled mainly in the same towns chosen by Hungarian Jews, where they established independent communities some of which continued to exist after the end of Turkish rule in the area. They were known as the "Ashkenazi Communities". Over the years they absorbed other elements such as Jews from Hungary, but eventually they merged with the Sephardi Jews. The Sephardi group was the largest and upon liberation from Turkish domination there were only small Ashkenazi communities in Sofia and other cities. The community in Sofia continued to exist up to the time of the mass exodus in 1948.

Following the expulsion from Portugal and Spain in 1492—1498 upon orders of their monarchs, many of these exiles came to Bulgaria. They spoke Castilian and Portuguese and arrived via Salonika and Istanbul. They settled in every city that had a Jewish community. They were strong quantitatively and qualitatively. These newcomers brought the highly developed culture of Spanish Jewry with them, which was superior to that of the local Jewish population. Because of its dominance, the local Jews were soon absorbed within the new cultural patterns and even began to speak Castilian, though Greek words current among the Romaniots and other foreign words filtered into it. Shlomo Rosanes has listed dozens of words and names current in Bulgarian Ladino which are the remnants of different ethnic roots and periods connected with the Bulgarian Jewish past.

Among the Spanish newcomers were celebrated rabbis, well-known philosophers, doctors and writers. They were industrious and wealthy and they contributed much to the development of the Turkish Empire in general and of Bulgaria in particular. Bulgarian Jewry was culturally more advanced than the rest of the Bulgarian population and the Turks. But the decline of the Ottoman Empire had its effect upon them, and ultimately their cultural level fell below that of the other Eastern and Western European Jews.

The well-known historian, Dr. Zvi Graetz, claims that the conditions of the Jews under the Turks were so favourable that they felt as if they were living in paradise. They amassed fortunes in business and did with their property as they saw fit. He believes that 300,000 Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal found refuge in the Balkan Peninsula, including Bulgaria.

The Jews founded many Romaniot synagogues, though by the last years of Turkish rule there was only one left in Sofia, the synagogue of "the Grigos" (Greeks).

The center of Jewish life was always the synagogue. Each synagogue was quite independent and unconnected with any other. In times of trouble, however, they joined forces and formed a united front. Each congregation was headed by an elected rabbi who exercised extensive authority and judged disputes between individual Jews. Nobody dared question his final decision, for those who did faced punishment and possible excommunication by the community.

The rabbi represented the community to the authorities. Under Turkish rule, the rabbi possessed great personal authority. At that time the community was devoutly religious; later a council of three or four was elected which implemented the rabbi's instructions. It also collected the taxes imposed by the imperial authorities upon the Jews.

The council maintained educational, health, welfare and other charitable institutions on a voluntary basis and financed by contributions from the community. Its schools taught reading (in Hebrew), prayers, Bible and *Mishnah*.

Community Organization

After withdrawal of the Turks in 1878, an agreement was signed in Berlin between Turkey and the superpowers whereby Bulgaria was divided into two: the independent Principality of Bulgaria which encompassed the northern and south-western districts with Sofia as the capital; the second state was called Eastern Rumelia and included the south-eastern part of the country which remained under Turkish rule with Plovdiv (Philippopoli) as its capital.

The peace agreement also assured the rights of the Jews in the two states. Section 5 stated that the rights of their citizens are to be protected irrespective of national origin or religious faith. Jewish communities existed in all the cities of Bulgaria at that time, headed by a rabbi, cantor or a local learned man.

Most Jews engaged in small business or in the trades; some had also become wealthy and were esteemed within the community which chose them as their elected leaders. Though they spoke mainly Ladino, many

had also mastered the language of the rulers — Turkish. Others had learnt French in the Alliance schools. A census conducted in 1880 revealed that 20,503 Jews resided in the two parts of Bulgaria, 4,117 of whom lived in Eastern Rumelia. During the next twenty years the Jewish population of Bulgaria grew by 70% and by 1900 there was a total of 33,307 Jews. Of the five synagogues in Sofia, three belonged to the Sephardi community, one to the Ashkenazim and another known as the Synagogue of the Grigos, which was the oldest of the five.

In 1866 the first elections to the leadership of the Jewish communities was held. The synagogues were put in the charge of a committee of three to five members, while the council administering the school consisted of three members. The former tended to matters relating to prayers; the upkeep of the synagogues and the seminaries; the appointment of rabbis, cantors, ritual slaughterers and beadles; and arrangements for celebrations — weddings, *barmitzvahs* and circumcisions — and for funerals. The latter, in accordance with the education law, appointed teachers, drew up the curriculum of study, maintained restaurants and boarding schools and supplied clothing for needy pupils.

The upkeep of Jewish schools was a heavy burden upon the communities. In 1894, Rabbi Dr. Gruenwald appealed to the Bulgarian Government for governmental upkeep of Jewish schools or, if that were impossible, at least financial aid. His request was rejected. Thus, the Jewish leaders had to make extra efforts to maintain these schools. It is due to these schools that a Jewish intelligentsia arose, including graduates of high schools, universities and military academies. After these academies were opened to the Jews, there begun to emerge high-ranking Jewish commanders and colonels who enhanced the prestige of the Jewish people. Among these colonels were Moshonov, Arvaham Tajer and Moreno Graziani.

In 1897 young intellectuals organized societies for the dissemination of culture among the Jewish public as well as sports clubs. The idea of national rebirth began to become popular due to contact between Bulgarian and Russian Jews. Associations had already begun to appeared in 1882 to foster agricultural settlement in Eretz Yisrael. with the aid of funds raised for the purchase of land, namely, *"Shevet Achim"* and *"Agudat Achim Leyeshuv Eretz Yisrael"*. These ceased to exist in 1896 after they had partially realized their objectives.

In 1895, Joseph Marco Baruch founded the first Zionist societies. Russian Jews arriving in Bulgaria in 1890 played a leading role in the development of Jewish cultural and social life. They were professors at the state universities and the academy of arts, and physicians. One of the most well-known was Boris Schatz, who left Bulgaria for Eretz Yisrael and founded the Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem.

The national ferment and the improved educational level of the Bulgarian Jews led to the publication of Jewish journals and newspapers. In 1893, a bi-weekly in Ladino *"El Amingo del Pueblo"* (Friend of the People) which first appeared in Belgrade, Yugoslavia began to come out in Sofia; the editor was Shmuel Eliaz. A monthly, *"Carmel"* was brought out by Joseph Baruch in French which folded after only five issues. In July, 1896, the periodical *"La Bos de Yisrael"* (in Ladino) appeared in Sofia; another *"Abreiski Glas"* (in Bulgarian) appeared at the same time and these were the first Zionist organs, which gained a large readership among Bulgarian Jews. The number of Jewish periodicals in both Ladino and Bulgarian increased from year to year. There were also periodicals which engaged in the class struggle against exploitation by the rich.

Jews in Public Life

The Jews played only a minor role in public life and in the government. In the elections to the national founding assembly of the Bulgarian principality there were no Jewish candidates. Chief Rabbi Gabriel Almosnino, though not formally elected, was nevertheless invited in 1878 to participate in the founding assembly. However, there were thirteen Jews in the East Rumelia founding assembly elected in 1879, whose seat was in Plovdiv. Participation of Jews in the elections was by order of law; their representatives were elected to represent a national entity and were not in a party framework. Nonetheless, the Jews did not appear as a separate national group; they preferred to present their candidates in the general Bulgarian list.

In the 1894 elections to the Bulgarian principality, the Jewish candidate Peter Gabba was voted into office. But several days after his election he was deprived of his mandate and replaced by a Christian in the national assembly.

Signs of Anti-Semitism in Bulgaria

Bulgaria was always considered to be tolerant of its minorities, and the Jews had not encountered hostility or anti-Semitism during the 500 years of Ottoman role, when the Turks extended their protection to the minority groups. With the attainment of independence, however, incitement of the masses against the Jews began. The infamous blood libel was also levelled against them. Pogroms broke out from time to time in different towns of the principality and the Jews were driven from place to place.

What are the reasons for the sudden apperarance of anti-Semitism after the attainment of independence? It cannot be attributed to the secure economic position of the Jews since they did not occupy high economic posts. Neither could the hatred have developed as the result of support

given by Jews to the Turkish rulers. On the contrary, historical evidence points to aid given by them to the Bulgarian insurgents, some of whom they saved from the hangman's noose. It may be concluded that the root of the hatred lay in the fundamental Christian belief that the Jews had crucified Christ and a belief in the blood libel. Later economic motives were put forward to justify the anti-Semitism: Jewish involvement in commerce and banking aroused envy and hatred among the Bulgarians.

In 1885, an anti-Semitic tract appeared in Bulgaria called *Torah and Talmud — A Mirror of Jewish Honour*; a second anti-Semitic book entitled *Jewish Prophets* appeared in 1886. The Jews were presented as an evil which was extending its sickness throughout the earth; as sucking Christian blood and as satanic beings embracing the commerce of the world and draining the Bulgarian people's blood by charging usurious interest rates.

Upon the appointment of Dr. Simon Dankowitz (of Czecheslovakia) as chief rabbi, a new period of Jewish self-defence was inaugurated. Dr. Dankowitz resolved not to remain passive but to actively respond to anti-Semitic incitement. He published a book entitled *The Jews and the Blood* after Jews in the city of Vratsa had been accused of stabbing a Christian girl to death and using her blood for ritual purposes. The accused were Yohanan Avraham Ben Best and his mother Sarah, and a Christian who was accused of helping them carry out the crime. There was the threat of an anti-Semitic outburst, and it was due only to Prime Minister Stambulov and his Minister Grikov that pogroms were averted in various cities. By order of the Minister of Justice, the accused were tried in order to appease the inciters. The state prosecutor himself showed the accused to be innocent and the judges therefore acquitted them. The police succeeded in tracing the guilty party — a Christian who wished to incite the masses against the Jews.

Nonetheless, this did not put an end to anti-Semitic incitement. On October 15, 1893, a newspaper — *Bulgaria without Jews* — published by a Bulgarian, Mitakov, began to appear. It opened with outright incitement against the Jews and demanded their expulsion from Bulgaria. Chief Rabbi Gruenwald published an article pointing to Bulgaria's tolerance towards its minorities and stating that there was no place for anti-Semitism in Bulgaria. Mitakov levelled a blood libel against the Jews of Sofia. A legal complaint was lodged against him and he was tried in June, 1904 in Sofia and sentenced to four months imprisonment. However, his newpaper continued to appear and contain inciting anti-Semitic material. In 1894 a blood libel was levelled against the Jews of Yambol, and a year later against the Jews of Pazardzhik. Only the intervention of the authorities averted an attack upon them.

Joseph Baruch, in his French newspaper, *Carmel*, published in Plovdiv, defended the Jews against the libels. He condemned the slanderous anti-Semitic pamphlet, *The Jews*, published by Tudor Petrov which incited the masses to violence, and asserted that anti-Semitism in Bulgaria was influenced by anti-Semitism in Czarist Russia. In 1896, another anti-Semitic pamphlet — *The Rothschild Family* — appeared in Yambol. But the peak of anti-Semitism was reached in the blood libel against two emissaries from Eretz Yisrael who had come to collect funds for the *yishuv*. They were accused of murdering a young boy to obtain his blood. Russian Jewry hastened to their aid, but only after strenuous efforts were the accused released without trial.

Jewish leaders went to great lengths to refute to the church officials and government authorities the pernicious blood libels. As a result of these appeals, the ecclesiastical authorities issued a cirular letter to the clergy requesting that it be formally proclaimed in the Christian congregations that the allegations against the Jews were without foundation.

Awakening of the Idea of National Redemption

Bulgarian Jewry had always felt a strong spiritual bond with the Holy Land, their ancestral homeland. The longing for redemption had always filled their hearts. Like other Jews they had often made their way in old age to Eretz Yisrael in order die there and be buried on the Mount of Olives. But in the second half of the 19th century there was a distinct transformation in their lives. The yearning for redemption gained momentum and the idea of rebirth through *aliya* and settlement of the land acquired more concrete expression. This change may be attributed largely to the writings of Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai from the city of Semlin, Yugoslavia. Bulgarian Jews were also deeply influenced by the Hovevei Zion Movement in Russia, information about which reached them via journals and periodicals from Russia.

The Bulgarian liberation movement in throwing off the Turkish yoke no doubt also had an effect on the Jews, and gave them the impetus to seek national independence in their own homeland. They were also aroused by the fact that many Turks who had lived for generations in Bulgaria returned to Anatolia their homeland after the restoration of independence to Bulgaria.

Thus, they formed organizations with the aim of fulfilling the idea of redemption and enlisting contributions for the purchase and settlement of land in Eretz Yisrael. The first of these organizations were founded in Sofia, Pazardzhik, Pleven and other centers.

Founding the First Sephardi Agricultural Colony — Har-Tuv

As the idea of *aliyah* took hold, groups were formed with the purpose of settling in Eretz Yisrael, and they founded the first Sephardi Agricultural colony, Har-Tuv, in 1895. They were the *"Agudat Achim Leyeshuv Eretz Yisrael"* and came from well-to-do families. Har-Tuv did not benefit from communal support as did other colonies established earlier in Eretz Yisrael. The settlers had to struggle on their own in order to survive and thus Har-Tuv did not develop as it should have during the fifty years of its existence. The lands were purchased for the sum of 4,000 Turkish pounds, 1,000 of which was paid in cash and the rest had to be paid within four years.

The report of the land purchase aroused much enthusiasm among the Jews of Bulgaria. Ten families of the *"Agudat Achim"* packed up and left for Eretz Yisrael, each commiting itself to working the land for another five families after arrival so that further *olim* would acquire cultivated land upon their arrival. Within two years of the purchase, twenty families from Pazardzhik, Sofia, Pleven and Plovdiv arrived in Har-Tuv. But acclimatization was not easy and not all the settlers weathered the storm. Some gave up and left to settle elsewhere, mainly in Jerusalem; others returned to Bulgaria. The main reason for their leaving was the lack of adequate funds to become established and the consequent hardships. Though in the first year they received financial support from Bulgaria, in the second year the flow of funds ceased because of the economic crisis there; thereafter the candidates for *aliyah* stopped sending the money they had undertaken to send.

The settlers suffered too at the hands of their Arab neighbours who would not come to terms with the arrival of Jews in their area. The former Arab landowners who had sold the land to the Jews tried to appeal against the legality of the sale itself. They requested the Turkish authorities not to register the lands of Har-Tuv (Artuf in Arabic) in the name of the settlers because they were not Turkish subjects. And the authorities in fact issued an order demanding that the Jews leave these lands within fifteen days. The settlers appealed to a prominent Bulgarian national residing in Istanbul — Shabtai Hezkiah — to have the decree annulled. Shabtai Hezkiah was in Istanbul in connection with the purchase of lands in the region of the city of Kerach, east of the Jordan River, for Jewish settlement. The appeal stirred him to immediate action. He and Yosef Ben Navon in Jerusalem, who was well known in Turkish Government circles contacted the High Vizier (prime minister) and aked that he rescind the evacuation order. The vizier responded to their request and sent an order to Jerusalem demanding that no harm come to the settlers who were Bulgarian nationals — and Bulgaria continued to pay taxes to the Turkish Government.

Nevertheless, the order from Istanbul did not have the desired result. It was necessary to persuade the authorities in Jerusalem to comply with it. The settlers found help in the person of Mr. Albert Entebbe, a firm friend of theirs who successfully interceded with the Turkish Governor in Jerusalem on their behalf, and the governor issued a new writ cancelling the evacuation order. Soon thereafter the settlers received documents of registration of the lands in their name.

These lands are 37 kilometres from Jerusalem and seven kilometres from the railway line connecting Jaffa with Jerusalem, not far from the town of Beth Shemesh in the Judean Hills (which is mentioned in the Bible). The whole area was strewn with Jewish settlements since ancient times. But when Har-Tuv was founded, the settlers felt as if they were surrounded by hostile Arab villages. This hostility continued for fifty years until the Arabs finally achieved their objective; in 1929 they attacked the colony and destroyed it after the Jews had evacuated their homes.

Bulgarian Olim settle in Horan

The *Ahavat Zion* Association was founded in Sofia in 1884, whose members wished to settle in Eretz Yisrael. But unlike other *olim* who established settlements to the west of the Jordan River, they set up a settlement to the east of the river in the north of Transjordan called Horan together with *olim* from Rumania.

The leader of the association was Yitzhak Menacham Levi of Plovdiv. In order to realize their goal, each family unit put 40 agurot into a common fund each week. In 1885, two members — Yitzhak Levi and Aharon Ben Ado — left for Eretz Yisrael to seek suitable areas for settlement. On arrival they encountered Bulgarian Jews, who had arrived earlier and who offered them 4,000 dunams of land in the area of the Arab village of Kafria at a cost of 4,000 Turkish pounds to be paid within six months. However, the members in Sofia were unable to enlist the necessary funds to purchase the land. The two envoys continued their search for smaller tracts of land. They found suitable land in the neighbourhood of the existing colonies of Rishon Lezion and Petach Tikva. But the negotiations foundered and they returned to Sofia disillusioned.

But the other members of *Ahavat Zion* did not lose heart and continued to collect funds which would enable them to realize their dream and found a settlement in Eretz Yisrael.

At that time the newspaper *"Hamelitz"* reported that 100 Jewish families in Iasi, Rumania had founded the *Ezra Betzar* Association with the aim of acquiring land in Eretz Yisrael for agricultural settlement. Yitzhak Levi contacted the chairman of the association, Yehiel Berkovitz, with a view to establishing a joint settlement. It was agreed that ten families of *Ahavat*

Zion be accepted as members of Ezra Betzar; one representative would be a member of its executive.

Berkovitz journeyed to Paris where he contacted Baron de Rothschild who had just purchased land in Horan, east of the Jordan River. After submitting his plans to the Baron's representatives, the latter offered him 200 dunams per settler at a price of 8 francs a dunam. They agreed that each family would put up 400 frances upon arrival in Eretz Yisrael, the balance to the paid within two years of receipt of the land. The settlers had to build their homes and purchase the necessary agricultural equipment at their own expense.

On October 4, 1895, four Rumainian families and one Bulgarian family went to settle in Horan. They established the first Jewish settlement in that region called Bnai Yehuda. The Baron's representatives acquired 88,000 dunams in Horan which they divided into four parts, each of which was to form the basis of one agricultural settlement.

In May 1896 another eight Rumanian and three Bulgarian families arrived. They built their own homes, plowed, sowed and harvested their crops in the best of spirits. At first they lived communally; the wives did all the household chores and even helped the men with the agricultural work. The men baked the bread in ovens fuelled by thorns collected in the surrounding area. They bought wheat and milled it themselves in flour mills belonging to the Arabs two kilometres away. Meals were eaten communally and consisted mainly of chickpeas and lentils. Towards the end of 1896, a ritual slaughterer from Safed arrived, and for the first time since coming to Horan the settlers tasted meat.

They accepted their hardships in a spirit of love. But after two years they were compelled to abandon their lands under pressure from the Turkish authorities who refused to protect them from evil Arab neighbours. Some of the settlers from Bnai Yehuda took part in founding the village of Yama, later called Yavniel.

Agricultural Settlements under Mandatory Rule

New *olim* from Bulgaria at the beginning of British Mandatory rule participated in the upbuilding of a Jewish national home. Like their Eastern European counterparts they organized work groups and helped pave roads in the north under the leadership of Yitzhak Levi. But their main efforts were directed towards establishing agricultural settlements. In 1930, the first Bulgarian *Moshav Ovdim* — Beit Hanan — was founded with the aid of contributions from the Zionist Organization in Bulgaria on land purchased from the Arab village of Kubeibe, which is near the village of Nes Ziona.

Kibbutz Ma'aborot and Kfar Hittin

A group of Rumanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian *olim* of the *Hashomer Hatza'ir* Movement founded Kibbutz Ma'abarot in 1933. The settlement had 128 members in September 1939 and by 1945, there were 149.

Groups belonging to *Hashomer Hatza'ir, Maccabi, Po'alei Zion,* who were active in Bulgaria, founded the first *Moshav Shitufi,* Kfar Hittin, near Tiberias in 1936. This semi-collective, semi-cooperative later served as a model for similar settlements throughout the country. Earlier pioneers had unsuccessfully tried to establish a settlement there but failed to strike roots. Haim Krispin, head of the *Hakotzer* group of Bulgarian pioneers, learnt of the abandoned land and wished to resettle it together with other groups. In 1935, he visited Kfar Hittin and discovered one Jewish couple living in a shack surrounded by thorns and nettles. Since the land had been transferred to the custody of the World Sephardi Organization, Krispin requested its president, Moshe de Pichoto to allow his Bulgarian group to re-establish the settlement before it was handed over to Eastern European olim who were pressing the Zionist Organization Settlement Department for settlers' rights. Moshe de Pichoto responded to the request and informed the department of the transfer of the land to the Bulgarian *olim* though they did not belong to the Sephardi organization.

The *olim* took possession towards the end of 1936: eleven settlers including one woman of the *Hakotzer* Movement; they began to cultivate the land, but the Arabs in the area claimed that they were the rightful owners. Clashes broke out and the mandatory authorities ordered the farmers to cease activities until ownership was clarified. In the meantime, a member was kidnapped by the Arabs — Shlomo Ben Nun — who was cruelly tortured and murdered; his body was tossed at a distance from the settlement. His grave was the first on the moshav. Nevertheless the settlers held out and their number increased to 60.

The settlers of Kfar Hittin, like other settlers, received financial aid from the *Banim Legvulam* Association, which was founded by individuals in Greece, and Bulgaria and Sephardim in Eretz Yisrael with the aim of encouraging Sephardi settlement.

Moshav Ovdim Zur Moshe

In the midst of the bloody riots of 1936-39, the settlement Tzur Moshe was established near Netanya. The settlers were members of the *Lasadeh* Association founded by Greek Jews and headed by Chief Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, Leon Recanati (founder of the Discount Bank), Moshe Carasso, Shlomo Venezia and Baruch Uziel, none of whom are alive today. Bulgarian *olim* joined with Greek *olim* to establish the settlement, which was named after the Greek Zionist, Moshe Kofinas; 60 per cent

came from Greece, 35 per cent from Bulgaria and other Balkan Peninsula countries, Yugoslavia and Turkey. There were also some Ashkenazi families.

Tzur Moshe, like Beit Hanan, is a *moshav shitufi*, i.e. each house and plot of cultivated land is privately owned, while the supply of the settlement's needs and marketing of produce are cooperative.

Settlers in Kibbutzim

Young people from Bulgaria and other countries settled on kibbutzim founded by the *Hashomer Hatzair* Movement: Kibbutz Mesilot (1938), Kibbutz Ramat Hashofet (1941), Hatzor (1946), Yakim (1947) and Hama'apil (1949). Individuals from Bulgaria settled in other kibbutzim too.

Founding of the Bulgarian Zionist Organization

The love of Zion was always deep in the hearts of Bulgarian Jewry. More than any other Sephardi Jewish entity in the Balkans or the Near East, they had a yearning to settle in Eretz Yisrael. As already mentioned, members of the local settlement movement, settled Har-Tuv and Bnai Yehuda, with the aid of its membership fees. It was only natural, therefore, that these Jews should be the first to respond to Herzl's call and found a Zionist association which was part of the World Zionist Organization. Previously there had been Zionist societies in each Bulgarian town which operated independently of one another.

In 1898, the first Zionist Convention was held in Plovdiv (then Philippopoli). This venue was chosen because the first emissary of Bulgarian Zionism, Joseph Baruch, settled there and began to publish his weekly *Carmel.* He had also founded the *Carmel 1* Zionist association which served in turn as the center for the *Carmel 2* and *Carmel 3* associations, which he later established in Pazardzhik and Sofia. He gained supporters for the Zionist idea among the youth and the common people.

The beginnings of the struggle over education were already apparent at the First Zionist Congress, which called upon the directorship of Alliance to increase the number of hours devoted to the study of Hebrew and restrict the study of French in the early grades. This demand led to friction between the Zionist leaders and the directors of Alliance which lasted fifteen years. The Alliance eventually ceased activity among the Jews of Bulgaria.

The Zionist leaders of Bulgaria followed in the footsteps of Dr. Herzl and strove to win over the communities. In 1900 they held a conference for the communities which adopted vigorous Zionist resolutions. The Jewish

Consistory, under the leadership of wealthy non-Zionist elements and Chief Rabbi Dr. Aronfreiss, tried to repudiate the position of the new congress of communities. This brought the chief rabbi into conflict with the Zionist leaders, and in 1914 he was compelled to resign and leave Bulgaria.

In 1897 the first Zionist literary organ, *El Di'a* had already begun to appear in Philippopoli, founded by Joseph Baruch Pardo. It became the mouthpiece of the Zionist Movement even before the first Zionist Congress. At the same time, a Bulgarian weekly also began to appear with the aim of explaining Zionism and defending the Jews against anti-Semitism.

In May 1901, the official weekly of the Bulgarian Zionist Organization, *Hashofar* began publication in Philippopoli edited by Dr. Marco Romano. It became the main organ of local Zionist propaganda and mirrored local Jewish communal life. Except for a brief interval, from 1910 to 1912, it appeared regularly until 1940, when it was banned by the Nazis. The Nazis also disbanded the Bulgarian Zionist Organization.

Jewish Educational Institutions

In 1900, there were thirty-one organized Jewish communities in Bulgaria, 25 of which ran Jewish schools belonging to one of three types: (a) Alliance in the large cities — Sofia, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Varna, Burgas, Ruse and Yambol — where three languages were taught: French, Bulgarian and Hebrew: (b) those maintained by the communities themselves: there were eighteen boys' schools and twelve co-educational. In two communities there was one school for boys and one for girls; (c) private schools: a learned man would simply gather children around him and teach them the prayers without explaining the meaning and significance of the content. They also taught reading and writing in Ladino. Such schools were to be found in five small communities.

Zionist activity was evident in various contexts. Beginning in 1897, sports associations began to appear which quickly turned into Zionist societies. The first Zionist society was set up in Plovdiv in 1897 and was called "Shimshon". Then another sports association was formed, called "Maccabi" which established branches in other cities. Its members even travelled to Greece and Turkey where they encouraged the founding of Maccabi sports associations, which later preached Zionism.

Between 1898-1918, associations for Jewish education were set up in Bulgaria. The most important of these was the *Hashachar* Association founded in Sofia which produced distinguished leaders who gave spiritual and Zionist guidance to Bulgarian Jewry. Worthy of special mention is the Organization for the Hebrew Language and Culture which was active

between 1914-25. Its founders were Hebrew teachers who had been influenced by Russian Jewish writers and poets.

The Palestine-Bulgaria Bank for Aliyah and Settlement

In 1918, the Jews of Bulgaria set up a bank to enable them to take part in the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael as a national home. The founders were Bulgarian Zionist leaders, such as, Haim A. Parhi, Eli Basan, Yaacov Panizhel, Yaacov Abramof and Morris Angel. Its purpose was to develop commercial relations between Bulgaria and Eretz Yisrael and purchase lands for the settlement of Bulgarian *olim* of the middle classes, craftsmen and labourers. In 1926 the bank opened a branch in Tel Aviv which did not however exist for long because of insufficient capital. The founders failed to raise the necessary capital.

Fifty Years of Zionist Activity

Fifty years of activity of the Bulgarian Zionist Organization left its imprint on all walks of Jewish life — education, youth preparation for *aliyah* and Zionist cultural activity. The founding congress took place in 1898, followed by twenty-three Zionist congresses during the whole period, the last of which was held in 1947 when the approaching dissolution of the Jewish community in Bulgaria was formally recognized and mass *aliyah* was announced.

Incidentally, Zionist activity in Bulgaria deeply impressed the founder of the World Zionist Organization, Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl. Though he paid only a brief visit to Bulgaria, his meetings with Zionist leaders led to this entry in his diary: "The Zionists of Sofia are the best organized of all."

In fact, the alertness of the Zionists saved Bulgarian Jewry from assimilation and conversion. Though their education was far from a traditional religious one, they did not sever links with Judaism. Their strong national ideals led to the voluntary and almost complete abandonment of the community, and its *aliya*.

The Struggle for Survival under the Nazis

The fate of Bulgarian Jewry would have been little different from that of the other Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the Balkans if the intellectuals, the Church and the royal house had not united in a determined stand against their deportation. The struggle in the critical years 1943-45 was waged with outstanding Jewish organization and fortitude. The exemplary courage of the Jewish leaders of all affiliations and political allegiance aroused the conscience of Bulgarian society. Through joint efforts, the plans of the Nazis and the Bulgarian fascists for the deporta-

tion and extermination of Bulgarian Jewry were frustrated. Reports to Germany when Nazi influence within the Bulgarian Government was on the increase emphasized that the necessary conditions for a racist ideology did not exist in Bulgaria.

In fact, on March 3, 1941, the day of the Nazi invasion, the anti-Semitic organizations in Bulgaria were unsuccessful in their attempts to reach the proportions of a real movement. Even before the Nazi occupation, there were active anti-Semitic organizations in Bulgaria, but their influence on society and political life was negligible. Attempts at anti-Semitic provocation had been quickly suppressed thanks to the strong stand taken by the Jews. The majority of the political parties were in favour of protecting the Jews. Not only did the Liberals, Democrats, Communists and Social Democrats condemn anti-Semitism in the parliament and in their party organs, but they also actively intervened when there were anti-Semitic outbreaks.

With the consolidation of the Third Reich in 1936, the Nazis started looking for footholds in Bulgaria. This country was an important link with the Near East and was considered by the Nazis as an important region for buttressing their position. The Hitler propaganda machine prepared the ground for the "new regime"; the Nazis began to organize with the Bulgarian facists, in particular with the Ratnik ("warrior") Organization, for open action against the Jews. In February 1940, a pro-German government was formed headed by Bogdan Filov, a professor of archeology and history at the University of Sofia (and a Germanophile): Peter Gabrovsk, a leader of the anti-Semitic Ratnik Organization was appointed Minister of Interior. Immediately afterwards, its representatives went to Germany to meet with Hitler. The first agreements were signed which made absolute economic and political dependence of Bulgaria on Germany inevitable.

In November 1940, the first meeting was held between King Boris III and Hitler. The latter persuaded the king to integrate Bulgaria within Nazi policy, and in March 1941, Prime Minister Filov signed the Triple Pact in Vienna permitting Germany to enter Bulgaria, and removing the last barriers against penetration of Nazi ideology into Bulgaria. A national campaign of racial legislation was initiated and preparations were made for the institution of a Bulgarian version of the Nuremberg Laws which included "the Law for Protection of the Nation" and which were concerned here not with blood and blood differences but with religion and religious disparities.

The new law forbad Jews from voting, being elected to government office or from fulfilling any municipal or public function; from marrying or having sexual relations with a non-Jew. The Jews were permitted to serve only in special forced labour units of the military. They were also prohi-

bited from owning property, economic securities or serving in executive business positions.

The promulgation of these laws was unfavourably received by the general population. The first protest was voiced by a friend of the Jews and President of the Bulgarian Republic, Vasil Kolrob, who declared over the illegal broadcasting station "No! The Bulgarian people will never accept that for the sake of economic salvation the Jews must be deprived of their property and sources of income. They will not be made the butt of insult and the victims of shameful treatment which, in the end, will only bring humiliation to the Bulgarian people themselves. For indeed if one people exposes another to disgrace and insult, then it condemns itself to a similar fate."

The fight against "The Law for Protection of the Nation" spread to the political parties, and on June 16, 1942 the Home Front arose which included the Communists, farmers, Democrats and retired democratic military personnel. They embarked on a campaign which gradually gained momentum. Naturally, the Jews enlisted every available public means against the racist scheme. As a result, parliamentary offices, the ministry of interior and the prime minister's office were flooded with telegrams and letters of protest from all parts of Bulgaria. A manifesto issued by the synod of the Bulgarian (Greek Orthodox) Church brought confusion to the Bulgarian authorities.

However, despite the public clamour and the courageous campaign conducted by the National Assembly against the above law, the legislation was enacted by parliament at the end of 1941. From that day, the Jews of Bulgaria ceased to be citizens with equal rights in a country where they had lived for two thousand years. Hitler's henchmen and the local anti-Semites believed that now the way was open for the "Final Solution".

The initial Nazi victories on the Russian front led the Bulgarian fascist regime to believe that the war would end in a Nazi victory. It therefore carried out the racist policies dictated by Germany and issued orders against the Jews whose rights were then withdrawn systematically. Jewish newspapers were banned; the Zionist Movement was disbanded; Jewish property was confiscated and almost all adult Jewish males were despatched to forced labout camps. Jews were forced to wear identification signs — the yellow badge — on the upper garment of their clothing, in order to humiliate them. They were compelled to affix the inscription "Jewish home" or "Jewish firm" to the entrance of their homes or places of work.

However, the Germans were not satisfied merely with laws restricting Jewish rights. Their ultimate objective was the complete physical destruction of the Jewish people. Under mounting pressure from the German

Government, the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs began to make preparations for the deportation of the Jews to Polish extermination camps. In November 1942 the Bulgarian Government discussed the practical aspects of this step, but encountered a serious obstacle — they lacked the necessary "experts" for the implementation of their scheme. The Germans had such experts and were willing to make them available. So on January 24, 1943, Theodor Nannecker an outstanding Nazi expert on Jewish deportation, arrived in Sofia. He was one of Eichmanns associates in 1941-42 and had directed deportation of the Jews from France and Belgium.

On February 22, 1943 an agreement was signed between Dannecker, and the Bulgarian Prime Minister whereby 20,000 Jews were to be transferred from the new areas annexed to Bulgaria, i.e. Macedonia and Thrace to Eastern Europe. Since only 13,000 Jews lived there, the Prime Minister planned to supply the Nazis with additional Jews from within the original borders of the country.

The Jews of Thrace and Macedonia were removed to concentration camps within Bulgaria and then transported to Nazi agents who loaded them on ships. Rabbi Michael Molho of Salonika, who has written a comprehensive monogaph on its Jews, states that the Jews of Thrace were loaded onto ships in the Port of Lom, but never arrived in Poland because they were drowned on the way up the Danube River. The more than 7,000 Jews from Macedonia were transported to the crematoria of Treblinka.

After expulsion of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, the Nazis and their Bulgarian accomplices planned the deportation of Bulgarian Jewry to begin on September 30, 1943. The Jews were to be moved to the eastern disticts of Germany; some 25,000 were to be expelled from Sofia and another 23,000 from the villages.

Jewish Leaders fight the Scheme

Bulgarian Jewish leaders were fully aware of the Nazi plans for the Jews and they took the necessary public measures to thwart them. They alerted friendly non-Jewish elements and asked them to use their influence with the government and King Boris to get them to rescind the expulsion decree. They also begged the support of Jewish leaders throughout the world in their attempts to attain this end.

In addition, Jewish appeals to church and democratic leaders bore fruit. A group of politicians, public figures, socialists and military reservists led by Vice-President of the Bulgarian Parliament, Dimiter Pesher met and discussed ways of thwarting the deportation plans. They requested a hearing before the king to whom they submitted a petition signed by 42 deputies against the expulsion of innocent citizens, which they considered

an inhuman measure. It was the king's duty to revoke the orders because it was in his power to do so. In all, the king received 63 letters stressing his personal culpability in the scheme.

On May 23, 1943 Jews from all parts of Sofia gathered in the main synagogue to pray for the annulment. A further prayer service was held the next day, after which the congregants marched to the king's palace to plead for his support. As the demonstration began, the Jews were assaulted by armed police bearing clubs and pistols who dispersed the crowd. Arrests were made in Jewish homes and on the streets, and the detainees were put on trucks. During the night the arrests continued according to prepared lists and by midnight 412 had been detained in Sofia.

A delegtion of Jewish leaders — Rabbi Asher Hananel, Advocate Adolf Haimov and Mrs. Laura Bracha Parhi — met with Metropolit Stefan, who was known as an honest man and sympathetic towards the Jews and who promised to use his influence with members of the government. He also told Mrs. Parhi to lead the delegation to Madame Carabilova, mother of the king, and persuade her to ask for her son's intervention on behalf of the Jews. She was to tell the king's mother that he, Stefan, backed them , and he asked to be informed of the result. The delegation took this advice. Madame Carabilova received them warmly and asked that Rabbi Dr. Hananel write a letter to the king which she would personally deliver.

On May 25, the evacuation of the Jews from Sofia began. It was carried out with cruelty and was completed by June 6. Only Jews with foreign nationality were permitted to remain in the city: Italians, Spaniards and converts to Christianity. A number also received permission to remain in Sofia temporarily in return for large bribes. The Jews were transferred to locations near the Danube ports so that they might be shipped to Poland.

As a result of the pressures, King Boris and his government took a firm stand which prevented the expulsion of the Jews beyond the borders of the country. Moreover, the retreat of the German army on the Russian front deterred the Bulgarian government from implementing the orders. Instead of deporting the Jews to Poland they sent them to a work and concentration camp in Somovit, which virtually became a prison. Among the arrested were community and religious leaders. Some leaders found refuge in the homes of non-Jewish friends and avoided arrest; others found sanctuary in a Catholic monastery in Sofia.

In April 1944 the concentration camp in Somovit was closed down. Some of the prisoners were freed while others were transferred to a camp in Pleven.

On August 24, 1944 the interior minister called a meeting of the members of the Consistory and informed them of a new law that the Consistory be disbanded and the Jews who had been expelled from Sofia be allowed to return and engage freely in their former professions. Also, the yellow badge would be removed from their clothing.

And, in fact, by the following day all restrictions imposed upon the Jews were abolished; the Consistory was disbanded immediately; the various Jewish institutions were reinstituted and regained their former official recognition as representative of the local Jewish community. A special order publicized the procedure for return of Jewish property to their former owners.

On September 9, 1944, an interim government was formed in Bulgaria under the leadership of Kimon Giorgiav, prior to the Communist rise to power. With the formation of the new government came the demise of the pro-Hitler regime and all anti-Semitic laws were rescinded.

Throughout the difficult times of the Nazi regime in Bulgaria, the Jewish community carried on its Zionist activities. The Zionist leaders in Sofia maintained regular contact with the Zionist emissaries in Istanbul. From time to to time they would receive a number of certificates enabling *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael.

At the outset of World War II, while the *Aliyah Beth* Movement was active, three ships were sent to Eretz Yisrael with illegal immigrants. These were the Salvadore, Dorian and Nadzhida. The first sailed out of the port of Varna on December 4,1940, with 326 immigrants aboard, but on the way it was caught in a violent sea storm. The ship was hit by a giant wave and wrecked not far from the Turkish town of Silibari. The majority of the passengers were lost at sea, and only 122 survived by swimming ashore, 204 drowned including 66 children.

Why Were the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia Not Saved?

The efforts of the Bulgaria Jewish leaders to rescue the 50,000 Jews dwelling within the area known as "old Bulgaria" raises the question: Why were efforts not made sooner to rescue all the Jews, including those residing in the regions annexed to Bulgaria during the war? The answer is that the legal status of the Jews living in the annexed areas was different from that of the Jews living in the older regions of the country. The latter were Bulgarian nationals, while the former were nationals of Greece, Yugoslavia and other states. The districts of Thrace and Macedonia were conquered and occupied by the German army. Only later were the areas handed over for administration by the Bulgarian government. Bulgaria did not require these areas to be incorporated within the country proper

and the government did not grant their inhabitants citizenship. For this reason, the Jewish leaders could not insist that the Bulgarian public bodies come to the rescue of their Jewish brethren in the annexed areas, or try and prevent their deportation to Poland.

The *Aliyah* of Bulgarian Jewry to Eretz Yisrael

The first arrival of Bulgarian Jews in Eretz Yisrael took place some centuries ago. The historian Shlomo Rozaness (1862-1938) writes in his book on the Jews of Turkey, that Bulgarian Jews first found their way to Eretz Yisrael in the 16th century. These emigrants were mainly well-known rabbis, though some others were laymen. In the 20th century, Bulgarian Jews came to Eretz Yisrael in order to die there and be buried on the Mount of Olives.

But in connection with the first modern *aliyah* of Biluim, the *aliyah* of Jews from Bulgaria must be mentioned. In the first and second waves of immigration about 300 Bulgarian Jews came to Eretz Yisrael. Among them were the founders of the settlement in the hills of Horan and of Har-Tuv.

Between the two world wars about 3,350 Jews came from Bulgaria. Among the *olim* in the 'thirties were members of the youth movements: Hechalutz, Hashomer Hatzair, Maccabi and the Poalei Zion Party. These pioneers established Kibbutz Ma'abarot as well as the *moshavim* Kfar Hittim and Zur Moshe. They also established the *kibbutzim* Ramat Hashofet and Mesilot.

One thousand and four hundred Jews arrived aboard illegal immigrant ships during the Second World War. Many were arrested and imprisoned on arrival in the detention camps of Athlit and Cyprus. In the four years prior to the establishment of the state (1944 to 1948) about 1,800 Bulgarian Jews arrived. The plan for partition of the land, which was endorsed by the United Nations in 1947, signalled the beginning of the mass *aliyah* of Bulgarian Jewry which led to the end of the community in Bulgaria. Between 1947-1952, 32,000 Jews arrived from Bulgaria. Present estimates put the number of Bulgarian Jews in Israel at 50,000.

These Jews displayed great initiative upon their arrival and they were more successfully absorbed than *olim* from other countries. They established industrial enterprises and factories, and founded educational asnd cultural institutions. The percentage of educated among the Bulgarian Jews is higher than that among other immigrant groups from the Balkans and the Islamic lands. Many of them were doctors, lawyers, architects, artistes (actors, painters, sculptors, musicians and singers) and well-

known scientists some of international repute. They also founded a financial enterprise called Kupat Aliyah which until just a few years ago was an active cooperative union. With the general liquidation of the cooperative financial unions, the union amalgamated with Bank Leumi. Today the enterprise is known as Bank Aliyah-Leumi and continues to serve the general public.

Meeting in Sarajevo on the 400th Aniversary of the Bosnian Community

The celebrations which took place in mid-October last year in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina (which is one of the six states compresing the Federation of Yugoslavia) were not just another Jewish event but took on a distinctly political character.

Apparently community, leaders, rabbis and representatives of world Jewish organizations had been invited to Sarajevo to join in celebrating the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Sephardi Jewish community. Representatives of some twenty Jewish communities abroad, as well as many former Yugoslavs who had settled in various countries, mainly Israel, came to the celebrations. For the first time, representatives from six Communist nations had been invited together with representatives from the West. Among them were Rabbi Katz from Slovakia, the Chief Rabbi of Rumania, Dr. M. Rosen, Rabbi Wolch from Suttgard, East Germany as well as community leaders and emissaries from Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.

From the Western countries there were the Haham Shlomo Gaon, Chief Rabbi of the Sephardi and Portuguese community in Britain, Rabbi Dr. Boltz, of the Luxembourg community, Mr. Abarbanel, head of the Sephardi community in Paris, Dr. Alkalai, head of the Sephardi community in Chile, and many others. But to the surprise of the delegation of the Jerusalem Council of the Sephardi Community (Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Pardes of Jerusalem, and the writer of these lines, in the capacity of Chairman of the Executive), the event took on a special significance and stimulated a spiritual awakening among the survivors of the community. They expressed a nostalgia for their Jewish past and a desire to preserve their Jewish identity.

Of the 60,000-70,000 Jews who had lived in Yugoslavia prior to the war, about 6,500 survived. Most were murdered by the Nazis. In the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, played a major role in the destruction of Jews. He had been expressely sent by Hitler and his henchmen to arouse the Moslems, who comprise about one half of the population of Bosnia (more than one million Moslems), to take action against the Jews. The Nazis soon found zealous

accomplices who carried out their work with enthusiasm. Of 15,000 Bosnian Jews only 2,000 survived. The majority live in Sarajevo and the rest in Zagreb and Split. Seventeen Jews (ten women and seven males) have survived in Dubrovnik, a lovely city on the Adriatic coast. The Tolintino family, one of the oldest of Dubrovnik, consists of two single brothers and their unmarried sister. This family takes care of the only synagogue in the city, which has a Torah scroll brought by Spanish exiles six hundred years ago.

As I have said, the celebrations became a public event. Radio and television stations gave them much attention and members of the government took a prominent part. About twenty representatives, including Rabbi Eliyahu Pardes, the Haham S. Gaon and Rabbi Rosen, were received at the historic palace in Sarajevo for an interview with the President of Bosnia, Mr. Rato Danvitz. The lengthy discussion focussed on the important national role played by the Sephardi Jews since their arrival in the country four hundred years ago.

For many generations the Jews exerted considerable influence upon the economic, political and cultural life of the country. The President expressed regret that the Nazi annihilation of the Jews had created a vacuum in the country's life that has not been filled to this day.

Despite the fact that the community has dwindled so substantially, there are a number of individuals who occupy eminent public offices. Some had fought in the ranks of the partisans and performed their duty in helping to liberate Yugoslavia. One of the three Kimhi brothers, Dr. Shmuel Kimhi, is Professor of Law at the University of Sarajevo. His older brother, Dr. Haim Kimhi, is head of the Jewish community and tends to the operation of the Jewish institutions. Another respected figure is Dr. Konfino, a doctor who gained recognition as a hero when he risked his life several times in order to give medical aid to wounded partisans. Nissim Elbahari, a member of parliament in Bosnia, was given official recognition as a "National Hero" because of his heroism in the Independence War.

There were Jewish heroes in all the states of Yugoslavia. The most distinguished was a man who played a key role in the establishment of the Federation of Yugoslavia, — Moshe Piade. He was Tito's aide and right hand man and was his chief political adviser and envoy in all the conferences which took place after the war: the Peace Conference in Paris and meetings of representatives of the Communist states in Moscow. Moshe Piade headed all the delegations, and became in effect the chief spokesman for Yugoslavia. But Piade's life was cut short and since his death he has gained status as a national hero. In general, however, the Jews of Yugoslavia tend to play down their Jewishness.

Synagogue Prayer on the Sabbath

On the Sabbath most of the delegates gathered in the only synagogue, that of the Ashkenazi community built sixty years ago. The rabbi of the Sarajevo community Menahem Romano, the last in a long line of rabbis and distinguished religious scholars originating in Sarajevo, gave a sermon in Hebrew describing the glorious history of the community, its tragic fate under Nazi occupation and the desire of the survivors to preserve the last spark of their Jewishness. This speech greatly moved the audience, and many of the guests, members of that magnificent community, wept.

The Haham Gaon, who is also a native of Bosnia, movingly lamented the loss of his brother and the other members of his family. For many of the congregation this was the first prayer service in years. The congregants (men, women and youth) were greatly moved and impressed by the special prayers which were held on Friday night and Saturday. Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Pardes, was asked to give the sermon in Ladino; he assented and for half-an-hour delighted the assembly with his personal thoughts on *Torah*, Judaism and the rebirth of the Jewish people in its homeland. His audience was overjoyed and many sat with tears in their eyes.

To my right sat one of the elders of the community who remarked with bitterness: "You see, even on the High Holy Days you can't find a *minyan*; the youth have all become assimilated. Take my daughter, for instance; she married a gentile and both of them are zealous communists who proclaim themselves anti-religious. They destroyed all the sacred books in my house and threw the *Hannukia* in the trash can. This *Hannukia* had been handed down from generation to generation in my family from the time the first exiles arrived from Spain. My son-in-law proudly announced that in our home there would be no crosses nor any objects of this sort. And I, in my sin, shut my mouth and made no protest. If I were only able from to time to come here and pray, and in that way to find peace... to receive some solace in prayer..."

Rabbi Rosen brought two Torah scrolls to the community in Sarajevo. The Nazis, in addition to their acts of murder had also vented their wrath on sacred objects. The rioters defiled the two synagogues and set fire to the Torah scrolls. The new scrolls elicited much enthusiasm among the community, particularly the elderly. The guest rabbis decided to hold a "*Simchat Torah*" and to put the scrolls into the ark after seven circuits and dancing, as is the custom. The news of the rejoicings quickly spread, and in no time many people streamed to the synagogue and filled it. Rabbi Pardes organized the ceremony and for two hours there was *Simchat Torah* in song and dance. The Rabbis bore the Torah scrolls aloft dancing and singing. Rabbis Pardes chanted aloud: "*Simchat Torah Yesh*

Yesh! Simchat Gila Yesh Yesh!" and the congregants chanted loudly in response.

Inauguration of the Museum

The highlight of the celebrations was the inauguration of the museum in the Sephardi synagogue. This synagogue which had been the glory of the community for generations was converted into a stable by the Nazis. Religious scholars and spiritual giants had been nurtured within its walls. Scores of Jews had frequented it every Sabbath, where they remained for the whole day. Now the municipality had decided to renovate it and convert it into a Jewish museum as part of the city museum. There are religious objects, *shofars,* Torah scrolls and other exhibits which illustrate the great past of the Bosnian Jews since their arrival from Spain and up to the Second World War. Documents and papers were displayed which clearly showed the important role played by the Jews in the economic, social and political development of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in the national war of liberation against the Nazis. The mayor of the city, Salko Lugandjia, a Moslem, made a speech full of praise and admiration for the Jews, and he dwelt at length on the great Jewish past. His words, which were spoken in Serbian, were simultanesously translated into French.

The Sarajevo Haggada

This artistic 14th century *Haggada* gained considerable renown in the Jewish world. It was published in a lavish edition not long ago under the guidance of Professor Cecil Roth, a lecturer of history at Oxford University. A very old volume of this *Haggada* is kept in the Sarajevo city museum where it is closely guarded. An interesting lecture on the *Haggada* was delivered during the celebration by a history professor of the University of Sarajevo, Mr. Karadvitz (also a Moslem). He spoke of the cultural and artistic trends which found expression in the Sarajevo *Haggada*. The lecture was accompanied by a film which presented the pictures of the *Haggada* beginning with that of Adam and ending with that of the Exodus from Egypt. He pointed to the influence of Spanish art over the centuries, as well as Moslem art styles which had gained increased acceptance among Jewish refugee artists from Spain. Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the first regions to be conquered by the Turks in the days of Sultan Bayezid who opened the gates of the Ottoman Empire to the Jewish exiles. Due to the tolerance of the Ottoman rulers, many Jewish communities were established and flourished in the Balkans and persisted for centuries.

Walking through the streets and alleys of present-day Sarajevo one may

observe architecture and customs of the Moslems and other sects, reminiscent of Istanbul — the mosques and spires topped by muezzins. As in Istanbul, where, despite official separation of religion and state, the influence of religious men is still strong, Moslem religious dignitaries still hold powerful sway over the inhabitants of Bosnia though they are under Communist rule. Many of the faithful stream daily to the mosques particularly on Fridays, for their special weekly prayer. There are valuable rugs on the floor of the central mosque of Sarajevo, the gifts of political leaders on official visits to Yugoslavia: Gamal Abdel Nasser, (of Egypt), Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran) and Houari Boumedienne (of Algeria).

As part of the celebrations, a music and dance programme was presented. Groups of folk dancers performed and old-time ballads were sung, which had in the past been sung mainly by female singers. Famous Jewish choirs from Belgrade and Zagreb took part as did the Sarajevo Opera and the Philharmonic Orchesta under the baton of the well-known Jewish conductor Oskar Denon, who was born in Sarajevo.

The Ceremony at the Cemetery

But the most impressive of the week's events took place at the cemetery. From early morning many thousands began to stream to the place: Jews, Christians and Moslems. Representatives of the communities and the rabbinate assembled at the monument erected in memory of the martyrs. First a secular ceremony was held and a choir sang songs of the partisans. Dr. Konfino spoke briefly of the heroism of the partisans and the thousands who had sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Yugoslavia. The representatives of communities and organizations then laid wreaths at the foot of the monument, prominent among them being those of the World Jewish Congress and Jewish Agency Bureau for Sephardi Communities.

Next, Rabbi Eliyahu Pardes was asked to conduct a religious ceremony. All those present stood at attention while he read portions from the Psalms and the *Mishnah* and recited the *Kaddish* concluding with the *Hashkava* prayer. The Hebrew melodies greatly moved the listeners, many of whom covered their heads out of respect for the prayer and wept silently.

This was a great day for the Jewish people.

Why Were Jewish Agency Representatives Absent?

As mentioned, the celebrations turned out to be an event of national import for both Jews and gentiles in Yugoslavia. The appearance of Jewish delegations from all over the world, and in particular that of the Council of the Sephardi Community headed by the Chief Rabbi of Jerus-

alem, inspired a resurgence of spirit in the hearts of this remnant of a Jewish community. The youth held special activities and discussions on local and general Jewish issues.

But the absence of Jewish Agency delegates was conspicuous. The organizers had invited members of the Agency executive and Mr. Zvi Luria and Mr. André Narboni were expected to attend. However, economic problems in Israel suddenly detained them. It was promised that the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress would be appropriately represented; that Dr. Nahum Goldman, who served in a dual capacity, as President of both the Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress, would attend. But he failed to appear and this caused considerable disappointment to the organizers. Mr. Ringner and Mr. Kaplan represented the Jewish Congress, Dr. Rosenberg of Geneva attended on behalf of the Jewish Agency Organization Department. It is indeed to be deplored that this excellent opportunity for appearing before communal leaders from twenty countries was missed — particularly those from the Eastern Bloc countries who had so much to relate as well as to learn.

Nazi Destruction of Jewish Communities in Greece

On March 24, 1944, following the defeat of Italy by the Allied armies, all of Greece was overrun by the German army. There followed a cruel persecution of the Jewish population on the Greek peninsula.

S.S. forces surrounded the cities of Preveza and Arta, and the Jews were compelled to leave their homes within twenty minutes. 524 Jews were transferred without food to Agrinion en route to Auschwitz.

The Jewish communities of Khalkis and Patres were forewarned and most succeeded in escaping. They hid in distant villages and in concealed places among the rocks in the regions of Euboea and Pelopennisos.

A similar fate befell the Jews of Kastoria, Larisa, Trikala and Ianina. The Jews of Kastoria were known to be specialists in the fur trade. They had been living in that city since Byzantine times. The Germans looted their property and laid waste to the community. Seven hundred and sixty-three Jews were transported in vehicles to Salonika were they were attached to convoys arriving from southern Greece on their way to Auschwitz. The trek lasted six days and the prisoners were supplied with neither food nor basic hygienic requirements.

From its earliest days the city of Ianina had given protection to its Jewish community. The community dated back to the seventh century C.E. Prior to their expulsion, the Jews of this fortress town, who numbered 1,950 persons, had been living in harmony and friendship with their Christian neighbours. Each family resided in a house of their own that was the fruit of strenuous efforts on the part of their distant forebears. Almost all of them were well to-do.

On Friday night, March 24, 1944, German forces encircled all the alley-ways of the Jewish quarter and within one hour arrested 1,860 Jews. These were transported without food or personal possessions to Larisa; from there they were transferred in cattle trucks under terrible conditions to their deaths in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Two hundred and sixty men, women and children from Khania, the capital of Crete, who had not managed to reach hiding places in the interior region of the island, were loaded into boats and drowned in the waters off the island.

A convoy of 1,800 Jews from the island of Corfu was "luckier." Like their compatriots, they too were moved to Larisa in order to continue their journey to Auschwitz... With the same cruelty 2,000 Jews from Rhodes were brought to the port of Piraeus on three rafts.

After wanderings in the countries of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Slovakia they reached the Czech-Polish border and their final stop...

The Jews of northern Greece, who spoke Ladino when they were expelled, turned to the Greek language in the extermination camps. Anonymous poets composed ballads in memory of their place of birth, which are very moving in their nostalgic simplicity. Below is one lament, translated from the Greek:

1) I was a young Jewess
I adorned myself with a small Star of David.
The soldiers crushed us
And we were taken to Poland
Oh! how we suffered!
They shaved our heads
We were dressed like humans.

2) Each morning after rising
We ran to "Zal-appel"
Always five in a row.
Oh my sweet little mother!
Always five in a row
Oh my dear little mother!

3) They took us to the bathhouse
Looked for lice
Our hearts pounded poom-poom
For fear that we would be gassed.

4) We marched to work
In rain and storm,
And when we worked slowly
We felt the whip.

Greek Efforts to Save the Jews

It should be mentioned that the Greek people made considerable efforts to rescue the Jews, in which the intelligentsia played a major role. This group included the high priesthood, writers, journalists and the best minds of the nation. They endeavoured to prevent the exile of their Jewish compatriots and courageously put up a united front against the arrogant cruelty of the conquerors; and did not hesitate to take dangerous counteraction in an attempt to frustrate the satanic designs of the Nazis. But the courteous treatment of the Jews by the Greek aristocracy and the heroic efforts of the Greek leaders were of no avail; the Jews were transferred en masse to the death camps.

The Salonika Community almost completely wiped out

The Jewish community of Salonika, like other Balkan communities, survived throughout the centuries due to the influx of immigrants from many other regions. Towards the end of the Middle Ages Jews arrived from Central Europe and from Italy. From 1648-1659 Jews came from Poland. But the immigrants who made the deepest impact on the culture of the community were the Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal. These educated and talented Jews contributed much to the development and advancement of the community and the absorption of subsequent ethnic groups.

In Salonika the Jews established industries including weaving and carpet factories. The fabrics produced by former Spanish Jews were, according to tradition, the specialty of the Jews of Toledo. This fabric was marketed in the Balkan states and the Near East.

Important Jewish legal and scholarly works were written in Hebrew by celebrated rabbis, philosophers and thinkers in Salonika. Newspapers and periodicals in French and Ladino were published as well as books and essays in Greek, French, Italian and English. Theatre and other arts flourished while lectures given in the institutions of higher education contributed to a rich cultural life.

Jewish physicians and scientists from Salonika were to be found on the staffs of many Greek hospitals, laboratories and observatories of international repute. Jewish doctors who risked their lives to keep the Hippocratic Oath and rescued many people in the Nazi camps were themselves put to death.

Though in the early 1920's there were 90,000 Jews in Salonika, the First World War and earlier the Balkan War had already diminished the importance of this Sephardi center. Just before World War II, the Jewish population of Greece and the Dodecanese Islands was about 80,000. In 1940, there were 56,000 Jews in Salonika, about 75% of Greek Jewry. A total of over 62,000 Greek Jews were dispatched to the death camps, more than 50,000 of whom came from Salonika. Eichmann and his gang reached Salonika in February 1943, and within one month shipments of Jews to the death camps had begun.

Cruelty

The Germans always took their accomplices into consideration. In light of this policy they transferred portions of Thrace and Eastern Macedonia to Bulgaria, and portions of Western Macedonia to Italy, which had earlier conquered the Greek peninsula and islands. Close to midnight on

March 3, 1943, a Bulgarian national holiday, a terrible catastrophe occurred in the cities of conquered Bulgaria. The temperature outside was five degrees below zero. Bulgarian soldiers broke into Jewish homes and with fiendish cruetty loaded all the Jews, regardless of age or sex, whether they were dressed in nightwear or not, into lorries and transported them to shacks belonging to a tobacco factory which had been set aside as a prison.

In a matter of hours 1,800 Jews from Kavalla, 596 from Serrai, 780 from Drama, 150 from Komotini, and 561 from Xanti had been rounded up. The Bulgarian soldiers looted the contents of all the homes and auctioned off the property which they themselves did not desire. In Kavalla and in other locales the prisoners were held in custody without food for three days in makeshift prisons. On March 7, 1943, all the prisoners were concentrated in Drama and from there were moved by train to Lom on the Danube River, from whence they were transported to the death camps.

Jewish Activity in the Greek Communities

My visit to several Greek towns a few weeks ago left me with a positive feeling, conscious of the improvement that had taken place in the communities which survived the Holocaust.

At the beginning of World War II the Jewish community of Greece numbered more than 80,000; today the number is about 5,000, in Salonika there are another 1,000. The remainder of the community is scattered throughout the country. The central organization of Greek Jewry comprises eighteen communities and is based in Athens. On my visit there ten years ago I was apprehensive of the fate of the tiny communities that had dwindled to insignificant proportions. Chief Rabbi Barzilai expressed doubts over the future of the youth who were fast assimilating. But in the interval of tens years between my first and second visits something good had happened and I sensed the new spirit that pervaded the Jewish community.

The Jews of Athens

A Jewish primary school was established in Athens attended by 180 children. The building was constructed with German restitution funds and with moneys collected by the various communities themselves, mainly of Salonika. It is a magnificent structure as are other buildings constructed from similar funds in many European communities. Teachers sent by the Jewish Agency Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora are making vigorous efforts to instill in their pupils a knowledge of Hebrew culture. It is to be regretted, however, that the principal is a non-Jewish teacher, Mrs. Lufu, who despite her abilities and virtues is unable to create a Jewish traditional atmosphere.

Most Jewish residents in Athens are natives of Salonika, who speak Ladino. By contrast, the native-born of Athens and the smaller communities do not know Ladino and have long conversed in Greek. Also, because of their extensive integration within the Greek environment they are little different from their neighbours. With the approach of the Nazi tempest, these Jews were convinced that the evil would not touch them, and that their fate would be different from that of the Jews of Salonika who had been dispatched to the crematoria. And indeed, the community in Athens

and in the small centers in other locales, which found themselves under Italian rule during the early years of the war, did hold out for a while. Though Mussolini subscribed to the discriminatory laws, the commanders of the Italian army of conquest treated the Jews with tolerance. Moreover, the Italian representatives in Salonika made intense efforts to rescue the Jews from the clutches of the local inhabitants, and even assisted them in finding refuge in other areas of Italian conquest. But when the Italian front collapsed and Italy itself was overrun by the Nazis, Hitler's cohorts began to hunt down Jewish communities in the areas of Italian conquest. Only those Jews who sensed the impending danger and fled to the mountains where they joined the partisans, were ultimately saved.

Organization of the Communities in Greece

Even today the Jews of Athens hold a prominent position in the economic life of the city: they are industrialists, importers and exporters and academicians. The recent improvement in economic conditions in Greece has had its impact on the Jewish communities. Those impoverished during the Second World War and who lost all their property have now been able to re-establish themselves.

Greece has a population of about eight million people and belongs to NATO and the European Common Market. It enjoys the active support of the West. About half-a-million workers have emigrated recently to various West European countries (mainly Germany) where they work, chiefly in factories. This outflow of labourers has led to a shortage of working hands at home and has adversely affected industries which have sprung up in Athens and in other cities. The building trade has been badly hurt too. Favourable reports from Greeks in Western Europe have only served to aggravate the situation and encourage the emigration of about four thousand workers to Western Europe every month during the past year.

Mr. Yitzhak Emanuel, a native of Salonika is at the head of the Greek Jewish communities. He has invested much effort in extending Jewish education among the youth and in strengthening national consciousness. At present the primary school has only six grades. The community is making the necessary arrangements to incorporate the remaining two grades so as to close the gap between the primary and secondary school levels and enable the pupils to complete their education in an orderly fashion. The Jewish Agency Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora covers the salaries of the Hebrew teachers from Israel.

The charter of the communities sponsored by the Greek government obligates each ethnic group to organize and maintain its own educational

welfare and religious institutions. For this purpose, the community is authorized to collect dues from its members.

Two communities, in Athens and in Salonika, suffer from a shortage of spiritual leaders. Neither has a rabbi or other religious officers to adequately nurture the spiritual life of the community. Due to dissension between him and the Athens community, Rabbi Barzilai was compelled to leave his position as the chief rabbi. Today Rabbi Yitzhak Gabai serves as chief rabbi. He was born in Morocco and was rabbi of the Barcelona community for ten years. Since his arrival in Athens four years ago, he has ensured the ritual slaughter of animals and the availability of kosher meat in a new butcher shop in the city.

Ties With Israel

The Israel government representative in Greece, Mr. Shai, born in Jerusalem of an old family (the Becher family) of Sephardi roots, is doing much to improve the relations between the two states. The Jewish communities esteem and value his efforts towards better relations among them and to fostering Jewish consciousness among the youth. Mr. Shai pays particular attention to the small communities scattered through Greece, and he extends to them any aid they may require to improve the content of their cultural and communal life.

Due to the national feeling that has been aroused among communities, the Jewish youth display great awareness of what is happening in Israel, and groups of forty young people come each summer to tour Israel and spend their holidays here.

Greece, like other Mediterranean countries, enjoys a large tourist trade and many Israelis are among the annual visitors. The port of Piraeus serves as a regular port of call for Israeli ships. Their frequent presence in Athens has strengthened the link with the Jewish community and the ties between the community and Israel.

Mr. Emanuel believes that Israel must do more to strengthen the Jewish communities, particularly the smaller ones in order to help preserve their identity and for the benefit of Israel.

The majority of Greek Jews found refuge in Israel after the war and they play a prominent role in all spheres of the economy (agriculture, industry and commerce), in the literary fields, in teaching and theatre. In all walks of life one is sure to encounter Jews from Athens, Salonika and other smaller Greek communities. The Israel Discount Bank, which occupies second place in the world of Israeli banking, was founded by the late Leon Recanati, who was head of the Salonika community for many years. Upon his arrival in Eretz Yisrael he did much to organize the Greek

Jewish community here and involve them in the communal and economic life of the country.

The seamen from Salonika, who reached Eretz Yisrael at the time of the outbreak of violence in 1936, helped to develop the port of Tel Aviv which served as the gateway to the world and broke through the economic blockade imposed by the Arab countries on the *yishuv.*

Survivors in Salonika

A sense of gloom and depression overcame me when I arrived in Salonika. Upon my first meeting with a Jew in the street I was gripped with dread. "Do you see" — he said to me in a distraught voice — "these streets which branch off in all directions were once Jewish streets. Upon the invasion of Greece by the Nazis, they were handed over to the gentiles and they have been devoid of Jews every since."

This community was of ancient origin and, according to historians, Jews had lived in the city for two thousand years. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Salonika had grown to be the largest Sephardi Jewish community in the world.

There are only one thousand Jews left in Salonika today. In the whole of Greece there remain only 5,000 Jews altogether. The Jews who lived under the German and Bulgarian occupations were the first victims: while those who lived in the area of Italian occupation were saved and even helped rescue a small portion of the Jews of Salonika.

The writer and historian of the Salonika community, Mr. Yosef Nehama, still lives in Salonika today. Though he is now old, he continues to record the history of this magnificent community. Thus far he has written seven volumes of his history in French, five of which have been published. The book, *The Holocaust of the Greek Jews,* which was written jointly with Rabbi Michael Molho, was translated and published by Yad Vashem. This is the revised edition of a book of the same title which first appeared in French. The first volume of his history appeared in 1948. The Hebrew edition thoroughly revised and updated is an important monument to the Jewish community of Greece and especially that in Salonika.

The two writers, themselves survivors of the Holocaust, witnessed the methodical destruction of the community. The naïvété of the Jews and their lack of awareness and understanding of what was happening led them to fall into the trap which the Nazis laid for them. The enemy closed in on them from day to day, slowly tightening their grip; yet they made no attempt to seek ways of escape from the inferno. Without a doubt the Jews of Salonika, like others in Eastern Europe were under the illusion that they were being transferred to a region where they would establish a

separate Jewish center. They could not imagine that they were being led to slaughter. As for the Jewish centers under Italian occupation, even after learning of the tragic fate of their brethren in Salonika, they were convinced they would remain unharmed. Some of them joined the Greek partisans in the struggle against Hitler's army, while others hid in caves and in the homes of their Greek neighbours.

The book reveals that in many cities the Jewish communities had the support and help of their fellow citizens and were thus able to save themselves. But in Salonika the Jews lived in a hostile environment; they were powerful and prominent in the local economy and comprised a majority of the population. The Greek nationalists in Salonika looked with disfavour upon them, and since the annexation of Salonika to Greece (on the eve of World War I), they began to squeeze the Jews out of influential positions and passed legislation with a view to undermining their economic and cultural status. The fact that they spoke only Ladino added fuel to the fire and the Salonika Greeks considered them an alien element.

So that when the Nazi invaders arrived with schemes for their annihilation, they found willing partners among the local populace. The Germans stripped the Jews of their businesses and handed them over to the Greeks. After the Jews were shipped off to the concentration camps, the Greeks took over their homes and other property in accordance with laws promulgated by the Nazis to facilitate such transfers of ownership. When the survivors came back after the war and asked for the return of their and their families' property, they found themselves involved in a tough struggle. It took several years before they recovered even a portion of their stolen property and received compensation for all they had lost.

However, the remnant Jewish community in Salonika today owns much property. Regrettably, community leaders are not deriving the maximum benefit from these assets. Salonika, the home of so many distinguished Jewish figures must exert greater efforts to restore the former glory to the Sephardi Jews. This can be encouraged through increased aid on the part of the Jewish community there to educational institutions both in Israel and elsewhere. In this way they can help contribute to the preparation of a new generation of religious and spiritual leaders who will fill the vacuum created by the Holocaust.

(1966)

Ingathering of Refugees by Italian Jewry

The number of Jews in Italy today does not exceed 35,000. Most of them reside in two important centers: the community of Rome numbers 12,000, while another 10,000 live in Milan. The remainder are scattered in various towns formerly magnificent Jewish centers, little of which splendour has remained. Communities of fifty to seventy families may be found in Florence, Kovorno, Turin, Trieste, Venice and Ancona. Naples, which serves as a stopover for Jews en route to Israel, had become almost empty of Jews. But by virtue of its recent role as a transit for Jews, a new community is taking shape which consists almost entirely of new immigrants.

Since World War II, and especially since the Suez Campaign in 1956, demographic changes have occurred in both the large and the small communities. Rome is a distinguished center of Italian Jewry who can trace their lineage back many generations, According to the community leaders, only some 10,000 are actually Italian Jews, the rest are immigrants who arrived after World War II from Eastern Europe, Germany and the Near East. There is also a Libyan Jewish community in Rome which numbers about 2,000. Libya under Italian control from 1911 proved an attraction to Italian Jews. With the end of the war and the attainment of Libyan independence, most of Libyan Jews left for Israel; a smaller number settled in Rome. Interestingly, this community has shown little desire to become a part of the general Rome Jewish community.

In accordance with the "Charter of Ethnic Groups", approved by the government of Rome under Mussolini, the Jews have the right to organize as a separate communal entity and maintain their own cultural way of life. They may establish their own educational, welfare and religious institutions. This charter also obliges every Jew to pay dues in support of the religious organizations and enables the two largest communities to maintain their institutions and preserve a distinctly Jewish way of life. However, these communities are not completely alike. In Milan, for instance, the community acts as an umbrella organization for Jews originating from different countries. Half of them are from old Italian families, or are immigrants from Eastern Europe and Germany, while the other half hails from the Near East: Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Almost each group maintains its own synagogue where prayers are conducted according to its own custom. Each community preserves a separate way of life and inter-community marriage is almost non-existent. Only in the

last few years, after the various entities attained citizenship, became established economically and began to mix freely, did any change take place in family relations. There is now a considerable number of "intermarriages".

This rapprochement is no doubt due largely to the danger of marriages with non-Jews which threatens the future existence of the Jewish communities in Italy. Such intermarriage is already nearing forty per cent and in the smaller communities over sixty per cent. Faced with this danger, the Jewish institutions have set up youth clubs for Jewish youth of all communities with a view to combating spiritual annihilation. Even the young girls from the Eastern Jewish communities, who were in the past "immune" to marrying out, have since fallen victim to this trend because they have gone out to work in offices where they come into contact with young gentile men.

The Chief Rabbi of Rome and of Italian Jewry is Rabbi Eliyahu Tuaff. Rabbi Tuaff comes of a Jewish family which arrived in Italy from Spain in 1630. The rabbi does much to foster Jewish and Zionist education among the youth. The community in Rome maintains Jewish educational institutions in which close to one thousand pupils receive their education, from the age of six months and up to the seminary for student rabbis.

The Jewish school in Milan, which like the school in Rome was also financed largely by money from the Claims Conference (the association for Jewish claims from the Nazis), has become a center for the education of more than a thousand children ranging from kindergarten age up to secondary school age. The principal is Dr. Shuman, who arrived in Italy in 1932 from Poland in order to complete his studies. He was ordained as a rabbi and then became a teacher and today he is the living spirit in the Jewish educational system of Milan. Anyone visiting these two schools, in Rome and in Milan, cannot but be impressed with the national spirit which pervades their activities.

Dr. Estora Meir is the leader of the Milan Jewish community. He is a Jew of fine calibre and comes of a family of immigrants which arrived in Italy fifty years ago. His father was the most active person in the community and now his son has inherited his role and continues to perform wonders in the field of preserving the Jewish heritage in this community which is split into many ethnic groups.

The budget of the Rome and Milan communities is covered from three sources: dues imposed on community members; burial and marriage fees, government participation in the cost of education (especially primary). In response to the increasing demand particularly by immigrants from Eastern Europe, a series of stores for the sale of kosher meat have opened recently, However, ritual slaughter constitutes a burden for the commun-

ity and brings in no income. This is because the community covers a substantial part of the price of the meat in order to lower its cost to ensure its sale.

The Jews of Milan are mainly industrialists (textiles and paper), and businessmen. Former Syrians, Lebanese and Iraqis are involved in import and export, while Iranians Jews are engaged in the rug trade. The Persian community consists of about three hundred families almost all of whom are employed in this trade. They have made Milan the rug center of Europe.

The Chief Rabbi of Milan appointed in 1945 is Rabbi Herman Friedenthal who arrived in Italy sixty years ago. He is a graduate of the rabbinical seminary in Toronto and served as the rabbi of various communities in Italy prior to this appointment. He is now 84 years old and has ceased to function in this capacity. He has been replaced by Rabbi Roberto Bonfilo who is a graduate of the rabbinical seminary in Turin. Rabbi Bonfilo is twenty-eight years old and is highly educated; he is making much effort to save the youth from assimilation. He was born in Greece and came to Italy as a child.

The two communities also maintain a number of other communal bodies: old age homes, welfare institutions and hospitals.

Behind the great Jewish synagogue in Rome, one may find even today a Jewish ghetto. Poor people, who trace their lineage back to the Jews who arrived in Rome before and after the destruction of the Second Temple, reside there. It serves as a monument to the Jewish community which has existed for thousands of years.

Rabbi Tuaff showed great interest in the world organization of Sephardi communities. In a conversation with me, he enthusiastically expressed his readiness to affiliate the Jewish community of Rome to the Sephardi Federation and to strengthening Zionist activity among Eastern and Sephardi Jews. He regretted that thus far he had not succeeded in drawing the Libyan Jewish community into the larger Rome community, and had been hampered in his attempts to prevent assimilation among their youth.

(1966)

Disturbing Developments in France — The Largest West European Jewish Center

North African Jewish Immigration to France

According to historical sources, Jews had lived in the large area from Libya to Morocco since the destruction of the First Temple. Until just ten years ago, half-a-million Jews still dwelt in the region, occupying a prominent position in the economy and society despite the upheavals of alien conquerors and a constant change of rulers.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, these Jews had always yearned to return to Zion, their historic homeland over the centuries. They frequently made their way back to Eretz Yisrael in small groups, who established a new society in the large cities: Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, Ramle and Lod. Many others from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria established ocmmunities in Canada, the United States and Latin America.

Most Algerian Jews, as already stated, made their way to France because of their French citizenship and the common language and culture, the total number being 150,000. They received a warm welcome from the French Government, which regarded them as returning nationals and were thus deserving of compensation. They, like the other million French nationals who lived for generations abroad while they consolidated French interests, were accorded special benefits. They were given housing, priority in finding employment and monetary support enabling them to provide their children with a comprehensive education (from kindergarten to university) and thus equip them with a gainful trade or profession.

The Jews of North Africa soon became a source of ferment in the new communities. Those who had formerly dwelt in ghettos in Tunisia and Morocco now found themselves in a democratic environment with unlimited prospects. Young women, who in those countries would not have dared venture from their homes without a male escort, could now walk about freely in the city streets by day or night without fear of being molested. But this very freedom which brought them so many benefits also posed dangers to their future Jewish identity.

Until the massive influx of 350,000 North African Jews, the Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jews who had arrived in France between the two

world wars comprised the larger Jewish community and the wealthy one. Ashkenazi Jews set up special educational and culture institutions in order to maintain a traditional Jewish way of life. There was also a community of Sephardi Jews who arrived between the two wars, but who stood aloof from other communities. These Jews were culturally close to France; they spoke French which they had learnt in the Alliance schools in the Near East, in Turkey and the Balkans.

But the arrival of the North African Jews fundamentally altered the structure of the community. The over half-a-million French Jewish community is probably one of the most problematic in the Diaspora because of the social difficulties that arose between these Jews and the veteran Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. They banded together either on questions of principle or on petty issues. As a result, an atmosphere of tension is created which spells trouble and an urgent solution is needed to obviate further unnecessary friction and clashes.

Communities in Southern France

After the Parisian community, other important communities were set up in the south and in the west: in Lyons, Cannes, Marseilles, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Toulouse and Nice. Communities had always existed there, where since the French Revolution Jews have played a major role culturally, economically and politically. In particular, educated Jewish youth have occupied important positions in the progressive movements; they are at the head of the socialist movement.

But though there is a Jewish communal life, there is no effective leadership. Many of the youth have become estranged from Jewish tradition and values and they have become thoroughly "French", and unless they are given a Jewish spiritual content to their lives they are in danger of losing their identity in a short time and becoming assimilated. The situation is most acute for thousands of families in the small towns and villages, where the rate of assimilation is conservatively estimated at fifty per cent. It is already a matter of daily concern demanding immediate action to counteract the insidious external influences and pressures. The loss to the Jewish people is irreparable.

After the French Revolution and the separation of church and state, the Jewish community gained formal recognition from the Government of France. The Consistoire (in Paris, the Jewish organization of communities became the supreme Jewish institution in France and was authorized to tend to all religious affairs, such as marriage, synagogue ritual and burial rites. The chief rabbi of France (who is assisted by the rabbis who head the Consistoire) is authorized to appoint rabbis and establish reli-

gious community institutions throughout the country. The Consistoire also established special educational institutions to provide religious instruction in Torah and prayer); but this was in fact Judaism stripped of its real substance. Only the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe brought Jews who preserved the vitality of Judaism. The Jews from the Near East and the Balkans who settled in Paris also contributed substantially towards preserving tradition and putting a brake on assimilation. But those who settled in the south did little towards educating the younger generations in a traditional Jewish spirit.

The Consistoire in Paris, which is far removed from Jewish national concerns and problems, does not show much interest in the troubles besetting the new immigrants. The result is an intense inter-community struggle between the "veterans" and the new immigrants in the south with respect to the structure of communal institutions and their direction. The immigrants constitute the majority of the Jewish population there and they demand the right to lead the communal bodies so as to better serve the interests of their children: to open synagogues, *Talmudei Torah* on weekends, and special schools with a complete Jewish education.

The *Ashkenazim* constituted the majority in all these cities in the past, and thus the leadership was in their hands. The rabbis who are recognized and paid by the Consistoire are always Ashkenazi rabbis, while the Sephardi rabbi, who has come from North Africa, is recognized as the rabbi of the Sephardi community only; he is not given official recognition by the Consistoire or the wider community.

The Jewish immigrants from North Africa, who in just a few years became economically established began to dedicate themselves to the setting up of their own distinct institutions. Synagogues were constructed in all the cities of southern France. Schools were built where dozens of children receive a Jewish education. There is a lack of qualified instructors, but the rabbi in each locale is helped by teachers and students from Israel, some of whom have come as emissaries from Israel and some who are studying in local institutions of higher learning.

The drastic demographic changes among French Jewry have caused difficulties not just for community institutions (the Consistoire) but also for the Zionist Movement. The Zionist Federation, which for years had been conducting its affairs under advantageous conditions, has suddenly been confronted with unfamiliar problems. They can no larger concentrate only on fundraising and giving lectures. There is a need to organize wider Zionist activity among young and old alike. The present directorship of the Zionist Federation, which is centered in Paris is quite capable of carrying this out. The *Halutz* (pioneering) Zionist Youth Movements, as we knew them in Eastern Europe between the two world wars, have not succeeded in extending their influence despite much effort. Dozens of

political party emissaries have come to France where they are attempting to organize activities among the youth. Clubs and study circles have been set up. But in the city of Lyon, for example, in which three youth movements are active (Hashomer Hatzair, Ichud Habonim, Bnei Akiva) they have no more than fifty members altogether.

The synagogue still serves as a center of activities. It is possible to meet Jews there who come not only to pray, but to participate in celebrations and gatherings. Synagogues in southern France, which had been closed for dozens of years, have been re-opened by North Africa immigrants and hundreds of Jews meet there.

Rabbi Binyamin Assulin, the rabbi in Lyons, who has served as the guiding spirit of the Sephardi community for thirty years, does not see any future for the Jews of France. He recently returned from a visit to Israel where his daughter married, and he was filled with emotion and enthusiasm at the prospect of personal redemption. He hopes to organize one hundred families from his community who will go on *aliyah* and settle in the Galilee or the Negev. The Jews of North Africa yearn for redemption, but they are in need of guidance and education in order to form an *aliyah* movement. Special attention must be given to the youth who are eager to establish themselves in Israel. But to attain this end it is imperative to boost their spirit and unite them psychologically.

The Gloomy Predicament of the Community in Marseilles

The Jewish community of Marseilles is also of ancient origin. Some of its leaders were among the most prominent figures in the history of French Jewry. Marseille played an important role in the struggle of the Jewish people for the establishment of its own state. The city also helped in the absorption of survivors of the Holocaust. Many illegal immigrants sailed from the city's ports en route to Eretz Yisrael to break through the British blockade. The aid extended by the French Government during the struggle to break the blockade will one day fill a glorious chapter in the annals of the Jewish people.

Jewish leaders in Marseilles were prominent in this struggle. Many Jews who had drifted far from Judaism were suddenly drawn to their people and were transformed overnight into ardent Zionsits ready to risk their lives to rescue the survivors of the death camps and bring them to Israel. Until a few years ago, the community in Marseilles was relatively small compared with that of Paris. Over the past ten years, however, it has become one of the major Jewish centers, not only in France, but in all of Europe.

The communities who live in Marseilles come from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. They could not hope to gain much aid from the veteran Jewish communal institutions. The Algerians Jews, because of the special educational and other benefits adjusted easily and *aliyah* to Israel is therefore far from their thoughts. The Moroccan and Tunisian Jews do not benefit from the same compensation, since they are not considered returning nationals by the French Government. Nevertheless, they too have succeeded in establishing themselves economically. They have found suitable employment in industry, commerce, the civil service and administration and are much in demand. As mentioned earlier, these communities, particularly the Moroccan and the Tunisian, are nonetheless confronted with a spiritual and cultural crisis. The parents send their children to general schools where they receive a French education without any Jewish content. The external influences have even affected traditional families, who no longer keep the Sabbath or preserve a Jewish way of life which might ensure a Jewish upbringing for their children.

Under these circumstances, a spirit of revolt has arisen in the Marseilles community. The new communities, under the direction of Advocate Charles Haddad, who led Zionist activity in Tunisia and was known for his influence upon the leaders of the Tunisian nationalist movement, have demanded change in the communal institutions and the integratuion of newly-arrived immigrants. But their demands have not been met by the veteran leadership, and they have therefore dedicated themselves to founding new educational and cultural institutions which would fight assimilation. Adv. Haddad has been elected president of the Zionist Federation in Marseilles, but he has not yet found general receptiveness to the idea of establishing institutions on a wide basis.

New synagogues have been opened which serve as a retreat for the adults, and schools have been set up for thousands of children. There are emissaries from all Jewish Agency departments in Marseilles today, and they play a prominent role in the Jewish and Zionist life of the new and the old communities.

The Sephardi Federation, at its meeting in December 1965 in Paris, resolved to call for a Sephardi Jewish Congress at the end of the following year also in Paris. This resolution was received with enthusiasm by the leaders of the new communities. They are hopeful that the congress will breathe new life into the Sephardi Federation and into the general institutions of French Jewry. They hope subsequently also to effect changes in the composition of the Jewish bodies, and also to be able to work towards the establishment of more important Jewish educational institutions.

But the most pressing question of all is: whence will the educators, guiding spirits and rabbis who must fill the vital functions come? Already a large percentage of Jewish youth has become alienated. On the outskirts

of the southern cities, single Jewish families have taken up residence in towns and villages, and within a short time have forgotten and neglected their Jewishness. Some are no longer even circumcising their infant boys and the rate of assimilation is high.

Somewhat less Gloomy in Toulouse

A rather less gloomy picture is to be found in Toulouse; the same Jews and the same problems as in Marseilles. Here, too, 1,000 North African Jews settled and attempted to fit into the existing Jewish institutions. These institutions have a respectable budget at their disposal, but they do not utilize it for the need of the hour, that is, for the building of educational faciliaties, for social welfare, or for the erection of synagogues for the new immigrants. One thousand of the 20,000 Toulouse Jews are new immigrants.

The community leaders are veteran administrators who arrived years ago from Eastern Europe. Rabbi Ephraim Rosen is officially recognized by the Consistoire. He is aided by a young rabbi from Morocco, Yosef Toledano, who has made efforts to prevent schisms between the new and older institutions. He is also trying to organize the youth of all ages. Recently he set up a youth organization and club for immigrant youth. Here the young people can meet one another, converse and hear abut Judaism and Jewish thought. They also come to participate in recreational and social activities. The dynamic rabbi understands that the young people will not continue to visit the club unless they can spend some of their leisure singing and dancing as in any youth club. He therefore planned a comprehensive entertainment program.

We had the opportunity of dining with the young people at the club together with Rabbi Toledano. Most of them were students. The rabbi had succeeded within a very short time in instilling in them a love of Zion. As a result, dozens of them may be considered potential *olim*. After a lengthy discussion on Israel and the Diaspora, all those present began to sing. They sang songs of Zion and Eretz Yisrael and we were surrounded by a warm Israeli atmosphere.

This rabbi's successful activity in Toulouse can serve as an example to other communities. Rabbi Toledano was not educated in Israel, but he studied in an Israeli institute for group leaders, and upon his return became the spiritual guide of the community and is admired by the local young people. He can claim to have brought back many young people to the Jewish fold and giving them a Jewish and Zionist environment.

Despite the large size of the community there is not even one Jewish day school. There is, however, a weekend school, where thirty pupils study on

Thursdays and Sundays, the two days when they are off from their regular studies. On these two days they acquire a minimum of Jewish and Hebrew instruction.

Incidentally, the well-known Toulouse University and also the Lycée offer Hebrew classes. But most of their forty students are Christian. In general, in numerous universities and schools throughout France Hebrew has been recognized as an official subject for study. But as stated, most students are Christian.

Recently, a representative of the Jewish Agency Organization Department came to Toulouse. He is trying with little success to prevent a schism between the veteran and the newer Jewish communities. Within the Zionist Federation itself there is a deep rift between the two camps.

Small Outlying Communities

There are some small communities in the outlying areas of Toulouse. Together with the Jewish community of Bordeaux, the total number of Jews in the district is close to 40,000.

It can only be hoped that the deadlock between the communities will be resolved and that the older community will cooperate to meet the new needs. Apart form the Ashkenazi community there is also a small veteran Sephardi community. Most of these stem from earlier immigrants from Turkey and Greece. They are well established but have become almost completely estranged from their Jewish tradition. Their sole link with Judaism is the one day in the year, Yom Kippur, when they come to the synagogue and identify with their people. Only a few are active in community affairs.

In the dispute between the two other communities these Jews refuse to intervene, as if the matter did not affect their Jewish future. These Sephardi Jews could serve as a bridge between the two conflicting camps, because they are regarded by the Ashkenazim as part of the older community, while they would also be acceptable to the new immigrants. It is to be hoped that the Zionist Federation in France will also help tackle these problems so as to resolve the disputes. This can be achieved by elections which will change the composition of the Jewish institutions and provide them with a wide democratic base.

(1966)

The Jewish Community of France after the Election of Chief Rabbi Sirat

On January 1, 1981 Rabbi Rene Shmuel Sirat took office as Chief Rabbi of the French Jewish community. This marked the beginning of a new era for the fourth largest Jewish community in the world. For about fifty years an Ashkenazi rabbi, Rabbi Yaacov Kaplan, served as the chief rabbi. The thousands of Jews who streamed from North Africa over the past twenty years soon constituted the majority of the 700,000 Jews in France. Upon the retirement of Chief Rabbi Kaplan at the age of eighty-five, it was therefore natural for a rabbi from the North African communities to be elected to this office.

Rabbi Rene Shmuel Sirat was born in the city of Bone in Algeria. He is about fifty years old and is known to be an erudite scholar and educator; he also holds a university degree. For many years he taught Hebrew language at the Sorbonne, where he served as head of the Department for Hebrew and was responsible for devising a suitable Hebrew language curriculum.

The French Jewish community is administered by the Consistoire which was established by Napoleon in 1808. The first Consistoire appointed Rabbi Sinzheim as the first chief rabbi of France. The chief rabbi is the spiritual leader of French Jewry, while the present head of the French Jewish institutions (CRIF) is Baron Alain de Rothschild. Both he and Chief Rabbi Sirat represent French Jewry to the national government. Baron de Rothschild also serves as President of the Consistoire and of the Fonds Social Juif Unifié and is active in the United Israel Appeal.

In one of his first interviews, Chief Rabbi Sirat asserted that his first priority was the development of an appropriate Jewish educational system. He aims to double the number of Jewish schools in France, from kindergarten to post-secondary school level. There are fifty Jewish primary schools in France today, more than 200 *Talmudei Torah,* hundreds of synagogues and more than 600 Jewish organizations. Rabbi Sirat fully recognizes the danger of assimilation and the consequences of the 50 per cent rate of intermarriage.

There is a community of close to 400,000 Jews in Paris and its environs, who are trying to preserve a Jewish way of life. The residence of the Parisian Jews are not concentrated in a special area. They live in all

districts, on the Left and Right Bank, in students' quarters and in prestigious neighbourhoods. In Pletzel it is possible to trace the past of the East European Jews. Apparently, Jews lived here as far back as the 13th century. Jews who escaped Czarist Russia in the early part of this century also came to this district. Later, Jewish refugees from Poland and Rumaia settled here, mainly in the 'twenties and 'thirties.

The newly-arrived Jews of North Africa have established many synagogues in Paris which serve as spiritual centers and the Ziona Movement, which provides a Zionist education and is the strongest arm of the Sephardi Federation in France; its director is Albert Ben Attar. Other prominent figures in the Ziona Movement are Jacques Abissera and Roger Pinto. These Jews have also established a number of kosher restaurants in the center of Paris, as well as bakeries and kosher meat stores. The French Jewish community closed ranks and became more united after the bombing near the Copernique Street synagogue in Paris in 1980. Anti-Semitism manifests itself from time to time and has also led to greater unity among the Jews.

Do the French Jews constitute an effective political force as do the Jews of the United States? In the presidential elections of May 1981 the influence of the Jewish voice was indeed felt. Since the policies of President Giscard d'Estaing were distincly pro-Arab, the majority of French Jewry (particularly in Paris) put their weight behind Mitterand's candidacy. In the municipal elections too, an important Jewish electoral force is taking shape. In the council elections in Paris there was competition between the candidates to gain the support of the Jews. The links between French Jews and Israel are also tending to become closer due to the fact that many North African Jews have close relatives in Israel.

The struggle of the North African immigrants in Israel to gain equality and eliminate their disadvantaged status has earned wide support from the leaders of the North African Jewish communities in France. Despite their close ties with Israel, they show no particular desire to immigrate and join their relatives here. Many hope that the religious and general Jewish education offered to the young people under the leadership of Rabbi Sirat will lead to increased *aliyah* and a return to Judaism in France.

Eastern Communities in Britain

The disintegration of the Jewish communities in the Middle Eastern countries was accelerated by the establishment of the State of Israel and the attainment of independence by these Moslem countries, as already set out in previous chapters. One of the countries of refuge sought out by the mass exodus was Britain, which was the destination of many Jews from countries which, until the end of World War II, had been under the protection of the British Empire.

These immigrants, concentrated in the main in districts of London, have developed a unique society. They have established their own synagogues and welfare institutions. Side by side with them live immigrants from Bukhara and Persia, who arrived in England in the nineteenth century as the result of the strong trade relations between Britain and these lands.

The last and most recent immigrants to arrive in London were the remnants of the Jewish community of Aden. They were compelled to leave Aden together with the last British soldies upon the granting of independence to Southern Yemen in 1966.

Jewish emigrants from Lebanon and Syria came to Manchester in the nineteenth century, where they played an important role in the development of the woollen clothing industry, as well as large-scale commerce which spanned all the continents of the globe. The Jews of Syria and Lebanon were dispersed throughout many lands, from the Americas to the Far East; they developed family commercial relations and in this way cultivated trade relations between Britain and other centers. The Iraqi Jews also did much to foster commercial relations between Britain and the countries of the Near and Far East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There is an Eastern Jewish community in Manchester, whose size is not more than 1,000 persons. Dozens of Jews from the Eastern lands reside in Birmingham, Brighton and other cities of England and Scotland. But because of their small numbers they do not maintain separate communities.

London

There are about 16,000 Sephardi Jews in London. Until his *aliyah* one

year ago, Rabbi Salomon David Sasson served as the leader of the communities of the Eastern Jews. The Eastern community in London is linked to the early community of exiles, who arrived in the city from Spain and Portugal three hundred years ago. The Jews, who could trace their line back to these exiles were once considered to be the elite, and they refused to allow immigrants from Eastern Europe into their community until about one hundred years ago. The descendants of the exiles have forgotten the Spanish and Portuguese languages, but even today they proudly boast of their connection to those exiles who, three hundred years ago, established the most organized Jewish community.

In a special book belonging to the Bevis Marks Synagogue of this community containing the names of wedded couples and deceased of the community over many generations, interesting names may be found. One of the names is that of the father of Benjamin Disraeli, the statesman, who filled an important role in the history of the British Empire and who purchased the majority of shares of the Suez Canal Company.

The chief rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese community for the last two decades has been the Haham Dr. Shlomo Gaon. Dr. Gaon is native of a town near Sarajevo in Yugoslavia, whose Jewish community celebrated its four-hundred-year anniversary in 1966. He has done much to draw the Spanish-Portuguese community closer to the Zionist idea, to the renascance of the Jewish nation and the reconstruction of the Jewish state. Until recently this community was thought of as anti-Zionist. Today they are loyal supporters of the United Appeal; many of the community's distinguished personalities were undoubtedly influenced by the Zionist spirit of the Haham Gaon, and they frequently visit Israel in order to keep abreast with the changes which are taking place in the state.

Haham Gaon has done much to break down the barriers between the community of Jews from Spain and Portugal and the communities of Eastern Jews. The cemetery of the Spanish-Portuguese Jews has become the cemetery of all these Jews. Rabbi Gaon serves as the spiritual leader of all the Sephardi Jews. He maintains good relations with the leaders of the Ashkenazi community. He has established religious courts for the Eastern and Sephardi Jews as well as arranged for separate ritual slaughter in order to facilitate their adherence to old traditions and customs.

Many of the immigrants who came to London from India, Iraq and Egypt are officials in business firms, factories and craft industries.

Mr. David Elias, leader of the community of Eastern Jews in London, works steadily to mitigate the hardships of the immigrants from the Eastern countries. He has become their spokesman and he tries to help solve their adjustment problems. He is also involved with the education of the youth. He has helped establish two synagogues in districts in which the

majority of Eastern Jews reside, and he has helped found four clubs for the youth. Mr. Elias arrived in London in 1950 and since then his home has served as a center for communal activity for Eastern Jews. Any Jew, of whatever origin, who is in need of assistance will find in Mr. Elias a helpful guide in all problems.

Manchester

More than one hundred years ago a stream of Jews from the lands of the Balkan Peninsula and the Near East began to arrive in Manchester, which is the center of the textile industry in Great Britain. The first step in setting up a Sephardi community was, of course, the founding of a synagogue, where the spiritual life and welfare activities of a community are usually centered in the Diaspora. After the first synagogue was founded in 1872, the new immigrants took the next step, which was to integrate the nascent community within the wider Spanish-Portuguese community founded in London three hundred years earlier by exiles from the Iberian peninsula. So they requested the necessary permnission to do so. The leaders of the community appealed to Sir Moses Montefiore for his support in persuading the larger association to accept them. Their request was granted, and from that time onwards the two synagogues in Manchester, Sha'arei Tefila and Sha'arei Rachamim (1904), have been part of the greater network of Spanish-Portuguese Jews in Britain. The chief rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese communities in Britain and of the Sephardi communities in the British Commonwealth serves as the spiritual leader of this community too.

There is a third synagogue which was founded in 1925 — the Sha'arei Tzedek Synagogue. Its congregants are largely of Middle Eastern origin, who broke away from the Spanish-Portuguese framework because they wished to continue to pray in the style of the Sephardim of Jerusalem. Among the founders of these synagogues were distinguished figures who endeavoured to set up also institutions of learning and welfare in order to preserve the unity of the Sephardi community in Manchester. Some of its personalities were Moshe Meshullam, Ben-Uliel and Ezra Alters. In the community register I found names belonging to the Laniado, Silvera, Katan, Nagrin, Ben-Satta, Assis and Ruse families who originated in the Balkans, North Africa and the Near East.

One of the former leaders of the community is Solomon Seruya, who came to Manchester from Gibraltar. The Seruya family had settled in Gibraltar some hundreds of years ago, where they came from Spain. President of the Manchester Sephardi community one hundred years ago was Isaac Belisha (of a Moroccan family which settled in Marseilles early

in the 19th century). The British War Minister during World War II was his grandson, Leslie Hore-Belisha.

Since the founding of the Sha'arei Tefila Synagogue, many changes have occurred in this community. Many families have moved to other countries, some to Argentina, such as the Teubal family who were well-known philanthropists. They settled in Buenos Aires where they founded a textile enterprise similar to those in Manchester. Others moved to the United States, particularly to New York, and were among the founders of the wonderful Syrian Jewish community.

The Sephardi Jewish community in Manchester constitutes a small minority within the larger Ashkenazi community of 30,000-35,000. Over the generations, the barriers between the two communities have come down, and today there is hardly a family which has not married into the Ashkenazi community. I conversed with Mrs. Linda Goldberg, secretary of the Sha'arei Rachamim Synagogue, on this topic. She herself may serve as a good example of inter-community marriage. Her family are from the Middle East: her father from Persia and her mother from Iraq. Her husband's parents are from Eastern Europe.

What is the present size of the Sephardi-Eastern Jewish community in Manchester? It is difficult to say. Because of inter-community marriages, the majority of congregants in the synagogues, and particularly in the Sha'arei Rachamim Synagogue, are Ashkenazim who pray according to the Spanish-Portuguese style. Incidentally, the same situation exists in the synagogue of the Spanish-Portuguese community in New York (She'erit Yisrael) which was founded more than three hundred years ago. Here too the majority of congregants are Ashkenazim, in this case former German Jews.

The spiritual leader of the Sha'arei Rachamim congregation is the Reverend Morris Gagin, who belongs to a distinguished family of rabbis from Jerusalem (one member of the family served as chief rabbi and Rishon Lezion in Jerusalem some generations ago). He is subject to the authority of the Haham Shlomo Gaon. The congregation of the synagogue is no larger than three hundred individuals. There are today in Manchester only about seven hundred to one thousand Jews whose parents came from the Balkans and the Near East.

There is a *Talmud Torah* in conjunction with the Sha'arei Rachamim Synagogue, where about 120 children receive Hebrew and religious instruction for four hours per week, on Saturdays and Sundays.

On my visit to the synagogue I became aware of the great change in the community of Sephardim in Manchester. Most of them have moved to other areas of the city and, as a result, the synagogue is virtually abandoned. The congregation is tiny. When you visit this house of worship

you can sense the atmosphere of sanctity which pervades it. The structure is beautiful. Its artistic carvings are of an antique style characteristic of the lovely synagogues of the Jewish communities of the Balkans and the Middle East. Very old Torah srolls are in kept in the Ark in cases partly made of silver. The "Rimonim" atop the scrolls were made by talented artists who lived in the Sephardi communities in past generations. And this sanctified temple, like so many others in the Diaspora, is empty and neglected.

There are other changes in the social make-up of the community. The Sephardi Jews who once worked in the textile industry have all but abandoned the trade. This may be due largely to the fact that Manchester has ceased to be a center for the textile trades. Perhaps it is also because the youth have studied and entered the professions. Some have established themselves as renowned scholars.

Unlike the Sephardi community of London, the Manchester community has not received any reinforcement from the great wave of immigrants from the Moslems countries. Wheareas a large Eastern community took shape in London, only a few individuals found their way to Manchester.

Many of the community members are active workers for the Zionist Organization and even hold important positions within it. Women from Sha'arei Rachamim belong to WIZO and are among the organization's more influential members. Many young people from the Sephardi community show a great itnerest in Israel and visit it.

(1971)

The Community in Gibraltar

The name Gibraltar has been inextricably bound up with the history of Zionist aspirations for many centuries. Since the peninsula's capture from the Spanish in 1704, it has served as a stronghold for British fleets.

One of the proponents of the liberation of Eretz Yisrael from Turkish domination, and of the establishment of a Jewish state in the ancestral land of the Jews, was Rabbi Yehuda Bibas, who was born in Gibraltar in 1780. Rabbi Bibas wandered in many lands and arrived finally in Corfu where he was appointed rabbi of the community, a position in which he served for many years. During his years of office he kept a close watch on the struggle of the peoples of the Balkans, among them the Greeks, for emancipation from the Turkish yoke. This struggle left its mark on the rabbi who was a thinker who devoted his energies to realizing the Jewish people's yearning to return to their homeland. The fact that Rabbi Bibas was born in Gibraltar has always seemed to me to be a wonderful thing. There is little doubt that the unremitting competition between the seafaring nations of Great Britain and Spain, which was then losing much of its power, influenced the thinking of Rabbi Bibas, who was tireless in his advocacy of the rebirth of his people.

Bibas was not the only Jewish native of Gibraltar who fought for the emancipation of the Jewish people. A number of other thinkers arose throughout the centuries who also advocated the emancipation of the Jewish people from the bondage of exile.

I began to gain an intimate knowledge of the community when I first met with one of its distinguished figures. This man, Shlomo A. Seruya, remained faithful to the idea of the rebirth of his nation, and gave up his privileged standing in Gibraltar in order to come to Israel and lend a hand in building the country. He had served as the Minister of Economic Development in Gibraltar, and following the Six-Day War, he and his entire family made *aliyah* to Israel where they became loyal citizens in its capital, Jerusalem. Mr. Seruya serves today as Vice-President of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem. He has also served as Israel Ambassador to the Philippines.

In an article published in the anthology *Shevet Ve'am* which is edited by myself, he deals with the community in Gibraltar and discusses the changing fortunes in its communal life. He states that from the 13th to the 15th

centuries Jews were already present in Gibraltar. In 1536, the community was involved in the ransom of Jewish captives who had fallen into the hands of Mediterranean pirates. In 1473, following the persecution of Jews in Andalusia, a number of Marranos found refuge in Gibraltar. However, there is no information available in connection with the community of the peninsula in the period from 1492 (Spanish expulsion) to 1704 (when the British conquered the outpost).

Following the British conquest, more Jews began arriving. When the Spanish fled from Gibraltar in the wake of the conquest, a vacuum was created in the building supplies trade. The British encouraged the Jews to engage in this field. At a later date Jews also arrived in Gibraltar from Italy (Livorno), England and Holland.

The Jewish community numbers five hundred people today. During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the Jewish population grew steadily and reached 2,000. The Jewish citizens were conspicious by virtue of their prominent public positions at that time. Walking through the streets you encounter the names of Jews who were part of the community: Ben Zimra Alley, Abuksis Passageway.

There are four synagogues in Gibraltar at present: Sha'ar Hashamayim (which celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1969), Eits Haim, and Abudarhem Synagogue. These three synagogues are built according to the Italian style while the fourth, which is called Nefotzot Yehuda, is built in Arab-Andalusian style.

Shlomo Seruya lavishes praise upon the community who have remained faithful to the traditions of their forebears. Prayers are conducted in an original style, the result of a variety of cultural influences of Jews emanating from North Africa, Holland and Italy. Ther is also an old *Talmud Torah* for boys and girls near the synagogue.

The community has a special fund to aid the poor, as well as other funds for visits to the ailing, for inexpensive clothing and for assistance to mothers. There is also a modern old people's home which was donated by a Protestant Christian philanthropist, John MacIntosh.

Distinguished personalities lead the community and conduct its affairs intelligently. The community is a marvel of organization. It employs a rabbi and is careful to maintain a Jewish way of life. On the Sabbath, Jewish merchants close their businesses, a practice which is conspicious because the Jews make up a significant proportion of the merchants. Consequently, on *Shabbat* business virtually comes to a standstill.

Joshua Hassan served several times a Prime Minister. Three Jews, including Shlomo Seruya, served as ministers in the government of Gibraltar. In a referendum, the majority of the population decided to remain under

British rule. However, the political and economic pressure applied by Spain upon Gibraltar has impelled the British Government to seek ways of arriving at an arrangement with it. It is expected that in the near future the two countries will find a basis for agreement. One indication of the change in Spain's attitude to Gibraltar is the cancellation of the economic boycott. This is undoubtedly due to the restoration of a democratic way of life in Spain since the death of Franco.

As mentioned earlier, the economic condition of the Jews is secure. In addition to commerce they are also prominent in the professions: as doctors, pharmacists and lawyers. The ties between the community and Israel are strong. The Government of Israel appointed one of the local Jews, Moshe Ben-Naim, as honorary consul. Keren Hayesod and other Zionist organizations are active among the community. At the time when the Jewish Agency was involved in the rescue of North African Jews, a transit camp was set up in Gibraltar where thousands of Jews on their way to Israel found temporary shelter.

It may be assumed that when Gibraltar falls once again under Spanish jurisdiction (and perhaps on the basis of a compromise agreement whereby both the British and the Spanish governments will exercise partial control), then the peninsula will acquire greater importance as a bridge between the nations of the region. And the Jews, too, will help create a cordial atmosphere between the different sectors of the local population.

The Community in Amsterdam

The lustre of Amsterdam, the city which played so great a part in the history of Sephardi Jewry, has tarnished. Only a few relics of that magnificent community, descendants of the *Geonim* who enriched the literature, philosophy and poetry of the Jews, have remained. Wandering through the city quarters once inhabited by teeming communities of Jews expelled from Portugal and Spain who found refuge in Holland, but where now there is nothing but rubble and desolation, you sense the great destruction which befell them.

However, we can still admire the lovely synagogue of the Portuguese community, which was built in 1675. Thanks to the efforts of the Dutch authorities, who contended with the Nazis and would not allow them to harm the synagogue, the building has been preserved as an historical site. Today it stands practically empty. Of the original 7,000 Jews who made up the Portuguese Jewish community in Holland, the majority of whom lived in Amsterdam, only a remnant of seven hundred has survived. Assimilation has also taken its toll as with other Dutch Jewish communities. It is doubtful whether the younger generation will continue to preserve a Jewish identity.

Not far from the synagogue is the historical library of the community (Etz Haim Library) which contains most valuable manuscripts of the great Jewish figures of the community and who were expelled from it, in particular Spinoza. But the library is shut most of the time and hardly anyone makes use of it. If not for the funds provided by the Dutch government for its upkeep, it is doubtful whether the community leaders would be able to preserve the riches within the library and the synagogue.

I was overcome with a chilly trembling as I walked about the courtyard of the buildings. Most of the year the synagogue stands vacant. It is only on holidays, mainly on the High Holy Days, that the survivors of the Porgutuese community as well as guests from other communities come to worship in the synagogue where so many important historical events took place during the three hundred years of its existence.

This old Sephardi community has no leadership. The chief rabbi, the Haham Shlomo Rodriguez Ferrera has reached old age, and a suitable replacement has yet to be found who will preserve the last spiritual embers of their Jewish identity. The community leaders recognize the

necessity of finding a young spiritual leader; but it is doubtful whether a new appointment will be made. The Ashkenazi community in Holland number 26,000, 16,000 of whom live in Amsterdam. But the fate of the Ashkenazi community is little different from that of the Portuguese one. Assimilation is exacting its toll among them too. According to estimates of their leaders the rate of mixed marriages has reached 42%. There is indeed a handful of religious Jews who are trying to provide a traditional Jewish education for their children. The Jewish community in general has established both an elementary and secondary school where about 1,000 young people receive their schooling. But the vast majority of Jewish youth is studying at public schools and is losing its ties with Judaism.

(1966)

SECTION III:
TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS — LATIN AMERICA

Sephardi Jewish Communities in Latin America

Cultural Split in the Diaspora

The South American continent is assuming an ever-growing importance in Jewish life and in activities which help to strengthen the State of Israel. Almost one million Jews are dispersed throughout twenty countries in Latin America. The largest of these communities is located in Argentina and it numbers close to half-a-million persons. This community has recorded outstanding economic and cultural achievements in the past generation.

The next biggest community is that of Brazil, which has 150,000 Jews. In Chile and Uruguay too communities are developing a distinctly Jewish way of life. The establishment of these communities may be linked with the waves of refugees from Eastern Europe who arrived in the period between the Russian Revolution and World War II. These Jews fleeing from persecution found refuge in all parts of the American continents. Most of them settled in the United States and Canada where they established the largest contemporary Jewish center which today numbers about six million. However, hundreds of thousands reached the shores of the southern hemisphere.

But the first settlers of Jewish nationality to established themselves in both the southern hemisphere and in the United States were Sephardim. With the discovery of the American continents, and most particularly with the growing persecutions connected with the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, many Jews began to seek out a haven in the new lands. But here too the Inquisition reached them. There are indications that many Jews assimilated into the alien surroundings and were lost to Judaism. One still encounters groups of Christians who do not mingle with their neighbours and are considerd to be descendants of Jews. They bear the names of Jewish families in Spain, some of them Hebrew names. A few of these families have preserved Jewish customs handed down through the generations.

There were also immigrants from North Africa, the Balkans and Turkey among the founders of the communities, who arrived in the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, immigrants from Syria, Lebanon and Eretz Yisrael began to stream to Latin America; new Jewish societies

arose which established their own particular communal structures and remained aloof from the East European communities. This separation is still evident, notwithstanding the new generation which was educated in government schools and speaks the Castilian dialect. Inter-community marriages are becoming more frequent, however, though most marriages are still along Sephardi or Ashkenazi lines.

Indeed, a close examination of Latin American communities will reveal divisions also between East European Jews and German Jews. One must realize that there is need of community conciliation in the Diaspora as well as in Israel.

The major problem confronting these communities is again assimilation. The youth have in many cases not received a Jewish education nor were they imbued with a love for Israel. Thus, many are drifting away from Judaism gradually and insiduously and are already on the verge of complete assimilation. Though in general, marriages are with Jewish partners there is little, if any, real Jewish content to their lives, and it is most likely that their own offspring will be completely alienated from Jewish tradition.

To fight this trend, Jewish communities have begun in recent years to esablish special Jewish schools. In most of these however instruction is little different from that in the general schools. A few hours a week are devoted to religious studies, and with that ends the connection with Judaism. However, there are communities which set up schools for more serious Jewish and religious studies and the study of Hebrew. The communities in Argentina (both the Ashkenazi which is rich in cultural and spiritual assets, and the Sephardi which is intimately linked to its heritage) have led the way in a Jewish education which is worthy of the name.

The establishment of the State of Israel had far-reaching effects on Jewish community life in Latin America. The links with Israel are becoming closer. The effect is most evident in the intense efforts to set up Jewish and Hebrew schools in even the smallest communities. Instructors from Israel are developing a successful program of Jewish education. Most of these schools are planned with a Zionist orientation with a view to building resistance to external influences.

But in order to strengthen the spirit of these communities and to further activities to counteract the insidious outside influences, it is necessary to ensure good spiritual leadership. The synagogue still serves as the social and educational framework of the Jewish community. Both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi synagogues serve as retreats from the alien surroundings. Near the synagogue is the club where the young and the old spend their leisure. Among the Ashkenazim there is a strong religious movement, and the different religious trends (Orthodox, Conservative and

Reform) each organize adult and youth activity. But among the Sephardi-Eastern Jews there are barely any communal frameworks able to strengthen ties with Jewish tradition. The danger of increasing spiritual erosion was recognized years ago, but practically nothing has been done to qualify rabbis and leaders to guide these Sephardi communities and breathe new life into their existence.

An obvious proof of this is the young rabbis who have arrived in recent years from Israel to take up spiritual leadership in some of the communities. Rabbi Avraham Shalem began his work after World War II and today he serves as the rabbi in Colombia. Rabbi Zion Levy serves in Panama and Rabbi David Dayan in Peru. These rabbis, graduates of *Yeshivat* Porat Yosef, arrived in Latin America with a large store of knowledge in Torah and Halacha; but they were unfamillar with the surroundings into which they were thrust. Thus they had a hard time adapting to the new way of life, learning Spanish and finally being able to begin educational activities which bore results. Many members of the Sephardi community who had drifted away from Judaism began to return to the fold and re-establish a connection with religion and Israel.

This situation without any doubt affirms the views of the directors of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem, who have long called for the establishment of the large *yeshiva, Beit Harashal,* in Jerusalem. It is intended to qualify young rabbis in the Torah and Halacha and equip them with the other tools needed for work in the Diaspora, such as the local language, knowledge of the local customs, and any other means of educating youth and adults and bringing them back to Judaism. And, indeed, information regarding the opening of a *yeshiva* for training students for such work was received enthusiastically by the leaders of the Sephardi communities in the Diaspora. Some communities are thinking about reciprocal influence and are planning on sending talented pupils to the yeshiva for the necessary training to return to the Diaspora and work as teachers and *madrichim.*

(1962)

Sephardi Communities in Mexico

Mexican Jewry is divided into four communities; three are Sephardi and the fourth Ashkenazi. The organized communities are located in the capital, Mexico City. Outside the city the division along Sephardi-Ashkenazi lines becomes blurred. In general, in the outlying towns and cities there is only one communal organization. Where there is only one school, it serves all the children of the Jewish community.

The three Sephardi communities encompass Jews of various national origins. Two of the communities include Jews from Syria; the Syrian Jews belong to two groups: those who hail from Damascus, and those from Aleppo. The third Sephardi community consists of immigrants from Turkey, Greece, Morocco, Algeria, Bulgaria and the remaining Balkan lands where the Jews speak Ladino.

Alianzo Monte Sinai — this community consists of former Damascene Jews. It was set up in 1912 on a formal basis though it had already been in existence for many years. The activity which defines the separate and distinct communal framework of Eastern Jewish communities in Latin America is the purchase of a plot of land for use as a cemetery. The community leaders acquired a licence to inter their dead from the president at the time, Francisco Madero. This community is considered to be the best organized of the three communities and has a rabbi. The thirty members of the executive council are democratically elected for three years. Classes for kindergarten up to high school level are held in the school, and those who complete it receive the matriculation certificate.

This community maintains three synagogues, because its members moved to the newer section of the city including the suburbs where they established additional synagogues. The Damascene Jews have their own religious functionaries and supervise the proper ritual slaughter of animals; all the Sephardi Jews are in the habit of purchasing meat from them. For many years, those Ashkenazim who assiduously adhere to dietary laws would not buy their kosher meat in the butcher shops of the Sephardim. But they changed their attitude in 1967, and from then on they began to purchase their meat from the Sephardim because an Ashkenazi inspector, a graduate of the Mir Yeshiva, became supervisor over the Sephardi ritual slaughterers.

The Damascene Jews run several charitable institutions, such as women's aid organizations: La Union Feminina, and the Committee of Mothers (Comité de Madres).

The Jews from Aleppo are organized communally into the Sociedad de Beneficencia Israelita Zedaca Umarpé, which was founded in 1938. This community, which formerly had joined the Monté Sinai community, split away because of disagreements. The community is directed by seven community officials and four members of an executive which convenes twice a week to discuss all communal questions. It also runs a full-time school from kindergarten through primary school and culminating in a *yeshiva* named *Keter Torah.* The studies in the *yeshiva* take place in the afternoon and on Sundays. They also maintain a separate cemetery. The members adhere to their ancient customs and live in a conservative fashion.

Union Sephardi

As mentioned, the members of this community hail from the lands of the Balkans and Turkey. The community was founded in 1923 ,as a *Bikur Holim* for the sick poor. Later the Sociedad de Beneficiencia La Fraternidad was established, a Jewish welfare organization as the name implies. The community has its own synagogue named after the greatest of Spanish Jewish poets, Yehuda Halevy.

The community of Balkan Jews has two choirs, a children's and an adults' choir. These choirs have earned a fine reputation among both Jews and non-Jews. There is also a women's charitable organization called Comité de Damas de el Bikur Holim, whose activities are many and varied and encompass the care of orphans and the ailing elderly. Many of the children study in Escuela de la Ciudad de Mexico, which is a private non-partisan school. Others study at the Jewish school of the communities from Damascus and Aleppo.

Their synagogues are more liberal than those of the Syrian communities. Many *Ashkenazim* are today affiliated to the community of Balkan Jews because they no longer use the Yiddish language for their daily affairs.

The three communities finance their educational and charitable activities by imposing levies upon their members.

Though all the communities helped establish an umbrella organization, the ties between them are not strong. Recently the Sephardi communities joined the Zionist Movement and participate in fund-raising for the various Zionist campaigns: Keren Kayemet Leyisrael, United Jewish Appeal and others. The Syrian Jews are known for their generous support of charitable institutions and *yeshivot* in Israel.

The Mexican Jewish community is the third largest in Latin America. The

biggest community is in Argentina and it numbers 400,000, about 40,000 of whom are Sephardi Jews. The second largest is in Brazil and consists of 165,000 Jews of which some 50,000 are Sephardim. In Mexico there are 50,000 Jews, 35% of them *Sephardim.* There are also 50,000 Jews in Uruguay, but no more than 5,000 are *Sephardim.*

The Mexican community is the oldest in Latin American; it dates back to 1521. But the present-day Jews are not the actual descendants of those sixteenth century Jews who lived there under the Spanish flag. They are not even the descendants of the Jews who lived in Mexico in 1821 when the country received its independence. After the expulsion from Spain, the Jews who lived in Mexico were compelled to conceal their identity and to appear outwardly as Catholics.

The present community began to take shape during the first decades of the nineteenth century. The early immigrants arrived from North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. Between 1879 and 1890 Jews began to arrive from the lands of the Maghreb; they had fled years earlier from Lebanon and Syria following the blood libel in Damascus in 1840. The immigrants were engaged by English firms in the construction of the railway line in Mexico. The majority settled in the city of Guadalajara. The revolution of the Young Turks in Istanbul brought still further waves of immigration from the Ottoman Empire. These Jews arrived mainly from Izmir, Salonika and Istanbul. There are also the descendants of Jews who arrived in the country after 1870 but who assimilated into the local Christian society and do not view themselves as Jews. Their identity was first discovered when they contributed anonymously to the United Jewish Appeal and purchased Israel Development Bonds.

Early in the 20th century, there were Jews in various towns outside Mexico City. These "rural" Jews were largely *Sephardim.*

Today, the Mexican Jews are dispersed throughout the country and even the more remote areas. Some are completely cut off from the main Jewish communal frameworks and do not participate in maintaining their institutions. However, they do not disavow their Jewish identity.

The Jews do not engage in manual labour or in any physical work. The majority are in the retail trades. A smaller number are the owners of clothing and textile enterprises. Only very few are involved in large industry.

A large proportion of the Mexican Jews, the second generation of the original immigrants, is engaged in the professions: dentists, physicians, engineers, architects and psychiatrists. Mixed marriages are becoming more common particularly among the *Ashkenazim* and the rate is about 30%. Half the spouses convert to Judaism to please their Jewish in-laws. All the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities are affiliated to the general

organization of Mexican Jews. But for practical purposes the organization exists on paper only. The first conference of Jewish communities took place in Mexico City on November 17, 1973. Delegates from four communities (three Sephardi and one Ashkenazi) attended.

Until 1924, there was a deep rift between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities and almost no intermarriage between them. But the later generation mingled more freely and marriages between the communities became more frequent. However, each community still maintains a separate and distinct way of life. Even fund-raising for Israel is conducted separately. Emissaries from Israel appear before Ashkenazi audiences and speak in Yiddish, and then before Sephardi audiences and lecture in Ladino or English. In recent years the various Zionist campaigns have begun to dispatch Sephardi emisaries to the Sephardi communities throughout Latin America.

The communities established a sports center, Centro Deportivo Israelita, which is situated in the suburbs of Mexico City. It is equipped with all the necessary amenities and has spacious areas for sports such as, handball, football, tennis etc. Tourists who visit the center are full of praise. It is designed to attract Jewish youth from all the different communities and give them a place to meet one another.

Those Jews who pay the yearly membership fee are entitled to make use of the facilities, while those unable to pay are given a reduction. Some *Ashkenazim* complain that the poorer Sephardi Jews come to the center with their entire families on Sundays and bring food with them. The *Ashkenazim* claim that the center has been converted into a recreation center for poor families.

There are two kitchens in the sports center one kosher and the other not.

The establishment of the Sephardi Federation and branch offices in Latin America has brought Sephardi Jews into the sphere of activity on behalf of Israel. Groups of Mexican youth of Sephardi background take part in seminars during the summer months in Jerusalem. These seminars are sponsored by the Organization of Sephardi Youth which was established by Dr. José Nessim of Los Angeles. They are held in premises owned by the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem which are located in the Old City. Rabbi Barukh Gershon, for many years rabbi of the Sephardi community of Madrid, has helped this important enterprise which is aimed at encouraging youth to take part in the building of the Jewish state, and serves as their spiritual leader.

The Jews of Panama

The new Jewish community of Panama was established one hundred years ago and is known as Kol She'erit Yisrael. In the early days it already split into two: the *Ashkenazim*, who came from England, France Germany, Russia, and Poland; the *Sephardim* (Caribbean), who came from the islands of St. Thomas, Curaçao, Jamaica and Barbados. Peaceful and harmonious relations prevailed between the two communities.

Panama has always attracted many immigrants because it serves as a transit and bridge between the United States and the southern hemisphere. A series of enterprises undertaken in the second half of the 19th century, and particularly the digging of the Panama Canal which links the Pacific Ocean with the Atlantic, brought about a great change in the economy of the country. Prior to the excavation of the canal, the area had been considered part of Colombia, but thereafter it became an independent state which attracted new Jewish immigrants. The construction of the railway in Panama in 1855 turned the area into the gateway to California, while the digging of the canal (which was first considered in 1879 and was completed by 1914) gave Panama special status in commerce and international sea transport.

By the end of World War Two, waves of Jewish immigrants began arriving in Panama from North Africa, the Balkans, Syria, Lebanon and Eretz Yisrael. The Sephardi immigrants founded the community and the Shevat Achim Synagogue. Many immigrants settled in the second city of Panama, Colon, where they founded the Kahal Kodesh community. Immigrants arriving between the two world wars settled in Colon and founded the Israel Cultural Center, which aimed to organize the religious life of the community and Jewish cultural activities.

With the Nazi ascent to power, new waves of German refugees began landing on the shores of Panama, some of whom regarded the country as a stepping stone to permanent residence in the United States. Other willingly settled in Panama on a permanent basis. The Jewish community of Panama did much to reduce the suffering of the victims of Hitler's persecutions. It supplied the destitute refugees with food and clothing, and arranged for the release of those detained in the detention camps because they were considered enemy aliens. The refugees settled in Panama and established a community which is known to this day as "the German Jewish community."

Except for a handful of Jews, the remnants of the first immigrants who are known as "Portuguese Jews", the other three communities are considered Zionists who work towards strengthening religious feeling and national ties. Most of Panama's Jews (2,000 all told) are Sephardi and Eastern Jews. Prominent positions are held by Jews from Syria, Lebanon, and Eretz Yisrael most of whom belong to families originating in Europe. Jews are well-to-do economically and they are engaged mainly in commerce. Among the Jews from Jerusalem I discovered the Mizrahi family, who emigrated there forty years ago. The youngest, David Mizrahi, arrived in Panama twenty-five years ago and became in time a leader of the Sephardi community. His home serves as an Israeli center and Hebrew is spoken there.

Rabbi Zion Levy from Jerusalem, who arrived only a few years ago, has done much towards fostering religious observance. He ensures that there is a ready supply of kosher meat, encourages a religious family life, and devotes much of his time to the youth.

The finest symbol of Jewish community life, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, is the Jewish school named after Albert Einstein, which was opened six years ago and where some 273 pupils study. The pupils publish a pro-Israel Spanish magazine.

The women are organized in WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization.) The youth are organized in B'nai B'rith, Freemasons and Rotary. The women plan to establish a youth club to provide the youth with a Jewish social atmosphere. Among the more active of the women in WIZO is Mrs. Tova Mizrahi, who is the living spirit of the organization's activities.

The descendants of the first settlers who came from Portugal are not a part of the community. They established a Reform synagogue, as far as I know the first Sephardi Reform synagogue in the world. Every Friday evening, they gather in this synagogue to pray. The cantor is a Catholic Christian who conducts their Sabbath prayer. They proclaim themselves to be Jews of the Mosaic Persuasion, and do not associate themselves with Zionism.

(1962)

Jewish Communities in Colombia

Colombia, a vast country occupying a large portion of the southern hemisphere, has more than 10,000 Jews. The community is diverse and consists of immigrants from Hungary who are little different from the adherents of *Neturei Karta,* as well as of highly assimilated Jews. But most of the community are dedicated Zionists who strive to impart a Judaic-national education to their children to prepare them for *aliyàh* to Israel and join in the upbuilding of the new-ancient land.

The Sephardi-Eastern community in the capital of Bogota and in the towns of Barranquilla and Cali constitutes an organizational unit in its own right and maintains well-organized communal institutions. In most Latin American countries there are separate communities of German immigrants, who are unwilling to join forces with East European immigrants or to jointly administer religious and communal institutions. While the latter do not have their own rabbi, the former have a spiritual leader. It is difficult to say with certainty to what religious stream the German Jews belong. They are neither Reform nor Orthodox . They seem to have lost their former source of religious inspiration and follow no definite path.

Like the other communities, the Sephardi community too arrived during the last generation. Some came from the Near Eastern lands such as Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, and some from the Balkan lands of Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria. Despite the geographic barriers between the communities, they constitute one entity and pray in the current Jerusalem formula.

But there are indications that since the discovery of the continent by Columbus, Jews have been landing on the shores of Colombia; first as refugees from the harsh persecution of the Inquisition in Portugal and Spain, and then later as Marranos who continued to live a double life in the Americas. Outwardly, they appeared to be observant Christians, but in their homes they maintained a Jewish way of life and tried to educate their children in the spirit of Judaism.

In the city of Medellin, in the Antioquia District, many Marranos took up residence during the period of Spanish colonization. To this day one can find in this city Christian families where the mother kindles Sabbath candles every Friday evening according to Jewish custom. Still other families preserve sets of gilt phylacteries which have been passed down

from generation to generation for centuries. They do not appreciate the value of this treasure but they realize that it represents their connection with the Jewish people.

Many of these people are reputed to be talented businessmen and men of enterprise, and they make no secret of the fact that they attribute much of their success to their being the descendants of the Jewish Marranos. Some of the most distinguished Christian families proudly declare that they are of Jewish descent in order to indicate that they have preserved the purity of the race and have not intermarried with the indigenous Indian population. Hebrew names, common to the Spanish Jews, may be detected among these families: Tishbi, Tzemuh, Ganani. There are also distinctly Jewish Sephardi names like Toledo, Laniado, Cordoba etc. The cemeteries are full of tombstones bearing the names of Jewish and Marrano families.

It is obvious that old Jewish communities assimilated and did not remain faithful to their the ancient religion and traditions. Those whose names indicate a connection with the Jewish people are but the remnants of a large Jewish community which once existed in Colombia.

There are about 500 Ashkenazi families living in Bogotá, mainly of East European origin. There are also 200 Sephardi and 300 German Jewish families in the city. Though the Sephardi community is the smallest of the three, it is, nevertheless, the best organized. At the head of the community is Rabbi David Shaharabani who is a graduate of the Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Jerusalem, and who was ordained by the Rishon Lezion, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel.

Chief Rabbi Shaharabani has been serving in this capacity in Bogotá for the past eight years and he has worked wonders. In a short time he learnt Spanish, adapted himself to the local way of life, and became an influential public figure among the Colombia Jews. Moreover, due to his pleasant manner, his wisdom and his feeling for human interrelations, he has also gained the respect of the gentiles. He has been invited to conduct Hebrew language lessons in the most important university in Bogotá, and to lecture occasionally on Judaism. Since his arrival, Rabbi Shaharabani has worked to draw closer to Judaism those families who were on the verge of assimilation; today these families are dedicated to Zionism and educate their children in the Jewish spirit. "Marrying out", which was a popular trend before his advent, has now virtually ceased. Furthermore, mixed couples, usually where the father is Jewish and the mother Christian, are returning to a Jewish way of life and are asking the rabbi to formally convert them to Judaism.

Upon arrival, Rabbi Shaharabani established a Talmud Torah for weekend study where some seventy children, between the ages of five and

fourteen are studying religion and Hebrew. Even the community school's program of study is becoming more Jewish in content because of his efforts.

His charm and spirit of tolerance have enabled him to resolve difficult situations and cope with seemingly insoluble problems. It is no wonder, therefore, that he is acceptable to both extreme religious factions and to Hashomer Hatza'ir. The leader of this movement sees the importance of inviting the rabbi to preside over every one of their celebrations, since he realizes that in the Diaspora only religion can act as a safeguard against assimilatory tendencies.

This versatile rabbi does not confine his interests to communal affairs only, but also engages in literary pursuits. In collaboration with a friend who is a linguist, he has compiled a Spanish-Hebrew dictionary to help those who wish to learn Hebrew. He has also brought out a Passover Haggada in both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi versions with explanatory notes in Spanish; it is illustrated with scenes of the Exodus from Egypt and serves as an inspiring aid to the student.

Community Institutions

The Sephardi community has a beautiful synagogue. There is also a club where most of the community spend their leisure in a pleasant atmosphere, particularly on Sundays. It serves to counteract the social isolation felt by the local Jewish population.

The communal institutions are supported from various sources: ***Hevra Kadisha,*** an annual community levy, slaughter taxes (the ***shochet*** — ritual slaughterer — is an Ashkenazi who works under the supervision of Rabbi Shaharabani in the general abbatoir of the city), etc. The head of the community is Mr. Roger Bijoux, a young man of endearing manner and speech. The community executive consists of the heads of respected families: Abbadi, Katzin and Egozi, whose task it is to ensure an adequate budget and to administer communal affairs.

Many ***Ashkenazim,*** particularly the youth, pray regularly in the Sephardi synagogue and have asked to be accepted as fully-fledged members.

Religious instruction is given every ***Shabbat*** in the synagogue, and many who had previously worked on that day have now changed their habits and pass the Sabbath in reading, in festivities either in private homes or in the synagogue following the afternoon service.

There are two WIZO branches, one for Ashkenazi women and the other for Sephardi women. This split is characteristic of almost all Jewish communities in Latin America, where the ethnic barrier creates factionalism

and schisms. The head of the Sephardi WIZO group is Mrs. Rachel Bijoux, wife of a physician, who has done much to organize the Sephardi women to be active in social work. Both organizations have achieved much in this sphere. But their greatest success has been on behalf of the world organization. The Sephardi branch has also given aid to other Jewish philanthropic organizations.

Communities in Outlying Towns

In the three cities, Cali, Medellin and Barranquilla, there are fairly large Jewish communities. There are two important Sephardi communities in Barranquilla and Cali. A former Jerusalemite is the head of the Cali community: he is Mr. Max Alkalai who immigrated to Colombia in 1929. Here the *Sephardim* and the German Jews conduct joint prayer services on *Shabbat* eve combining elements of both traditions. The synagogue is full on that evening including the women's section.

The well-known community worker and journalist, Mr. Eliyahu Kastel, lives in Cali; he took an active part in organizing the various Sephardi federations and congresses. For six years he has been publishing the bi-monthly *El-Mancer* (The Dawn), which deals with events in Israel and in other Sephardi communities.

Five Sephardi families live in Medellin. Most of the Jewish community hails from Eastern Europe. They have established a model textile industry. In Barranquilla, which is in the tropical region on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, there are 150 Jewish families eighty of whom are Sephardi. The leader of the Sephardi community is Mr. Haim Mizrahi, an energetic young man dedicated to Jewish values. The community has a rabbi, Rabbi Joseph Haiyun, who is from Egypt. Due to his efforts, the community has a well-organized synagogue and kosher meat. There are also two clubs, one for *Sephardim* and one for *Ashkenazim*. It is said that when the *Ashkenazim* became wealthy they decided to build a more lavish club for themselves. However, some *Ashkenazim* did not wish to leave the old club and they continue to be members.

Each club has a swimming pool, sports facilities and social and entertainment programs for youth, whose parents wish to keep them away from harmful influences.

In these three cities, the communities have established Jewish schools which are attended by most of the children. The teachers are Israelis who give religious instruction and teach Hebrew.

But many children continue to attend the Christian schools and this education has left its mark on their way of life. After they leave school, they tend to break away from the community, and quite a number have married out and discarded their Judaism.

Present-day Jews in Peru

The Military Coup and the Jews

Last August (1962) I arrived in Lima, Peru. This was shortly after the military coup which followed the election victory of the leader of the Socialist Party, De la Torre. The elections took place according to the "democratic" principles characteristic of Latin America. De la Torre was considered to be the leader most admired by the masses. His struggle to gain power continued for decades. He had formerly belonged to extreme Leftist circles and had received backing from Moscow. He advocated the liberation of Latin America from the American imperialist yoke, and he endeavoured to establish a pan-American liberation movement... but each time he was on the threshold of power, he was either imprisoned or forced to flee.

In last year's elections De la Torre enjoyed the active support of Washington, and the State Department expected his rise to power which they hoped would release Peru from the threat of takeover by the disciples of Castro and Moscow. But the election results did not spell a decisive victory for De la Torre and his party. He intended, however, to form an alliance with a leader of the smaller parties, a former dictator, in order to guarantee his participation in the government. The military faction would not come to terms with this alliance and they resolved to seize power, to oust the president, and prevent the political parties from forming a government.

Presently, the military junta are in control, and as usual, they promise to hold their own style of "democratic" elections. It ought to be mentioned in favour of the junta, that the coup d'état was a bloodless one and even the political leaders who were denied access to power are free and hope to participate in the next elections and try their luck again.

It is difficult to foretell whether the military junta will keep its promises, but Jewish leaders saw the military coup as a salvation, for the government was about to fall into the clutches of Fascists-Nazis. The Fascists' announced intention was to purge Peru of the Jews if they should attain power. Thus, the Jews began to breathe more freely when the military junta seized power.

However, their future is by no means certain. Meanwhile, Peru is faced with a serious economic crisis. The first to be hurt were the Jews most of whom are in commerce and in the business market there is a total freeze. Like the Jews in the other Latin American countries, the Jews of Peru went into the building-contracting trade after the Second World War. They set up contracting firms and developed Lima, the capital city. They sank deep into financial commitments connected with the erection of the buildings; and now after the coup, the sale of apartments has come to a virtual standstill. The Jews do not know where to turn. How can they recover their money? Not only have the prices of apartments plunged, but there are simply no buyers.

In these difficult times the Jews are seized with a deep sense of regret. They talk of a way out, of escaping before it is too late. Some refer to Israel, but as a rule they are inclined towards other countries.

The Jewish Community of Lima

The Jewish community of Peru numbers 4,000, most of whom live in Lima. Like other Latin American communities, they too are divided into factions. The *Ashkenazim* comprise 80 per cent of the total Jewish population and are split into two entities: German Jews and East European. The Sephardi Jewish community constitutes the remaining 20 per cent and consists almost entirely of immigrants from Izmir, Turkey, who arrived fifty years ago.

The first Jewish community in Peru was established in 1870 by immigrants from Germany. The community building situated on the road port city of Callao is testimony to that community.

In the period between the two world wars, immigrants from Germany and Eastern Europe began arriving, and they set up the two newer communities. The three communities — the two Ashkenazi and the one Sephardi — established the Federation of Jewish Communities in Peru, and one representative from the three communities serves as chairman on a rotational basis.

It is interesting to note that in the small Jewish society of Lima you encounter the entire spectrum of affiliations: from ardent Zionists to Neturei Karta. Zionist activity is very limited. There is a a WIZO branch whose membership are mainly immigrant women from Eastern Europe.

The Sephardi Jews are organized in a charitable association and their spiritual life revolves naturally around the synagogue which regularly fills up with worshippers, particularly on Sabbath eve. The community has a rabbi. Following the establishment of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shalem was

invited to serve as the community's rabbi. He was a student at the Sha'arei Zion Yeshiva and was one of the outstanding pupils of the Rishon Lezion, Rabbi Uziel. He is a fine speaker and has a pleasant voice. He has succeeded in increasing the prestige of the Sephardi community.

Five years ago Rabbi Shalem left Lima in order to serve as rabbi in a number of communities; he finally arrived at his present post as the rabbi of the Damascene community in Mexico, Monte Sinai. Rabbi David Dayan now serves as the spiritual leader of the Separdi community in Peru. He too was a pupil of Rabbi Uziel and completed his studies at the Sha'arei Zion Yeshiva. His wife is the daughter of Rabbi David Chelouche, rabbi of the Sephardi congregation of Netanya. Both Rabbi Dayan and his wife devote most of their time to youth education. The rabbi's wife organized a children's choir. Many gentiles request the rabbi to circumcise their children since he is known to be a reliable *mohel.*

Rabbi Dayan has earned the esteem of all the Jewish communities, not just of the Sephardi Jews. He has striven to organize the ritual slaughter of meat for all three communities. Moreover, the Fresha margarine factory, which belongs to a Christian decided to obtain the kashrut authorization of Rabbi Dayan; this was then publicized in the bulletin of the Catholic Church in Lima.

The Lima Jewish school is supported by all three communities and has six hundred pupils. It comprises a primary and a secondary school, each involving five years of study.

The most acute and painful problem besetting the Jews of Peru, and of all the other Latin American countries, is that of intermarriage. Many young men wed Christian girls, and then request the rabbi to convert their wives to Judaism in order to placate their parents. But the rabbi refuses to do so and as a result the younger generation is sinking further into the alien environment.

The community leaders and the rabbi are making vigorous attempts to fight assimilation by means of Jewish and Hebrew education. But a negligible number of children actually studies Torah or acquires a knowledge of Hebrew. Some parents have begun to send their children to study in *yeshivot* in New York and in Israel.

During my visit to Rabbi Dayan I was present at an event which involved the return of a women of Jewish brith to the Jewish fold after many years of living a non-Jewish life. This is what happened.

One evening a tall, middle-aged woman burst into Rabbi Dayan's apartment and began crying. She explained that she was the daughter of an Algerian Jewish mother who had married a Christian and moved to Barcelona in Spain. There she became acquainted with a Christian physi-

cian from Peru and gave birth to his two sons. After World War II she arrived in Lima with her husband where he separated from her. Meanwhile she met Reuven Haim Lipschitz, who had been a famous Jewish singer in Berlin before the rise of the Nazis. They met in Lima and lived together for many years. In time the singer was taken ill with a serious ailment and she devotedly tended to him. Gradually she began to recall her childhood and her mother's words: "Know, my little one, that I am a Jewess and you too must remain a Jewess." These childhood memories prompted her to consider a return to Judaism and marriage as a Jewess to the seriously ill singer.

So she decided to turn to Rabbi Dayan in order to be properly converted. The rabbi made an investigation of several weeks and requested relevant papers from the woman. After it was proven beyond a doubt that she was a Jewess, he resolved, nevertheless, to convert her formally. For some time she came regularly to the rabbi's house and studied Jewish tradition, the rabbi's wife adding other knowledge necessary to a Jewish woman.

Afterwards, the rabbi arranged a conversion ceremony, and on the same day the marriage ceremony was performed. Having realized their long-awaited wish the couple was filled with joy and happiness. That is the story of Anna Sitka and the singer Reuven Lipschitz. And now only one more desire remains for them: to have the privilege to grace the soil of Israel with their presence.

(1963)

Public Activity of Sephardi Jews in Chile

The Jewish Minority in Chile

Upon arrival in Chile following my visits to the other three countries in Latin America (Panama, Colombia, Peru), I immediately felt a difference; a difference from the economic, Jewish and Zionist points of view.

In many respects Chile is superior to the rest of Latin American. The chairman of the parliament, Acobo (Yaacov) Shaulson, is a Jew of immigrant parents from Israel (his cousin Rabbi Bar-Shaul is the rabbi of Rehovot). He told me how Chile had attained independence 152 years earlier and that the national parliament had been in existence since then. Despite the crises besetting the country, a democratic regime strongly resembling that in Israel had sprung up in Chile.

Incidentally, the geo-political conditions in Chile are also strikingly similar to those of Israel: a long and narrow country with long borders presenting serious military and economic problems. Unlike its neighbours (Peru and Bolivia), Chile is a country where the white man has full control. Of a total population of eight million, only half-a-million are Indians, descendants of the original indigenous races. Moreover, the Indians live in the south and do not constitute a disturbing factor as in Peru and other countries. The white population consists of immigrants from Spain, Italy and Portugal. These have left their imprint on the way of life.

Culturally, Chile is much more advanced than its neighbours. The many universities and colleges, both public and private, play an important role in shaping the character and image of the younger generation and in preparing a leadership of calibre able to carry out the reforms demanded by the masses in their struggle for equality and for the equitable distribution of the national wealth. The strength of the democratic regime may be attributed to the cultural progress of the country. The Communist Party is legal and has freedom of action as do similar parties in the West. Unlike the rest of Latin America, the Chilean armed forces are not involved in politics. The army has only one purpose: to ensure the security of the state.

Hence, the two large minority groups enjoy freedom of action. They are the Jews and the Arabs. The situation is fairly evenly balanced between them. The two groups are more or less the same size, both numbering

about 50,000. The Jewish community largely consists of immigrants who arrived during the past fifty years from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, particularly Turkey. The Arab community comprises Catholics and Greek Orthodox from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine (Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Ramalla and Nazareth, before the establishment of the State). The two sectors make a deep impact, and have considerable influence on the economy. They are both engaged in commerce and in industry. The Arabs control four banks (one of them, Banco Continental, was founded by wealthy Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and was subsequently sold to the Arabs), while the Jewish community controls one bank.

Both the Jews and the Arabs run their own communal and educational institutions. The commercial broadcasting stations have set aside special time slots which are paid for by the Egyptian embassy and provide programs directed against Zionism. The incitement has assumed dangerous proportions over the past year and has prompted the Jews to take active measures against the monthly *Mondo Arabe*, which had been calling for a boycott against the Jews. They warned the local Arab leaders to cease their support of the inciters; these warnings were heeded.

As mentioned, the Speaker of the parliament is a Jew who was elected unanimously; the head of the Finance Committee too is a Jew, Mr. Feibosh, who has considerable influence on government financial policy. The Arabs hold key positions in the House of Representatives.

A Zionist Organization based on party loyalties is active in Chile. Since *Sephardim* do not belong to political parties, they send representatives to the leading bodies of the World Zionist Organization. A Zionist newspaper comes out in Spanish, *Mondo Judio*, which is of a high level and of great educational value.

Organization of the Jewish Community

The Chilean Jews are organized in three basic communities: *Ashkenazim*, German Jews and *Sephardim*. There are however some joint enterprises: an old age home, youth clubs and an excellent primary-secondary school.

The Maccabi Movement, set up in 1936, was not properly organized until 1955; but today it is performing wonders. It has succeeded in enrolling more than 3,000 boys and girls in its ranks and thus prevented them from drifting away from the community. Maccabi engages in educational, cultural and social activities. An *Oneg Shabbat* is held every Saturday evening in the large hall of the Maccabi club, and a large turnout of residents from Santiago, the capital of Chile, participates. There are performances with Jewish national content, sometimes with the participation of well-known artists who are associated with city or government bands. There are thirty-five members in the Maccabi theatre. There are also a folklore

group, a choir and a dance group. In the summer, members of Maccabi leave for camps on the coast. Groups also make ski trips to the high mountains along the Argentine border. Maccabi also has about 300 members who are the offspring of mixed marriages, usually where the mother is Christian. These mothers wish to remain within the Jewish community and they therefore send their children to Maccabi so that they may be in a Jewish-Zionist atmosphere. Groups of girls and boys travel to Israel every summer to participate in courses sponsored by the WZO (World Zionist Organization) Youth and Hechalutz Department.

One of the more effective means of counteracting the trend to assimilation is the Istadio Israelita (sports center), where the youth may spend their leisure and participate in sports, particularly on Sundays. Here they have the opportunity of meeting one another. Weddings and barmitzvahs are also held here.

The Sephardi Community

Though the *Sephardim* constitute a separate entity of the Jewish community, the youth find their way to the Maccabi Movement, and the adults are often active in the leadership of the organization.

Nonetheless, the community leaders are concerned over the inadequate organization and uncoordinated communal activity. The Sephardi community is well-to-do, but has no spiritual leader nor cultural center as do the German Jewish and Ashkenazi communities. The community would like to have an Orthodox rabbi with progressive views who would be able to familiarize the young people with their traditions from Turkey and draw them close to Judaism. But thus far a suitable leader has not been found.

At the beginning of last summer, the Sephardi leaders in Santiago and other towns held a conference where they set up the Sephardi Federation which encompasses all the Sephardi communities in Chile. Its aim is to strengthen communal activity among the Sephardi Jews. Dr. Henrik Alkalai, an enthusiastic Zionist who came to Chile from Yugoslavia, is the head of the Federation. He is making an earnest attempt to fortify the Sephardi institutions and increase activity among the youth.

Among the Sephardi communal workers, I found many who were deeply attached to Zion and were preparing for their *aliyah* and settlement in Israel. Many of them had already visited Israel and laid the foundations for their ultimate move here.

Mrs. Hannah Albala de Levy holds an important position among the community workers and is one of the foremost Jewish spokeswomen. She is a journalist who writes for the largest circulation newspapers in Santiago on the problems of the woman and her social status. She understands

thoroughly the problems of the different ethnic groups in Israel. In the days of Wadi Salib (a poor quarter of Haifa in Israel), she demanded that the Zionist Organization in the Diaspora make efforts to help eliminate prejudice and to bridge the gap between *Ashkenazim* and the Eastern Jews.

Mrs. Albala de Levy advocates the consolidation of the Sephardi community in the Diaspora and in Israel in order to be able to solve the grave problems confronting our community. Before the public and at conferences she has severely criticized the Zionist leaders and the World Jewish Congress for their lack of interest in strengthening the Sephardi institutions.

Mrs. de Levy's husband, Roberto, also took part in many Jewish conferences after the Second World War with the purpose of founding a renewed Sephardi Federation. He asserts that the failure of the Sephardi Federation resulted from the involvement of non-Sephardi elements not interested in organizing the Sephardi communities either in the Diaspora or in Israel.

The leaders of the Federation in Chile supported the convening of a new congress of Sephardi communities from Israel and the Diaspora in order to revamp the Federation and transfer its headquarters to Jerusalem. They proposed the initiation of a number of centers in Paris (since France is one of the largest centers of Eastern Jewish immigrants), in New York (to arouse American Jewry to the dangers of impoverishment of a branch of the Jewish people, and of another in the Islamic Diaspora), and in Buenos Aires where more than 40,000 Jews hailing from the Islamic countries and the Balkans now live. The center in Buenos Aires would serve as the organizational center for Sephardi communites in Latin America. But the implementation of this plan is dependent upon the aid the Zionist Organization is willing to offer the Federation executive, or more importantly, upon whether the Zionist and Jewish Agency leaders will cease undermining the relations between the Federation executive in London and the Federation in Israel. Indeed, the Sephardi leaders in the Diaspora have recently gauged fully the consequences of such action, and it can only be hoped that they will do whatever is necessary to make the Federation an active and vital organization before the Third Sephardi Congress.

(1963)

Sephardi Communities in Argentina

The Sephardi Jewish community of Argentina is the largest in Latin America. According to estimates, this community numbers about 60,000 and comprises about ten per cent of the total number of Jews in the country. The majority of Sephardi Jews lives in the capital, Buenos Aires. The Eastern-Sephardi Jews are divided up into four organizations of immigrants from Middle Eastern cities and countries. The two most important organizations are those of Jews from Aleppo and Damascus. The third is of former Moroccans, while the fourth is of Jews from the Balkans and Turkey.

The community of Moroccan Jews was founded in 1891 and it represents all the former Moroccan Jews living in Buenos Aires. It maintains contact with Moroccan Jewish communities in other cities in Argentina.

The Aleppo and Damascus communities were founded at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The difficult conditions in Syria and Lebanon and in all the countries of the Ottoman Empire compelled many Jews to migrate across the ocean in search of better economic prospects. Most emigrants were young. The migration increased following the revolutin of the Young Turks in 1908, when the youth wished to avoid being drafted into the Turkish army.

Young people from Jerusalem who were part of this mass migration during the 'twenties headed for Buenos Aires, where they hoped to make their fortunes and then return to Israel to help in the upbuilding of the homeland. The Jerusalem youth, whose way of life was similar to that of the Syrian Jews, allied themselves with the communities from Aleppo and Damascus, and strengthened the attachment of the latter to Eretz Yisrael. These two communities established charitable and educational institutions and extended aid to their brethren in Syria and in Eretz Yisrael.

The community of Balkan and Turkish Jewry consists of immigrants from diverse countries, who arrived in Argentina as a result of the wars between Turkey and the Balkan peoples between 1912 and 1914. The most prominent were the immigrants from Izmir. They established the Sephardi organization and were strictly religiously observant. In 1929, the leaders of the Izmir community gathered around them all Ladino-

speaking people. The cemetery set up by the Izmir Jews served as a unifying force of all the different Balkan Jews.

An attempt was made in 1927 to establish a general rabbinic authority for the Ladino-speakers led by Rabbi Shabtai Jain, who was an emissary of the World Confederation of Sephardi Jews. He had served for years as rabbi of the Munster (Yugoslavia) community. Upon arrival he immediately made contact with the Ladino-speaking community and hoped to instill in them a fervent religious spirit and national feelings. In 1928, Rabbi Jain began to organize the religious life of the Sephardi communities not allied with the Aleppo and Damascene Jews. In addition to Balkan Jews, Moroccan Jews and Jerusalemites also took part in the supreme religious council.

But Rabbi Jain did not remain for long as the spiritual leader because a dispute between him and his community in 1931 led to his dismissal. He began to wander among the various Jewish communities of the world but unfortunately was not successful in securing another post.

The Sephardi-Eastern immigrants arrived in Argentina almost destitute. They began working as pedlars, loading their wares on their shoulders and going from village to village to peddle their materials and haberdashery. However, though at first they were unable to get credit for the purchase of their wares, they quickly became store and factory owners; later they set up large factories for the production of fabrics and some made vast fortunes.

The Aleppo Jews began to consolidate their institutions with the help of the talented Rabbi Shaul Sathon Sabah. He headed the Aleppo community between 1912 and 1930 and established a rabbinical court, a *Talmud Torah* in the spirit of pious Judaism and a kosher butcher shop. The community also administered the *Hesed Shel Emet Hevra Kadisha* (burial society).

The Damascene Jews established a separate organizational framework; in 1920 they founded the *Or Torah* community and had their own burial society — *Bnei Emet.*

After the death of Rabbi Shaul Sathon in 1930, the Aleppo community was without a rabbi for some years and the rabbinical court ceased to function. In 1938 Rabbi Yosef Hai Panizel arrived in Buenos Aires from Jerusalem and served as spiritual leader until his death in 1946. He was replaced by Rabbi Amram Blum, who arrived in 1947. This was a rare instance of an Ashkenazi rabbi assuming the leadership of an Eastern community. The lack of Sephardi rabbis and other leaders has led to many Sephardi communities, particularly in the United States, being administered by Ashkenazim; this has become more widespread since the reorganization of many Sephardi communities as Conservative ones.

The establishment of Israel did much to revive and invigorate the Sephardi communities. The ties between the community leaders and Israel have grown stronger. They began visiting Israel frequently and have helped increase the funds contributed by their respective communities.

Rabbi I. Shehebar, who was appointed rabbi of the Aleppo community in 1956 following his arrival from Aleppo, did much to consolidate the community institutions, particularly the *Talmudei Torah.* He proposed converting the community *Beth Din* into the court of all the Sephardi communities by appointing rabbis from other communities to sit on the court with himself as its head.

In 1958 Rabbi Angel, who had previously served as rabbi of the Jewish community in Alexandria, was appointed rabbi of the community of Jews from the Balkans and of the other Ladino-speaking Jews. He did much to strengthen the religious institutions of the community.

Social Clubs

The Sephardi organizations established a number of clubs in Buenos Aires and other Argentinian towns for cultural and sports activities, to combat the drift away from Judaism. This was possible because of the improved economic situation of the communities. There were twelve Sephardi clubs in Buenos Aires in 1963.

Welfare funds were set up within the clubs. The club women have especially distinguished themselves in charitable causes, and they organize fund-raising events for these purposes. The poor are helped with clothing and food. Young orphan couples are assisted to marry and establish themselves.

Aleppo Community Leaders initiate Revival of the World Sephardi Federation

Aleppo community leaders in Buenos Aires played an important role in organizing the World Sephardi Congress convened in Paris in 1951. In the winter of 1947, the president of the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem, Mr. Elie Eliachar, went on a mission to Argentina on behalf of the Keren Hayesod. At the time, Jerusalem was under siege and in danger of being cut off from the rest of the country. Mr. Eliachar, together with Jerusalemites, immigrants to Buenos Aires in the 1920's, persuaded these leaders to help initiate renewed activity in the Sephardi Federation which had been established in 1925. A convention of community leaders from Argentina and Uruguay was held, where it was decided to form a committee which would prepare a World Sephardi Congress. The purpose of the renewed Federation was to prepare all

Sephardi communities to assist the new State of Israel, and the Sephardi and Eastern communities living in unfortunate circumstances and those who were most likely to make *aliyah* to the fledgling state.

Subsequently, delegations of the Balkan and Aleppo communities participated in all the congresses and conferences of the Federation, and they now play an active role in all its activities.

In 1972, a conference of Sephardi Zionist organizations was convened in Lima, Peru through the efforts of the Sephardi Federation in Israel, with the assistance of the Federation of Sephardi Communities in Latin America (FESELA) which is part of the World Sephardi Federation. The delegates of the Latin American organization are members of the presidium of the Federation, as well as of its various committees.

In the days of the British Mandate, emissaries of the Keren Hayesod and Keren Hakayemet would visit the Sephardi communities of Argentina to promote fund-raising. Among these was the researcher into the history of the *aliyah* of Eastern Jewry, Moshe David Gaon, who spent several years in Buenos Aires and did much to strengthen the Jewish schools, and Yehuda Burla, the writer.

After the inception of the State, Yosef and Miriam Meyuhas came as emissaries to the Balkin Jewish community. They belonged to the Hashomer Hatza'ir Movement and worked with the youth in order to draw them to Zionism. At their initiative youth groups were brought to Israel to participate in seminars about the country and its problems.

Since the establishment of the World Sephardi Federation and the Department for Sephardi Communities of the World Zionist Organization, there has been an expansion of Zionist activity among the Sephardi communities. Youth groups from all the communities come every year to Israel to participate in seminars.

But as the leadership of the Sephardi communities passes more and more into the hands of the younger generation, there is a break away from the special aid programs formerly sponsored by the communities on behalf of their brethren in Israel. This is especially evident in the Aleppo community. Up to the seventies, the leaders used to provide various forms of assistance to the weaker strata of Israel society. A special loan fund was set up to help the needy — Keren Argentina, which operated as part of an *aliyah* fund set up in Israel by Bulgarian olim.

But the new generation, which had taken over the leadership of the Aleppo community expressed its opposition to assistance programs. They even acceded to the pleas of the Keren Hayesod and stopped sending 25% of the local funds collected towards the above special social aid programs or to Sephardi cultural institutions in Israel.

The discontinuation of these contributions does not obviously exempt the community from assisting institutions and *yeshivot* in Israel. Dozens of rabbi-emissaries (*meshulachim*) visit Argentina each year and diligently seek out the communities to enlist their support of *yeshivot* and other institutions.

In 1981 the presidium of the Federation, under the leadership of Nessim Gaon, demanded the organization of separate drives in all the Sephardi communities. This was planned to enlist funds for activities of the Federation on behalf of the weaker strata of Israel society.

The Teubal Family in Buenos Aires

A.

There are very few public personalities and figures from among the Sephardi and Eastern Jews who have gained as much celebrity and fame as have the Teubal brothers of Buenos Aires. They have earned prestige and repute as men of charity and of action. Their activities extend to many countries of the world.

The Teubal family originated from Aleppo. The Aleppo Jewish community, which lived for generations in a filthy ghetto surrounded by Moslem fanatics, sought release from its unfortunate circumstances in lands across the sea. Many times over the past hundred years, waves of Jewish immigrants have abandoned their homes to seek safer shores. The first waves from Aleppo and other Syrian and Lebanese communities flooded the American continent in the days when there were neither borders nor boundaries to restrict the movement of peoples. They would pack up their personal belongings and without passport or visa take to the road. These migrants established "colonies" in Europe, North America, South America and even in the Far East.

They scattered all over the globe but retained one great virtue: wherever they settled — in Milan, Manchester, New York or Buenos Aires — they retained their old connections, and thus were able to established commercial networks, fincancial institutions and industrial enterprises that straddled the entire globe. They traded among themselves. In time they accumulated great wealth and became veritable millionaires. It has been estimated by informed sources that the total number of millionaires of Aleppo Jewish ancestry throughout the world is close to forty. These Jews were extremely resourceful. When an Aleppo Jew would hear of a country with good economic prospects, he would pack his bags and make his way there with the utmost despatch. Once there, though devoid of means, he would adapt to local conditions and quickly establish himself.

The Teubal brothers made the long journey from Aleppo to Buenos Aires. Part of the family wandered between New York, Buenos Aires, Manchester and Italy, while another part immediately settled and made their home in Buenos Aires. There were four brothers: the eldest, Ezra Teubal, the first of the emigrants and head of the family, enhanced the family name.

His noble acts and great talents in the field of finance, as well as his generosity and philanthropy won him a reputation as a modern Abarbanel.

The next in age was the late Nessim Teubal, a man of vigour and spirit. He lived in Manchester for many years and recorded the family history in a book written in the Castilian language, called *El Immigrants*. He describes his life including the events connected with the Teubal family after Ezra left them in Aleppo and began his wanderings. Nessim Teubal's book is one of the rare books in the literature of Eastern Jewry that depicts the trials and tribulations of impoverished Jews in the ghettos of Middle Eastern lands. These people were subjected for generations to the whims of tyrannical rulers, and when they moved to the free world they soon revealed their commercial talents and were among the founders of modern industry in Latin American countries.

The third member of the clan is Elias Teubal. He is a man of lofty spirit and refinement who became a central figure in Sephardi community activity throughout the world.

The youngest of the four brothers is Moshe. He is different from his three brothers in that he has dedicated his energies cntirely to his business dealings.

B.

Since Ezra Teubal's arrival in Buenos Aires over sixty years ago, he has become the axis around which the life of the whole family revolves, in both the practical and the charitable spheres. He too left Aleppo without any means. Today he is one of the wealthiest of the world's Eastern Jews.

This former pupil of the Alliance school, who knew very little about the ways and customs of the world, became one of the leading figures in Argentina's economy. As soon as he had established himself in Buenos Aires, he took steps to secure the future of his family. And so they began to arrive in Argentina, brother after brother, until the entire family, including the aged parents, were there. At first they were peddlers hawking their wares from town to town; but in time they became the key founders of the textile industry in Argentina. The success of the Teubal brothers, as Nessim stresses in his book *Meruah Haemun*, lay in the cooperation between the four brothers, who always helped one another. Ezra was the initiator of the enterprise, Nessim the executor, Elias the marketer, and Moshe, an aid to them all. When fortune smiles upon one brother, the others rejoice with him; should one falter, the other three rush to his aid and do their utmost to extricate him from his trouble and put him back on his feet.

But the brothers gained eminence principally as a result of their communal activities. The immigrants from the Eastern countries were poor and disadvantaged, materially and spiritually. The Teubal brothers soon realized that without synagogues, Jewish schools and charitable institutions, these new communities were in danger of extinction. And though there is still dissension and strife among the Eastern communities, their *Talmudei Torah*, synagogues and *yeshivot* serve as a source of inspiration and guidance to them.

The influence of the Teubal brothers can be felt in every successful economic undertaking and community project. They are involved in activities on behalf of all the communal institutions of both the Eastern and Ashkenazi Jews.

Ezra, who is approaching his nineties, is still fully aware of the need to provide for the spiritual future of the youth, and it is therefore no wonder that he was the first contributor to the Beth Harashal Project — the *yeshiva* in Jerusalem which prepares rabbis and spiritual leaders for the Sephardi communities in Israel and abroad. And it is he who initiated a large educational center in Buenos Aires.

As for Elias Teubal - noble and refined - despite his failing health, he is dedicated wholly to the United Jewish Appeal. He and his active friend, Mr. Jack Mizrahi, with their crew of young community workers, established a roof organization of Eastern Jews in support of the UJA. But they were aware that this activity could not succeed fully if funds were also not allocated for Sephardi educational and religious institutions in Israel. The Teubal family, Asher Alacid, Mauricio Alacid, the Kabili family, the Abulafia family and the Levy family from Hebron (all now living in Buenos Aires) have made sure that a portion of the above funds goes towards aiding the communities of the Eastern Diaspora and Eretz Yisrael. Due to their support there were several Sephardi settlements prior to the inception of the State: the renewed Kfar Hittin, Kfar Oria, Beit Halevy and other agricultural settlements. After the establishment of the state, Keren Argentina provided loans to *olim* from the Eastern countries and the Balkans.

The Maccabi movement too and all the other youth movements, which made a deep impact upon the younger generation, have received support from the Teubal family, particularly Nessim Teubal, who died while still vigorously involved in a number of community activities.

It is axiomatic in the Teubal family that communal activity is an integral part of their practical lives. They divide their time between business and community activities, the two complementing one another.

C.

The bond of the Teubal brothers with Zion and Israel is strong and unseverable. The love of Zion which they imbibed as children from the prayer books, the Torah and their father's house has led them to maintain a Zionist atmosphere in their homes and to educate their children to a love of Eretz Yisrael and the aspiration towards the rebirth of the Jewish people in its homeland.

The fathers laid strong foundations in Israel. They gave and invested a part of their capital in various projects out of concern for their future, and primarily that of their children. And we pray that the day is not for off when their children will come to settle here. They devote themselves fully to work on behalf to Zion and rebuilding the land; and they are readying themselves for the day of return.

The Sephardi Jewish element, which is so lacking in men of community spirit and practical acumen, undoubtedly looks to the Teubal brothers for inspiration. If those with talent would emulate the brothers Ezra, Elias and the late Nessim, the condition of the Eastern Jews would be far improved. But without a doubt the seeds of their communal activity, which they have sown in the Diaspora and in Israel, are bound to yield fruit and serve as a firm basis for the Sephardi institutions in the future. The name of the Teubal family will be inscribed in the annals of the Eastern Jewish communities as the perpetuators of the tradition whose roots were in the golden era of our people in Spain.

A Meeting With Arab Journalists in Buenos Aires

Arab Culture in Buenos Aires

Sounds of Arab song emerged from the alleyways. Um-Kultum sang her melodies and Abd El-Wahab gave her support. These are the stars of Arabic music who have won the hearts of both young and old. These artistes once attracted huge mixed audiences when they appeared upon the stages of Cairo and Alexandria. But they became *persona non grata* in Egypt since Gamal Abdel Nasser does not like idols other than himself.

As a result, the stars of Arab song have been forced to flee to Europe, just like the pre-revolutionary political activists. In Buenos Aires, however, the recordings of Um-Kultum and Abd El-Wahab continue to win the hearts of old and young alike. Many of the Arab youth have become assimilated into the local culture and have lost much of their Arab identity, and yet they continue to enjoy Arab songs.

But it is not just these singers who lend character to the alleyways which serve as the commercial center for immigrants of Syrian and Lebanese extraction in Buenos Aires. The odour of roasted meat and other foods became stronger as we wound our way deeper into the littered lanes. The sides were lined with a hodgepodge of stalls, haberdasheries, grocery stores and restaurants. And the signs above the openings bore the names of Arab foods and cities.

In these alleys, reminiscent of lanes in any Eastern land, are the offices of various daily Arab language papers. Perhaps "newspaper" is not the proper term for these publications, which are little more than scanty pamphlets whose chief purpose is to provide a living for their publishers. There is, for example, the weekly *A-Salem* which was founded by Camille Chamoun's uncle. Camille Chamoun was the president of Lebanon until the last revolution in 1958, when he was forced to resign under the pressure of Nasser's agents. The weekly was founded sixty years ago and today it is but a pathetic publication which comes out under the auspices of the original founder's son, whose name is also Camille Chamoun. Then there is also the so-called "daily" newspaper, the Syrian-Lebanese Paper, which appears five times a week (not on Saturdays or Sundays) half in Arabic and half in Spanish.

There is also the Arabic Hour on one of the radio stations of Buenos Aires, in which slander and hate against Zionism are aired. But the words

of incitement are uttered in Spanish except on those few occasions when the ambassador of some Arab state decides to address the immigrant-listeners in Arabic. The announcer simultaneously translates the message into Spanish so as to convey the meaning to those who have forgotten Arabic.

Dr. Yitzhak Shamosh (instructor in Arabic literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem) and I decided upon a visit to the publishing offices of the Arabic papers immediately after we met. Dr. Shamosh was touring Latin America with the purpose of collecting material for his book on the topic of Arabic literature in Latin America and the United States of America. This modern literature, which flourished until the' thirties, had an influence not just upon the Arabic literatures in America, but even left its mark upon the modern literature of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. Due to the Arabic literature of Latin America, the literatures of Syria, Lebanon and Egypt were able to free themselves from the rhetoric and stagnation which had characterized them for generations.

The meetings with the newspaper editors were planned so that we could gain a close-up view of the situation of the Arab immigrants, particularly the Lebanese, and to understand their role as the guardians of the popular Arabic press in these countries.

Visit to A-Salem

We first went to *A-Salem*, whose editor, as stated, is Camille Chamoun. We entered a vast room piled high with old newspapers; a thick layer of dust covered the tables. Even the pictures on the walls, of the founder and other Arab personalities from different periods, were coated with a thick layer of dust. We entered slowly and looked for someone who might receive us.A middle-aged man appeared. We greeted him and stated our purpose, which was to converse with him regarding the problems of Arabic literature and the press. We presented ourselves as natives of Al-Kuds, Jerusalem, the holy city. Camille Chamoun began assiduously wiping and removing the dust from the table and the chairs and he appeared to be wondering to himself who, in fact, these uninvited guests might be.

When we finally seated ourselves around the table we were obliged to introduce ourselves once again. Dr. Shamosh once more stated that he was an instructor in modern Arabic literature at the Hebrew University, while I solemnly proclaimed myself to be a Hebrew journalist interested in the problems of the Middle East. Then it seemed that a thunderclap resounded in the heavens. Camille Chamoun's face turned very pale; yet he managed to brace himself and begin talking. Before us lay an issue of the weekly in which had appeared an article that had been copied from

the Egyptian paper, *Al-Jumhuria*, the organ of expression employed by Nasser, in which the writer of the article strongly attacked the Saudi king.

— Is *A-Salem* pro-Nasser? — we asked the editor.
— Never! — Camille Chamoun responded. Could the Chamoun family be loyal to Nasser, the man who had destroyed the stability of Lebanon and who had sown strife among brothers who had lived in harmony for generations?

— And yet despite that, you have printed the words of Nasser's attack against the Saudi king? — I asked again.

— We are a free newspaper and we publish any article which contains words of truth... — he replied simply, and he did not see any contradiction between his anti-Nasser position and his support of Nasser.

But the truth, as it is known to everyone in Buenos Aires, is that *A-Salem* like the rest of the Arabic papers in Argentina, receives support on a continous basis from the Egyptian embassy, and only because of this support is it able to appear at all. The paper does not have any influence whatsoever, but the editor is interested in promoting its appearance in order to present himself as the guardian of the last embers of Arabic press and literature on the continent.

Camille Chamoun began to display signs of impatience, and we were not interested in pressing him further. We asked him for the address of *"Syria and Lebanon"* and he willingly acceded to our request; the important thing was to be rid of us.

Visit to "Syria and Lebanon"

The atmosphere and reception at *Syria and Lebanon* was quite different. Upon entering we were welcomed by a graceful young woman who is in fact the editor of the Arabic section of the paper. She listened attentively to our request, but then expressed her regret that the owner of the paper and its chief editor, Amin Constantin, was not present. And she said that she preferred to conduct a discussion together with him. It was not entirely clear to us if this girl, who had recently arrived in Buenos Aires from Syria, was quite aware of who we were. But she promised that if we would come back the next day, the editor would be pleased to receive us. And in fact, the next day, when we came for the interview, Amin Constantin received us happily. He was a tall man, hard of hearing, who used a hearing aid. He brought us into the editorial room with Eastern cordiality; an orderly and clean compartment. On the walls were pictures of the heroes of Arab culture and history, and the face of Gamal Abdel Nasser was prominent among them. He seated the girl beside us and we opened the conversation.

We introduced ourselves to him, our occupations and identities. It was a wonder to see that Amin Constantin did not show even the least discomforture or displeasure. On the contrary, he was apparently most interested in a conversation with us. Not only was he the initiator, but he filled most of the hour with his own talk. He expressed his amazement that the Jews were able to revive the Hebrew tongue in Israel; it was this language which was the cement binding together the immigrants arriving from all corners of the earth. But you are reviving the Hebrew language not only in Israel; in the Diaspora too I encounter Jews, particularly young ones, who are learning Hebrew. On the other hand, Arab immigrants to other countries are forgetting their language. Look, the paper *"Syria and Lebanon"* appears today half in Arabic and half in Spanish in order to enable the younger generation to read it and know what is happening in the Arab countries. Amin Constantin portends a gloomy future, and does not believe that he will be able to carry on much longer. The number of subscribers is decreasing from year to year, and with every old person who passes away he loses one more dedicated reader.

Amin Constantin questioned us regarding the situation of the Arab minority and the study of Arabic in Israel. When he heard what we had to say he assumed an expression of wonderment: Were the minority group indeed permitted to learn and teach Arabic? And he was even more amazed when we told him that Arabic was taught in secondary schools and in the universities. When we added that Arabic was an official language of Israel he reacted as if he were listening to a tale out of "A Thousand and One Nights." Really? Either Amin Constantin who is under the influence of inciters did not know of such things or he simply pretended ignorance.

In the course of the conversations, Constantin lavishly praised the Lebanese people and reiterated that Lebanon would stand strong and guard its independence. He did not want to accept our assertion that the Moslems in Syria, and in particular Nasser, do not want a free and independent Lebanon. These elements are employing every possible means to undermine the existence of the state. But Constantin, a Christian-Lebanese, is sure that the Lebanese people is intelligent, and that the Moslems and the Christians living side-by-side will know how to defend the independence of their homeland. In his opinion, there is no obvious contradiction between Lebanon as an independent entity and the ideology of Arab nationalism which sees borders and divisions between Arab states as the fruit of Western imperialism during the last century.

Just as we were about to leave, he asked a question in a rather offhand way: "Tell me please, gentlemen, is there any basis to the claim that you Zionists are stimulating unrest in Latin America and doing your best to

give it an anti-Semitic colouring in order to encourage the Jews to emigrate to Israel?"

Amin Constantin promised to publish a notice in his paper regarding our visit; he would mention the conversation which took place between us and would relate what we had said, etc. etc.. But nothing ever appeared. It seems that he is frightened of adverse reaction. For after all his publication is supported through Nasser's contributions and how could he possibly write something about the visit of Zionists to his offices?

(1963)

A Lebanese Singer in *Beth Ha'am* "Eliezer Ben Yehuda" in Buenos Aires

Jews and Arabs in Buenos Aires

The community center named after Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the reviver of the Hebrew tongue in Eretz Yisrael, serves as a center for cultural activity for Eastern Jews in one of the important Aleppo Jewish quarters in Buenos Aires. Young boys and girls of different ages gather here and spend their time in cultural pursuits, Hebrew language studies and in listening to lectures on Jewish social and national problems. The large hall in the *"Beth Ha'am"* is used for sports activites and for parties and family celebrations. Balls and artistic performances are occasionally organized there in order to raise funds for the poorer sections of society.

At the forefront of youth and welfare activities are young men and women who received a Jewish training and education, and who wish to make their personal contribution to Israeli projects.

These young organizers, under the dynamic leadership of Nijim Jakar (secretary of the United Israel Appeal of the Eastern and Sephardi Jews in Argentina) are energetic in many other fields. They long for activity on a much wider scale and dream of preparing youth and adult groups towards *aliyah*. They are standing firm and are forming "defence" groups able to withstand the Nazi and fascist hooligans who attempt to attack the Jews from time to time. They are also working for better relations between the Jews and the Arabs.

They believe that Latin America, with its two-and-a-one-half million Arabs (mostly Christians from Lebanon) and its one million Jews, can serve as the center for conciliation between Arab and Jew, and eventually between the State of Israel and its Arab neighbours. They have many plans for setting up information offices directed towards Arab immigrants in America; they are also considering the use of special broadcasting stations to disseminate information on the position of Israel and its role in promoting the development of the Middle East and the Arab countries.

Of course, for the present such plans are on paper only. But the young Aleppo and Damascus Jews are indeed making contact with Israeli Embassy people in Buenos Aires and are helping them to find their way and gain a knowledge of the environment. Yet the distance between this

and the actual implementation of their plans is great. They are, however, unrelenting in their determination and persistent in their schemes. They cultivate friendly relations with Arab immigrants, establish contact with writers, journalists and particularly artistes and singers who come on a regular basis to the Americas. Strange as it may seem, they are doing more for the Arab artistes than the Arabs themselves. A band of performing artistes from Syria or Lebanon is more likely to turn to these Jews for aid in arranging appearances and in finding an Eastern audience both Arab and Jewish, than to the Arabs. And the artistes have great success and leave with full pockets thanks to the help of the directors of the Eastern Jewish clubs, "Oriente" and "*Beit Ha'am* Eliezer Ben Yehuda".

Though it is doubtful whether these singers have the power to bring peace between Israel and its neighbours, their appearances at parties and celebrations organized by young Jewish people contribute greatly to warmer relations between Arabs and Jews in Argentina. Despite the constant incitement by extreme Arab circles which cooperate with the Nazis and the fascists against the Jews, a large portion of the Arab immigrants do not pay any attention to the inciters and they go so far as to display their disenchantment by appearing at parties arranged by the Jews and taking active part in them.

A Joint Jewish-Arab Affair

During my visit to Argentina last September, I attended one of the balls which was held at "Beth Ha'am Eliezer Ben Yehuda" where I was able to view at close range the activity of these young people in promoting good relations between immigrants from the two ethnic groups. Dr. Yitzhak Shamosh and I were invited. He had come to Buenos Aires on behalf of secondary and higher education for the Eastern Jewish community. We witnessed the educational and cultural activity of these young people though, regretfully, they received no support or guidance from those bodies which could reap the maximum benefit from these efforts.

Arab and Jewish singers performed at the party which was attended by the cream of Eastern Jewry and Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. Among those who were invited and attended were the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs of the Lebanese Embassy in Buenos Aires, journalists and intellectuals from Syria and Lebanon, and a large mixed audience. Only an Israel representative was missing. In response to my question "why?" the organizers answered: "The Israel Embassy does show interest in our educational and cultural activities but does not appear at affairs of this sort." The heroine of the evening was "Putat Lubanan" (the Lebanese girl), a singer of repute in Lebanon and in Syria, who had gone on a tour with her lover in the Latin American countries in order to win the title of "star of Arabic singing."

We sat down at tables arranged in the Oriental style with piquant delicacies and a variety of salads, *"pitot"* which were delicate and warm and a selection of drinks. The women were dressed in the finest blend of East and West and the men were attired according to the latest fashion.

Mr. Jakar opened the evening in the name of the organizing committee and outlined the purposes to which the community center was dedicated. "This gathering is an expression of the desire for cordial relations between the members of the two ethnic groups", said Mr. Jakar. "And we are pleased that many of our Arab friends responded to the invitation and came to spend the evening together with us Jews in listening to the songs of Arab and Jewish singers."

The speaker did not conceal from the gathering that the income from the affair was earmarked for Zionist education among the Jewish youth. The candour displayed by the dynamic young man yielded surprising results.

An orchestra comprising oriental instruments appeared on the stage. Most of the musicians were from Lebanon with a few Eastern Jews among them. In the center of the stage stood Putat Lubnan, with the Lebanese Jewish singer Zaitoni, on her right. The musician who played the Oud was Muhsin Muawud, a Lebanese Christian.

Putat Lubnan, started singing together with Zaitoni, accompanied by the orchestra. She had a very pleasant voice. Some of the songs were modern ones which she had brought with her from home, while others were old favourites. Soon the audience began to warm to the performance and joined in. In a short while, cheers of encouragement and praise swept through the crowded room. Between one part of the entertainment and the next, fund-raising activities were conducted. Contributions began to pour in from the audience; some individuals contributed enought for two, or three people. Surprisingly, the Arab guests were conspicuous among the contributors. They gave generously and willingly in honour of the performers and also or behalf of the important causes which were the object of the affair.

To the right of the attaché for cultural affairs of the Lebanese Embassy (who was a woman) sat a well-known and experienced singer, the daughter of Lebanese immigrants, who was born in Argentina. Her name was Wuhida. She happily watched the singers on the stage and no doubt thought wistfully to herself: There was a time when I also appeared upon the stage and was the object of applause and cheers... and suddenly... Zaitoni turned to Wuhida and asked her to come up on the stage and grace the hall with some of her own songs... songs from her youth which were well known to all. Though she was in her fifties, Wuhida was still good looking and of erect and proud bearing. She went up on the stage and commenced to sing. Only now did the audience sense the real joy of the evening. Being a singer of long experience she knew how to arouse the

audience. They all joined in the singing enthusiastically. She sang popular songs of yesteryear.

Wuhida earned the prolonged applause and "bravos" of the audience which would not let her go. "More, more!" they cried, and the applause was unending. It was only after Jakar mounted the stage and explained to the assembly that the guest singer needed a rest, for she was not as young as she used to be... only them then did they quieten down.

We were especially delighted, as guests from Israel, when the song *"Chov Yisrael,"* a song of love and admiration for Israel was sung. Zaitoni sang a verse and the audience repeated it. The entire audience without exception, including the Arab guests, sang along and clapped. This too was an expression of the joy which filled the hearts of the audience that night. At the end of the song, fund-raising activities were resumed, and once again the Lebanese and the Syrians were among the donors.

Arab Artistes for Peace with Israel

The singing of Putat Lubnan, Zaitoni and their friends went on for many more hours, until the approach of dawn, when they stopped. The audience began to disperse. The organizers of the evening introduced us, the Israelis, to the artistes. I turned to Putat Lubnan and the oud player with the question: "Would you be willing to visit Israel if you were invited?" — "Certainly" — answered Putat Lubnan enthusiastically... while the musician went further and said: "We are praying for the day... we are artistes. Literary people and musicians can make a considerable contribution to better relations between Arabs and Jews... The tragedy is that the rudder is in the hands of the politicians... We will happily come to Israel if we are invited."

Putat Lubnan and Muawud (the oud player) immediately gave me publicity pictures for the Israeli press with a warm dedication appended... We parted warmly and expressed the hope that the day was not far off when we would meet in Israel...

We left for the hotel. It was already dawn outside. We had been so joyous the whole night that we had not felt the passing hours. I sank deep in thought over the night that had passed, and I asked myself: Why can't we attempt to follow this path?... To bring the artistes closer to us... Perhaps they can be the doves of peace between our neighbours and ourselves. In any event, it is the obligation of the Israel Embassy people to display a greater awareness of the activities of the young Aleppo Jews in Buenos Aires. The question must be asked: Why was the Israel representative for cultural affairs absent from the event at Beit Ha'am Eliezer Ben Yehuda at which Jewish and Lebanese artistes performed together... Is this not just standing aloof from the surroundings in which they are living?

(1963)

SECTION IV
TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS — NORTH AMERICA

Sephardic Jewish Communities in the U.S.A.

It is difficult to estimate exactly how many Sephardi and Eastern Jews are at present living in the United States. Contrary to what has been published and from an investigation which I myself conducted during a several months tour of the Sephardi communities along the east and west coasts, I concluded that the number is over 150,000.

Since the independence of the Middle Eastern Islamic countries, waves of immigrants headed for the United States reaching tens of thousands. New communities of Turkish, Balkan, Iraqi, Egyptian and other North African Jews have been established. The Syrian Jewish community, which prior to World War I was already considered an important factor in New York Jewish life, is now thought to be the largest Sephardi community, numbering about 20,000.

At the beginning of 1971, a book was published in the U.S.A. entitled *The Grandees* by the Christian writer, Steven Birmingham. It deals with the twenty-four Spanish-Portuguese families who arrived in New York in 1654 and laid the foundations of the largest Jewish community in the world, which today numbers six million. The writer depicts these families as aristocratic and of high intellectual attainment, who played an important role in United States history. These Jews gave their support to the founders of the liberation movement, and thus helped to shape the greatest democracy on earth.

The book gained wide admiration in the American press, but Sephardi Jewish historians were critical of it. One of these historians, Edward Roditi, who is professor of humanities at the University of California in Santa Cruz, points out in an article in the monthly *Commentary* (October 1971) that the Spanish exiles of 1492 were indeed considered to be part of the elite of Spain at that time, having been prominent in its intellectual and economic life. But the immigrants who came to New Amsterdam (the name given by the Dutch to the colony located on the site of present-day New York) were refugees who fled from Brazil after its conquest by the Portuguese to be out of reach of the long and cruel arm of the Inquisition. He emphasized that these Jews were not part of the elite of Spanish exiles, but simple people who had fallen into the clutches of Spanish pirates. They had been rescued by the captain of the French ship who transported them to New Amsterdam. In time, these families struck roots, began to

amass fortunes, and married into Sephardi families from other countries, including England. Gradually, they penetrated into "high society."

The Spanish-Portuguese community continued to expand in the 17th and 18th centuries. It established synagogues, which to this day bear the name "The Spanish-Portuguese Congregation." These synagogues are to be found in New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, and in Montreal, Canada. The wave of immigration of Sephardi Jews to the United States ended in the 18th century.

In these two centuries, additional waves of *Sephardim* reached the shores of the country. They were practically the only Jews who came at that time, and it would not be far from the truth to say that the history of American Jewry during these centuries is in effect the history of the *Sephardim* in America.

In 1939, the Sephardi Jews in the Unites States numbered about 75,000, the majority living in New York. But some of the Sephardi immigrants were dispersed in other cities and had established a number of new communities.

The first Jewish immigrants from the Eastern lands began arriving in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century. Those from Istanbul started to arrive at the beginning of the 20th century. With them came Jews from Gallipoli, the Dardanelles, the island of Rhode Salonika, the Balkan Peninsula, and various countries of the Middle East (particularly from Syria — Aleppo and Damascus, and Lebanon — Beirut).

Between 1899 and 1912, these immigrants totalled more than 8,000. As a result of the revolution in Turkey in 1908 and increasing ferment in the Balkan countries in 1913-1919, immigration of Jews to both North and South America accelerated.

The communities established by Jews from the Balkans and the East separated themselves from the East European Jews because of a language barrier (Yiddish) and a consequent cultural gap.

An interesting trend was that the Eastern Jews originating mainly from coastal towns naturally gravitated to the coastal cities in the U.S. Thus the largest new communities arose in New York, Seattle, Washington and in Los Angeles.

After so many generations, the descendants of the Eastern and Sephardi Jews still lack good organizational qualities. True, the first arrivals though destitute eventually amassed considerable wealth. It is also true that they placed great store on the education of their children, and their descendants therefore occupy prominant positions in American society today. But they did not succeed in endowing their children with a deep Jewish consciousness, so that they drifted far from Jewish tradition.

The *Ashkenazim,* on the other hand, due also to their large numbers, successfully established Jewish educational centers. It is rare to find similar institutions among the Sephardi communities. Only the Syrian Jews devoted themselves to setting up *Talmudei Torah* and have thus taken steps to protect their families from the pressures to assimilate. The Syrian Jewish communities are considered the best organized American communities both spiritually and materially.

(1972)

An Encouraging Awakening among Sephardi Communities in America

The more I visit the United States — with the intention of encouraging Sephardi community leaders to greater activity on behalf of Israel and strengthening their ties with the Jewish state — the more surprising discoveries come my way.

During this present visit (October 1972), I conferred with community leaders at the Sephardi Federation Convention organized to coincide with the biennual conference of the American Zionist Organization. I learnt that many communities which were not "on the map" are in fact active communally and are willing to organize a branch of the Sephardi Federation in the States, regarding which it has been decided that activities should be resumed. I also spoke with public figures, communal workers and historians from the Ashkenazi community who are studying all Jewish communities in the U.S.A. They are emphatic that the number of Eastern and Sephardi Jews approaches 200,000.

To these may be added another 200,000 in the southern hemisphere and some 30,000 from the Middle East and North Africa now residing in Canada, mainly in Montreal and Toronto. It may thus be concluded that the total number of "Sephardi" Jews in America is close to 400,000, no negligible figure. And it is our duty to give them our full attention in order to reinforce their spiritual life and bring them closer to the Jewish spirit and the Zionist Movement.

Incidentally, many Sephardi communities are today led by Ashkenazi spiritual leaders. For instance, Rabbi Jacob Ott of the Balkan Jewish Congregation in Los Angeles, Rabbi William Greenberg of the Rhodes Jewish Congregation in Seattle, Washington and Rabbi Arnold Marans of the Cedarhurst Congregation in New York.

And indeed, the two conventions — one in Chicago on October 22, 1972 and the other in Lima, Peru on October 26, 1976 — resolved to further the above aim. Both conventions pledged renewed activity of the Sephardi Federation. They proclaimed full identification with the Zionist Movement and repeatedly stressed their affiliation with the Zionist Organization, as resolved at the last Zionist Congress (the 28th) held in Jerusalem in January and February 1972. Following the Chicago convention, a

convention of Canadian Sephardi communities was organized. There too it was decided to establish a branch of the Sephardi Federation.

These conventions provided a unique opportunity for representatives of communities, intellectuals and men of action to meet. All were determined to revive Sephardi-Eastern Jewry and to spur the Federation branches on to activity on behalf of the communities in the United States, Canada and South America, as well as in Israel.

The success of these conventions was due to the Federation emissaries who are active on the American continent, in accordance with the wishes of the Federation Executive, in the framework of the different departments of the Jewish Agency. They are Nessim Farhi, who has been stationed for two years in Buenos Aires and has made extensive tours of other Latin American countries; Shimon Dery, who has been in Montreal for two years and has visited various cities in Canada and, the "youngest" of the three, Matti Ronen, who arrived only two months ago in New York and has already done wonders in organizational work. He has made use of the knowledge he gleaned in Jerusalem from returning emissaries and communal workers from the States. He succeeded in bringing to the Chicago Convention the best communal workers and Sephardi community leaders from all parts of the U.S.A.

In all there were about fifty delegates: a delegation from Canada under the leadership of Elias Malka (leader of the North African Jewish communities there); Mr. Shimon Dery, Mr. Arye Pincus (Chairman of the Zionist Organization, Mr. Yitzhak Navon (Vice-Chairman of the Knesset and Chairman of the Zionist General Council) and Mr. Avraham Shenker (Director of the Jewish Agency Organization Department and member of the Jewish Agency Executive). They expressed the hope that the younger generation would assume responsibility and dedicate themselves to the consolidation of the renewed Sephardi (Zionist) Federation.

A new leader proved to be the most prominent delegate; I refer to Prof. Daniel Elazar, who served as chairman of the American Zionist Conference between October 21 and 23. In his opening speech, he outlined the entire range of problems engaging the state and the Zionist Movement to the five hundred Zionist delegates including those from "Hadassah", *Hamizrahi* and the Zionist left wing parties. He stressed Israel's social problems and urged the Zionist Movement to pay serious attention to them and speed up their remedy. He did not overlook the important role of Sephardi public figures and active workers in the national revival. He mentioned for example the Rishon Lezion, Jacob Meir, Chief Rabbi of Sephardi Jews in Eretz Yisrael, who ninety years ago went on *shlihut* (a mission) to Bukharian Jewish communities and aroused their enthusiasm with the call to *aliyah*. Those who responded to his call built neighbourhoods in Jerusalem and helped in the development of the *yishuv*. That

very first seed planted one hundred years ago continues to bear fruit to this day. The *olim* arriving today from Bukhara are emotionally linked to the idea of Jewish renascence, and have joined ranks with the thousands of *olim* from the Soviet Union.

Prof. Elazar proved to be the central figure of the Convention of Sephardi communities and was elected chairman of the new executive of the Sephardi Federation in the United States; Mr. Eliachar was elected vice-chairman. The executive includes Dr. José A. Nessim, Rabbi Jacob M. Ott, Victor Tabah (Los Angeles), Mr. Steve Shalom, Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky, Mrs. Rachel el-Hassid (New York), Mrs. Lillian Winn (Florida), Rabbi Arnold Marans (Queens, New York), Mr. Edgar Nathan, head of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregation in New York and its secretary, Mr. Victor Tari. This community is considered to be the first Jewish community established in New York more than three hundred years ago.

One of the executive's first plans was to organize a convention of Sephardi synagogues. The Haham Dr. Shlomo Gaon, Chief Rabbi of Sephardi Jewry in Britain (also considered the spiritual leader of Sephardi Jewry in the U.S.A.) undertook to initiate the plans for such convention. It was agreed that the conference be convened next March when the Haham Gaon was scheduled to visit New York.

(1972)

Groups of Sephardi Jews in New York

Of the two million Jews living in Greater New York, 60,000 are Sephardi. Half of them are descendants of Jews who came from the Balkan lands and Turkey, while the other half are from the Arab lands and are known collectively as "The Syrians". Two years ago the Portuguese community celebrated the 300th anniversary of the founding of their community by immigrants from Spain and Portugal.

Their synagogue still bears the name of the original community; yet only a few individuals from the Portuguese Jewish community continue to pray there. The greater part of the congregation consists of immigrants from Germany and other *Ashkenazim.*

The more recent immigrants from the Balkan Peninsula and the Arab lands have established separate synagoues near their homes, which are the centers of their communal and spiritual life. Most Sephardi Jews reside among the Eastern European Jews, and though they have succeeded in preserving their own way of life and customs, they have not been able to unite within an organizational framework. The young immigrants who arrived forty or fifty years ago did try to emulate their East European brethren and establish special congregations to maintain their own social ties and unity. There were also clubs near the synagogues where the youth would meet on weekends.

However with their improved economic situation and integration into the American way of life, they began to leave their old neighbourhoods for better conditions and a higher standard of living. Today most of those originating from the Balkan lands and Turkey have become scattered throughout the city and now live far from their original social and communal centers.

The young people who were educated in general schools have broken all ties with traditional Judaism and have little or no interest in the Zionist Movement.

No Future for the Community

Veteran communal workers are striving to preserve the community institutions which they founded. The leader of the Sephardi Jews is the lawyer Shlomo Nissim, who traces his roots back to Salonika. He is Vice-President of the World Sephardi Federation and has participated in the

two congresses of the Sephardi communities held since the establishment of the State of Israel - in Paris and in Jerusalem.

In a talk we had he was pessimistic about the future of the Sephardi communities. He regretted the apathy of the youth towards Jewish communal activity, as a result of which there is hardly any social life. The only shared life of the Balkan Jews is limited to the lovely old age home which they built. They have failed to organize any sort of educational or philanthropic institutions. The youth have so far resisted complete assimilation and break with Judaism only because they reside within the community of two million New York Jews. Because of the overwhelmingly Jewish environment the community is not plagued by mixed marriages.

The Sephardi Community — Flock without a Shepherd

The Sephardi community is also without a spiritual guide to direct the youth. Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Alkalai, who served for many years as Chief Rabbi of Yugoslavian Jewry and found refuge from the Nazis during World War II in the United States, is still formally the rabbi of the community thought he is now eighty years old and no longer able to play an active role. He lives far from the main concentrations of the Sephardi Jews and does not pray in the community synagogue. Only infrequently, on festive community events, does he make an appearance.

The situation is quite the reverse in the Eastern communities. They generally live in one area, known as the Jewish neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, and they still preserve their ancient traditions and customs. This does not apply only to the elderly and the adult generation, for the youth are equally intent upon preserving their religious and cultural ties. Most of them receive a good grounding in religious values at home, learn to pray *"Arvit,"* and participate en masse in *Shabbat* and holiday services. Their synagogues are filled to capacity on the Sabbath, and the women's section is no less crowded.

At the present time, the Syrian community is inaugurating a magnificent new synagogue which they erected in Brooklyn, and which is said to have cost one million dollars. Apparently this edifice aroused the envy of the Sephardi community which resolved to build a no less beautiful synagogue of its own.

Leader of ths Syrian community is the well-known philanthropist, Yitzhak Shalom, who labours day and night to maintain the spiritual life of his community. He puts great emphasis upon the acquisition of a good religious education. He is the head of the educational institution *"Ozar Hatorah"* which maintains a network of schools and *Talmudei Torah*, not just in New York, but also in North Africa and Iran. The budget for these institutions is covered by his fund-raising campaigns among the Jews

from the Arab lands; and more importantly, it is covered by aid from the "Joint."

Immigration of Jews from the Arab Lands to the U.S.A.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt began to seek new havens on the American continent, especially those with relatives there. Many settled in New York City where they adjusted to their new life with little difficulty.

Most of them are merchants, while some of the Balkan Jews who worked formerly in the trades now earn their livelihood as labourers in the various industries of the new Diaspora.

Among the immigrants who arrived in recent years from Egypt and Iraq, there is a thin layer of intelligentsia with a higher education most of whom work in the free professions.

A Scattered and Dispersed People...

Regrettably, the Balkan and "Arab" Jews in New York, like their counterparts in Latin America, do not maintain any inter-communal contact. The result is a handful of Jews divided into factions and separate communities — particularly the two blocs of Balkan and "Arab" Jews. The effect is destructive, for these separate communities are weak and the lack of organizational links militates against the enlistment of adequate funds for the maintenance of communal institutions. The community leaders are thus unable to organize comprehensive educational and religious activity.

It is doubtful whether these barriers will fall without the intervention of external forces. It is very distressing, therefore, that the general Jewish organizations do not take the initiative of bringing about a rapprochement among the various communities or of creating Hebrew and religious schools like those of the Ashkenazi communities. It is to be feared that the fate of the Jews from Arab lands will be little different from that of the Balkan Jews, since those who reach a better social and economic level tend to abandon their homes in Brooklyn and to become scattered throughout remote neighbourhoods.

(1962)

Syrian and Egyptian Jews in New York

Syrian Jews

Greater New York was a haven for refugees from the Inquisition who arrived in 1654 from Brazil. They laid the foundations of the Jewish community of New York and of the American Jewish community in general. Only after 1880 did the influx of Jews from the Balkans and the Middle East begin. They arrived in wave after wave and formed the basis of the many-hued mosaic of the Sephardi community comprising Turkish, Greek, Yugoslavian and Syrian Jews. By the time of the First World War the Syrian Jewish community was well organized and established mainly in Brooklyn. The further waves of Syrian Jews contributed to the development of the Brooklyn community.

Today, the New York Syrian Jewish community of about 24,000 persons is considered the best organized Sephardi-Eastern Jewish community in the U.S.A. Despite the major social changes which have overtaken this community over the past hundred years, they continue to follow their ancient practices, traditions and customs and to hallow their glorious past. Most are religious. They established *Talmudei Torah* to educate their children in the spirit of the great spiritual leaders of the once flourishing Damascus ane Aleppo communities.

The strong Aleppo community erected the beautiful synagogue on Ocean Parkway, *Sha'arei Zion*, at a cost of one million dollars. The congregation is about one thousand strong. A second synagogue, *Ahi Ezer*, was built by the Beit Torah congregation of Damascus Jews. There is a third synagogue — *Magen David.* As is customary among Eastern Jewish communities, the synagogue serves as the center for all communal activity. Because of the closeness of community ties they have been able to maintain their deep attachment to Judaism, despite the changes in the lives of all Jews in the United States, which have led to assimilation and intermarriage with the non-Jews around them. But the Syrian Jews have preserved a Jewish way of life and rarely marry out.

This community has strong ties with Israel, and is part of the Sephardi community which supports the Jewish fund drives and contributes generously to educational institutions and *yeshivot* in New York and in Israel. About 90% of their children study in *yeshivot* and in *Talmudei Torah*, and only after they have imbibed a large dose of Jewish culture and tradition do they continue their studies in public schools. In recent years, the

Talmudei Torah have been closed down and replaced by schools with more advanced methods.

For many years the philanthropist and active community worker, Yitzhak Shalom, was at the head of communal affairs. He maintained regular contact with institutions in Israel, but most of his energies were channelled towards the upkeep of the Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Today young and dynamic people are directing the affairs of the Syrian community in New York; Yitzhak Shalom's sons, Henry and Steve, hold eminent positions in the community and are following in their father's footsteps. They mobilize the community in the fund-raising campaign and for aid to religious educational institutions in Israel.

Rabbi Yosef Katzin who was born in Jerusalem has long served as Chief Rabbi. He has been assisted for some twenty-five years by Rabbi Avraham Hecht, an Ashkenazi rabbi who is a follower of the Lubavicher Rebbe, and who succeeded in adapting himself to the life of the community after he learned its ways and manners of speech. Rabbi Katzin continues to this day to give his sermons on *Shabbat* in the Arabic dialect of the Aleppo Jews in Jerusalem, while Rabbi Hecht speaks to the congregation in English. The older generation continue to address their families in the language of the original Aleppo Jews, but the youth are practically ignorant of the Arabic tongue and their language is English.

For some fifty years, the Syrian community isolated themselves and made no attempt to establish ties with its Jewish Ashkenazi neighbours. However over the years, the barriers between the ethnic groups began to break down, and today the two communities maintain close links and act jointly in various community areas. As a result there are also marriages between members of the two groups. It is estimated that about 20% of young Syrian Jews are married to spouses from other communities. The majority of these "mixed marriages" has taken place between the more educated of the groups.

The Syrian Jewish community is considered to be the most well established of the Sephardi communities in New York. On their arrival most of them engaged in small business; but later they founded large commercial enterprises or factories, and above all, engaged in the investment of capital in diverse enterprises.

But there are marked changes: many of the youth received an education in institutions of higher learning and entered the free professions: engineers, physicians, pharmicists, directors of firms run on the most modern methods. They have set up large business chains.

Like Syrian Jewish communities in South America and in Western Europe, the community in New York helps the remnants of their ancient community in Aleppo and Damascus. They regularly send financial sup-

port to help maintain their brethren who live in ghettos and are unable to earn their daily bread. The New York community is in the vanguard of the struggle on behalf of the liberation of their brethren from captivity, and they are applying pressure on the Syrian Government to permit the Jews to leave the country.

The largest waves of Syrian Jewish immigrants to New York came in 1911-1920. But immigrants have continued to arrive ever since, and they receive the support and assistance of their compatriots in their economic and cultural integration.

Four years ago a group of rabbis from the New York Syrian Jewish community came to Jerusalem where they completed their studies to be *dayanim*. They studied at the Tiferet Yerushalayim Seminary of the Council of the Sephardi Community. The seminary renewed its activities in the Old City of Jerusalem following its liberation in the Six-Day War.

Egyptian Jewry

About ten thousand Jews from the ancient community in Egypt found refuge in the United States when they were forced to leave following the wars of 1956 and 1967. The largest part of this immigrant group, which decided not to immigrate to Israel, settled in New York City, within the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn. They slowly adjusted themselves to the ways of the veteran community both materially and culturally and became in time an inseparable part of it.

Many Jews in Alexandria and Cairo were originally from Syria and Lebanon. In the 19th century, Jewish families in Aleppo and Damascus began to look for further sources of income. To this end they set out with some of their neighbours, mainly Syrian and Lebanese Christians, for Egypt, where they settled and came to fill a prominent role in the economic development of the country. They were among the first industrialists and "money giants", were active in the Egyptian money markets and helped develop trade.

Once in New York, these immigrants knew well how to adapt within the economic system. Most work in the textile industries, are bank officials, or continue to engage in commerce as a result of their widespread links in Europe and the Far East. Just as they once imported goods to Egypt twenty years ago, they now bring merchandise into the Unites States.

The Egyptian Jews, like the Greeks, the Italians, the Lebanese and the British, were a minority in Egypt: they were gifted with a highly developed commercial sense, and spoke diverse European languages. Many speak English, French and Italian, or Greek and Arabic of the Egyptian dialect.

The first wave of Egyptian immigrants came right after the Sinai Campaign of 1956. One member of the community described to me the end of the ancient Jewish community which had once numbered 100,000: "The Sinai Campaign put an end to Jewish community life in Egypt." After that war the Jews of Cairo began to feel uncomfortable. They encountered open animosity in the streets, the marketplace and wherever they went "Zionism" and "Judaism" became terms of shame when used by Moslems. Morning and evening, when making purchases in the market, they were harassed by insults and curses and by denunciation of "the Jews who were torturing our Arab brethren in Palestine"...

As the spirit of nationalism grew, persecution not just of the Jews but of all the minorities increased. The purpose was clear: to purge Egypt of all minority elements; since they were regarded as the source of all its troubles... the Jews were considered personally responsible for the war in which the "imperialist" nations (France, Britain and Israel) had taken part.

Most of the immigrants who settled in Brooklyn joined the Sha'arei Zion community, and now belong to the synagogue on Ocean Parkway.

Some emigrants went first to Italy and France, but after some years resumed their wanderings and reached New York. Here they feel free and independent and have easily adjusted to the new life.

A Community of Munster Jews in New York

A

Who would have thought that the destitute and impoverished immigrants who arrived in the United States from the Balkan Peninsula at the end of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th would eventually become industrialists and merchants with important positions in the community life of American Sephardi Jewry? Most prominent among them in New York are families who came at the beginning of this century from Munster and Kastoria. Though they are now wealthy they have not forgotten their early sufferings after arriving with barely the shirts on their backs.

When you encounter a wealthy merchant or industrialist in his community, he frankly reveals his initial trials and tribulations. Neither does he conceal his lack of education and his illiteracy, which compelled him to engage in any sort of menial task in order to earn his livelihood. Some were janitors, others shoeblacks. Very soon, however, they adjusted to their surroundings. They knew they would be able to get ahead if they committed themselves to their work. And so most of them eventually did well. But the great revolution in their lives came when they were able to give their children a higher education. There is hardly anyone of the younger generation who did not complete his studies in an insitution of higher education before joining his parents in the management of the family business. These educated youths now play an important role in shaping the image of one of the best established Ladino-speaking Sephardi communities in New York. This community even rejected the path chosen by many East European immigrants, namely that of American Conservative Judaism.

In general, Sephardi Jews everywhere rarely deviate from the principles of Orthodox Judaism. Even those who drift away from religious observance and those considered to be liberals never establish new religious frameworks, either in Western Europe or in the U.S.A. The Sephardi Jews, even when they do not keep all 613 commandments or attend synagogue every day usually do not dissociate themselves from Orthodoxy. However, the offspring of immigrants from the Balkans, Turkey, Greece and the lands which merged to form Yugoslavia (Serbia, Munster, Kastoria) sought to blaze new trails in religious life in the hope of continuing to observe the Jewish precepts. The youth of the Munster Jewish community in New

York, after finishing their military service where they were under the influence of Conservative rabbis, set up a new communal framework similar to the Conservative communities. They were responsible for the establishment of the Conservative Sephardi community in New York, whose spiritual leader is Rabbi Arnold Marans.

B

Rabbi Marans' account of the establishment of this community, as publicized in his conversation with the journalist Matti Ronen, the first Sephardi emissary of the Jewish Agency and the World Sephardi Federation (see Bama'aracha, issue 143), describes the revolutionary change which took place in the Munster Jewish community — one of the more active among the Ladino-speaking Sephardi communities in the United States.

Rabbi Marans relates that in 1951 about 1,000 Ladino-speaking families resided in Brooklyn, who were mainly from Munster and Kastoria. The youth sought to establish a synagogue which would be a source of inspiration. They therefore invited Rabbi Marans, a student of the Jewish Theological Seminary, to be the spiritual leader of the new community. He gladly accepted and in the ensuing twenty years created an entirely new spiritual atmosphere among young and old alike. He understood that in order to serve successfully as the guiding spirit of the Sephardi community he must learn about their heritage, culture and traditions lest his congregants should forget and neglect them. And indeed, Rabbi Marans strives to foster the Sephardi traditions and culture among the youth, and today he is one of the pillars of the executive of the Sephardi Federation in the United States.

The most prominent lay leaders of the community are Louis Rousso and his family. They are active in supporting communal and cultural undertaking. They are also sensitive to social problems in Israel and are among the major contributors to educational and welfare institutions in the country. They give aid to religious educational institutions like Porat Yosef and the school for girls' education, Ora Haim, in Bnei Brak. They also donate stipends for students at institutions of higher learning in Israel. They responded to the appeal by the President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Mr. Avraham Harman, to help establish a department for pre-academic studies for Eastern Jews. The department has been set up on Mount Scopus and will soon be able to serve its intended purpose.

The community leaders may pride themselves on the erection of an old-age home in a suburb of Brooklyn. At first the home was intended for the elderly of the community only, but later was opened to all the Eastern Jewish communities. The widespread use of English has removed the last

barriers between the different Sephardi and Eastern groups and has led to closer relations and inter-community marriages. My visit to the old age home to meet the over ninety-year-old communal worker, Rabbi Alkali, who until World War II was rabbi of Yugoslav Jewry, enabled me to discern at first hand the important role of the home in the lives of the elderly. If not for this home, they might have been abandoned to a life of lonelines and isolation. The staff includes doctors and nurses; some of the former are Holocaust survivors who resolved to devote the rest of their lives to helping and caring for the aged.

Ten years after the founding of the new community in Brooklyn, the *Emet Veshalom* Synagogue was established in Cedarhurst, Long Island. This was made possible when most of the Munster Jewish community moved to Long Island. The synagogue serves not only as a religious center but also offers educational activities for young and old. Rabbi Marans organizes special activities for the women upon whom lies the onus of maintaining their children's ties with Judaism. He also organizes regular *Onegei Shabbat* and holds classes on Judaism for all ages. As with all Conservative synagogues, there is a Sunday school where the children learn Hebrew, Jewish history and Judaism.

The community leaders are deeply interested in their ancient heritage. A monthly bulletin is issued with reports on communal acitivities and articles on the history and cultural legacy of Sephardi Jewry.

In order to commemorate the Munster Jewish community wiped out by Hitler, Mr. Louis Rousso engaged the Israeli writer Uri Oren to document its history. The book appeared in English and Hebrew. Some of the community succeeded in escaping to Israel or countries of the west.

The Rousso family is a large one, many of whom came to Eretz Yisrael in the 19th and 20th centuries at the time when Louis' own family immigrated to the U.S.A. They maintain close ties with relatives in Israel and, during their occasional trips here, visit the Munster Jewish Congregation's synagogue in Jerusalem — the Yigal Yaacov Synagogue in Mekor Baruch, where they participate in the prayers whose specific style is so dear to them.

Thirty Thousand "Yordim" from Israel...

New York City has the largest Jewish population in the world — two million Jews gathered from all corners of the globe. They are prominent in the economic sphere, not just of this vast city but of the United States as a whole, because New York is the nerve center of the American economy. Since the Jews are involved in all economic spheres, their influence extends far beyond the continent. Complete streets, not just in Brooklyn where Jews have long lived, but in all parts of the city, have become "Jewish" areas. Certain branches of industry and the trades are also considered "Jewish". In recent years, Jews have begun to engage with marked success in the areas of development and construction.

A new Jewish group has of late become conspicious: not destitute immigrants or war refugees, but Jews born and bred in Israel, or who came originally as *olim* from the Diaspora and suddenly decided to seek their fortunes in the *"Goldena Medina"*. This group, which is known in Israel as *yordim* (emigrants), numbers about 30,000 in New York. It does not of course include those who came prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. They too are numerous, but it is not possible to ascertain accurately their exact size. One may meet Jews who came from Eretz Yisrael before World War I and later. It is said that if the emigrants from Safed were to return to their native town, then it would have about 50,000 inhabitants. These emigrants together with those from other centers in the Lower and Upper Galilee constitute a separate organizational unit. They gather in clubs and groups to reminisce about their childhood. They are linked intimately with Israel and promise themselves to return one day. But the younger generation who has grown up in America, though nourished on tales of their parents' hometown, has lost all ties with Israel... at most they are proud that their parents were born there... But they are are in reality far from Eretz Yisrael, not just geographically, and because of them the parents have become reconciled to merely entertaining the idea of return. For they are not prepared to break off contact with their offspring who are now Americans in spirit and manner.

Among pre- and post-World War I immigrants, the Eastern Jews are the most prominent. They belong mainly to the Lebanese-Syrian group who are known as *"Halebim"*. They arrived during the first half of this century and founded large "colonies". As mentioned, they continue to observe a traditional Jewish way of life. Immigrants from Eretz Yisrael joined their

community and became an inseparable part of it, though they still identify themselves as Eretz Yisrael Jews. Almost all are involved in commerce and trade. It is interesting to note that they maintain close commercial ties with Arabs, both Moslem and Christian, who came to New York from Syria and Lebanon.

A special group within this community consists of the Jews from Yemen and Aden. Thirty years ago the U.S. government officially granted Yemenite Jews immigration visas, since Yemen had not made full use of its quota. When this fact became known, Yemenite Jews began to register at the American Consulate in Jerusalem as Yemenite nationals. They settled mainly in New York where they gained a reputation as craftsmen, particularly in the fields of jewellery-making and the fine metalwork trades they had learned in Eretz Yisrael. The Yemenite Jews have opened restaurants which attract many who wish to enjoy typical Eastern dishes.

But since these immigrants are from pre-state days ,they are not included among the "*yordim*", though they too ought long ago to have returned to Israel with their children, who have now lost almost all connection with this country.

It is painful to see among the *yordim* mainly young people, who served their homeland... fought in the War of Independence, and even held important positions among the builders of the land. Then, tired and disillusioned, they set out in search of quieter shores. Full of youthful energy, they hoped to do great things in the "land of opportunity" ....and mainly were indeed successful. They did well... but as the years go by they feel increasing regret. Their children have grown up and have inhaled the alien air; moreover their ties with Israel are severed... What will these young parents do now? They frankly admit their mistake, but do not dare return to Israel, fearing a new struggle and economic insecurity.

Among the *yordim* are *olim* from Eastern Europe who came to Israel after the War of Independence and the Sinai Campaign, found good employment and did well. But, because they had relatives in the U.S.A., they were tempted to go there in the belief that they would make their fortune. They soon learnt the bitter truth that all that glitters is not gold.

One of these sorrowfully admitted to me: "We came to Israel from Poland after the Sinai Campaign. I found a position as an accountant in the Haifa Municipality and was very content. However, my wife had family here and decided that we must not pass up the opportunity to immigrate to the United States... and we became uprooted.... and today I work like a horse in order to make a living... I have lost my peace of mind... but what can I do now? Can I get up and go back to Israel with empty hands? I am hopeful that one day I will have a bit of money so that I may return to Israel and try my luck once again..."

Among the *yordim* is another group which has been a great loss to Israel. these are students and experts. They receive special "treatment" in the U.S. Their working conditions are of the highest quality. They attain high positions and good pay; they decide to remain... they do not hide but on the contrary lash out at you in an attempt to justify their actions.

Some young men and women came to study, and have established families, sometimes with American spouses. Then they abandon their studies and become simple businessmen. But like the rest of the Israeli group, they do not want to sever all ties with Israel. Most try to maintain contact with similar families in order to live in a Hebrew and Israeli atmosphere. They meet regularly, talk about Israel and try to prove to themselves that in practice they are Israelis. They like to think that their sojourn away from Israel is temporary and the day will come in the not too distant future when they will be back.

(1962)

In the Company of Professor Meir Bernaditi

The name of Professor Meir Bernaditi has been familiar to me for many years. I knew that he was serving as a professor in one of the universities in New York in the field of Sephardi Jewish literature and culture. But when I visited various American and Canadian communities last summer, and proposed our program for establishing an institute for the study of the Spanish and Eastern Jewry heritage to the community leaders, historians and researchers the following words were oft repeated to me: "When you arrive in New York, speak to Prof. Bernaditi; he is an erudite man involved in the field you call 'Spanish Jewish Heritage'. You will find much of interest in what he says and receive advice regarding the promotion of your program in Israel."

And so when I reached New York I took the necessary steps to make an appointment with him. But surprisingly the professor has no telephone. He prefers to be cut off from such means of communciations which are considered by most "progressive" people as vital for conducting their lives. But he considers it an unnecessary nuisance and disturbance. We were therefore compelled to find a mutual acquaintance to aid us in arranging the meeting.

Prof. Bernaditi leads a group of community workers of Balkan and Turkish background, who have for years been dreaming as have many others in the field of Sephardi Jewish studies, of doing real work to rescue rich and valuable stores of material relating to the history of Sephardi and Eastern Jewry, before such resources are lost. Their desire is to to publish such material. This is a commendable idea which many have expressed but not implemented. Prof. Bernaditi's group has also been wavering for years in this regard. Though the group is led by an intellectual giant with a thorough command of the subject, yet around him there is a great vacuum. And despite his talents and abilities, he has not been able to put his ideas into practice.

I established contact with the head of the Society for the Promotion of Sephardi Culture, Mr. Louis Levy, and within two days an appointments was set for a meeting with the esteemed professor and his staff of assistants. They too were interested in meeting me, when they heard of the preparations made by the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem and the World Sephardi Federation to found an institute for study of

the Sephardi Jewish heritage, in cooperation with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

And indeed, this was an impressive and fruitful meeting. Prof. Bernaditi's apartment is situated in a quiet quarter of Brooklyn, a tranquil and charming neighbourhood. As is customary in the home of every scholar and researcher, there is a virtual sea of books which cover all the walls.

But before I relate the substance of our conversation, it is worth giving a few details about the man and his life.

Meir Bernaditi was born in 1895 in the small town of Canakkale, which is two hours from Istanbul. He was the eldest of nine boys in a poor family of eleven. Like many of his contemporaries, Prof. Bernaditi received his education at an Alliance school and this early educaiton equipped him with an elementary knowledge of the world. When he finished his primary education he wished to continue to acquire further knowledge, but a suitable school was not found. All the secondary schools and institutions of higher learning were under government auspices and the language of instruction was therefore Turkish. Meir Bernaditi was not attracted to this educational environment and he began the search for a more suitable school.

In those days Istanbul was a cosmopolitan center with various cultural trends: Armenians, Greeks and Jews lived together with Turks. Each community lived within its own quarter or ghetto, where it maintained its own distinct way of life. Yet, despite the ethnic divisions, there is no doubt that daily contacts left their mark on each element. The Jews too, despite their distinctive Jewish way of life, were influenced by their environment. They learnt other languages and adopted some of the customs of their neighbours. Meir Bernaditi, considered to be an exception, mixed with other ethnic groups and became familiar with their customs. This knowledge later proved useful, particularly at the University of Cincinnati in the U.S.A., where he studied Eastern and Spanish cultures.

And how did the boy from a poor family reach the great world across the seas? Like many other Jews living in the Ottoman Empire, Meir Bernaditi set sail in 1910 for the American continent to find a better life for himself. He did not attain wealth because he did not embark upon a business career. Instead he immersed himself in study and gradually acquired the knowledge that gained for him a professorship in the Sephardi language and culture. His familiarity with Ladino from his home served him well in his research and studies. He became known as an expert in his field, and for fifty years taught thousands of students, many of whom became scholars and followed in his path. They are now involved in research into the Sephardi language and culture. But most of these researches have not seen the light of day because of the limited interest in this subject. There is

apparently no authorized institution willing to aid in printing and distributing these studies.

In my meeting with Prof. Bernaditi, I was immediately struck by his greatness and the richness of his knowledge. But one is never a prophet in one's own country. His publications on the Sephardi Jewish heritage are an invaluable legacy for all future researchers. He has not, however, succeeded in attracting men of means towards realizing his plans for the establishment of a research center for the study of Sephardi Jewry. Thus, when I informed him of our activity in Israel in this sphere, he was overjoyed with the news; for here was the realization of a lifelong dream. Prof. Bernaditi was far from Zionism, because of his educational background. Up to now he had evinced little interest in Israel; but he was beginning to realize that only in Israel can researchers do justice to the historical and cultural material which might otherwise be lost foreover. This is because in Israel there are more than one million Sephardi and Eastern Jews.

Prof. Bernaditi hoped that the necessary conditions have been created for the foundation of the institute, for there are hundreds of researchers educated in universities throughout the world particularly in the U.S.A. He named dozens of researchers who had come to the States after the last war and acquired sufficient erudition to further research into the legacy of Sephardi Jewry. They were the natural collaborators of this program, and without a doubt when it is opened in Jerusalem the institute can look to their involvement in bringing to light and preserving this heritage.

As a further impetus for the project, he proposed an international symposium in Jerusalem of researchers and scholars as soon as the foundations of the institute are laid. Such an event would provide an opportunity for an exchange of ideas, and for eliciting support in getting the enterprise on its feet. He too hoped to participate and make his own contribution.

Despite his advanced age, the professor is full of life and energy. It is still customary for his many students to gather in his home every Shabbat evening and pass many hours of discussion on various topics. On these occasions, the professor lectures as if he is conducting a university class.

We wish the dear professor a long and fruitful life. And we hope that on the day when the institute for the study of Sephardi Jewry is opened in Jerusalem, he will be among the joyous celebrants.

(1972)

Hebrew Youth Camps in the U.S.A.

Under this heading, I speak of Jewish youth in general in the United States and this includes Sephardi youth who receive their education together with the Ashkenazi youth either in Hebrew schools or more commonly within the general school system. It is therefore worth dwelling on some important youth activities which encompass all sectors of American Jewish youth.

Hebrew Education — Safeguard against Assimilation

Does a Zionist Movement exist in the United States? What role does the youth play in the largest Jewish center in the world? These questions occupy those who are concerned over the fate of Diaspora Jewry.

Jewish centers in the Diaspora have come and gone. But the Jewish people as a whole preserved its existence throughout the ages because of its religious practices, traditions and Jewish education. At the present time too the existence of a Jewish life in the Diaspora is an historical fact which cannot be ignored. Only a proper Jewish education can ensure the spiritual integrity of the younger generation and can save them from assimilation. In the whole community of about five-and-a-half million American Jews, there are about one million youth. How can we preserve their Jewishness, living as they do in an alien environment with its temptations and pressures? The answer is unequivocal — education! But what must be the content and essence of this education? There are religious, national and non-national streams, all of which have not yet found the answer. It is apparently difficult for American Jewish leaders to admit to failure, for without Jewish-Hebrew education there is no hope for Jewish youth. And whatever other barriers might be erected in an attempt to cushion the young from the alien influences, these will be to no avail.

Those who are educated in the general school system still preserve loose ties with Judaism, but the next generation will without any doubt abandon even these loose ties and merge into the surroundings, becoming irretrievably lost to our people.

Hence the grave concern of American Jewish leaders for the future of the youth. How can they inculcate in them a Jewish spirit and consciousness? We mean that Jewish spirit the East European immigrants bequeathed in

their homes to those who first grew up in America. In various districts of New York City, there are Hebrew schools, *yeshivot, Talmudei Torah* and public schools where the language of instruction is English, but where Hebrew and religious studies occupy an important place. The number of such schools in the U.S.A. is almost three hundred and if, according to a conservative estimate, the number of pupils in each one is five hundred to a thousand, then the total number of pupils in these Hebrew and religious schools reaches a quarter-of-a-million — 25% of Jewish children who are protected from external dangers by this education. This proves the possibility of establishing a fine educational network which will be a blessing, not only for American Jewry but also for Israel. For only youth who receive a traditional Jewish education will feel the bond with Israel and will one day join the ranks of its builders.

Camps

Summer camps are an integral part of the general Jewish and Hebrew educational programs in the U.S.A. Apparently, summer camps are more characteristic of the Jewish community than of the other communities, and they too are designed to protect Jewish youth from the alien and negative influences around them. About one-third of Jewish youth spend the two months of summer vacation in Jewish camps. But in most camps a national Jewish spirit does not prevail, and the only spiritual connection with tradition is the festive Sabbath prayer service. Yet even this is not performed in all camps. For this reason, the leaders of the Hebrew youth camps are deserving of respect and praise.

The Hebrew youth camps in the U.S.A. and Canada have increased in number in the past twenty years and have become centers of the Jewish spirit and education. The founders of these camps were the directors of the camp movement, Massad. The founders of the latter, once members of the Hebrew Youth Movement in the U.S.A. hoped that the youth movement would become the mainstream and would encompass most Jewish youth and bring them back to their rich national heritage. But the Youth Movement disbanded, while its creation — the summer youth camps — gradually grew in number. Today there are twelve such camps in North America and close to 3,000 girls and boys between the ages of six and seventeen spend their summers there. The camps are staffed by counsellors and assistants who conduct all their activities in Hebrew.

Visit to Massad Camps in the Pokono Mountains

We were given the opportunity to visit Massad camps in the Pokono Mountains of Pennsylvania, and were able to view at close range the far-reaching changes occurring among the youth in these Hebrew camps.

Their purpose is to instill in the child a knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism, a love of his heritage and of Israel, and the aspiration for national renascence.

Upon arrival in a Massad camp you feel as if you are in a camp in Israel. Both in appearance and in atmosphere the impression is of an Israeli environment. The fields, the roads, the paths, cabins and buildings have geographical names associated with Eretz Yisrael and with national heroes from the distant and recent past. The camps of Massad A are divided into two parts. The camp on the slopes is called Kibbutz Haemek and the one on top Kibbutz Hagalil. They are near lakes where the campers spend time each day. The lake of Massad B is called Hayarden. The buildings for entertainment and cultural activities are also named after historical personalities: Herzl, Nordau, Bialik, Henrietta Szold, etc.. In order to familiarize the campers with nature, the groups are divided up according to parts of a tree. The youngest (6-8-year-old) is called *Adat Hashoresh;* the second (9-11-year-olds) is called *Adat Hageza.* The third (for ages 12-13) is called *Adat Ha'anaf,* and the 14-16 year-olds are called *Adat Hatzameret.* At the beginning of the camping season each group chooses a settlement in Israel and learns about its structure and geography.

Tradition and religious values are very important in Massad camps: morning prayers, strict observance of the Sabbath, and the holding of religious ceremonies. The campers greet the Sabbath with a solemn prayer service out in the open. They hoist the U.S. flag and the flag of Israel. They pass the entire Sabbath in song and traditional melodies. In the evening there is an *"Oneg Shabbat"* and later a *"Melave Malka"*. At these celebrations they sing religious and Israeli songs. They present performances and have discussions on topics of Jewish national import.

It is difficult to imagine that you are in a mountainous region of the United States and not in Israel. American Jewish youth, who seem rather strange in an urban setting, take on a completely different aspect in the camps. They come from Greater New York as well as from more remote and smaller communities. Their parents feel it imperative to send their children to a Hebrew camp where they will be in a Jewish atmosphere and learn to appreciate and remain faithful to Jewish tradition.

The Maccabia and the Institute for *Madrichim*

One of the main undertakings of the Massad A and B camps is the Maccabia. Its aim is to stimulate personal creativity, to develop positive interrelations, to disseminate information on the Jewish people, its country and culture, and finally, to enrich the child's Hebrew vocabulary.

Each camp is divided into two competitive groups. Each group must

adopt a specific subject such as: town and city, pioneer and soldier, etc.. The competition is held in certain spheres determined in advance and includes sports, swimming, song and essay compositions, the presentation of plays and other activities. Each activity earns the participant points and the group receiving the most points is the winner.

A particularly praiseworthy educational program is the Institute for Madrichim. Since the inception of Massad A in 1941, hundreds of youths have received their training in the institute and gone on to serve as educators in the Hebrew camps in general and in the Massad camps in particular. They are the leaders of the Massad A and B camps and play a prominen role in camp activities especially in Jewish education. The fine educator and guide, Rabbi Eliezer Bernstein, is the head of Massad B camp. Rabbi Eliezer Safar of Massad A was also among the pupils of the institute. From among the former Massad campers ninety couples emerged who speak Hebrew at home and try to influence their acquaintances to return to the Jewish fold and the study of Hebrew. Some have come on *aliya*. It may therefore be asserted that the Massad and other Hebrew camps in the U.S.A. and Canada indeed serve as a substitute for the Hebrew Youth Movement.

The Direction of Massad Camps

The Massad camps, like other Hebrew camps, are under community supervision and are conducted not with an eye to profit but with higher aims. This year the budget of the camps reached half-a-million dollars. The camps are largely financed through the fees paid by parents of the campers. The directorship of the camps also provides suitable support for children from poor families. The initiator of Massad camps and their director to this day is Mr. Shlomo Shulsinger helped by his wife, Rivka.

The Shulsinger family immigrated to the United States from Israel many years ago. There they set up a printing press and publication house for Hebrew and religious books. All the family are closely involved with Hebrew educational and cultural undertakings. The youngest of the clan, Shlomo Shulsinger, dedicated his life to Hebrew youth camps. He began his work in 1941 with a summer day camp in which twenty-five children participated; and today the two camps have eight hundred participants and several hundred educators, counsellors, artists, rabbis, writers and other intellectuals. This team provides a rich cultural and spiritual environment. The artistic work of the two institutes for painting and drawing, called Bezalel, encourage the development of artistic talents among the campers. There is no aspect of education or culture which the director has omitted from the camp program. Mr. Shulsinger lives the life of the camp every day of the year and is an integral part of it. He thinks about the

camps day and night and is constantly planning to improve their content and increase the influence of Hebrew education upon the campers.

The impact of the Hebrew camps is also felt in the youth camps of the Zionist parties. These camps too, including those organized by Reform rabbis, devote part of their program to the study of Hebrew and Judaism.

It is hoped, that the American Hebrew educational program which is making yearly progress will contribute to the advancement of the Hebrew camps and that these in turn will serve as a basis for a strong Hebrew youth movement in the United States during the coming decades.

(1962)

Sephardic Jews in Seattle

In the northwestern corner of the United States, on the coast of the Pacific Ocean not far from British Columbia, a Canadian province, lies the city of Seattle, Washington. The city has gained much publicity recently because of the large Boeing aircraft industries located there. But because of the economic recession in that industry in the past two years, thousands of engineers have been dismissed. Many have been left without means and have had to seek other work, even as taxi drivers. Jewish aeronautical experts and engineers heard of the developing airplane industry in Israel, including that connected with the Ministry of Defence.

They packed their belongings and went to Israel, where they were quickly absorbed. The Six-Day War stirred the Jewish community of Seattle, a number of whom visited Israel, found that they had little difficulty intergrating into its society, and decided to remain.

There are 15,000 Jews living in Seattle today; they constitute the second and third generation descendants of immigrants who arrived from other regions of the United States in search of better sources of livelihood. They believed that the city, situated on the Pacific coast, was destined to become an important economic center in the west of the U.S.A. "Fresh" immigrants from Eastern Europe also settled there, some of whom had come to join relatives who had immigrated earlier.

An Interesting Immigrant Story

There is a community of Sephardi Jews within this larger Jewish community. They were immigrants seventy years ago from Turkey and from the island of Rhode which until the end of the first world war, was under Turkish rule.

This community numbers about 3,000 today. How did these Jews come so far to this city on the western coast? The story of their migration is one of adventure.

During my recent visit to Seattle, I conversed with Rabbi Shlomo Maimon of the main Turkish community: for the immigrants from Rhodes set up a separate community. He gave me details regarding the immigration of Turkish Jewry to Seattle, where he himself arrived in 1924 with his parents at the age of five. His father, Avraham Maimon, served as the

spiritual leader of the immigrants from mainland Turkey who established the Bikur Holim community. Rabbi Avraham Maimon passed away suddenly in 1931. He had given his son a religious education to prepare him for the role of spiritual leader. Shlomo Maimon stuided at first in a college and then at Yeshiva University in New York. In 1944 he was ordained as a rabbi by the university. Then he returned to Seattle and for the past 28 years has served as the spiritual leader of the Bikur Holim community.

He told me that he was compelled to learn Yiddish in order to study at Yeshiva University. In this way he adapted to the method of study of his teachers and educators, who were *Ashkenazim.*

The Bikur Holim community also contains immigrants from Yemen and Egypt who arrived lately. There are twelve families from Egypt and six from Yemen.

Hebrew taught with the Sephardi Pronunciation

At the time of my visit, Rabbi Maimon, together with the directors of the *Talmud Torah*, was introducing the study of Hebrew in accordance with the Sephardi accent. For many years Hebrew was taught with the Ashkenazi pronunciation. Of the 170 pupils in the Hebrew school there are 50 Sephardi girls and boys. More than one thousand children go to Sunday school, a system common to most Jewish communities in the United States. The program of study includes Jewish history, Judaism and some Hebrew. Another three hundred pupils study three times a week (six hours), pray and receive instruction in Hebrew.

I had a pleasant surprise in Seattle when I met the chronicler of the Sephardi community, Albert Addato. In most communities I visited in Western Europe, Canada and the United States, I found few who were interested in research into the history of the Sephardi communities. Only recently have young university graduates evinced interest in such research. They are discovering material concerning the immigration of their families to the United States and are being encouraged to write their final seminar papers on this subject. I met Rabbi Marc Angel in New York, assistant to Rabbi Louis Gerstein, who is the rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese community. Rabbi Angel is completing a research into the history of the Jews of the Island of Rhodes. Mrs. Rachel Dalvin, an English literature instructor at New York University, has also shown great interest in the history and culture of Sephardi Jewry. She is presently recording the history of the Jewish community of Ioannina, Greece, (her family came from there) which was liquidated by the Nazis. Mrs. Dalvin visited Greece and also collected much evidence from former inhabitants of Ioannina who had made *aliyah* to Israel. She will soon complete this study.

But the pioneer in recording the history of the new Sephardi communities is Albert Addato. Graduate of the University of Seattle, he devoted his thesis to the Sephardi Jewish communities of Seattle. The manuscript has been in his drawer for more than thirty years, and thus far he has not succeeded in finding help to publish it. I photocopied it for the archives of the Sephardi Council in Jerusalem. I also wished to enlist support to assist us in publishing this important essay.

The history of these communities is a stimulating and refreshing story. The first immigrants were two Jews from Turkey, Salomon Kalbo and Jack Polikar who arrived in 1903. This is the story of their migration. A Greek merchant (from Turkey) who immigrated to the U.S.A. at the end of the 19th century, settled in Seattle. He engaged in fishing and made quite a fortune. In 1903 he returned to his home town in Turkey and met his two friends Kalbo and Polikar; he told them of the opportunities in Seattle. The two were then aged 18 and they resolved to seek their fortune in the new world. They informed their parents of their intention and despite the latter's fears the youths resolutely set out for their destination.

They wandered from state to state and from city to city, until finally, they arrived in Seattle, where they immediately entered the fishing trade.

They were successful and their success attracted many of their relatives and friends from the old country. At the time too the first Jew, Nessim Alhadeff came from the island of Rhodes. He too was tempted to seek new pastures after a visit by Greek American immigrants from Seattle, who told Alhadeff about their good fortune and acquired wealth. Alhadeff went to Seattle and was equally successful and his example drew many other Jews from Rhodes to Seattle.

Within eight years (1904-1912) 1,500 Sephardi Jewish immigrants arrived. The Ashkenazi community constituted about 8,500 persons. The number of Sephardi immigrants continued to grow because of the deteriorating security conditions in the Ottoman Empire. Turkey was pressed into wars and revolutions: the revolution of the young Turks, the Balkan War and World War I.

This group of immigrants was divided along regional lines. Those who came from the area of the Sea of Marmara established the Bikur Holim community in 1914. Those who came from Rhodes later set up the Ezra Bessaroth community. Most of the new communities dwelt in two of the city's streets.

Sephardi Immigrants not welcomed by Ashkenazi Jews

The first Sephardi immigrants were not given a warm welcome by the Ashkenazi Jews. Kalbo and Polikar began to seek the company of Jews

immediately upon their arrival. They went to the Ashkenazi synagogue and requested permission to pray. But since they did not speak Yiddish the Ashkenazi congregants did not believe that the guests were indeed Jews. They pulled out their tzitzit fringes and called out loudly "Shma Yisrael"; but the congregants were still not convinced. The rabbi explained to his congregants that there were Jews who did not know Yiddish. Though they were eventually permitted to pray in the synagogue, the barrier of discomfort remained and persisted even with the growth of the Sephardi community. Many of those who arrived after the war laid the foundations for new communities in Portland and Los Angeles.

In 1931, Mr. Albert Levy an outstanding educator succeeded in amalgamating the educational institutions of the two communities, Bikur Holim and Ezra Bessaroth. He knew Hebrew well and also Spanish, French, Arabic and Greek. He edited and founded the weekly which appeared in New York in Ladino, *La Vara*. Albert Levy also organized Hebrew evening classes for adults. But he did not remain long in the community because of the lack of understanding for his enterprises; finally he returned to New York.

The small merchants from the coast of Anatolia and Rhodes, quickly adapted to the new environment. They sent their children to government schools and these as a result drifted away from the traditions of their forebears. They did not learn Ladino and stopped singing the traditional songs; they forgot the "Romances" their mothers had sung to them as children and their links with Judaism became tenuous.

Mixed Marriages

The first to take an interest in the spiritual condition of the Seattle Sephardic communities were members of the (Ashkenazi) Reform community, in contrast with the Orthodox Jews. Though not one Sephardi Jew associated himself with the Reform synagogue, and not one Sephardi married a girl from among the "temple" members.

But today, seventy years after the arrival of the first immigrants, the barriers between the *Sephardim* and the *Ashkenazim* have practically vanished. The rabbi of the Sephardi community of Ezra Bessaroth is the Ashkenazi Rabbi William Greenberg. Regrettably however, the rate of intermarriage of *Sephardim* with non-Jewish partners is three times higher than the rate among the *Ashkenazim*.

The Sephardi youth is largely university educated and holds an esteemed place in urban life. But their links with Jewish communal activity have been impaired. While the first immigrants displayed an awareness of and a concern for the fate of other Jews, I did not discover a sensitivity to the condition of needy correligionists among either of the communities.

Sephardi Communities in Los Angeles

Los Angeles is the capital of California, the fertile state in the west on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. As with the other cities on the west coast, San Francisco and Seattle, the economic boom began after World War I. American trade, which began to expand towards the Far East, was one of the reasons for the mass migration of millions of Americans from the eastern states to the western cities which were being transformed into major centers of American commerce. California is of major importance, not only in the American economy, but also in American political life. Every candidate for election to the presidency must give his attention to the problems and desires of the residents of this state, in particular those of Los Angeles.

Today there are between seven and eight million inhabitants in Greater Los Angeles. The city is expanding in all directions. It is a metropolis of industry and commerce, but without consolidation and organization. There is no public transportation and every inhabitant rich or poor, whether a janitor or an industrialist, must possess an automobile in order to conduct his daily life, to go to the market and to work. A new and original program for public transportation is now being given publicity: buses will transport the inhabitants to all sectors of the city free of charge. This is to reduce the giant fleet of private cars which block the thoroughfares and result in dozens of traffic accidents daily.

The Second Largest Community after New York

The history of the Los Angeles Jewish community, like that of the city itself, is short. The influx of the Jews began with the general influx of the other inhabitants. But today the local Jewish community is second in size only to the New York community. It is estimated that there are about 800,000 Jews there and it is considered one of the richest communities in the country. The community center is one of the most important to be set up by American Jews.

Within this larger Jewish community are to be found small groups of Sephardi Jews. The term "community" is applied to any group of Jews which establishes its own synagogue. I attempted to gather well-ordered material relating to the history of the Sephardi communities. But my

attempts came to naught. The Sephardi Jews of Los Angeles are concentrated around four synagougues: the largest is the Tiferet Israel; the second is in Hebrew Center; the third is the Magen David Center for Syrian Jews. Wherever Syrian Jews settle they immediately establish a synagogue and call it Magen David. The fourth community comprises Jews from Iran and the Far East.

The first Sephardi immigrants came from Turkey, the Balkan States, Salonika, and the Island of Rhodes. The inhabitants of Rhodes, living under difficult material conditions, began to emigrate in the nineteenth century. They settled in the Belgian Congo (Zaire today) and attained great wealth. With the attainment of independence by Zaire in 1960, the Rhodes community there were forced to flee fast and lost almost all their property. Jewish immigrants from Rhodes arrived in Los Angeles and set up the Hebrew Center community. For many years Dr. Irving E. Benvenisti headed this community. Today it has many young workers and is seeking to consolidate its spiritual and material position. Yosef Cordova is the head of the community; he is a young intellectual who dedicates his days and nights to the improvement of his community.

The *Sephardim* are not an Organized Community

The largest Sephardi congregation in Los Angeles is Tiferet Israel which consists mainly of immigrants from Turkey and the Balkans. Many are wealthy but they are not united like the Ashkenazi communities which founded admirable educational and charitable institutions.

How many *Sephardim* are there in Los Angeles? The answer is not clear. According to various estimates, there are between 15,000 and 16,000 Eastern and Sephardic Jews in the city. Tiferet Israel includes about 8,000 members. Hebrew Center has about 3,000 members; Kahal Yosef and Magen David each have about 4,000 congregants.

A Jerusalemite leads the Community

The Sephardi communities have few active communal workers within their own ranks. But every synagogue has a women's organization which is active in social aid and Hebrew schools. All attempts to unite the Tiferet Israel and the Hebrew Center congregations, both of which have Spanish-speaking members, have been unsuccuessful. This is a pity, for amalgamation would have helped improve their spiritual situation.

For many years, the spiritual leader of the Sephardi Jews in Los Angeles was Rabbi Shlomo Mizrahi. He was a native of Jerusalem and a pupil of the great Sephardi rabbis of the last generation. He reached Los Angeles at the end of the twenties and became rabbi of the Sephardi congregation.

In 1959, Rabbi Jacob M. Ott took office as the spiritual leader of the Tiferet Israel congregation. He had acquired extensive Jewish education, and though an Ashkenazi Jew, he has a vast knowledge of the history and culture of Spanish Jewry and has a high standing among the general Jewish spiritual leadership of Los Angeles. He is dynamic and a dedicated Zionist and has for many years served as chairman of the locad Zionist Federation. There is no Zionist activity in which Rabbi Ott is not involved. Since becoming chief rabbi of the Tiferet Israel congregation he has influencaed many of his congregants to participate in Zionist activities.

For many years the brothers Milton and Richard Amado (whose family originated from Turkey) have played a leading role in the affairs of this community. Victor Tabah is very active in education and activities connected with Israel. He is a native of Bulgaria who wandered for many years from country to country before settling down in Los Angeles. Since the establishment of the State of Israel he has worked towards solving some of its problems, and is one of the few who has contributed to strengthening Israeli educational institutions including the Technion in Haifa. He has visited Israel nine times. In 1949, he made a special trip to Israel to help relatives who had come on *aliyah* from Bulgaria. With almost superhuman energy he succeded in taking out thirty-eight relatives from absorption camps and providing them with decent housing and a source of income. He may today regard them and their achievements with pride.

Among the outstanding personalities of the Sephardi community is Amnon Barness, who is a native of Jerusalem. He has amassed great wealth and has done much philanthropic work for Israel. He is aided a great deal by his partner, Mr. Max Candiotty, whose family immigrated from Turkey.

Gynecologist is Communal Worker

Dr. José Nessim, a gynecologist by profession, is a dynamic personality active on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal among the *Sephardim*. He devotes much of his time to drawing the youth closer to Zionism. He comes of a Jerusalemite family which immigrated at the beginning of the twentieth century to Latin America: he reached Los Angeles after a period of wandering. Dr. Nessim is well aware of Israel's social problems and he participated in the 28th Zionist Congress held last January. In an impressive speech on the social gap in Israel, he demanded that the Zionist Movement contribute more towards solving Israel's many problems in this sphere.

Many Iraqi Jews in Los Angeles arrived via Israel. They were part of the

mass *aliya* of Iraqi Jews in 1950 and 1951, the Ezra rescue operation. About one thousand families totalling about three thousand persons, are affiliated to the Iraqi congregation, Kahal Yosef. Some of them came from India, Burma and Singapore. Within a short time they attained impressive economic achievements. They are involved in construction and commerce, founded business firms and are well-to-do. Kahal Yosef is headed by Mr. Shaul Halevy, a young man from Calcutta. Rabbi Eliyahu Haim, a graduate of Yeshiva University, is the community rabbi.

Unfortunately, the Zionist movement takes no interest in these communities, who have almost no contact with the Zionist Organization and its activities. I believe that it is time to pay more attention to these communities and help rescue the younger generation, who have severed nearly all ties with Judaism and the rich tradition of its ancestors, before it is too late.

(1972)

Estate of the late Morris Amado

At the present time, the cornerstone is being laid at the Haifa Technion for the building of the Faculty of Mathematics. This was made possible by donations from the estate of the late Morris Amado of Los Angeles. The ceremony was held in the presence of his relatives and friends including his two nephews, Milton and Richard Amado, who are the executors of his estate.

During my visit last September to Los Angeles I heard much about this philanthropist's unique personality mainly from the distinguished communal worker, Victor Tabah, who devotes himself unstintingly to activities on behalf of Israel. He is one of the patrons of the Haifa Technion and has expended much energy in finding other contributors. He was very close to and had much influence upon Morris Amado and was instrumental in persuading him to will half of his estate — one million dollars — towards construction of the above building.

Return to Judaism

Morris Amado experienced many spiritual crises in his life. For many years he drifted away from Judaism and even married a Christian. But he had no children, and after being widowed he began to feel remorse at abandoning the faith of his forefathers. He had long discussions on Judaism and Christianity with leading figures and began to read the works of Jewish thinkers, including those of the Golden Age in Spain, and he thus arrived at the conclusion that he had no recourse but to return to his roots as the only way to find peace for his restless spirit. This decision was influenced in no small measure by the study of his family tree. The Amado family was descended from Spanish exiles who had found refuge in the city of Salonika, where they gave rise to a long line of illustrious rabbis and scholars. Some wrote philosophical works and well-known commentaries on the essays of the Rambam. By reading these works, Morris Amado learned of the greatness of his own family and also of the uniqueness of Judaism. He learnt of the changes taking place in Israel and came to understand the acute social problems involved in the *aliyah* of various Eastern communities. He believed that a special effort should be made to educate the children of Eastern immigrants in the exact sciences and modern technology so as to bring them up to the level of Ashkenzai youth.

Hence, Morris Amado decided to donate a half of his wealth to the Haifa Technion; the second half, another one million dollars towards strengthening Jewish communal life among the Sephardi Jews of Los Angeles; three-quarters of a million dollars he donated for the construction of a new synagogue for the Tiferet Israel Congregation; a quarter-of-a-million dollars for a scholarship fund for the youth of his community.

Education for Eastern Jews in the Technion

In a speech at the ceremony in Haifa, Richard Amado described his late uncle's virtues and fine personal qualities. He stressed the latter's desire to foster the education of Eastern Jews. Groups of soldiers from the Eastern communities, who had been sent by the Israel Defence Forces to study at the Technion, were present at the ceremony. They do a preparatory course of several months before entering the regular program of study in the various faculties.

I learnt of their impressive achievements at the dinner arranged by the Technion for the guests. I was seated near some of them and also near Mrs. Yael Rom, the teacher who prepared these student-soldiers for entrance into the Technion. She herself had served in the air force and is the wife of a professor at the Technion; she is educator and adviser to the soldiers. She pointed out that almost all belong to large, underprivileged families. But despite their problematic home environment and their past failures, they are revealing their talents and are getting high marks in the entrance examinations following the eight months of preparation. The students with whom I dined were dressed in military uniform. Their responses to my questions indicated a high degree of intelligence and general knowledge. They expressed themselves on numerous subjects, including the problem of social divisions in the country. They insisted that they need not be the only young people from the Eastern communities to benefit from an academic education.

The courses are the result of an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and two Sephardi communal workers (of Pennsylvania), Mr. Marco Mitrani and Colonel Yehiel Eliachar, who set up a scholarship fund to aid young Eastern Jews to complete their studies at the Haifa Technion and other institutions of higher learning. Two-thirds of the tuition fees are covered by the ministry and the other third by the scholarship fund.

Hundreds of Soldiers study at the Technion

There are a variety of courses in which hundreds of these soldiers have studied. The majority passed the entrance examinations and began their studies at the Technion; some became engineers, some are working

towards a master's degree and a few towards their doctorate. Mrs. Rom indicated with satisfaction that the number who dropped out is smaller than the number among the general body of students. Indeed, the student-soldiers have a keen desire to study and, more importantly, to meet the challenges facing them.

I parted from Mrs. Rom and the students with the promise that I would publicize their attainments. We can only hope that the number of these students will grow each year until the enrolment will equal that of the Ashkenazi communities. I believe this goal can only by attained through the implementation of a national program with the required funds. The results attained by these soldiers point to the truth of the saying: "Do not neglect the sons of the poor, for the Torah will emanate from them..."

(1972)

Communities of Eastern and Sephardi Jews in Canada

French-Speaking Jews in Montreal

The French-speaking community in Montreal is a young one. Only fifteen years ago the first immigrants from North Africa settled in the capital of Quebec, the French-speaking province of Canada. The government of Quebec wishes to strengthen the French element of the population. The nationalist elements seek to proclaim independence for the province, at least insofar as internal government is concerned. Hence, Jewish immigrants from the territories held by France in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) were welcomed.

Today the French-speaking Jewish community totals about 12,000. Despite the sympathetic attitude of the local authorities towards these immigrants, their integration was not easy. About 40 per cent of this community are to this day welfare cases. The HIAS organization, which was responsible for bringing the Jewish refugees to Canada from North Africa and other Middle Eastern countries after three wars with the State of Israel, was not willing to aid in settling immigrants. As a result, immigrants almost all of whom settled in Montreal felt themselves abandoned. Only recently have they begun to organize communally. Meanwhile, a new generation has arisen. They were sent to study at government schools because of a lack of Jewish schools and produced a considerable number of intellectuals. Their parents, who had arrived almost penniless managed to improve themselves economically. They are now able to devote their time to establishing Jewish schools, and ensuring a Jewish-national environment.

Ties with Israel

At the initiative of the Executive of the Sephardi Federation in Israel, a group of 108 students and other French-speaking youth paid a visit to Israel this past summer. This was organized in conjunction with the Departments of Immigrant Absorption and Youth Aliyah of the World Zionist Organization. In seven weeks the group travelled the length and breadth of Israel. They participated in a series of lectures on the Zionist

Movement and Israel's problems. In Jerusalem, a part of the group was put up in the building of Tiferet Yerushalayim in the Old City. The Federation Executive held a study day at Beit Elisheva in Jerusalem on the problems of the Middle East, Sephardi Jewry in Israel and the Zionist Movement. Lectures were given by Minister Shlomo Hillel, Mr. Eliahu Eliachar (Chairman of the Federation in Israel), Mr. Arye Pincus (Chairman of the Jewish Agency), Mr. André Narboni of the Jewish Agency Executive and others.

This visit has already yielded results in Montreal. Since the return of the group to Canada there has been increased activity among the youth.

Leader of this community is Mr. Elias Malka, who undertook to organize the new community and their educational and cultural institutions. He strives to involve all the North African and Eastern Jews in these activities. Among his loyal helpers are Mr. Shlomo Ben-Baruch and Mr. Elias Levy. One young and dynamic leader who will surely leave his mark on the community is Dr. Lasri, a graduate of the French university in Montreal and a psychologist by profession. He gives much of his time and energy to the organization of cultural circles in the community.

Mr. Dov Yanai, emissary of the Jewish Agency Department of Youth and Hechalutz, expressed concern over the future of the Jewish youth if they are not involved in Zionist activities. The New Left is making its impact on Canadian students, including the French-speaking Jewish youth who are cut off from Jewish tradition. Thanks to community efforts, about four hundred youth are involved in Zionist activity; but several hundred still remain on the fringe and are therefore vulnerable to the threat of the New Left ideologies. It is the duty of the Sephardi Federation to send a special youth emissary to Montreal who is an Eastern Jew with a good knowledge of French and English. Mr. Dov Yanai admitted that such an emissary could have tremendous influence on the youth. It is thus vital that the Youth and Hechalutz Department respond to this need as soon as possible.

The importance of the work of *shlichim* (emissaries) of the Eastern communities sent by the Zionist Organization and the Sephardi Federation may be better gauged from the achievements of Mr. Shimon Dery. This young Israeli lawyer of North African origin responded to the request of Mr. Uzi Narkiss and Mr. André Narboni to go on *shlichut* to Montreal. The Federation Executive was gratified that an emissary of North African origin was chosen for this task. Upon arrival, Mr. Dery was met by an apparently impenetrable wall. The community were concerned for their relatives in Israel who were living under difficult conditions. Many North African Jews, *yordim* (emigrants from Israel) in Montreal, had engendered an atmosphere which frustrated any talk of *aliyah*. But today, less than two years after his arrival, Mr. Dery has become a leading light in

the French-speaking community and has succeeded in creating an atmosphere conducive to *aliyah*. This is an example of the importance of sending emissaries from the Eastern communities to the Sephardi and Eastern communities throughout the world.

The Middle Eastern Communities in Montreal

In the previous section I dealt with the French-speaking community in Montreal, which in general comprises immigrants from Morocco. But there are also other Eastern Jewish groups. There are the immigrants from Tangier, the majority of whom speak Spanish, and are organized in a separate community. They have their own synagogues and schools, *Talmudei Torah* and evening classes for Hebrew and Jewish studies.

The Algerian Jewish community totals 5,000. Its members are of a much higher cultural and educational level than their Moroccan counterparts. But since most of them are officials and craftsmen they are not yet economially secure. The French-speaking community has a number of well-to-do families, the Tangier community are mainly in the middle class; they have no welfare cases.

The oldest Sephardi community in Montreal was founded two hundred years ago by refugees, descendants of exiles from Spain and Portugal. They established a magnificent community similar to those founded in London, New York, Amsterdam, and Manchester. Their beautiful synagogue was built seventy years ago. However, most of the congregants today are Jews from the Eastern countries. The head of the Spanish-Portuguese community of Montreal is young Rabbi Joseph Heward, sent by the Sephardi Department of Yeshiva University upon the recommendation of the Haham Shlomo Gaon, Chief Rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese community of London, and spiritual leader of the Sephardi communities in North America.

The Iraqi Jewish Community

This community of three hundred families (about 1,200 persons) formed a separate community and has almost no contact with the other Eastern communities. They attained high economic status and today occupy an important place in the commercial life of Quebec. The first immigrants arrived in Montreal from Baghdad and also from their community in Persia in 1952. The next year they began to arrive in large numbers. In 1954, they started establishing their own communal institutions. The first synagogue was erected in conjunction with immigrants from Yugoslavia. Mr. Albert Gaon, a Yugoslavi Jew, served as assistant to Cantor Abdallah Hillel who was the spiritual leader of the Iraqi community.

Mr. Aharon Kattan is the head of the community many of whom are well-to-do, such as the Lavi and Shavila families. Prof. Daniel Khazzoom a professor of economics at the English university of Montreal, has attempted to involve the community in public and Zionist activity, but without much success.

Recently the community has tried to establish ties with other Jewish communities. They turned to the executive of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue and asked to be allowed to join. But though the directors of the synagogue responded favourably, the Iraqi Jews did not show much willingness to becoming active members. They were ready to be permanent guests in the synagogue and not more. After lengthy negotiations an agreement was reached making the Iraqi community associate members only.

A women's organization is active in the Iraqi community, which enlists contributions for a scholarship fund for the Iraqi community in Israel. Every year they organize drives to raise funds for this purpose. Chairman of the fund is Mrs. Marcelle Shashua.

The Egyptian Jewish Community

There is a strange situation in regard to the Jews who arrived in Montreal from Egypt. These refugees, who lost all their property and capital in Egypt, are scattered throughout the city and have no interest in maintaining ties with fellow Egyptain Jews, nor with other Eastern communities.

All efforts to track them down and help them with their problems have failed. It is equally difficult to determine their number. There are various estimates: some believe there are 4,000 while others tend to exaggerate and say there are 8,000. Even the HIAS personnel, who tended to their transfer to Montreal, are unwilling to give reliable information concerning their numbers. It is possible that not all the immigrants from Egypt remained in Montreal, or in other cities of Canada for that matter. Many wished to join their relatives, particularly in the United States. Apparently Egyptian Jews used Montreal as a stepping-stone to the U.S.A.

Syrian and Lebanese Jews

There are also small groups of Jewish immigrants from Syria and Lebanon. Though in New York these Jews have formed an organized community which has existed for more than fifty years, in Canada they have not organized themselves.

Community of *Yordim*

The *yordim* from Israel belong in a world of their own. Their number in Montreal is about 10,000. They are mainly of East European origin, but also include Israeli-born, the children of Israeli-born and even the sons and daughters of *kibbutzim* (collective settlements). Some of the *yordim* are from North Africa and other Eastern communities. These people live on the fringes of Jewish society and have no contact with the rest of the Jewish community. It seems that feelings of guilt and shame have prompted them to keep to themselves, and they have assumed sole responsibility for their fate.

This is the general picture I received during my one-week visit to Montreal.

(1971)

Eastern Jewish Community in Toronto

Toronto and Montreal are the capitals of their respective provinces, Ontaria and Quebec, the most heavily populated of the ten provinces which constitute the federal system of Canada. These two provinces border on one another and both share a border with the U.S.A. The majority of the Canadian population, totalling twenty-two million, resides in these two provinces. Hence, most of Canadian Jewry, totalling about 300,000, also live in these provinces; about 125,000 live in Quebec and another 100,000 in Toronto.

Most Jewish immigrants from North Africa were naturally attracted to Quebec because it is dominated by the French language and culture. But a smaller stream of North African Jews — about 4,000 — arrived in Toronto too. Very little is known about the number of Jews in Toronto from the other Middle Eastern countries including Egypt. The number of Egyptian Jews is estimated at a further 4,000. They are scattered throughout the city and, like in Montreal, do not maintain any connection with Jewish communal institutions, either Eastern or Ashkenazi.

It was difficult for North African Jews to establish themselves in the Toronto commercial world, mainly because of language problems. It took them several years before they could earn an adequate livelihood and were thus unable to find the time for spiritual matters. Only in recent years have communal workers in the North African Jewish community, most of them Spanish-speaking and from Tangier, made an effort to form a congregation and establish a synagogue of their own. Today, this congregation, known as Petach Tikvah, comprises two hundred families and are like one big family. On the Sabbath and religious holidays, all the congregants and their families celebrate together and participate in communal festive meals, in reciting traditional religious poetry and singing Israeli songs.

However, the Petach Tikvah Congregation suffered from the lack of a spiritual leader. The Sephardi section of Yeshiva University in New York, which devotes much time to strengthening the spiritual institutions of the Canadian Sephardi communities, recommended a young Sephardi rabbi, one of its graduates, to the congregation as an organizer and educator.

Close Ties with Israel

I arrived in Toronto for the *Shabbat* when a special service was being conducted in the Petach Tikvah Synagogue in honour of the young rabbi. This was indeed a traditional *Shabbat*. After the service, the rabbi delivered an emotional speech calling upon the worshippers to take courage and organize their community life in accordance with the custom of their forebears in North Africa, in Tangier. Only in this way, he said, would they be able to curb the assimilationist trend among the youth. Following the service, the congregants partook of a festive meal, and I had the opportunity to converse with them about the obligation to strengthen ties with Israel. This bond would be encouraged by fostering Hebrew education among the children; for only such an education would induce the youth to remain loyal to their people, be true to their religious beliefs and, in the course of time, consider making Israel their home.

It should be noted that the North African communities in Toronto and Montreal maintain close ties with Israel, where relatives and friends live. They mentioned with love the names of settlements in the Galilee and in the Negev where these relatives live. They still hope that one day they will have sufficient means to make *aliyah* and live in more comfortable conditions than those their relatives had to contend with during the 'fifties.

The women of the Petach Tivah Congregation formed an organization which does educational and charitable work. They hold regular meetings, organize balls and bazaars, whose proceeds are earmarked to help the needy of the community.

A Large Group of *Yordim*

The head of the above congregation is Mr. Leon Uziel, a young and dynamic communal worker, who went on *aliyah* through Youth Aliyah which gave him his schooling. He speaks Hebrew and is familiar with life in Israel. He was compelled to leave Israel when his father passed away in Morocco leaving a wife and a large family of small children without any source of income. He could not prevail upon the Jewish Agency Aliyah Department to bring the entire family to Israel, since they were unwilling to take the responsibility of raising such a large family of young children. Mr. Uziel had no other choice but to return to Morocco and arrange the transfer of the family to Canada — in this way they all came to Toronto. The absorption pains were not easy, but by stages Mr. Uziel began to rehabilitate his family.

Another community from Morocco established a separate congregation and the Magen David Synagogue. Its leader, Mr. Henri Sion-Cohen, is an immigrant from Haifa who came to Canada more than ten years ago. He

makes strenuous efforts to keep the community together and has been unsuccessful in merging it with the Petach Tikvah Congregation.

Rabbi Yehuda Adiri, originally from North Africa, did not integrate well into the rest of his community and therefore resolved to form a separate organization. He set up a *Talmud Torah* for the children. The education of the children of both communities is a pressing problem that requires an immediate solution, since they are presently studying in public non-Jewish or Christian schools and thus their links with Jewish tradition are weakening.

The *yordim* in the two cities constitute a separate group. Conservative estimates put their number at about 22,000, 12,000 of whom live in Montreal and another 10,000 in Toronto. Though most of them do not associate with the rest of the Jewish community, some take an active part in Jewish communal life and even hold eminent positions in the administration of the Jewish institutions.

Jews Pray In A Christian Church

A Jew travelling over the globe in search of fellow Jews encounters strange phenomena. He comes across families whose sons and daughters have married Christians. Sometimes a young Jew marries a Christian girl, who sincerely desires to become a part of the family and of Jewish society and wishes to convert. Frequently after conversion, during which she has studied the religious laws and traditions, she becomes a pious Jewess and tries to adthere strictly to the precepts, outside and inside the home. I met many such couples during my travels. I saw women converts who were keen adherents of Judaism and had become exemplary educators of their children. In such a home there are no contradictions nor feelings of inferiority. There are also mixed marriages where the husband has all but severed his ties with Judaism and displays little, if any, interest in the conversion of his Christian wife. The two married in a civil court and each one continues to live in accordance with the dictates of his or her own conscience. Among mixed couples who are not religious, it is not hard for the individual to continue a separate way of life.

A Jewess from Morocco marries the Son of a Russian (Communist) Non-Jew

While in Spain, I met a Jewish family from North Africa. We discussed the problem of assimilation which was having an adverse effect upon our North African brethren who had settled in France. Particularly in remote towns and districts many children study in general schools and mix with their Christian peers forming relationships with the girls and sometimes marrying them. The new family lives like a Christian family with all its customs. When the children are born, they are not baptized, but neither are the boys given a *Brit Milah*. The child grows up in a Christian atmosphere among school friends and is completely unaware of the religion of his forebears.

The head of this family told me how his family had lived for generations in Fez in Morocco. One day, his young and talented sister decided to continue her education at the Sorbonne in France. There she met a young professor and fell in love with him. He was the son of a Russian Communist diplomat who had defected to the west. The son was educated in the west and had almost no connection with his homeland. He progressed

rapidly in his studies and became a successful scientist, attaining an eminent position at the Sorbonne where he fell in love with the girl from Fez and they decided to marry. They wanted to live without any ties with either religion or tradition; the professor was an atheist; the young girl had ceased living according to the Jewish customs of her family.

The marriage deeply shocked the girl's parents; the break was deep and the parents found no solace. The father took seriously ill and within a few weeks passed away. The daughter fell pregnant. The family in Fez were filled with anxiety: if the child was a boy, would she agree to a *Brit Milah* as required by Jewish custom? The girl replied to a letter from her mother: "You ask me if I intend to give the child a *Brit Milah* if it is a boy, and I can answer you 'Yes'. I am willing to circumcize him for reasons of hygiene. However the circumcision will not be performed by a *Mohel* but will simply be a routine operation in a hospital..."

Their own Version of Jewish Life

This is a comon trend in most Diaspora communities. Thus, when one hears of the shock felt among the ranks of Russian Jewry because the younger generation desire to learn Hebrew and Torah and return to a Jewish way of life, this is probably the natural reaction to unsuccessful assimilation. The children of Jews who lost their identity fifty years ago receive a communist education but are not fully accepted by communist society. A a result they suffer from a sense of alienation. Then, one day, they suddenly see a great light, the light of Judaism and the restoration of the Jewish people in its homeland. This stirs them to try and regain their Jewish identity, to go on *aliyah* to Israel, and seek comfort for their broken spirit in their rightful homeland...

Such "repentants" may be found in the west too. It is particularly the youth and lost souls, without any direction who are searching for a new path. And is it not wonderful that the path which they have chosen leads to Jewish tradition? Most Jewish youth who have returned to the Jewish fold are not willing to adhere strictly to the precepts of Judaism. But they want to study Judaism, to learn the history of their people and be free to follow their own idea of a Jewish life.

A Little Judaism

In an attractive corner on the coast of the Pacific Ocean lies the city of Victoria, British Columbia. This province was annexed to Canada one hundred years ago and is one of its ten provinces. I encountered a small community of seventy-five Jewish families in the city, most of whom arrived one hundred years ago during the Gold Rush on the west coast of the American continent. These Jews, mainly from Eastern Europe,

formed a small congregation around the synagogue. They were able to rest from all labour on the Sabbath and to come on foot to the synagogue as has been the Jewish custom for generations. The synagogue was affiliated to the Orthodox Movement and had a women's sections; the service was conducted in Eastern European style.

The children received a general education in public schools and a Jewish education in *Talmudei Torah* on *Shabbat* and on Sundays. This has proved inadequate. External influences were stronger and more irresistible and mixed marriages became a common trend. Where the young adults still maintained a formal connection with Judaism, they nevertheless abandoned their parents' traditions. They have already persuaded the older members to convert the synagogue from an Orthodox to a Conservative one. The women's section has been eliminated and men and women sit together.

When I visited the community during the High Holy Days this year, I encountered assimilated intellectuals who were seeking the path back to their Judaism. But they want a Jewish way of life more suited to their own inclinations, and a different format of prayer. They even wished to form a separate synagogue. At the head of the rebels was the spiritual leader of the community, a teacher of North African origin who had found his way to Victoria.

Meanwhile, they had to find a different place for their services during the High Holy Days. A young professor, one of the reformers, suggested that they appeal to one of the churches for the use of their building for this purpose. The church authorities acceded to their request: the crosses were removed from all the walls, and thus the new community held its services inside a Catholic church. The strange thing was that among the worshippers were seated a number of nuns who were as if glued to their seats, praying with the Jewish congregants with the help of an English translation of the prayer book. I was told later that this too was not unusual. Not infrequently, have Jews in the cities of western countries been in need of a place for prayer. They appeal to Christian church authorities, usually Catholic churches and receive the use of one of the chapels for their prayer services...

(1971)