

The SCRIBE

JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

PUBLISHED BY THE EXILARCH'S FOUNDATION

No. 29

OCTOBER 1988

Est. 1971

A HAPPY NEW YEAR 5749 TO ALL OUR READERS AND FRIENDS

Planning Success

There is a Baghdadian saying that it is better to have a wise enemy than a foolish friend. But in the person of Margaret Thatcher we have a leader who is both wise and a friend at the same time.

On the two occasions that I approached her in connection with our community centre, she rose to the occasion and gave us the necessary support within the law. The first was the roll-over relief on the disposal and the second is the planning application for the change of use. I proceeded with these two matters in the face of legal and expert advice that they were hopeless.

It may be interesting to give here part of the statement that I made at the Appeal hearing:

"I speak both for myself and a group of persons, some of whom are here today, most of whom are well known to me and have been acquaintances of mine over many years. I speak largely as an Iraqi who has lived permanently here in London for 25 years and am a representative of the Iraqi-Jewish community.

"The Jews have lived in Babylon/Iraq for 2,600 years. It was there that Ezra the Scribe evolved the idea of a 'communal place of assembly' that enabled us to survive over the millennia and which set the pattern for the development of the three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Babylonian exile did not break the spirit of the cream of Jewish society that were deported there. Those events are well commemorated in Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* and Verdi's moving opera *Nabucco*. Our small band of exiles looked around them and did not like what they saw. They were proud of their heritage and stood up and told Babylon, 'You are weighed in the balance and found wanting.' They were, in fact, the sole custodians at that time of civilised values as we know them today: equality before the law, both divine and human; the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; kindness to animals; democracy as the basis of good government; social justice, toleration and charity; peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice. They firmly believed that the world is subject to a moral law as surely as it is subject to the physical laws of nature.

"Recent events in the Middle East resulted in the dispersal of our people to the four corners of the world, including the

U.K., where the need for a meeting place was felt in the late fifties.

"I first came to London in 1933 to enter London University and when I came back with my family to settle down here in the mid-sixties I lent a hand to the search for a social centre. We first hired a hall in Westminster and then in Bayswater and in 1969 I found No. 11, which was the headquarters of the Zoroastrian Parsees for forty years. A company was formed by a number of friends to acquire the property, which had the benefit of a Class XVII planning use. We used that property for eight years without being aware of any complaints from neighbours. However, the place was not ideal for our needs and the search continued.

"In 1977 the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea put on the market the Chelsea Community Centre in Kings Road which would have satisfied our needs. As property prices were going down we took the opportunity of an offer for No. 11 from a school of English and sold it to them at a favourable price that would have enabled us to pay for the Chelsea Community Centre. At the same time a Charitable Trust was formed for the purpose and this made a bid for the Chelsea Community Centre. Although ours was the highest bid it was not accepted and the Royal Borough kept that property vacant for seven years till 1984 with complete disregard of our needs.

"In 1979, with the revolution looming in Iran, our numbers were increasing by Iraqi exiles living in Iran and the need for a new centre became acute. Unable to find anything suitable and seeing that property prices were going up again I came across No. 14 which was vacant and we bought it in April 1970 as a stop gap measure.

"I enclose correspondence relating to our attempt to get a property in Lauderdale Road, W9, belonging to the Church Commissioners in September 1978, to Barkers Depository in May 1985, also belonging to the Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and our attempt to acquire space in St. James's Church, Holland Park. We also tried to use land in Southwell Gardens Churchyard but we encountered difficulties from the planning department of Kensington & Chelsea.

"I submit copies of letters to 15 estate agents, to the Diocese of London, to the Valuer of Kensington & Chelsea, Church Commissioners for London, Department of the Environment, Crown Estate Commissioners, GLC, The Valuer of Hammersmith and ads in the *Estate Gazette* and the *Evening Standard* - all without success.

"The people using the property are

shareholders and their guests. The majority live locally. Our group is now mainly elderly people meeting two evenings a week. We celebrate various festivals there such as Hanuccah and Passover, when we read the narration of the Exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt some 35 centuries ago.

"In contrast to the oppressive Pharaoh, Cyrus the Great was a wise and tolerant king, and when the Iranian embassy celebrated in 1971 his 2,500th anniversary, a jubilee of jubilees, at the Savoy Hotel, I led a large delegation there to express, in the presence of a historical gathering of ministers and diplomats, the appreciation and gratitude of Babylonian Jewry for the help of that great king.

"In view of our need and difficulties, the authorities should provide us with a suitable place. In fact, all we are asking is to continue the temporary use of No. 14 until we find a suitable place. We seek no public funds. It must be clear by now that the Borough lacks suitable properties of this kind and this gap has to be filled. I appeal to you to allow us to continue the use of the property as a community centre."

After five months of deliberations the Appeal was allowed and planning permission was granted for the use of the property as a community centre.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, on the first case, I wrote at the time, "On behalf of the members of our Community I wish to extend to you our grateful thanks for your kind help in this matter, which has redressed an unjust decision. Rest assured that those who govern in the fear of the Lord need fear no human." © N.E.D.

The Numbers Game

A group of French politicians, who visited Israel a few years ago, gave the following advice to Jewish leaders: If your population does not increase to six or seven millions in 10 to 20 years you will have no future in the Middle East, and no business remaining there.

This conclusion was based no doubt on the French experience in Algeria, where 3 million French sabras (*pieds noirs*), with a powerful metropolitan France behind them, had to leave Africa with the cry "Algerie Française" ringing in their ears.

De Gaulle decided that prudence was the better part of valour and brought to an abrupt end 150 years of French presence in Algeria ©

The Jews of Iraq – the Sequel

From an article in *The New Yorker* by Milton Viorst, who recently visited Baghdad

Iraq's Jewish community, the oldest and once the largest in the world, has in recent years lived on the edge of doom. Exiled to Babylon twenty-five hundred years ago, in the era of Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews became fully integrated into the local culture, though they hung on tenaciously to their religious identity. On the eve of the Second World War, they numbered a hundred and forty thousand, and – singled out for special favours under the "divide and conquer" policies of the British mandate – they had never been more prosperous, better educated, more self-assured. Their vulnerability became apparent only after the war began, during the flirtation of the Arab nationalists with the Nazis, when the first anti-Jewish riots took place. In the years that followed, Zionism intruded into Arab politics, and Iraq's Jews became routine targets of violence. After the Arab defeat in the war against Israel in 1948, Iraq enacted its first anti-Jewish laws. But at the same time, coveting Jewish assets, the government acquiesced in Jewish emigration, and within a year, 90% of the ancient community had shrunk to three thousand. Then the Ba'ath, after its 1968 takeover, suspended Jewish emigration and publicly charged nine Jewish businessmen with "spying" for Israel. In the next year or so, dozens of Jews disappeared. Finally, in 1970, the regime decided to authorise the remaining Jews to depart. Today, though conditions are much improved, only about three hundred Jews are left in the country; almost all of them live in Baghdad, and almost all of them are elderly.

Baghdad's last synagogue (Meir Tweg) is on a narrow street near the Tigris. It is surrounded by a wall, and it is not easy to find. A sympathetic taxi-driver took me there late on a Sabbath afternoon, and, unbeknownst to me, went ahead to announce my coming. When I arrived, four or five elderly men were waiting at the gate to welcome me with the Hebrew greeting "*Shabat shalom*". One of them handed me a yarmulke – actually, a white skullcap of a type worn by Arab workmen and commonly sold in the souk. Then I was invited inside for the service, and they ushered me, with some pride, into the sanctuary.

What I found was a large, shabby old hall that evoked for me the stern synagogues of my grandfathers. On two sides were pillars, which held up the balconies where the women had

once sat. Bare light bulbs and electric fans were suspended from the ceiling, and Hebrew prayer books filled the shelves. The altar (*teba*) was at floor level, facing the ark, which one approached by climbing six or seven steps, and in front of the altar were two double rows of wooden benches, facing each other. Men sat in the first row on both sides, women behind them. Apart from two teenagers, everyone in the congregation of about thirty people looked to be sixty or older.

In the absence of a rabbi, the members collectively conducted the service. As in all Sabbath services, the high point was the dramatic ceremony associated with the removal of the Torah from the ark. While the Torah was carried through the synagogue to be kissed by the members, the congregation chanted lustily. As it was placed carefully on the altar, I was invited to the reading of a portion. I heard my name called in Hebrew – Moshe ben Eliezer – and I rose to recite the lines I had known since my boyhood. Before I resumed my seat, the men standing around me shook my hand warmly. After half an hour or so, a senior member of the congregation delivered a sermon in Arabic, of which I understood only that a blessing had been bestowed on Saddam Hussein. At last, the closing hymn was sung, and the service was over.

Some of the men waited for me in the courtyard in front of the synagogue, indicating a willingness to join in conversation. They told me that in the first year or so after the 1968 Ba'ath revolution life was hell. It was not just the hangings and the disappearances. Jews were forbidden to work, even in the souk; their property was frozen; and they were subject to constant harassment by the secret police. The situation improved as Saddam Hussein assumed more power, they said, and today Jews are treated like other Iraqis. They have their old businesses back, mainly in the import-export trade. They hold respectable jobs as teachers and civil servants, and, the men noted with satisfaction, the government recently sent a Jewish chemist from Basra to represent it on a trade mission to China. Jewish children go to the public schools and the universities, and half a dozen young Jews are serving in the Army – as engineers and doctors as well as soldiers. After the property of the Jews was restored, the men told me, the rental income from ten former

synagogues and two hospitals – vestiges of the community's departed grandeur – became available for Jewish charities. It now supports old people who have no other source of income. Some of it, they noted, will go next year to renovating and air-conditioning the synagogue from which we had just emerged – the only one still in use.

Indeed, if life is still difficult, the men said, it is not because of any oppression of the Jews. Far from stirring up anti-Jewish animosity, the government sees to it that Jews are protected. Even Israel's highly publicised support of Iran in the present war has had no unfavourable repercussions, they said. The difficulties that the Jews experience come from the unique problems of a remnant population. Wartime restrictions imposed on Iraqis permit only essential foreign travel, for example, but Jews find this rule particularly onerous, since almost all of them have family members living abroad.

In truth, with the congregation too small and too old to be viable, Iraq's Jews are almost all certain to leave after the war with Iran. The community senses that it is where it no longer belongs, and not surprisingly, a discernible air of melancholy surrounds the synagogue. When they finally left me at the courtyard gate, with the city already in darkness, they exchanged a wish with me and among themselves, spoken in Hebrew, that seemed to sum up their lives in Baghdad. It was translated for me as "May next week also be good" ●

BRIDGE

Ruff and Discard

by bridge builder

The most unforgivable sin that a defender can commit in bridge is to lead a card in a suit that is void both with declarer and in dummy. Declarer can then discard a loser from one hand and ruff in the other hand, thus gaining an extra trick which he could not have created for himself.

Thus declarer will make his contract when he should have been one down ●

Bridge is a social game, meant to promote friendship among members of a club. Thus, no member should be reluctant to play with another member, because he thinks he is a better player ●

LETTERS

I have come across a few copies of *The Scribe* and found them all very interesting.

In reading the names of ancestors, it gave me the feeling that I had found long lost relatives, although most of the names of the persons are not known to me by face, but, the names are very familiar to my ear.

As I live in Haifa where there are very few Baghdadians living here, I practically have no contact with them which I very much miss.

I shall be very pleased if you will include my name on your mailing list for future issues, and any back numbers available will be very much appreciated●

Haifa, Israel

J. Navi

I was shocked to read in *The Scribe* that Israel could remove Jerusalem as its capital to some other place. This is unthinkable, a preposterous suggestion. Jerusalem is the heart of Israel. Can anybody live without the heart? The Jewish people will never agree to change Jerusalem as its capital. We pray three times a day for Jerusalem. The Shechina dwells in Jerusalem●

London NW11 Rev. Monty R. S. Ezekiel

(The article was only referring to the administrative aspect of the capital. Jerusalem will always remain the heart of the Jewish people and should become the spiritual centre of the world. - Ed.)

I read your journal *The Scribe* from time to time at my sister's house, Gisele Fattal, and I would be most obliged if you would be kind enough to send it to me, as I find great pleasure in reading it, being an instructive and informative paper●

London NW4 Mrs. Linda Shaya, B.A.

Regarding your Editorial on Jordan is Palestine, one is reminded of an Israeli decision taken in 1951, which would prove in today's circumstances to be a mistake of enormous proportion. I am referring to the efforts made by Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan in persuading King Abdullah to drop the name Palestine from the title of his yet to be established kingdom. King Abdullah reluctantly agreed and in 1950 annexed the West Bank and created the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Had the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan been called the Hashemite Kingdom of Palestine as King Abdullah wanted it to be called, the present day problem of the Palestinians' aspiration for a homeland would have been perceived by the outside world as an internal issue concerning the nature of the regime within an existing Palestine (i.e. today's Jordan) rather than a problem questioning the nature and essence of Israel itself●

University of

Western Australia (Prof.) Rony Gabbay

We heard of your paper recently and it aroused our interest. My wife called at your office and was given six copies of your April issue, which contains an obituary of my brother Abraham Sofaer, the actor. These we have distributed to members of our family, who have all been glad to receive them.

One further point has aroused the greatest interest in us. In commenting on an early Babylonian group in Rangoon, you mention a Heskell Hai Shlomo Khedhour. It is possible that this gentleman is my maternal grandfather and I wondered if perhaps you had more information about him than appears in the April issue. I am anxious to have all the particulars about him that are available●

Croydon

Ellis Sofaer

Many of my friends here would like to enjoy reading *The Scribe* which is very interesting and nostalgic to all of us, so please send 5 copies of every issue●

Israel

H. E. Dangoor

I am a Deputy on the Board of Deputies and I recently came across the August issue of *The Scribe*. I found it most interesting reading and have passed it around to interested members of my congregation, of which I am chairman. I would be most appreciative to receive your Journal on a regular basis●

Luton

Mrs. Karen Powell

May I say first of all how very much I look forward to receiving each successive issue of *The Scribe*, which is made readily available to all visitors in the Library.

I should like to invite any of your readers who may have books, pamphlets, periodicals, etc. of Jewish interest, surplus to their requirements, to donate them to us where we will preserve them for posterity.

The Library, established with the College in 1855, now possesses some 80,000 volumes and is one of the foremost collections of Hebraica and Judaica in Europe. It also holds on semi-permanent loan the books and manuscripts collected by Sir Moses Montefiore, which scholars from all over the world come to consult.

Needless to say, we are always seeking means of enlarging and improving our collection and it is for this reason that I should like to appeal to your readers - never throw anything away which could be of interest to present or future researchers, but instead allow us to preserve it●

Jews College,
London NW4

Ezra Kahn,
Librarian

I must say that I find *The Scribe* very stimulating, and it obviously reflects a genuine concern for Israel and the Jewish people. I wish you continued success●

London NW11

Sam Bloom-Nitzan

Thoughts on Rosh Hashana

The Jewish New Year, unlike that of other religious faiths, is a time of spiritual stock-taking, repentance and prayer. It starts the Ten Days of Repentance culminating in Yom Kippur, when our sins are forgiven.

There are three components in repentance - confession, regret and resolve not to repeat the sins. During Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, our rabbis hold, the gates of mercy are opened and our fate decreed for the following year.

The great significance of the week of Creation is that the Almighty Himself, after six days of work, rested on the Sabbath to set an example whereby man can rest physically and engage also in spiritual refreshment.

It is interesting to note that there are four new beginnings in the Jewish year. The first is Rosh Hashana. The second is the New Year of Trees, on the 15th of Shevat - Tu B'Shvat - to celebrate the planting of trees. The third is the first of Nisan, the start of the civil year. The fourth is the first of Elul, which in Temple times was used for calculating tithes or offerings●

P.S.G.



Yehudit and Dov Sherf with their two lovely sons - Gilad and Lior, of Rishon Le-Zion, Israel.

Mrs. Sherf, who is a teacher with the Ministry of Education, and whose family emigrated from Musil (Mosul), Iraq, is expecting a baby in February. She is the first to apply to the Exilarch's Foundation for financial assistance under the scheme - RAISE A CHILD IN ISRAEL. The parents are willing to name the new-born baby after a Jewish victim of the Iraq government. It is hoped more people will come forward to join in this scheme - both as sponsors and recipients, that will not only increase Israel's crucial Jewish population but will also commemorate the name of a relative or friend and bring to life some of the millions of Jewish martyrs that we suffered this century, turning them into posthumous *olim*. Suddenly, the victims of persecution will have arrived in the land of their ancestors.

We hope to hear more of the World Foundation to Promote Jewish Population Policies, that was recently announced in the Knesset, to encourage Jews in Israel and the Diaspora to have more children●

IN NEXT ISSUE

Kismet - do we have free will or are our actions pre-determined?

The Baghdad Hangings - 20 years on

by N.E.D.

The New Ottoman Empire

Petrol was the undoing of the old Ottoman Empire; water may become the lifeline of the new one.

by Naim Dangoor

Turkey is the "joker" of Eurasian geo-politics. Yesterday it was the spearhead of Moslem armies trying to subdue Europe. Tomorrow it will become the spearhead, in the opposite direction, of a united Europe wanting to resume the conquests of Alexander the Great into Asia.

The Turks originated in Mongolia and belong to the Turanian Race, which comprises the Manchus and Mongols of North China, and the Finns. In the 6th century they spread into Turkestan and in the 7th century they adopted Islam. There are Turks in Soviet Russia, China, Afghanistan, Persia and Iraq.

The Seljuk Turks in 1055 secured political control of the caliphate and were succeeded, early in the 14th century, by the Osmanli dynasty which remained in power until 1922. During the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire was one of the strongest Powers in the world. It comprised Asia Minor, part of Russia, the Ukraine, the Crimea, the Balkan States, North Africa and the whole of Arabia. The Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Aegean were dominated by Turkish ships, and the Ottoman dominions covered not only the Byzantine Empire but the greater part of the whole Roman Empire.

Constantinople, as the seat of the Byzantine dominion, withstood the assault of the Moslem armies for 600 years marked by constant hostilities. The Empress Irene had been forced to pay a heavy tribute to the Baghdad Government. Nicephorus, who succeeded her, reopened hostilities with a diplomatic note characteristic of the official correspondence of the period: "From Nicephorus, the Roman Emperor", the letter ran, "to Harun, sovereign of the Arabs. Verily, the Empress who preceded me conveyed to thee many loads of her wealth, and this through the weakness of women and their folly. Now, when thou hast read this letter of mine, return what thou hast received of her substance, otherwise the sword shall decide between me and thee." Harun's answer, written on the back of the Emperor's letter, was short and to the point: "From Harun, the Commander of the Faithful, to Nicephorus, the dog of a Roman; verily, I have read thy letter, O son of an infidel mother. Thou shalt not hear, but see my answer." In the subsequent fighting in 805 the Romans sustained a heavy defeat and agreed to pay tribute of 30,000 gold pieces a

year. But the Moslem armies never attempted to take Constantinople.

However, in 1450 a Hungarian engineer developed a powerful cannon and offered it to the Byzantine emperor, but the latter declined to buy it, saying that he had no plans to attack anyone. So the cannon was sold to the Turks who used it to great advantage in the attack on Constantinople. The gun was transported, on a bed of slippery sorgum seeds, to the gates of the city, which surrendered in 1453. Thereafter, the Ottomans pushed their borders into Europe, and besieged Vienna in 1683. On their withdrawal, they left behind coffee bags and a quantity of croissants in the shape of a crescent moon - the Turkish emblem. Coffee and croissant achieved instant success in the cafés of Vienna and from there they spread to other countries.

Jews helped Turkey

Turkish ascendancy in the economic, commercial, diplomatic, naval and military fields was due in great measure to the influx of Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492. Turkey welcomed with open arms the Sephardim, who were rich, cultured and experienced in all spheres of government. They helped Turkey to attain naval supremacy.

The Jews were favoured as a valuable trading and artisan element and also as a counterpoise to the potentially disloyal Christian minorities. Solomon Ashkenazi and Joseph Nasi were able to exercise great influence in the State. Nasi became an intimate of Selim, the heir to the throne. In c.1561 he received from the Sultan a lease of Tiberias and an adjacent area which he endeavoured to develop as an autonomous Jewish centre. When Selim became sultan in 1566, Nasi was created Duke of Naxos and was promised to be made King of Cyprus if the island became Turkish. Cyprus was only taken in 1571 after a disastrous war.

It is interesting to note here that Ezekiel Gabbai who was a prominent banker in Baghdad helped in suppressing, in 1811, the rebellion of Suleiman Pasha, governor of Baghdad. Gabbai was called to Constantinople where he was appointed *Sarrafi Bashi* (chief

treasurer) and became the sultan's favourite. In this position he revealed exceptional talents and wielded tremendous influence. Many honours were bestowed upon him and he succeeded in displacing the Armenian faction from the Court. His brother Ezra Rahamim replaced Sheikh Sassoon as *Nasi* and *Sarrafi Bashi* in Baghdad and held this position from 1817 to 1824.

The Turks followed a liberal policy throughout and did not even change the name of their capital Constantinople (*Qustantiniyya*).

Turkey's decline started with the rise of European nationalism. In 1669 the Turks lost Hungary and in 1774 Russia ousted them from the Crimea. In 1821-9 Greece threw off Turkish rule. In 1908 the Young Turks secured the grant of a constitution. The final break-up of the empire came in the Great War of 1914-18 with the Western Powers wanting to exploit the huge oil reserves of the Middle East, which holds two-thirds of the proven oil reserves of the whole world.

Arabian Water Shortages

Oil is as plentiful in Arabia as water is scarce. The story goes that one garage in Kuwait displayed a notice: "Water £1 per gallon. Petrol free!" The aridness and desolation of the Arabian peninsula is due mainly to the work of the Arabs themselves, whose camels and goats ate all the trees and vegetation, which resulted in the loss of the topsoil and the creation of desert conditions. With the greenhouse effect threatening our globe, these conditions will tend to get worse.

After the thaw of the ice age 10,000 years ago, Arabia was green with vegetation. There was the site of the Garden of Eden and there Adam lived after he migrated from East Africa when it was still connected with Arabia, and the Red Sea was still a lake. Adam discovered the wild wheat and started agriculture, and is by definition the father of our civilization. The people of Arabia consisted of the industrious Abaras (the migrants) and the lazy Arabs (the residents). The Abaras, forefathers of the Hebrews, migrated in pursuit of their economic advantage, whilst the Arabs stayed put, owning a camel, a donkey or a goat and virtually waited for the date of the palm tree to drop into their mouths. Characteristically, Israel is now engaged in reclaiming the topsoil and in pushing back the desert.

So, if the discovery of Arabian oil

was the cause of the break-up of the old Ottoman Empire, is it possible that Arabian water shortage will help establish a new Ottoman Empire? For, the Arabs, now rich in petrodollars, have been looking for water sources for many years – artesian wells, desalination, even towing an iceberg from Antarctica to provide potable water. Kuwait had rejected Kassem's offer of water from Shat-al-Arab for fear of Iraqi domination.

Turkey is the "Joker" in Eurasian geo-politics. In the past its sultans were the leaders of Islam, carrying the mantle of the Prophet and the authority of the Caliphate. After the Arab treachery of the First World War, Ataturk decided to westernise the Turkish people, forcing them to have surnames, wear western clothes and hats, adopted the Latin alphabet and separated State and religion – Islam ceasing to be the State religion.

Turkey is now a member of the European Common Market and an important member of NATO, ready to play its part in any possible dismemberment of the Soviet Union. Moreover, on her recent visit to Ankara, Mrs. Thatcher agreed with the Turkish prime minister that henceforth the whole of Turkey is to be recognised as an integral part of the continent of Europe, this having become realistic not least by the opening of three giant bridges across the Bosphorous, connecting both parts of Turkey.

So, while yesterday Turkey was the spearhead of Moslem armies trying to subdue Europe, tomorrow it will become the spearhead, in the opposite direction, of a united Europe wanting to resume the conquests of Alexander the Great into Asia, aided by a new generation of technology for which Asia can have no defence.

The Flood

Likewise, Turkey occupies a prominent position in the geography of the Middle East. Its mountainous terrain dominates the alluvial plains of Arabia and provides an ideal catchment area for the rainfall of that region. Contrary to H. G. Wells' theory that the Flood of prehistorical legends of the Middle East took place when the straits of Gibraltar were burst open by the weight of Atlantic waters that submerged the Mediterranean basin, I believe that Noah's Flood occurred at the end of the Ice Age when a combination of warm weather, and a heavy rainfall (40 days and 40 nights) brought down so much water from the ice-covered Turkish mountains that a large part of the region was flooded. Noah's Ark is reputed to have settled on Mount Ararat in north-eastern Turkey.

The Flood story demonstrates in a dramatic way the extent to which Turkey dominates the geography of that region. The mighty twin rivers of Iraq, the Tigris and Euphrates themselves rise in Turkey and other rivers flow into the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

As reported in *Al-Arab*, Turkey has conducted a feasibility study into diverting the excess waters of the Seyhan and Jeyhan* rivers of southern Turkey into a network of pipelines totalling 6,550 kilometres in length and supplying 7 Arabian countries with water. The average flow of these two rivers is 39 million cubic metres daily of which Turkey uses 23 million, and 16 million are wasted, in spite of Turkey's efforts to construct dams to store the excess water.



Mrs. Thatcher has declared, last April, that the whole of Turkey is an integral part of the continent of Europe.

The plan is to collect these excess waters near Adana and pump them into two parallel pipelines via Aleppo and Hama in Syria, where they part – one going south passing Damascus, Amman, Tabuk and terminating at Medina in Hejaz; the other pipeline going east towards the Gulf, passing by Kuwait, Dammam, Doha, Abu Dhabi, up to Ras-al-Khaima. The western pipeline, 2,650km, will carry 3.5 million cubic metres per day divided as follows:

300,000 cubic metres for Turkey
 1,100,000 cubic metres for Syria as follows:
 300,000 for Aleppo
 100,000 for Hama
 100,000 for Homs
 600,000 for Damascus
 600,000 cubic metres for Jordan
 1,500,000 for Saudi Arabia.

The eastern pipeline, 3,900km, will carry 2.3 million cubic metres per day divided as follows:

600,000 for Kuwait
 800,000 for the eastern region of Saudi Arabia – Jubayl, Dammam, Khubr and Hufuf
 900,000 for the Emirates.

The cost of the project is estimated at 27 billion U.S. dollars in 1988 prices. The preliminary study has been conducted by the British firm of consulting engineers Brown & Root, who intend to produce a more detailed study in the light of observations from the seven Arab countries that will benefit from this project.

This immense undertaking will result in a wave of economic activity that will give employment to thousands of workers, engineers and technicians and many Arab construction companies that are semi-idle at present. It will take eight to ten years to finish the project which will include constructing new dams and reservoirs in Turkey itself and conduits to transfer the waters of Seyhan to Jeyhan ready for pumping. The diameters of the pipes range from 3 and 4 metres to 1 and 2 metres for the branches. All pipes will be constructed locally of local materials.

In addition, eleven electrical generating stations with a total capacity of 900 megawatts will be needed for the Medina branch and five stations of 600 megawatts for the Gulf branch.

Now, the all important cost of the water: it is 1.07 dollars per cubic metre for the Gulf destinations and 0.47 dollars per cubic metre for the Medina branch.

While these figures are subject to revision it appears that the Turkish government has received a positive response from the seven Arab governments. *Al-Arab* points out that the project is big and even historic and would produce a "green revolution" in many of the countries that it traverses but wonders if it will ever see the light of day, in view of inter-Arab rivalries that in the past resulted in cutting off water supplies from each other. Finally, the paper asks, "will this project be safe from Israel?"

We should ask ourselves, "Will Israel be safe after such a far-reaching transformation of the Arabian desert?" In time, the Arabian peninsula, which is larger than India, could accommodate 1 billion people. Would not this pose a threat to Israel? A united Europe in itself is a sufficient threat to Jewish survival.

Israel must look far into the future and develop close relations with Turkey, for the Jews can be of immense value to the new Ottoman Empire as they were to the old. Turkey can resume its traditional role of countering Iranian ambitions in the area and promote a regional confederation that will ensure peace and stability in the Middle East ●

© Copyright

*In Baghdad when one was said to talk from Seyhan to Jeyhan (min shihon li bihon) it meant that he was talking nonsense.

An Indian Rosh Hashanah

(From the *Washington Post*)

Rosh Hashanah dinner at the apartment of Nahoum Nahoum, owner of a well-known bakery of the same name in Calcutta, is a treat – a treat for the senses and a treat for the soul. A heavy cloth covers the table, nearly obscured by an assortment of dishes heaped with various traditional foods, fragrant with many spices.

The guests arrive, speaking French, English and Hebrew, even a little Arabic. Then the candles are lighted, conversation quiets, and it's time to observe the New Year.

In honour of the occasion, the women are dressed in their finest; guests in subdued saris and kamish choridor (the baggy pants costume worn by fashionable women throughout India) mingle with those in western silk or cotton dresses. The men are comfortable in short-sleeved shirts and skullcaps. Rosh Hashanah is about to begin – Calcutta style.

The servants scurry around, filling glasses with water and pouring a thick greenish raisin wine into heavy tumblers.

Most of the Jewish families in Calcutta came to India from Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, and they still retain an allegiance to that part of the world, speaking Arabic in the home and an appropriate Indian language (like Bengali or Hindi) or English in the street.

The blessings are sung in rapid-fire Hebrew by a handsome, brown-skinned young man with an ornate yarmulke, Jonah Samson. First, he blesses that curious, cloying sweet and slightly viscous wine. Then the bread, round and somewhat flat, sort of like a hallah that didn't fully rise, with little satellites of rolls clinging all around, and the whole sprinkled with kulanjee (the strangely pungent black onion seeds used to flavour certain Indian dishes).

Then, one at a time, he goes on to bless the succession of various symbolic foods on the table, foods that are meant to be tasted before the start of the meal, sort of like ritual hors d'oeuvres. He holds up his glass or one of the plates for the appropriate *berakha* (blessing). After each prayer, he helps himself to a bit of food from the dish he holds aloft and then passes the plate so others at the table may also sample its contents.

There are two dishes of apples cooked in honey, one flavoured with rose-water and the other with cardamom and cloves; a small bowl of pomegranate seeds and one of tender,

unctious dates. "From Saudi – the best in the world".

Next there's white pumpkin followed by garlic shoots and then long, long, long green beans, rather like those served in certain Chinese dishes. And then he blesses a dish of spinach-like greens and a huge, monstrous fish-head (blessed but not eaten). Finally, he recites a blessing over the fish.* The thick, pure white flesh of the bhetki has been rubbed with a masala (spice mixture) before being baked in a tandoor and served at room temperature. The complex flavour imparted by that particular masala, a combination of lemon, salt, coriander, cumin, turmeric and ground red pepper or green chillies, provides an exquisite counterpoint to the bland, heavy fish.

Then the serious eating begins. Course after course, starting with brinjal (tiny eggplants) stuffed with a rather mild-tasting mixture of chicken and rice; hulba (a Yemeni dish of chopped greens with fenugreek), "good for the heart", according to the hostess, Nahoum's sister Helen, gently looking out for the welfare of her guests; gajar pilau (rice cooked with tender grated carrots); a curious mélange of chicken giblets and eggs; and alluringly-seasoned pot-roasted chicken, almost more Middle Eastern than Indian in flavour, served with pungent fenugreek chutney. Next they serve the most famous Indian Jewish dish of them all – rich, brown, crusty alu makala, "the best potatoes in the world."

The meal is then topped off by bright yellow chicken soup with little textured dumplings. No, not curried matzo balls but, like everything else served that night, a dish traditional to those Calcutta Jews whose ancestors arrived in India two or three hundred years previously, bringing with them the broad variety of tastes they had acquired along their diverse routes. As time went on, their cuisine was influenced by certain available Indian foodstuffs and spices. For instance, the little dumplings in the bright yellow soup were made of ground basmati rice, the flavourful long, narrow-kernel rice grown throughout India and Pakistan. They were then stuffed with a hauntingly-scented meat mixture, and the whole concoction is referred to as kubba curry.

It turns out that the diet of these Baghdadi Jews, while varied and exotic, revolves primarily around chicken

*The blessing over fish is peculiar to Baghdadi Jews in India

וְהִי רֵעוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֵּהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּפְרָה וְגִרְפָּה בְּדָגִים :

(May we be fruitful and multiply like fish.)

and fish – and vegetables, of course, since a great variety is available year-round.

But, no matter how delicious, after the various platters are passed several times around, the eating slows, the conversation quiets and, after they nibble at an assortment of fresh fruit, washed down with exquisitely delicate Darjeeling tea, the guests depart. And the new year is properly on its way●

FISH IN THE STYLE OF BHETKI

(8 servings)

- 2 tablespoons coriander powder
- 2 tablespoons cumin powder
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne or 1 small green chilli, finely blended
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1½ teaspoons oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 lbs thick fillet of fluke or flounder
- (Optional: for a milk meal, add 2 teaspoons yogurt to ingredients)

Roast together in a hot, dry small pan the coriander and cumin powders. Add turmeric, cayenne, lemon juice, oil and salt; mix to a paste. Rub on fish and leave for 1 hour. Bake uncovered in a 450° oven 10 minutes or until flesh is opaque.

BAGHDADI STYLE JEWISH POT-ROASTED CHICKEN

(8 servings)

- 2 small roasting chickens, disjointed (9 to 10lbs total)
- 5 to six cloves garlic
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 3 bay leaves
- 1½ teaspoons turmeric
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup water
- 1½ teaspoons black peppercorns
- 2 tablespoons oil

Place all ingredients in a heavy pan, mixing until turmeric is distributed throughout. Cover and cook approximately 1 hour, or until nearly done. Remove cover and cook on moderate heat until water evaporates and chicken is tender. Chicken will stick to bottom of pan as it browns in the accumulated fat and oil. Cool in the pan. Serve with browned side up, either at room temperature or slightly warmed, accompanied by Mehti Chutney.

ALU MAKALA

(Brown potatoes made in the style of the Jews of Calcutta)

(8 servings)

- 1 quart vegetable oil
- ½ lb chicken fat, cut into small pieces (or ½ quart more vegetable oil)
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 16 old, round and smooth potatoes, peeled

Heat oil and fat together until chicken fat is melted. Strain out brown remains of the fat. Boil a large pot of water; add turmeric and salt. Cook potatoes about 4 minutes. Drain and dry thoroughly. Heat fat and oil mixture until smoking. Add dried potatoes and turn heat to low. Cook slowly about 1 hour. Do not allow potatoes to brown.

Cool in the fat. Remove and prick each with a long pin in several places; return to oil. Leave 3 to 4 hours. Shortly before serving, place pan over high heat until potatoes are golden brown all over. Serve while warm.

CHICKEN SOUP (MARAG)

(8 servings)

5 lbs stewing chicken, cut into pieces (or two small fryers, or equivalent amount of chicken parts)

2 onions, finely chopped

½-inch piece of ginger, finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

½ teaspoon turmeric

2 tablespoons oil

10½ cups water

2 to 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon sugar

1 tablespoon salt, or more to taste

3 to 4 stalks celery

4 fresh tomatoes, chopped

Kubba Curry Dumplings (recipe below)

Wash chicken and mix onions, ginger, garlic, turmeric and oil with ½ cup water. Place chicken and mixture in heavy covered pot and cook until chicken is nearly tender and onions are soft and mushy. Open lid and allow liquid to evaporate, stirring about 8-10 minutes. Cook until chicken begins to stick and there is a fragrance of ginger and garlic. Add remaining 10 cups water, lemon juice, sugar, salt, celery and tomatoes. Cook 1 hour. Add seasonings; add dumplings to boiling soup, cooking for 30 to 40 minutes longer.

KUBBA CURRY

(Dumplings in Soup)

(Makes about 24 dumplings)

2 cups basmati rice, soaked in 4 cups lukewarm water at least 4 hours, preferably overnight

1 teaspoon salt 1 egg, beaten

FOR THE FILLING

½ lb chicken or lean lamb, ground

¾ cup grated onion, squeezed dry in the corner of a towel

½ teaspoon chopped garlic

¾ teaspoon chopped ginger

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

½ teaspoon turmeric

¾-inch piece fresh ginger, grated

1 tablespoon chopped coriander

Drain and dry rice. Using metal blade, place in food processor and grind until smooth dough forms. Add salt. Add egg, if desired, for easier handling. Mix together filling ingredients. Place small ball of dough in the cupped palm of a moistened hand and pat out with moistened fingers to approximately ¼-inch thick. Place a marble-sized ball of filling in centre and, cupping hand, enclose filling entirely, forming a ball. Cook in soup 30 to 40 minutes.●

Spot an Ancestor

A FURTHER SELECTION from the Register of military taxpayers of the Baghdad Community of 1892.

Aboudi Heskell Hayim Abed
Heskell Shalom Abed Kheyat
Shaul Shalom Abed Kheyat
Heskell Yosef Aqchi
Moshe Yosef Aqchi
Heskell Ezra Abdulla Amran
Moshe Matuq Isba
Ezra Yishaq Assia
Heskell Eliahu Aqiba
Abraham Heskell Aqiba
Aboudi Eliyya Aqiba
Matuq Eliahu Abdulla
Mordechai Selman Ferhana
Abraham Dawid Ferhana
Heskell Dawid Ferhana
Ezra Dawid Ferhana & Sons
Shmuel Aghababa Fettal
Aharon Shlomo Fettal
Abraham Yisrael Fettal
Yisrael Abraham Fettal
Eliahu Abraham Fettal
Ezra Shmuel Nanna Fettal
Yehuda Abraham Fettal
Heskell Reuben Fettal
Meir Yishaq Piri
Heskell Meir Saleh Farha
Moshe Efrayem Parizat
Heskell Abraham Parizat
Abraham Efrayem Parizat
Saleh Rahamim Yosef Pasha
Heskell Rahamim Yishaq Pasha
Rahamim Yosef Pasha Khebbaz
Eliahu Abed Pasha
Yacoub Rahamim Pasha
Heskell Eliyya Pasha
Heskell Moshe Penhas
Saleh Moshe Penhas
Penhas Nessim Penhas
Rahamim Ezra Plaw
Meir Yosef Faqiru
Saleh Yosef Faqiru
Ezra Rahamim Faqiru
Sasson Yishaq Ftayya
Yishaq Saleh Peress
Yacoub Eliyya Peress
Rahamim Heskell Ezra Peress
Menashe Yosef Eliyya Peress
Saleh Heskell Ezra Peress
Nahom Mordechai Abul Pacha
Yishaq Nahom Pachaachi
Eliyya Saleh Hakham Saleh
Yacoub Yosef Hakham Saleh
Heskell Yosef Hakham Saleh
Aslan Muallem Saleh
Saleh Abraham Hakham Saleh
Shaul Moshe Sadqa
Heskell Ezra Hakham Shmuel Sadqa
Reuben Moshe Sadqa
Yishaq Hakham Abraham Sadqa
Menashe Moshe Sadqa
Yacoub Hakham Abraham Sadqa
Shaul Moshe Surani
Saleh Meir Surani

Sasson Abraham Surani
Heskell Ezra Sarraf
Yishaq Ezra Sarraf
Ezra Yishaq Saleh
Saleh Selman Saleh
Heskell Ezra Sabha
Reuben Saleh Sabha
Abraham Mordechai Sabha
Mordechai Saleh Sabha
Moshe Hayim Sabha
Reuben Ezra Hayim Sabha
Shlomo Hayim Ezra Hayim Sabha
Shaul Barukh Sayegh
Yosef Abraham Shalom Sayegh
Eliahu Lewi Sayegh
Selman Muallem Yacoub Sayegh
Ezra Sasson Hay Sayegh
Heskell Yona Sayegh
Yosef Yishaq Hayim Sayegh
Shalom Hayim Shalom et Sayegh
Shaul Yona Sayegh
Dawid Heskell Barukh el Sayegh
Meir Heskell Barukh Sayegh
Yehuda Abraham Sayegh
Abdulla Heskell Matuq Sayegh
Yishaq Abd le-Ezair Sayegh
Eliahu Abraham Sayegh
Yacoub Abraham Sayegh
Menashe Barukh Sayegh
Shua Dawid Yosef Sayegh
Yacoub ibin Yishaq el Sayegh
Heskell Eliahu Seltoon
Yacoub Rahamim Dawid Seltoon
Sasson Eliahu Seltoon
Hougu Moshe Saleh Seltoon
Yosef Ezra Seltoun Shakarchi
Moshe Ezra Seltoun Shakarchi
Shlomo Ezra Seltoun
Abdulla Hanuka Sebbagh
Dawid Saleh Seltana
Yona Yacoub Yona Saddiq
Shmuel Menashe Slaigh
Shalom Yacoub Sebbagh
Shalom Eliyya Semah
Yosef Khlef Qezzaz
Hayyu Abdulla Qezzaz & Sons
Hayim Heskell Qezzaz
Abraham Moshe Qerr
Yishaq Moshe Qerr
Ezra Yom Tob Moshe Qerr
Shaul Yishaq Qereen
Ezra Yishaq Qereen
Dawid Yishaq Qereen
Dawid Yishaw Qereen
Nessim Yishaq Qereen Tutunchi
Abraham Muallem Yacoub Qereen
Meir Aharon Qatan
Abraham Saleh Qatan
Aharon Sasson Qatan
Mordechai Moshe Nessim Qatan
Yehuda Moshe Nessim Qatan
Yehuda Abraham Qatan
Heskell Ezra Aharon Qatan
Yacoub Moshe Nessim Qatan
Eliahu Sasson Nessim Qatan
Menashe Shaul Qatan
Heskell Yosef Qatan
Sasson Abraham Yosef Qatan
Shaul Moshe Qatan
Meir Abraham Qatan
Shaul Yosef Qatan
Moshe Yosef Qatan
Heskell Nessim Qatan
Heskell Yosef Shua Qessab & Sons
Abdulla Eliyya Shua Qessab
Menashe Eliyya Shua Qessab
Aharon Saleh Qebbanchi
Heskell Ezra Shmuel Qeshqush
Yacoub Hay Qendarchi
Hayyu Heskell Qojaman
Menashe Heskell Qojaman Msaffi ●

BAKED SALMON

Alice Shashou writes: To clarify the recipe given in the August issue, No. 28, you need to put ¼ cup water with the fish and 1 cup water in the tray around the wrapped fish.

In general, when in doubt, always use your judgment●

In order to qualify in Israeli politics you now have to show that you come from Iraq or from North Africa. If you are from Iraq or Morocco you are recognised●

Abba Eban

Annette Basri

The Yeshiva University recently held a large banquet at the New York Hilton in honour of five recipients of awards for upholding the mission of the University and for the advancement of Torah education. Annette Basri was the recipient of the Sephardic Heritage Award. The citation stated:

"ANNETTE BASRI is indomitably committed to the highest principles of Torah life and scholarship. She was among the stalwart women who helped pioneer the lay leadership at the Yeshiva University High School (YUHS). She is also active in Yeshiva University Women's Organisation and the Yeshiva University Museum. Mrs. Basri is the daughter of one of Iraqi Jewry's most distinguished families, Mazli Iny and the late Frank Iny, of blessed memory. She is married to Dr. Albert Basri, a noted pathologist whose late grandfather – Haham Ezra Dangoor, of blessed memory – was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad. Mrs. Basri's son, Dr. William Ezra Basri, is a graduate of the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy-YUHS for Boys who went on to attend Yeshiva College, Columbia University, and Mount Sinai School of Medicine. He is now in his residency at Beth Israel Hospital. Her other son is Dr. Raymond Basri of Middletown, N.Y. Her daughter, Carole, is married to Dr. Jonathan Heilitcer, a YUHS alumnus.

"Mrs. Basri is a past president of the Ocean County Medical Center in Lakewood, N.J., where she is active in the Bezalel Yeshiva Day School and Congregation Sons of Israel."

In his award address to Mrs. Basri, Dr. Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, said that the name Iraq would invoke in American people thoughts of backwardness and aggression but the Jews of Iraq made over the centuries immense contributions to Jewish scholarship. Looking at a copy of *The Scribe*, he added that they should be called not Iraqi but Babylonian Jewry ●



In front: Georgette Meir, Mazli Iny, Hannah Abed . . .

Annette and Dr. Lamm

Hussein Panics

King Hussein, alarmed by the argument that Jordan is Palestine, that would be pursued both by a winning Likud as well as by the PLO, has taken drastic measures to dissociate Jordan from the West Bank in a desperate attempt to save his throne.

Suddenly realising that his continuing claim to the West Bank may rebound on him, he decided to drop it like a hot charcoal. This leaves Israel and the PLO in a straight fight. As the Camp David accord has now become a dead letter, Israel should not hesitate to annex the territories, declare the Arabs as Jordanians, apply Israeli laws and introduce land value taxation throughout Israel ●

For your free subscription in
The Scribe
write to the publishers.

Board of Deputies

At a special General Meeting held in May, the following members were elected to represent the Iraqi Jewish Community in the UK on the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to hold office until April 1991: Naim Dangoor, Elias Dangoor, Avihou Ben David, Shaul Shuker and Salim Soffair.

At a meeting on 19 July these five elected Deputies unanimously resolved to constitute themselves into an Executive Committee to look after the affairs of the Community in the UK.

It was further resolved to set up the following committees: Constitution, Membership, Community Aid, Social Activities, The New Club, and Library. Members interested in joining any of these Committees, please contact the Hon Secretary Mr Maurice Khalastchi.

Mr Percy Gourgey was elected to the prestigious Executive Committee of the Board of Deputies ●

Jews in Arab lands

The joint officers for Jews in Arab Lands, Mr Percy Gourgey and Mr Sidney Shipton, are planning a Seminar on this subject to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the Universal declaration of Human Rights in December 1988, and a special Memorial Service in January 1989 to mark the 20th year since the terrible hangings of nine innocent Jews in Baghdad, which shocked the civilised world ●

New Sefer Torah

A new Sefer Torah was dedicated in Od Yosef Hai Yeshiva in Hendon in July in honour of the late Mr Levi Kalaty, its great benefactor, who was born in Bombay. The Sefer Torah was carried in joyous procession under the chuppah from the home of Mr Kalaty and the rejoicing reminded one of that of King David when he brought the Ark to Jerusalem ●