

TIES BETWEEN THE JEWS OF ALEPPO AND OF IRAQ IN THE 18th CENTURY

Abridged from *Nehardea* (Autumn 1999)

In Iraq in the 14th-17th centuries there was a spiritual as well as a demographic and economic decline. This was caused by the Mongol conquests, starting from the 13th century, but chiefly in the 14th and 15th, leading to the abandonment of the region by its inhabitants.

By contrast, the Jewish community of Aleppo in that period underwent no degeneration but the opposite. The exile from Spain brought new forces to Aleppo, which burgeoned and became fortified in spirit, organization, and economy.

From the start of the 18th century the Jewish community of Iraq underwent very significant developments in demography, as more and more Jews entered the region of the Iraqi delta, Basra, and Baghdad. The Ottoman conquest of Iraq in 1638 brought about stability to the region and encouraged Jews to settle there.

The region from Baghdad southwards, namely the Iraqi delta and the Persian Gulf, had been closed to commerce for centuries. The trade route from the Far East to the Persian Gulf and thence to Basra and Aleppo was sealed by the Portuguese who ruled the area. They stationed warships and cannon at the entry to the Persian Gulf with the aim of controlling the trade route between the Indies and Europe. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch and the French, and only during the 18th century did the British gain mastery of the shipping in the Indian Ocean. It was they who reopened the trade route from India via Basra, the Euphrates river or the Western Desert to Aleppo, and thence to the Mediterranean, Palestine, Egypt, and Europe.

These factors led to the economic growth of Iraq, and Basra and Baghdad became increasingly populated.

There are data from the 18th century attesting to a strong connection with Aleppo. Both local and foreign sources that I found in the archives of the powers that ruled the region then, namely Britain and France, provide proof that Jews from Aleppo reached Iraq, mainly Basra and Baghdad, and assumed very important functions in the community. At this time Rabbi Sadka Bekhor Hussin of

Aleppo was invited to Baghdad by the Jews there. Asked why they turned to a rabbi from Aleppo when they could have approached Istanbul, the Jews of Baghdad turned to Aleppo and not to Istanbul because of the stronger ties with Aleppo.

Scribe: The reasons why the Jews of Baghdad turned to Aleppo rather than to Constantinople were:

1. that Aleppo was so much nearer to Baghdad
2. that the Jews of Baghdad and Aleppo were Arabic speaking, as also were the immigrants from Spain, whereas the community in Constantinople spoke Turkish

In time, the movement between Aleppo and Baghdad became a two-way traffic, with Baghdad gradually becoming the dominant partner. So much so that in the Far East the term "Baghdadi Jews" came to refer not only to Jews from Iraq but also to Jews from India, Persia, Syria and even the Yemen. Communities in most of these areas turned to Baghdadi Rabbis for answers to various religious enquiries.

The reason why the Portuguese closed the route through the Persian Gulf, was to promote the sea route round the Cape which had been discovered by the Portuguese Vasco de Gama and was entirely under their control.

JEWS AND ARABS UNITED BY GENES

taken from *The Times* 9 May 2000

Jews and Arabs are extremely closely related, a new genetic survey has shown.

Wherever in the world they now live, Jewish men carry the same Y chromosome as Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese.

"Jews and Arabs are all really children of Abraham and all have preserved their Middle Eastern genetic roots over 4,000 years," said one of the scientists involved. Harry Ostrer, director of the Human Genetics Programme at New York University School of Medicine. The team analysed regions of the Y chromosome in 1,371 men from 29 populations worldwide. The Y chromosome passes largely unchanged down the male line.

The results, published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, show that the difference

between Jewish and Arab populations is extremely small, considerably smaller than that between North and South African populations, for example. The study confirms that both Arabs and Jews owe their genes to a common ancestor population that predated the Jewish religion.

A second conclusion is that the Jews have maintained their genetic heritage to a remarkable degree, given the Jewish diaspora and the long isolation of small Jewish populations in many places.

"Because Jewish religious affiliation is assigned maternally, our study afforded the opportunity to assess the contribution of non-Jewish men to present-day Jewish genetic diversity," said Michael Hammer, the study leader. "It was surprising to see how significant the Middle Eastern genetic signal was in Jewish men from different communities in the diaspora," he said.

The latest human chromosome to be deciphered in full suggests that human beings may have many fewer genes than previously supposed. Chromosome 21 contains only 225 active genes. The finding suggests that the entire complement of human genes may total nearer 40,000 rather than the previous estimates of between 70,000 and 140,000.

Huge areas consist of apparently worthless DNA. In one stretch of seven million base pairs (the letters of the genetic alphabet), a stretch longer than the entire genome of *E.coli*, there is only a single gene. The full sequence of Chromosome 21 is published online today by *Nature*.

Scribe: It is now clear that the Arab is our brother, and we have no other.

Actions speak louder than words

It is what we do that really matters, not just what we say.

A bad workman always blames his tools

Good workmanship depends no more on the quality of the tools than it does on the way in which they are used, so to blame the tools for bad workmanship is to attempt to excuse one's own lack of skill.



The exterior of the Iraqi Synagogue called Babylonian Jewish Centre - in Great Neck N.Y. fully described on page 15 No. 72.

MY VISIT TO INDIA

by: Mordechai Ben-Porat
Abridged from "*Nehardea*" No. 12

The trip began on February 1999 on an El-Al flight to Bombay, now Mumbai.

We met the President of the Baghdad Jewish Community, Mr Solomon Sopher, who had remained in Bombay and who also serves as the Trustee of the David Sassoon Fund. He is a pleasant, kindly man who has a great deal of energy and who devotes much of his time to the service of the community. He is also the Cantor for the Magen David Synagogue in Mumbai.

The Israeli Consul in Mumbai, Mr Walid Mansur, is a Druse who has served many years in the Israeli Defence Forces and was retired as a Brigadier General. He is well loved by the Jewish Community and has a great understanding of them. On the Sabbath, I visited the Eliahu Synagogue with Mr Mansur. There were about three minyanim and a similar number of women. Among the men were representatives of the American Joint who had come for the dedication of a new building for the Jewish Community. In Mumbai there are about fifty people of Baghdadi origin who were born in India. In all of India there are some 5,000 "Bnei Yisrael". In this Synagogue, in the 1950's there were about 700 worshippers. In those days the Bnei Yisrael were not a part of the Baghdadi community but today the Baghdadi Jews are very much helped by the Jews of "Bnei Yisrael" in many ways.

We visited the library named for David Sassoon, the Sassoon family has about 17 trust funds. At the entrance to the library is a statue of David Sassoon and many things written about him. Then

we visited the Magen David Synagogue.

We visited Miss Sophy Kelly who used to be the wealthiest person among the Jews of Bombay but is today in painfully straightened circumstances.

In Poona we went to the Ohel David Synagogue, an impressive structure, within and without. In Poona there are three Baghdadi families. It is heartbreaking to see how badly the Synagogue was burned, together with the Torah Scrolls, by Iranian ruffians who broke in through a window one night and set fire to the building. This was during the Gulf War when missiles were being fired on Israel.

In Calcutta we visited the old and beautiful Magen David Synagogue with the President of the Community Mr David Nahoum. From there we proceeded to the Beit El Synagogue. This synagogue has a ritual bath, an oven for baking matzot and a winery for preparing raisin wine. Outside the synagogue is an area for erecting a tabernacle (succah). Inside there are some twenty Torah Scrolls. Mr Nahoum told me in great distress that in order to save what is left of the Community's property there is a plan to turn it all over to the care of the government: it will then be designated as a protected site.

There are still about 60 Jews in Calcutta and all are over 65 years of age. Each week on Erev Shabbat, prayer services are held, alternating between the Synagogues.

On our return to Mumbai, we were invited by Mr Sopher for Friday night kiddush and dinner. He invited 12 guests, and there were 15 varieties of food well-loved by those from Iraq.

Scribe: Mr Ben-Porat's visit to Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia in March

1998 and his visit to India in February 1999 can be regarded as a sequel to the historic visit of the well-known 12th century Jewish traveller, Benjamin of Tudela, who over 14 years journeyed through Europe and the Middle East to record the life and activities of Jewish communities there.

In the case of Mr Ben-Porat his travel had a happy ending in that he married his secretary soon afterwards (see photograph Scribe No. 72, page 30).

PALESTINIAN POPULATION GROWS AT UNRIVALLED RATE

from *New York Times*

Sent in by Salim Khabbaza - Great Neck, NY

The population explosion in the Palestinian-governed Gaza Strip appears to be unrivalled in the world. Its population of 1.1 million - half under 15 - is expected to double by 2014, which would pose almost unimaginable strains on what is already a highly congested area with few jobs, severely inadequate housing and almost no natural resources. (The current population of just over 3 million in the West Bank and Gaza combined is expected to rise to 5.5 million by then).

Gaza's extremely high fertility rate of seven children per woman is comparable to Somalia's or Uganda's. But unlike those countries, almost all the babies survive and adults live a relatively long life, fuelling a boom that is now forcing difficult choices on Palestinians and their leaders.

Family planning is a central issue in Gaza - central, at least, to many young Palestinians who say they do not want their children to suffer as they did in oversized poor families. But, for the young Palestinian government, with its conservative, male-dominated Islamic society, family planning is culturally sensitive and politically complex. Large families are not only traditional but a point of nationalist pride.

For the five year old Palestinian Authority, the population issue has been a challenge, although one that has not been publicly acknowledged. Officially, Palestinian leaders have long advocated population growth as a way to outnumber the Israelis on the land the two groups share.

MIDRASH BEN ISH HAI

I enclose as promised, the report of the commemoration by Midrash Ben Ish Hai in New York of the 90th Anniversary of Hakham Josef Hayyim, with three photographs taken on the occasion.

London Rachel Manasseh

The **Yom Hillula of Morenu Rabbenu Hakham Yosef Hayyim 'a'h** was commemorated at a special event held by **Midrash Ben Ish Hai** on 13 Elul 5759, the 24th August 1999 in New York. Members of the Hakham's family came especially from Geneva and Montreal, with guests and friends from England, Canada and the United States. A crowded audience, including a number of Rabbis, gathered to pay tribute.

Mr Naim Levy from Montreal and Mr Jouri Lawi from Geneva, great grandsons of the Ben Ish Hai - as Hakham Yosef Hayyim is known, after his most famous work - both addressed the gathering with deep emotion. While some of the elder members of the family were unable to come and were missed, some of the younger generation were present, and all were together in spirit. Mr Salman Abraham, also a great grandson, and family were also present. The brothers Jack David and Joseph Hayyim David in London, known as "*Beit el Hakham*", great grandsons from the male line, though unable to come, appeared on video addressing the audience each with a special message from the life of Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a'h.

Dr Samuel E Moshe presented the packed programme, and related several stories from the life of the Ben Ish Hai. The **Midrash Ben Ish Hai choir** directed by Hakham Ya'aqob Menashe - ages ranging from 7 to 70! - presented a lively selection of some of the many *shbahoith (pizmonim)* written by Hakham Yosef Hayyim, with a specially prepared music accompaniment, and was enthusiastically applauded. One guest in the audience even telephoned her father in Brazil during the performance so that he could hear the *shbahoith* being sung!

Videos were shown, courtesy of Mr Jouri Lawi, of his participation in a Hillula a few years ago in Jerusalem - reciting *Qaddish* at the memorial grave at the Mount of Olives and the blessing of

Continued on following page



Left to right: Abdallah and Francine Simon; Naim Levy; Jouri Lawi, his son Roget Lawi; Hakham Ya'aqob with Rabbanih Ruth Menashe



*Reciting the Hashkabah prayer for Hakham Yosef Hayyim
Standing in front row from left to right: Jouri Lawi; Salim Abraham; Naim Levy; (great grandsons of Hakham Yosef Hayyim) and Hakham Ya'aqob Menashe*



The Midrash Ben Ish Hai Men and Boys' Choir under the direction of Hakham Ya'aqob Menashe, performing Shbahoith and pizmonim penned by Hakham Yosef Hayyim, the Ben Ish Hai

the Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu at Hekhal Shelomo. Hazzan Hayim Salman who had come from Israel for the occasion rendered a song he had especially composed in the Iraqi tradition in honour of Hakham Yosef Hayyim, the Ben Ish Hai. A video presentation of Rabbi Sinai Halberstam, supporter and guide of Midrash Ben Ish Hai since its inception, stressed the universal regard for Hakham Yosef Hayyim 'a"n not only in Babylonian and Sephardi communities but also in Western and Hassidic Jewry.

Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe spoke quietly and feelingly of the long regard for the Ben Ish Hai he had imbibed from his father, and the special choice of the name when founding his Midrash over ten years ago. Then followed the lighting of candles and *Qaddish* recited by the three grandsons present, Mr Naim Levy and Mr Joory Lawi, and Mr Salman Abraham, and the *Hashkaba* by Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe. The warmth and deep reverence was felt by all the standing audience.

The wonderful atmosphere of the evening was enhanced by the songs and music of the times, the much appreciated Baghdadian catering of Mr Aodi Zilkha and a display of the life and works of Hakham Yosef Hayyim especially prepared by Mr Hayim Habousha. The Hillula reflected the organisational expertise of the Hillula committee and the care and devotion of Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe and Rabbanith Ruth Menashe. As our guests remarked, "It was beyond all expectations" - **a fine tribute to the living heritage of our great spiritual leader and sage, Hakham Yosef Hayyim 'a"n, the Ben Ish Hai.**

To: Friends and Supporters of the International Sephardic Educational and Cultural Center (SEC), a Center for all Jews

**From: Jose A Nessim, M.D.
Founder and President**

This report is to update you on what is happening at the SEC in Jerusalem, as well as the branches in the Diaspora. The success is unequal in contemporary Sephardic history. For 21 continuous years we are becoming larger, better and stronger.

In February 1999 after negotiating for years with a great deal of



24 November 1958 - Picture taken in Baghdad at a birthday party for Abe Yousef Dali. One is reminded of the school song, "Forty years on when far and asunder parted are those who are singing today".

difficulty, we purchased the three historical buildings we had been leasing for twenty years from the Government of Israel for \$7.5 million payable over three years. We have been paying on time except for one of the payments that was due last April for \$1.1 million. Unfortunately, we were only able to raise \$350,000 by the due date. We are doing everything in our power to awaken and energise the 1.5 million Sephardim living in the Diaspora so that we can complete the payments and avoid risking the loss of this campus to the many other Jewish organisations who are clamouring for the opportunity to bid on this phenomenal piece of real estate in the heart of Jerusalem.

The SEC needs you and everyone you know to make this building campaign smooth and successful. The architectural plans call for a complete renovation of the campus that will make it a world class centre attracting people from around the world, whether on one of our programs or simply touring Jerusalem. The SEC will soon be the beautiful gateway to the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall.

Aside from the physical premises, the SEC is now a world Jewish movement that is tolerant, not judgmental, and has enriched the lives of tens of thousands of young people around the world. To get better acquainted, please go to the internet and look up www.secworldwide.org. Specialised programmes for all sizes of groups can be arranged with the SEC's experienced

staff of educators. The Centre is open year around and is ready to meet the needs of your community - whether it be in Jerusalem or in your own city.

Celebrating a Bar Mitzvah at the Kotel, which is just steps away from the Centre, is an experience that is unforgettable and can be arranged by the SEC staff. In September we begin an accredited One Year Programme in conjunction with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In Diaspora the branches continue to flourish and we have lectures, shabbatons and yearly conventions in North and South America. Over 600 married couples have met at our activities over the years, and now form young married groups in their communities.

Opportunities are now available for you to have your name inscribed in these buildings in Jerusalem for as little as \$1,000.00. We invite and expect everyone to participate in this special project that will keep alive the legacy of our parents in a place they always dreamed of and mentioned in their daily meditations.

Remember that our only goal is to unite and organise the 1.5 million Sephardim living in the Diaspora in order to create the necessary organisational structure that will ensure the Jewish survival of our children and their descendants. All Jews are invited to join this noble and sacred cause. For more information, please e-mail us at secforever@aol.com or visit us on the web at www.secworldwide.org.

YEHUDI MENUHIN AND THE NAZIS

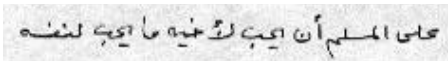
Perhaps the reason why, unlike Jascha Heifety, Yehudi Menuhin was not averse to appearing in Germany and playing under a Nazi conductor, and that Menuhin was not a Rabbanite but a Karaite Jew.

During the war the Nazis did not harass the Karaites, and gave them complete freedom to practice their religion and carry on with their lives. They apparently had a certificate from Cathryn the Great that they were not ethnic Jews and were tolerated in Russia, while the other Jews underwent recurrent pogroms. (See Scribe No. 63).

The Karaite movement began in Baghdad in the 8th Century by Anan Ben David and was the Spiritual successor to the Sadducees, whose party were paradoxically in power in Judah at the time of Jesus.

MOHAMMED GOT IT RIGHT

Continuation of Thoughts & Afterthoughts



Much has been written about the Golden Rule, namely, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". But this is a tall order, as no-one can love a neighbour, less so a stranger, as oneself. Moreover, this is not what the Bible says. The words are - VE AHAVTA LE REAKHA KAMOKHA, and not ETHREAKHA. In other words, the true meaning of the Golden Rule is to wish for your neighbour or even for a stranger as you wish for yourself.

It appears that the true meaning got lost in the translation from Hebrew to Greek and from Greek to other languages. But the Koran got it spot-on; it says, (a Moslem has to desire for his brother as he desires for himself).

It is interesting to note that this Arabic dictum is one of the versions of the Golden Rule inscribed on the walls in the Religion Section of the Millennium Dome.

On the occasion of the death of President Hafez al Asad, we publish the above picture which shows the Syrian dictator shaking hands and welcoming the Chief of the Syrian Jewish Community Council, Yousef Kh. Jajati, who gave us this photograph on a visit to London a few years ago.

MILLENNIUM DOME, FAITH ZONE

Quotations from the Faith in the Future section

Baha'i

"Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself." - Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'ullah, 71

Buddhist

"Do not hurt others that which hurts yourself." - The Buddha

Christian

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." - Matthew 7.v12

Hindu

"This is the sum of duty: do nothing to others which would cause you pain if done to you." - Mahabharata, XIII:114

Jain

"In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self." - Mahavira

Jewish

"What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the law: all the rest is commentary." - Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Muslim

"No-one of you is a (true) believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." - Prophet Muhammad

Sikh

"Don't create enmity with anyone as G-d is within all." - Guru Granth Sahib p. 258

Zoroastrian

"That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self." - Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94.5

The Arabic paper *Free Iraq* published in London, has re-printed in its October issue 1999 an Arabic translation of the last letter which the late Sasson Dallal wrote to his brother David the night before his execution.

That moving letter appeared on page 25 of The Scribe No. 71. It reflected the strong character of the writer and his devotion to freedom, democracy and peace.

REVIVING THE DEAD

In our thrice daily prescribed prayers, and on all other occasions, we bless our Creator for various mercies, adding, "Blessed art thou O Lord who revives the dead". Where is the evidence? Most people take this blessing with a grain of salt, perhaps as a later insertion to promote the Religion and as a sop for people's sensitivity. Thus, it is noteworthy that people never bow at this blessing, as they do for all other blessings.

Thus, when Rabbi Ezra Basri, Chief Justice of Jerusalem, offered to write an article for The Scribe, I readily asked him to write an article on the revival of the dead as appears in our liturgy. What he wrote was taken from mythology and as he would readily appreciate, could not be accepted as an evidence in a Court of Justice.

However, thinking again and again about the subject myself, I came to what may be a proper answer and a satisfactory explanation.

The answer is in the question or, perhaps, in the bones of the dead. The Bible tells us how our ancestors were very careful to preserve the bones of their dead and to carry them with them when they journeyed to other destinations, such as when the children of Israel carried with them the bones of Joseph when they left Egypt. They knew that the remains were merely bones and yet they attached great importance to them.

The Prophet Ezekiel when visiting a mound of bones in Babylon asked himself, "can these bones really come to life again?"

It appears that the Persians and Babylonians, at that time used this method of burial in the open so that vultures would pick off the flesh and leave only the bones as the valuable remains of the deceased, and thereby avoiding polluting Mother Earth and the environment. Likewise, Jewish religion does not allow cremation so as not to destroy the personal identity of the deceased.

Science has now demonstrated that each individual has a specific number consisting of millions of digits. A milestone has recently been achieved, considered to be the most important of all time in discovering and tabulating the complete human genom. From this it follows that eventually a dead person may be recreated from the DNA taken from his bones. Isn't that fulfilment of G-d's promise of the future revival of the dead?

My father once told me when I was very very young, that his grandfather who lived in Baghdad was the Hakham Abraham Sofaer and that my mother's grandfather was the Hakham Haron Aghasi of Iraq and the surrounding areas. And that Hakham Aghasi was so well-known and respected that when he died, a large part of the Middle East neighbouring Iraq went into mourning.

I am 83 years of age and before I leave this earthly domain, I shall be most grateful if you could enlighten me as to who were these two great gentlemen.

For your information, the actor Abraham Sofaer, who died not so long ago in the USA was my cousin. His father and my father were brothers. Also, the ex-Judge Abraham Sofaer who ruled on Ariel Sharon's case against the "Time" publishers, is my nephew, my elder brother David's son.

I thank you for all the issues of The Scribe you have been sending me which as a source of information and comfort I could now never do without.

Shoresh, Israel Sassoon MeyerSofaer

Scribe: For full information please refer to the book entitled "Yehude Babel" by Dr Abraham Ben Yaacob. We have also sent you some information on Hakham Shimon Haron Aghassi Ben Aba Ben Aba taken from Yehudé Babel by Dr Ben Abraham Yaacob and from Quez Hayamim - history of Babylonian Rabbis Ancient and Modern.

I enclose an article which appeared in the American Jewish paper "Yated NE'EMAN about my grandfather (my mother's father) HARAB SHIMON AGASSI Z.L., as well as a photograph at the unveiling of a street in Jerusalem named after my grandfather.

New York Violet Gabbay (née Shashou)

HAKHAM SHIMON AGASSI zt'l

The year was 5600 (1840). Thousands of pure Jewish children were faithfully learning *Toras Hashem* in the various branches of *Beit Midrash Talmud Torah* that were established by Rabbenu Abdulla Somech zt'l, considered one of the greatest Iraqi rabbonim of recent times. Baghdad's children, who had previously learned at home were now streamlined into a Torah school system.

And then, like a thunderstorm on a clear day, the agents of Alliance Israelite Universelle (*Kol Yisrael Chaveirim*) stormed in to trap the pure souls of the young children. "We only want to promote Torah with *derech eretz*," they claimed. Rav Yosef Chaim spoke against it. Baghdad, a large city residing in glory in the middle of Babel was a Torah center for hundreds of years. Even after the *Talmud* was sealed in the time of the *Rabbonon Saborai*, it continued carrying the flag of Torah in full strength. For five hundred years the *geonim* of Babel lit up the Jewish world with their Torah, and the light of their

written Torah continues to shine today.

For many years they glorified the eastern side of the Torah world with *gedolim* and *chachomim*, great *poskim*, Kabbalists and *paytanim* whose songs are still sung today in Iraqi communities.

"There was a man in Baghdad, HaRav Shimon Agassi, whose light of Torah spread through the hearts of that entire generation and the those after it. *Gadol bakol mikol kol*," HaRav Yaakov Hillel, *rosh yeshiva* of Ahavas Shalom wrote about him, "in the revealed and hidden Torah, in his vast knowledge and depth of understanding. A great *posek* and *darshan*, a great *paytan* and philosopher, a great leader in *chassidus* and *perishus*, great in his *tzedaka* and kindness, great community activist and great in understanding and vision, great in accepting affliction with love, overcoming *nisyonos*, and above all and in spite of everything, he was a great *masmid*",

In 5615 (1855), the sun began to shine with the birth of a son to Reb Aharon Agassi zt'l, whose parents came to Iraq from Persia. The Agassi family had a paint business, which was an ancient Turkish profession, and wanted the thirteen year old lad, who had just finished *talmud Torah*, to join the business.

The struggle, as the reader can well understand, was difficult. The young Shimon was up against the rich family and their tremendous pressure to utilise his talents, as well as the fact that all his friends decided to continue their studies in the new secular school of Baghdad. In spite of everything, Shimon pursued his one and only goal - Torah!

His parents, who encouraged him the entire times, supported his decision. The decision enriched *Klal Yisroel* with one of the foremost *geonim* of the generation. In the end, he benefited materialistically too. When his parents observed in wonder how their young boy was growing into a mighty giant, they decided a few years later to give him their house as a sign of appreciation for his great accomplishments.

He began to realise his brave decision in Beit Zilkha: the city of Baghdad's huge *beit midrash* established by HaRav Abdulla Somech zt'l, which became a place where hundreds of *talmidei chachomim* studied Torah diligently, twenty-four hours a day.

Rabbenu was twenty-six years old when he started writing his *peirush* on the Torah, an explanation that began a



Above : At the unveiling of the plaque of Hakham Shimon Agassi Street in Jerusalem. On the left is Aharon Shashou, a grandson.

long chain of outstanding *seforim*: *Zahav Shevo*, *Imrei Shimon*, *Bnei Aharon* and *Shem MiShimon* which encompass all parts of the Torah in breadth and depth. As the years went by, Rabbenu became one of the important ones.

Rabbenu did not have pleasure from *Olam Hazeh*, and he described the terrible tragedies that befell him in a sea of tears and blood. He witnessed the tragic death of his three sons, one after the other. Rabbenu refused to be comforted. His students related that Rabbenu did not accept comfort for his oldest son until his last son Ezra Tzion grew up and married his brother's intended wife. Only then, on the day of his wedding, did Rabbenu remove the black turban from his head and rejoice happily.

His son's death gave Rabbenu the impetus to toil in the Torah of *gilgul*, creating for later generations the outstanding *sefer Bnei Aharon* which took him nine years to write.

In 5659 (1899), Rabbenu turned his house, which he inherited from his father, into a *beit knesses*. Six years later, he gave it to a *gemilus chesed* organization to establish a school for orphans and poor children. Many of Baghdad's poor who were in danger of *shmad* were saved by this outstanding school and eventually developed beautifully.

With *chasidei Hashem*, a philanthropist was found in the city who agreed to Rabbenu's request to dedicate a large portion of his riches to build educational Torah institutions for the young. In a number of places in his *seforim*, Rav Shimon mentioned the *gvir Meir Eliyahu* "who poured money out of his pocket to raise the flag of Torah and return the crown to its former glory." This *mesiras nefesh* saved the generation from the clutches of those who sought to uproot religion from the youth.

Rabbenu succeeded in hiding himself so well that when he went up to eulogise Rabbenu Yosef Chaim zt'l in 1909, some of his neighbours were surprised to see a man whom they considered a simple merchant among the *chachomim* eulogizing. Hakham Shimon died peacefully in 1914.

Better late than never

It is better to do a thing after much procrastination than not to do it at all.



The above picture shows Iranian President Mohammed Khatemi (Centre) receiving Chief Rabbi Yusef Hamdani Cohen of Iran and Jewish member of Parliament Maurice Mutamed. They were among a delegation of Jewish leaders visiting the Head of State.

Khatemi declared that Judaism is an officially recognised religion in Iran and that the 30,000 Jews living in the country represent the highest number in any Moslem State. He claimed that religion played no part in sentencing 10 Jews to various prison sentences as spies for Israel. These sentences are being appealed.

Firstly may I say a big thank you for the latest edition of *The Scribe* which I'm enjoying reading over the web - it's great - well done to the Team!

I believe it was the last edition where we found arabic proverbs and sayings.

I enclose some anagrams which I enjoy and thought I might share them with you and your Editorial Team.

I especially enjoyed the article on stamps in this edition - if ever you need any information on stamps from around the world please don't hesitate to ask my father Joseph Murad as he collects stamps of the world from when they first appeared to today.

- Dormitory - Dirty Room
- Desperation - A Rope Ends It
- The Morse Code - Here Come Dots
- Slot Machines - Cash Lost in 'em
- Mother-in-law - Woman Hitler
- Snooze Alarms - Alas! No More Z's
- Alex Guinness - Genuine Class
- The Public Art Galleries - Large Picture Halls, I Bet
- A Decimal Point - I'm a Dot in Place
- Princess Diana - Ascend in Paris

London

Joy Dangoor

For some reason, I have not been receiving *The Scribe*, for what seems to be a long time. *The Scribe* has been one of the magazines that I enjoy immensely, and in fact, among the numerous publications that I receive, *The Scribe* is the only one that I read from the first letter in the first page to the last letter in the last page. It is indeed a shining star amongst the Iraqi Jews publications. If possible, please resume sending it to me. My best wishes for your continued success. Your service to the Iraqi Jews is priceless.

Greenlawn, NY Joseph M Koreen, MD

I receive regularly *The Scribe* which I find extremely interesting - I have no connection whatsoever with Babylonian Jewry, my family (on both sides) being typical Italian Jews for at least 600 years, possibly more.

The articles in *The Scribe* are very interesting and the book reviews better than in many leading papers.

Please keep me on your mailing list.

London

John S Montefiore



George Bush Junior is running as the Republican candidate for President of the United States. The above picture, taken recently at The Dorchester in London shows George Bush senior and Mrs Bush, after a meeting with Renée and Naim Dangoor, the day Mr Bush received a knighthood from the Queen.

To: Dr Zvi Shtauber
 Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime
 Minister's Office
 Jerusalem

It was a pleasure meeting you at the meeting with the Prime Minister, and I enclose herewith a copy of my Journal *The Scribe*, which you may find of interest.

I am glad you took on board the remarks I made at that meeting about the claims of Jews from Arab countries. Not only the personal assets of those who were forced to leave, but the complete rights of our community, which constituted nearly a third of Baghdad's population and was predominant in the economy and finance of Iraq. While the Palestinians clamour to return to their homes in Israel, we cannot now go back to Iraq, but there is no reason why our full rights are not taken into account in the context of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

Naim Dangoor



*Shanghai Public School for Girls Reunion
 London, 27 November 1965*

*FRONT ROW, L to R: Mrs F M Gavan (J M's Mother), Mrs D Moffatt, Miss M C Munday, Mrs Aitchison, Miss M Rudge, Mrs A S M Hawkins (Alex), Mrs D Parrott, Miss Margaret MacGregor, Miss D Fredericks, Joan MacKenzie, Renée Dangoor
 MIDDLE ROW: Frances Bomko, Delia Colombo, Mireille Middleton, Frenny Karanjia, Peggy Clements, Mabel Chard, Connie Hayward, Betty Parsons, Adriana & Jaoba van Herwijnen, Sarah Ahmed, Madeleine Hardoon, Iris Krass
 BACK ROW: Mr Hawkins, Margaret Heath, Margaret Davies, Lorraine Henderson, Anne Archer, Beryl Davies, Jean Aitchison, Johanna van H, Edith Quayle (obscured), Shirin Petigura, Mr Ernest Parrott*

Last February, the wedding took place in London of Robert, younger son of David and Eileen Khalastchy to Fiona, daughter of Desmond and Anne Rule.



The above picture shows the couple with Robert's parents and uncles. Left to right: Naim and Renée Dangoor; David and Eileen Khalastchy; Robert and Fiona; Abdullah and Claire Dangoor; Sasson and Stella Dangoor.



As evidence of the rapid growth of the Iraqi Jewish community in London, the picture below shows all of Robert's cousins with spouses.

Left to right: Standing: Daniel Dangoor; Robert Dangoor; Anna Dangoor; Leif Engdahl; Bibbi Engdahl-Dangoor; Judy Dangoor; Audrey Dangoor; Michael Dangoor; Elie Dangoor; David Dangoor; the couple Robert and Fiona; bridesmaid Gaby Khalastchy; Freddie Khalastchy; Frank Khalastchi; Eric Dangoor; Reuben Dangoor; David Dangoor; Robin Engdahl; Eddie Dangoor; Robert Dangoor; Gary Fox.

Sitting: Daniella Dangoor; Joy Dangoor; Sandra Dangoor; Eileen Khalastchy; Linda Khalastchi; Astrid Fox; Rosie Khalastchy; Hilary Dangoor; Natalie Engdahl.

Sitting on the floor: Lauren Dangoor; Jacqueline Engdahl; Alexandra Dangoor; Stephanie Dangoor; Sarah Dangoor.

In September 1998, the Government of Venezuela issued 10 commemorative stamps, as shown, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the State of Israel. All designs carry background Israeli flag motif.

Sent by Freddie Khalastchy



Ninety percent of inspiration is perspiration

Inspiration is useless without an aptitude for hard work; hence the perspiration!

VIZNITZ TALMUD TORAH'S FIND SHABBOS AT CARMEL

Taken from the Jewish Tribune 21.1.00

Shabbos Parshas Bo will be etched for a long time in the memories of the close to 100 children and staff of the Viznitzer Talmud Torah in London, who spent this memorable Shabbos in Carmel College near Oxford. The idea, fostered by the Menahel and nurtured by a dedicated team of Mechanchim and assistants, came to successful fruition after many weeks of preparation both by the children and the organisers.

Participation by the children was only possible by collecting tokens over a period of 10-12 weeks. These were awarded for a variety of accomplishments (according to age and ability), such as successfully being tested by heart on Perokim of Mishnayos, achieving a certain level of marks in the weekly tests of their Limudim learning whole Sedorim without interruption, behaviour in class, during Davening and meal times and Derech Eretz.

At 4:00 pm on Friday all boys were assembled in the spacious Beis Hamedrash to say Shir Hashirim and have a learning session to welcome Shabbos Hamalko. After Mincha they were treated to an inspiring Droshe by Rav Shmuel Stern. Mashgiach of the Viznitzer Yeshiva Ketana.

A thoroughly uplifting Seudas Shabbos was experienced by all, interlaced with Zemiros and Divrei Torah. Reb Chaim Moshe Feldman demonstrated his enthusiasm and appreciation to both the children and Mechanchim by honouring the event with his presence and delivering Divrei Torah during the Seuda.

During the Seuda, Divrei Chizuk were heard from Rabbi Dovid Chaim Katz, Maggid Shiur in Viznitzer Yeshiva Ketana and, similarly during Sholosh Seudos, from Reb Yisroel Zieg. Rebbe of the top class. Following Sholosh Seudos, the highlight and keynote speech was given by Rabbi Shimon Hirschler.

Motzoei Shabbos was honoured by a Melava Malka and Siyum for the Mishnayos (in excess of 1000 Perokim) learnt by the boys.

After a full day's programme on Sunday, the boys returned in the early evening, tired but happy and spiritually fulfilled, attesting without exception that this was a most enjoyable Shabbos in all respects.

Reb Herzi Stern and Mrs Stern worked selflessly and tirelessly to achieve the resounding success of the event.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION by Rev. Dr. Leslie Griffiths

In a debate in the House of Lords two nights ago, Labour peer Lord Ahmed called for a new law outlawing religious discrimination. He's rightly pointed to a number of anomalies in the way religions are treated. Only Christianity is protected by blasphemy laws, for example; Jews are defined as a race rather than a religion (even though this race includes, as Lord Ahmed put it on this programme the other day, black Falashas, white Russian and brown Lebanese Jews). In Northern Ireland there's already a law against religious discrimination. But not on the mainland. He wants to put an end to these differences; he wants all religious groups protected by the law.

Begging his Lordship's pardon, but I think he's barking up the wrong tree. Anomalies do exist and they definitely need dealing with. But I'd go in exactly the opposite direction from the proposals he's making. It's my view that religions shouldn't seek any special privileges or protections. People should be free to criticise us, misunderstand us, and even make fun of us. Sometimes, no doubt, we'd deserve it whilst at others we wouldn't. We should earn any respect accorded to us and work hard to make our contribution to the good of society understood and welcomed. We should always be invoking the Gamaliel principle: if what we're all about is of merely human origin then it'll enjoy its moment in the sun before fading away. If, on the other hand, G-d has something to do with it, then it's going to be part of the scene whether people like it or not. Or, put in a somewhat different way, and as I heard a ninety four year old Cardinal suggesting the other day, The Christian Church is facing its second Constantinian moment. In the fourth century, with the conversion of the Roman Emperor, Christianity began a long flirtation with secular power which, many would argue, has had a disastrous effect on our actions and led to the accommodation of huge privileges across the centuries and around the world. But now, the church is fast reaching the point when secular government, post-Christian realities and pluralistic societies make it highly unlikely that such privileges will continue. Good. Let believers in any religion seek their proper protection under the Civil Law. Let all discrimination on grounds of race, gender, orientation or class be anathema.

Let religion take its full place within civil society, a voice and a presence to be reckoned with in the search for justice and the common good. It doesn't need to be cushioned or treated in a special category or given special protection. And when religion loses those swaddling bands of special status, that's when it can stand up on its own feet and offer its unique attractions to a generation which, I'm as convinced as can be, needs them now more than ever.

From BBC - "Thought for the Day"

Hafiz al Asad with Jewish Leader



On the occasion of the death of President Hafez al Asad, we publish the above picture which shows the Syrian dictator shaking hands and welcoming the Chief of the Syrian Jewish Community Council, Yousef Kh. Jajati, who gave us this photograph on a visit to London a few years ago.

The last number of *The Scribe* which we have received is no. 72 of September 1999.

In order not to discontinue such an interesting magazine which is constantly used by our Rabbis and Professors, we would appreciate it very much if you could send us the missing issues at your earliest convenience.

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

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