

**Understanding Diversity Among Jewish Religious Practices  
and Customs as a Reflection of Cultural Differences**

A Curriculum Guide for Tenth Grade Students

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### RATIONAL

Some Jews within a traditional context are legally bound to abstain from rice, beans and corn during Passover, while others are legally permitted to eat them. Some congregations chant the entire service in Arab sounding melodies, while others have a more European influence. The decision to ordain women into the Rabbinat originated in twentieth century America, rather than in another time or place. Different laws for eating, different customs for chanting, and different practices for ordaining. Where do they come from? This curriculum guide is geared to helping students understand that the multicultural aspect found in Jewish religious laws, practices, and customs has developed, and resulted from Jews living in culturally distinct lands and being influenced by the interactions with the peoples of those lands. It is this synthesis which has led to the diversity we find among Jewish practices today.

There are many approaches to teaching about multiculturalism. One approach is to focus on a segment of the population and explain the unique customs of that people, e.g., the Yemenite Jews. Another approach is to study a people through an historic lens by analyzing the factors that lead to a community's transference to a particular country, and their development and

integration into society at large, e.g., how the Jews came to the United States and the various institutions they created.

This curriculum guide uses both cultural and historic lenses to better understand the multicultural dimension of Jewish religious law, practice, and custom among Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry. It will examine life-cycle events, service order, religious music and poetry, holiday celebrations, sanctuary decor, thinkers, the development of new customs and practices, and compare holiday observances in the United States and Israel. Tracing the development and manifestations of law, practice and custom among the different subgroups within Judaism as a helpful way to understand the multicultural dimension of our tradition.

The content and perspective of this curriculum guide are significant to the identity of individual Jews because education is the sustaining force of a people. To broaden ones knowledge is to kindle ones interest. And kindled interest leads to identification. By learning about the variety of ritual law, practice, and custom within our tradition, ones knowledge is expanded. Their identity is strengthened and they remain active, involved, devoted members of the Jewish people.

The intended subjects for this course are tenth grade students who have received several years of liberal Jewish education. This is an age when they

can begin to grasp and appreciate difference in practice and custom. B'nei mitzvah age is typically the time most emphasized for educating Jewish children and tenth grade among the least. Yet it appears that tenth grade is when students are more likely to retain that education. This guide addresses that gap by exposing students to different facets of Jewish religious life through readings, research, discussions, music, food, field trips, art, and video.



## NOTES TO THE TEACHER

1. The teacher of this curriculum should be one who is personally intrigued/fascinated by Jewish multiculturalism and have a burning desire to expose students to their rich heritage through music, art, food, reading and various religious events. It is essential that the teacher of this curriculum be familiar with the Jewish calendar and is positive about Jewish ritual, since much of this course focuses on that. The teacher should also be aware that the curriculum takes a supportive stance of women in the rabbinate.

2. This curriculum contains nineteen one and a half hour sessions. These sessions can be taught once a week or twice a week in forty-five minute segments. Each unit notes the number of sessions at the top near the heading. Unit I has two sessions; Unit II has six sessions; Unit III has four sessions; Unit four has four sessions and Unit five has three sessions (units here measured in hour and a half segments).

3. Units II and III include visits to traditional Sephardic and Ashkenazic congregations. Please prepare ahead of time by contacting those congregations and locating a member who can speak with students about the

congregation. It would be especially helpful to have visited these services ahead of time.

4. Finally, the teacher can prepare for this course by reading the following articles most of which are provided in Source Materials. Ronald H. Isaacs, A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle, the introductory chapter, located in Source Materials which is all about the differences between law and custom in Judaism. This is also very important for teaching Unit I. For teaching about Sephardic laws, customs and history in Unit II, read Isidore Epstein's history book chapter seventeen or at least pages 180-194, also located in Source Materials. For Unit III's history of the Ashkenazic Jews, please read Robert Seltzer's Jewish People, Jewish Thought, pp 350-372 before teaching this unit. For Unit IV, a history of Jews in Europe and how they got to the United States, please read, from the Source Materials, Bernard J. Bamberger's The Story of Judaism, Third, Augmented Edition, Schocken Books, New York, 1964, chapters 49, 54, 58, 61, 62. For Unit V, please read Bamberger, chapter 53, also in the Source Materials.

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**Unit I: Introduction: What are Jewish Religious Practices/Laws and Customs and How Did They Come to Be?** This is an introduction to what will be discussed in future units.

< 2 Sessions >

Enduring Understandings/Essential Questions:

In spite of cultural diversity, there is an essential core of religious practices that Jews share.

How have religious practices and customs evolved in the context of cultural diversity among Jews?

**GOALS:**

1. Enable students to explain what Jewish religious practices and customs are.
2. Enable students to articulate the difference between their practice of religion and culture and other practices of religion and customs in Judaism.
3. Initiate students into world of Jewish cultural diversity through history.
4. Enable students to explain key concepts: cultural diversity among Jews, variations in Jewish practices among Jews, and the relationship between practices and customs in Judaism.

**OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. describe and distinguish between Jewish religious practices/laws and customs and give examples of each.
2. articulate their congregation's religious and cultural practice and compare with other examples within Judaism.
3. give historic and geographic examples of places where Jews migrated to and resided as a result of historic circumstances.
4. define in their own words the key concepts.

**KEY CONCEPTS:**

**\* Cultural diversity among Jews**

Traditionally Jews have seen themselves as Am Echad, One People, in their belief in Monotheism and adherence to Torah. But there exists a wide range of expression within the acceptable norms of the Divine Law as a result of Jews having lived in different historical societies and communities which

developed over the millennia. These differences include language, food, music, roles of males and females, life cycle events and even holidays, to name a few.

**\* Variations in Jewish practices among Jews**

Again, Jews have core observances that unite them throughout the world, like Shabbat, chagim, life cycle events (brit milah, bar mitzvah, wedding and funeral), prayer and observance of mitzvot. But some Jews, depending on where they are from, will practice variations of the core observances.

**\* The relationship between practices and customs in Judaism**

A law derives from the Torah and Talmud while custom (*minhag*) derives from popular practice. It is created by the people, serving the needs of the general community. For example, celebrating Shabbat is a universal practice, but a Sephardic Kabbalist circling the table seven times meditating with willows in his hands on Friday night is a custom of Sephardic Kabbalists. Practice and custom often become interwoven and it is difficult to make distinctions between them. Another example can be seen with the recitation of the *Shma*. Some communities have the custom of standing during its recitation while others follow the custom of staying seated. Many life cycle rituals are not based on the regulations of the Bible or Talmud, but are simply customs, the unique practice of a ritual by a large number of Jews in a community.

**SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**

**I. Understanding the differences between religious laws/practices and religious customs.**

A. Open this section with a question sequence on where students think both religious laws/practices and customs come from (what's their source) and how they evolved? Using the concept attainment model, make a list of biblical quotes that are the source of religious laws/practices and customs. Below are a list of quotes you can use. After students have determined the importance of those quotes, explain that all Jewish practices/laws are linked to the Torah, either directly or indirectly. **Reminder:** Practice is sometimes interchanged with the word "Law." A law derives from the Torah and Talmud whereas custom derives from popular practice. [Note to teacher: I highly recommend reading Ronald H. Isaac's' Rites Of Passage introductory chapter *Source of Jewish Law*, for a very short, but clear explanation]

He that is eight days old shall be circumcised (Gen 17:12)

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Consecrate to me every firstborn, man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine, (Exodus 13:1-2) [commandment for Pidyon Haben (redemption of the first born)] or,

For every firstborn among the Israelites... is Mine...I consecrated them to Myself at the time that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt (Numbers 8:17).

At thirteen one is ready to fulfill commandment (Pirke Avot 5:23) [This is from the Mishnah, an interpretation of the Torah. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not a commandment in the Torah, but Rabbinic interpretation gives it the weight of law]

It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a complement for him (Gen 2:18) and, “A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:23) [for marriage].

A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and he writes her a bill of divorce, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; she leaves his household and becomes the wife of another man (Deuteronomy 24: 1-2) [divorce].

B. Have students read different Shavuot observances from around the world. In Source Materials find Philip Goodman’s The Sukkot and Simhat Torah Anthology, which gives examples of religious practices/laws and customs of Jews from around the world.

*Shavuot as Celebrated by the Jews of Kurdistan p150*

*Shavuot in Eastern Europe p160*

*Shavuot in the Soviet Union p167*

*Among the Jews of Algeria p155*

*Shavuot on a Farm in Connecticut p172*

After students read different examples of Shavuot from various countries, ask them which parts are “universal” laws/practices and which parts are customs. What accounts for the similarities as well as the differences in practice/law and customs? Ask students to come up with other holidays and see if they can pick out the universal practices/laws from the local customs.

C. Bring in big, colorful Jewish cookbooks of traditional Jewish foods from around the world. Look at how the same holiday is celebrated with different

from around the world. Offer to make copies of any recipes and distribute these in the following class (or if you have an assistant, give out the same day). Ask students to let you know how the dish tasted and would they recommend it? Bring Post-It notes and pencils so that students can tag the page with their names.

## **II. History/Geography of Jews**

Give students packets which include maps, diagrams, political situation, dates, and population. Look to Source Materials for Robert Seltzer's Jewish People, Jewish Thought and for maps from Haim Beinart's Atlas of Medieval Jewish History. Have them work in pairs (chevruta) and diagram different regions where Jews migrated to and resided. Each paired group will represent a different region (Israel, other parts of the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and North America). In Source Materials please find references concerning a range of periods in Jewish history. Have students choose a period/packet (for example, ancient, medieval, or modern history). Follow with discussion: How do students think Jews living in different places effected their ability to maintain "universal" Jewish practices? How do they imagine religious practices/customs evolved over time?

## **III. Donning tefillin three different ways.**

Bring enough tefillin for each student to participate. Bring in a guest who can show the students the difference between how Sephardim and Ashkenazim don tefillin. There are also variations among the Ashkenazim, ask to see those as well. [See teacher's resource for diagrams of the three different styles]



# **Source Materials**

**MITES OF  
PASSAGE:**

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*A Guide to the Jewish  
Life Cycle*

Ronald H. Isaacs

KTAV Publishing House, Inc.  
Hoboken, New Jersey

# I

## *Sources of Jewish Law*

There are those who would think that we have but two alternatives, to reject or to accept the law, but in either case to treat it as a dead letter. But these alternatives are repugnant to the whole tradition of Judaism, and it is to combat them that the (Jewish Theological) Seminary was brought into being . . . Jewish law must be preserved but . . . it is subject to interpretation by those who have mastered it, and . . . the interpretation placed upon it by duly authorized masters in every generation must be accepted with as much reverence as those which were given in previous generations.

—Professor Louis Finkelstein

According to Jewish law, may a newborn be named after a deceased beloved aunt? What is the naming ceremony for a girl? When is a *pidyon haben* not performed? May weddings take place between Passover and Shavuot? When must an unveiling take place?

These questions are typical of questions that are often asked concerning the rites of passage observed by Jews. In order to understand the observances of the important life cycle events, one must be able to distinguish between law, custom, and superstition. Sometimes one can find a local custom which is stringently observed while a basic law is seemingly overlooked. Before beginning a study of the Jewish rites of passage and their rituals, customs, and folklore, a brief analysis of the sources of Jewish law is in order. An understanding of the sources of Jewish practice will help place the laws, customs, traditions, and folklore into their proper perspective, leading to a better appreciation of the beauty of our Jewish rites of passage.

#### *What is the earliest source of Jewish law?*

The Torah, sometimes called the *Humash*, Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses, is the earliest source of Jewish law. The Torah consists of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Reverence for and acceptance of the Torah are the foundation of Jewish law and its interpretation. Although the Torah does contain those guiding principles from which Jewish law and its interpretation spring, it does not contain all of Jewish law. A parallel can be found by comparing the Torah to the United States Constitution. Although the Constitution is a relatively brief document, the shelves of libraries are filled with many thousands of volumes based on it. These books contain additional laws established by legislation and interpreted by courts. Similarly, Jews look to the Torah as authoritative on

many basic traditions, but constantly seek the rabbinic interpretation of the law which followed in order to definitively learn how to live as authentic Jews.

#### *What is the Talmud?*

The Talmud is the major source for the rabbinic interpretation of the law. The Mishnah, which is part of the Talmud (sometimes called the Oral Law), sought to explain the laws as set forth in the Torah. It consists of the teachings of the *tannaim*, scholars and sages who lived prior to 220 C.E. Judah HaNasi and his associates sifted through, evaluated, and edited a large number of legal opinions that had been expressed over the centuries in the learning academies. The product of their work was the Mishnah, a six-volume collection of legal opinions.

The Mishnah could neither encompass all the situations in any person's life nor cover new situations which were constantly developing. New situations and ambiguities in the text of the Mishnah often led to discussion among the rabbis, and soon new rulings and decisions began to appear. Numerous life experiences, cases presented to the rabbis, and questions asked of them combined to expand and elaborate the teachings of the Mishnah. These later teachings were set down in the Gemara, which was completed around the year 500 C.E. The scholars whose views are presented in the discussions of the Gemara are known as the *amoraim*, meaning "interpreters" or "speakers." For the most part they lived in Babylonia, where the great academies were situated following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. The Mishnah and the Gemara together comprise the Talmud, the major compendium of discussions on Jewish Law held by the rabbis, and the record of their decisions. The Talmud also contains Jewish folklore, sayings, and stories.

A second Talmud, the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud,

was also composed. The Mishnah of Judah HaNasi is the central text of this work as well. However, the Gemara of the Palestinian Talmud consists of all the discussions that took place among the amoraim in the learning academies in Palestine. The Palestinian Talmud has always enjoyed a lesser status than the Babylonian Talmud because its academies were not equal in stature to those of Babylonia.

For the first five hundred years following the final editing of the Talmud—from the years 500–1000 C.E., great scholars continued the process of interpreting the Bible. They also explained and commented on the Talmud and gained new insights from its teachings. This period is known as the gaonic period, and its scholars are called *geonim* (singular *gaon*, meaning “his eminence”). Among the better known geonim are Hai, Sherira, and Amram, each of whom headed a Babylonian learning academy. These scholars, as well as those who followed after them for approximately the next five centuries, until the mid sixteenth century, were known as the *rishonim*, meaning the “early ones.” In addition to analyzing and studying the Talmud, they wrote commentaries on it and answered questions directed to them by rabbis and teachers all over the world. Among the more celebrated scholars of the post-gaonic period (after the year 1000 C.E.) was Jacob of Fez, known as the Alfasi or by the acronym Rif, the French-born Solomon ben Yitzchak, better known by the acronym Rashi and Moses ben Maimon of Spain, also known by the acronym Rambam and by the patronymic Maimonides.

*What are the codes?*

The Talmud never really served the Jewish people as a code of Jewish traditions and rituals. The sea of Talmud was so vast that it was often difficult for a person to locate all the specific references on any given subject. This situation led

the rabbis to begin to codify the laws and set them in order, according to subject matter, so that one would be able to find them more easily. Among the many famous codifiers was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides: 1135–1204). In his fourteen-volume code of law, called the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides arranged in a methodical and logical manner the established laws as set forth in the Talmud. The *Mishneh Torah* is still fruitfully studied today.

Other Jews also created their own codes of law. Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel (1250–1320), the spiritual leader of the community of Toledo in Spain, made an abstract of the material in the Talmud. His son, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, wrote another code, using a method similar to that of Maimonides, that is, arranging the laws by classification rather than by location in the Talmud. He called his work *Arba'ah Turim*. (“The Four Rows”). This compendium of Jewish law consisted of four parts:

- *Orach Chayim*, dealing with laws of prayer and a person's daily conduct.
- *Yoreh Deah*, dealing with the dietary laws, laws of ritual purity and mourning.
- *Even Haezer*, dealing with personal and family matters, including laws of marriage and divorce.
- *Choshen Mishpat*, dealing with criminal and civil law.

By far the most popular, respected, and authoritative code of Jewish law, called the *Shulchan Aruch* (“The Prepared Table”), was written by Rabbi Joseph Karo. The *Shulchan Aruch* is actually an abbreviated and simplified form of the Arba Turim, taking into account the views of previous codifiers, including those of the Alfasi and Maimonides. This code dealt with Jewish law and practice wherever the Jew might be, at home, synagogue, or business. The *Shulchan Aruch*

completed in approximately 1555 and together with subsequent commentaries on it became the most authoritative book of Jewish law and observance. Since Joseph Karo was a Sephardic scholar, he was charged with ignoring the views of Ashkenazic (French and German) legal authorities. As a result, Moses Isserles of Poland, a sixteenth-century scholar known by the acronym Rama, wrote supplementary notes to the *Shulchan Aruch* called the *Mappah* ("tablecloth"). The notes of Isserles set forth the views of Ashkenazic scholars and presented the customs of their communities. When Karo and Isserles do not agree on a particular custom, the Sephardim generally follow Karo while the Ashkenazim will most often follow Isserles.

With the publication of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the period of the early scholars (*rishonim*) ended and the period of the *acharonim*, "the later ones," began. From the end of the sixteenth century to the present the *acharonim* have issued authoritative interpretations of the law. Among the famous *acharonim* are the Polish scholar Solomon Luria, known by the acronym Maharshah, the Hungarian Moses Sofer and Rabbi Abraham Kook, the former chief rabbi of the Ashkenazic community in Palestine in 1921.

A very important late twentieth century interpreter of Jewish law for the Conservative movement was Rabbi Isaac Klein (z'l). His *Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* serves as an important law code for many Conservative Jews (see later in this chapter).

#### *What are customs, folklore, and superstitions?*

Laws and customs are the building blocks of Jewish life, unifying the community. Whereas a law derives from the Torah and Talmud, custom derives from popular practice. It is created by the people, serving the needs of the general community. Unlike law, which is imposed from without,

custom (*minhag*) takes root and flourishes from within. For example, when reciting the prayer the *Shema* some communities have the custom of standing during its recitation while others follow the custom of staying seated. In a second example, Jews in Israel follow their custom of observing fewer days of some festivals (e.g., Sukkot, Passover, Shavuot) than do Diaspora Jews. Many life cycle rituals are not based on the regulations of the Bible or Talmud, but are simply customs, the unique practice of a ritual by a large number of Jews in a community.

Folklore refers to the creative, spiritual, and cultural practices and teachings of the Jewish people handed down, mainly by oral tradition, from generation to generation. Folklore might include popular tales, legends, songs, and anecdotes that are transmitted primarily by word of mouth.

Finally, a superstition is any custom or act that is based on an irrational fear rather than on tradition, belief, reason, or knowledge.

#### *What is midrash?*

Midrash is the process by which Jews in every generation have grappled with the underlying significance of biblical texts. It contains homiletical interpretation of the Bible, sermonic teachings, ethical maxims, popular sayings and legends. The best-known is the *Midrash Rabbah* ("Great Midrash"), consisting of ten books of homiletic interpretations of the Five Books of Moses and the Five Megillot.

#### *What are responsa?*

Responsa are written replies given to questions about all aspects of Jewish law by qualified authorities from the talmudic period to the present. The questions asked by the individuals of their rabbis were often based on some current

situation which was not directly dealt with in the codes. For example, is it permissible to use a life sustaining device to keep a patient alive? The rabbi would give his responsum (answer), basing his reasoning on support statements and earlier precedents found in the Bible, the Talmud and, later, the *Shulchan Aruch*. In this way Jewish law continued to develop, change, and be modified in order to be in consonance with new times and new situations.

*What is the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards?*

The Rabbinical Assembly is the professional organization for all Conservative rabbis. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, whose task it is to interpret Jewish law for the Conservative movement, consists of twenty-five rabbis appointed by the President of the Rabbinical Assembly. Its decisions were formerly issued as reflecting a majority and minority opinion. Nowadays, acceptance by six members of a position paper under discussion constitutes a legitimate opinion and official position. However, only when the opinion is unanimous and has been raised to the level of a standard of rabbinic practice by a convention of the Rabbinical Assembly is it incumbent upon the local rabbi to follow the decision of the Committee of Law and Standards.

The committee has rendered numerous decisions over the years which have impacted upon Conservative Judaism and the way in which it is observed. Among these decisions are the clarification of the use of electricity on *Shabbat*, the permission to use an automobile to drive to and from the synagogue on *Shabbat*, the inclusion of women in the minyan, the extension to women of the right to serve as abbas and cantors, and the attempt to solve the problem of a woman whose husband refuses to grant her a Jewish divorce (get).

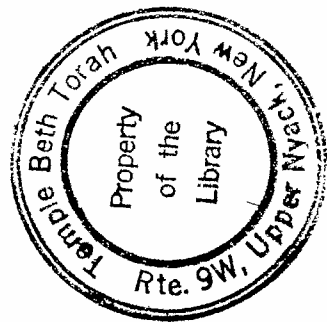
*Is there one code of Jewish law for Conservative Jews?*

There is no standard code of Jewish law that all Conservative Jews are expected to follow. However, one of the most important codes of Jewish law to be produced by the Conservative movement was published in 1979 (an augmented edition was published in 1992). Written by Rabbi Isaac Klein, a leading authority on Jewish law, the volume is entitled *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*. This guide was compiled and written in the spirit of the Conservative movement. It presents both the so-called normative Jewish practice and the decisions reached by the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Law and Standards. It deals with such contemporary issues as artificial insemination, organ transplants, and autopsies, reflecting some of the most recent scientific advances of our day, and the burial of cremated remains in a Jewish cemetery.

*The*  
**Shanout**  
**Anthology**  
*Philip*  
**Goodman**

*The Jewish Publication Society of America*

PHILADELPHIA





forev (ibid. 17.1-7); and the sixth *Shabbat Amalek* (ibid. 8-17).

On the fourth day after the sixth Sabbath of *sefirat ba-omer*, the maritans celebrate the day of standing at Mount Sinai. According to their tradition, the Pentateuch was given to the children Israel from above Mount Sinai on this day. They pray and read the Pentateuch from the middle of the night until the following evening. The seventh Sabbath during *sefirat ba-omer*, forty-ninth day of the period, is called the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments (ibid. 19.1-20.14).

The pilgrimage on the festival of Pentecost begins early in the morning, and during the processional all the places holy to the maritans that are situated on the peak are visited: Givat Olam, which Moses' tabernacle stood; Isaac's altar, the spot where Abraham bound his son; and the site of the twelve rocks that he placed before erecting Moses' tabernacle, according to maritan tradition.<sup>4</sup>

### \* *Shavuot as Celebrated by the Jews of Kurdistan*

ERIC BRAUER

The Jews of Kurdistan call the festival of Shavuot, the second of three pilgrimage holidays, *Ziyara* ("Making a Pilgrimage"); this festal day is set aside for the visitation of holy places. The most important of these sites is the tomb of Nahum the prophet Alkush, near Mosul, since there they also carry out the symbolic ascent on Mount Sinai. They likewise visit the graves of Hazan David and Hazan Joseph of the Hazanai family in Amadiyah; the tomb of Rabbi Naraniel Halevi Barzanai in Barazan; the Cave of Elijah in Bitanura, and the sepulcher of Daniel near Erbil.

The custom to eat on Shavuot dairy foods is also widespread among the Kurdistan Jews. Consequently, most of the preparations for this holiday involve large quantities of butter and cheese. The Jews who have businesses in distant villages ex-

change their wares at this season principally for dairy products. On Shavuot evening the dinner is not much different from the customary evening meal; however, in Gila, Rican, and several other places they eat on this evening a sort of milky food which is known as *madira*, made of crushed wheat boiled in sour milk, with *kutalai*, dumplings stuffed with a filling of butter and flour instead of meat, as is usual.

After the meal the people go to the synagogue for the *Hatimat Ziyara* (the end of the *Ziyara*), as they call the prayers on the first night of Shavuot. This service of worship at which they use the Baghdad edition of *Seder Kriah Moed* is more important to the Jews of Kurdistan than even the night of *Hosbana Rabbab*. The men likewise gather in the homes of mourners, where, according to tradition, are also invited a quorum of ten scholars to offer prayers in honor of the departed.

While in Zakho only a small number of elderly women come to the synagogue, in Amadiyah almost all the women and young maidens go to the synagogue to participate in the evening religious service; some of the women also attend the prayers in the mourners' homes.

In the synagogue hundreds of candles are alit, for every individual kindles a candle in honor of his deceased. Today candles are generally made from oil with wicks. However, there are settlements where wax candles are lighted.

In memory of their dead, families bring to the synagogue dishes full of fruits in order to make a blessing over them. If a close relative died during the course of the year, the mourners make every effort to obtain new fruits of various kinds, as far as possible, to recite the blessing *Shebebeyanui*; and the rich import fruits from Baghdad for this purpose.

In the morning the devout go to the river for immersion, for they want to greet the presence of the Torah like bridegrooms who bathe ritually before the marriage ceremony.

In Zakho, the *gevir* (rich man of the community) is honored with being called up to the reading of the Torah portion which contains the Ten Commandments. In Amadiyah, in the past, this honor was given to the man who succeeded in buying the fourth *aliyah* for the entire year. Today, however, they sell this *aliyah* separately in Amadiyah and Seneh. Formerly, this honor was also awarded to the *gevir*.

In Amadiyah, when the service is over, the women bring *yiprakk*, that is, arak, and three-layered cakes, known as *kadai*, from the homes of the mourners and present them to the head of the "fellowship" (in charge of taking care of the dead bodies until interment) for these are gifts associated with the dead. The head divides the *yiprakk* among the "fellows" exclusively; but the rest of the congregation may also receive some of the *kadai*.

The great significance of the festival of Shavuot for the Jews of Kurdistan is derived from the pilgrimages to the holy places. To these shrines stream, on this holiday, crowds of Jews from nearby and far off.

In Amadiyah, for the pilgrimage to the sepulcher of the Hazanai family masses of Jews gather, and the local Jews are obliged to provide shelter for the visitors. Often one family shelters not less than fifteen pilgrim families. The *ziyara* (pilgrimage) of the males takes place on the first day after the religious services, and the one for the women on the second day. Before they visit the graves the pilgrims immerse in a ritual bath and put on new clothing. Then they pass in a procession before the grave and every person kisses it.

On the second day, especially, during the *ziyara* of the women, there is great rejoicing. The women dance and sing, and the maidens bring with them their own swings. The *gabbai* sits at the entrance of the shrine and distributes wine or sherbet to the pilgrims. They approach the grave, kiss it, deliver their petitions, and distribute their money, which they saved for this purpose during the entire year, among the various charity boxes. Afterwards, the women reassemble to sing and dance and to wish each other a blessed pilgrimage (*ziyara berikba*).

The holy shrine which attracts the largest crowds is the tomb of the prophet Nahum at Alkush. Annually, thousands of Jews come here from Mosul, Baghdad, Basra, and from all areas of Kurdistan. An idiosyncratic detail of this *ziyara* is "the ascent on Mount Sinai," which takes place on the two days of the festival. Near the sepulcher is a hill which is called Mount Sinai. The men climb up this mount and recite the Ten Commandments [from the Torah] as they stand on the summit. Every community does this separately. The *aliyot* are sold at a public auction. Frequently the price is very high since individuals from other communities

participate in the auction; it is indeed regarded as a shame for a community to permit an outsider to acquire any of the *aliyot*.

After the Torah reading the crowds descend with joy and jubilation. Bands accompany them and the strongest men at their head perform a sword dance.

On the second day they again ascend Mount Sinai and read the Torah on the summit. On the third day they also pass before the tomb, give charity, and receive from the *gabbai tubarkai* some fruits and sweets that were lying on the grave throughout the whole night.

After the morning prayer service and the *ziyara* following it, the men return to their homes to eat the Shavuot meal. In Amadiyah this feast consists of *kadai*, butter, and drinks prepared from honey and milk. However, in the provincial villages the women cook *madira*.

After the feast everybody goes to the home of the man who was honored with the *aliyah* of the Ten Commandments. There they dance and sing and are served arak and *maza* plentifully. These foods they consume without waiting the two hours, as is customary with them, between dairy and meat foods. In many places, the person who receives the honor of "going up" for the reading of the Ten Commandments gives a banquet for the prominent people of the community. On this occasion the men sing "hallelujah"—psalms of praise—and, in addition, indulge in merriment and amusing witticisms: "Hallelujah, hallelujah, let us eat boiled eggs and roasted beef."

Translated by Herbert Parzen

\*

### \* *Shavuot at the Tomb of the Prophet Nahum*

JOSEPH ISRAEL BENJAMIN II

From Tanura I went to Alkush [Iraq], where I arrived in 1848, two days before the Feast of Weeks.

Alkush is situated in a very unfruitful neighborhood. The town is inhabited only by Armenians, and appears to be very ancient. The houses, which stand single, are like fortified towers, rising

at the foot of the mountains. Several Israelites and Kurds accompanied me to Alkush, in order to attend the ceremonies here, which take place at the tomb of the prophet Nahum. Quite close to one of the mountains is a large court, in the middle of which stands a spacious building, consisting only of one room, capable of containing about one thousand persons. There are two entrances into this building, which was intended for a synagogue; but, standing as it does without a community, it presents but a strange appearance. In this desolate temple on a spot, parted off by railings, is a catafalque, covered with tapestry worked in gold, and ornamented with various coins, above which is a costly canopy. This is said to be the tomb of the prophet Nahum. The Jews from Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, from the Kurdistan mountains and from a still farther distance of eight days' journey round, annually assemble a week before the Feast of Weeks for a ceremony, at which they spend fourteen days in religious exercises. . . .

The pilgrims bring their manuscripts of the Law with them, and deposit them in the holy shrine of the temple. The women then enter the chamber of the prophet; and after this the service begins. First the Book of Nahum is read aloud from an old manuscript, which is laid upon the catafalque; when this is finished, they make a solemn procession seven times round the sacred shrine, singing sacred songs. After the seventh round, a hymn is sung addressed to the prophet, the chorus of which is "Rejoice in the joy of the Prophet Nahum!" . . .

On the first evening of the Feast of Weeks, the sixth of Sivan, they assemble in the synagogue, which is lighted by about one thousand lamps, and enter the chamber of the prophet, when service begins. . . . As soon as it is over, they go without further ceremonies into the sacred house, where a festive and general entertainment takes place, at which coffee is plentifully served. At break of day the morning prayer is recited; and then the men, bearing the Pentateuch before them, go, armed with guns, pistols, and daggers, to a mountain in the vicinity, when, in remembrance of the Law, which on this day was announced to them from Mount Sinai, they read in the Torah and go through the *Musaf* prayer. With the same warlike procession they descend the mountain. The whole community breaks up at the foot, and an Arabic fantasia, a war performance, begins. The picturesque

confusion, the combatants, their war cries heard through the clouds of smoke, the clashing of weapons, and the whole mimic tumult presents a fantastic spectacle, which is not without a certain dignity and makes a strange impression on the spectator. This war performance is said to be a representation of the great combat, which, according to the belief in those parts, the Jews, at the coming of the Messiah, will have to maintain against those nations who oppose their entrance into the promised land, and the formation by them of a free and independent kingdom. The women, who remained behind in the town, come, singing and dancing to the accompaniment of a tambourine, to meet the men, and they all return together. . . .

I was at first almost stunned by the tumult and excitement of the noisy crowd; but later became quite meditative, when I saw to what a degree ignorance and custom can deface a religious festival, and injure even the most essential principle.

Several parts of these ceremonies are doubtless of foreign origin, and give evidence of Arabic custom. I therefore thought it well to address some words on this subject to my brethren in the faith, who testify great respect to Jewish European travelers, and consider their opinion as especially important. It was explained to me that these customs have been held in respect since ancient times, and that they must be kept up until the coming of the Messiah.

The return to the synagogue took up nearly half a day, as they often stopped by the way and renewed their warlike games. When at length they reached the synagogue, the Pentateuch, which they had taken with them, was replaced to the holy shrine; after which began near the catafalque the usual service for the prophet. That finished, all returned to the town, to rest themselves after the exertions of the day.<sup>6</sup>

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### *\* Among the Jews of Algeria*

NAHUM SLOUSCHZ

On the evening of the eighth day of Passover the Jews [of Tlemcen, Algeria] buy green corn from the Arabs, which they

suspend in their houses from the ceiling. There they let it hang until the Feast of Weeks, and during the [counting of the] *omer* they all eat of the corn, together with a sort of pancake, first dipping both of these in milk. On the day after Shavuot is the "Feast of Waters," when the Jewish women besprinkle each other. This festival is also observed at Tripoli and elsewhere. . . .

The morning after Shavuot the Jews of Mizab in the Sahara have a peculiar festival which they call ironically: "The Taking of Ghardaia by the Jews." All the Jews unite in the open oasis and, mounted on mules and donkeys and bearing long branches of palm, make a triumphant entry into the city.<sup>7</sup>

\*

### *\*The Torah's Marriage in Gibraltar*

CECIL ROTH

The account which follows is based on personal observation at Gibraltar, during an unforgettable, exquisitely enjoyable Pentecost in 1929. The neighboring communities of North Africa, of course, follow the same practice and it is to be traced also farther East in the Mediterranean world.

In these communities, then, one of the features of Pentecost is the solemn celebration of the espousals of Israel with the Torah. The parallel is carried out as exactly as possible. In front of the ark burn bridal torches, surrounded with bouquets. The Scrolls of the Law are decked in white vestments, like a bride. When the ark is opened, special hymns are sung. And then comes the climax. The reader unrolls a parchment, illuminated in color as all *ketubot* (marriage contracts) should be; from it he reads, in the characteristic chant reserved for such occasions, the contract of marriage. Its form is exactly the same as that which serves on all similar occasions—though with a few poetic embellishments.

On Friday . . . the sixth day of the month of Sivan, on the day when the Lord came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir . . . in the year 2448 from the creation of the world, according to the reckoning which we here reckon in gladness and song, in

this lovely and glorious land, and great and awesome wilderness. Then came before us the prince of princes and noble of nobles who is named Israel . . . and said to the dear and pleasant child of many qualities, the perfect Law of God . . . be unto me as wife, thou who art lovely as the moon, and I will betroth thee unto me for ever. . . . By the bidding and with the help of heaven I will cherish and honor thee all the days, forever and forever. I will give unto thee moreover as the price of thy maidenhood an ear that hears and an eye that sees, which may have abundant fruit. And this bride, the holy Torah, was willing and became his wife, engraven on the tablet of his heart; and he placed the crown of sovereignty on her head.

There is a good deal more in the same hyperbolic language. When the recital is finished, the Scrolls are taken up to the reading desk, preceded by a boy bearing a bouquet of flowers. The greatest *mitzvah* of the day is that of holding the mantle during the procession—accompanying the bride, as it were, to the espousals. Meanwhile, the usual psalm is sung to the melody generally reserved for the marriage hymn.<sup>8</sup>

\*

### *\*The Jewish Child's Initiation into School*

HAYIM SCHAUSS

In the Middle Ages, the elementary Jewish school was an old established institution behind which was a history and tradition of over a thousand years. Every boy began school at the age of five or a little later, depending on the health of the child. Among the Franco-German Jews, the day on which the boy began school was celebrated as a great event in his life.

The little boy was washed and dressed in his best clothes. Three eggs were cooked for him, and three honey cakes were baked, the dough kneaded by an innocent virgin. Apples and other fruits were brought to him. In some communities school began on the new moon of the month of Nisan. In other communities this great event took place on Shavuot.

The Festival of the Giving of Our Law was selected as the day when the child should begin his study of the Torah.

\* *Shavuot in Eastern Europe*

HAYYIM SCHAUSS

Shavuot does not give Jewish children as many days of freedom as does Pesah, but the Hebrew school is open only half days from the beginning of the month of Sivan. *Rosh Hodesh*, the first day of the Jewish month, was always considered a semiholiday in Jewish schools; since there are only four days after that till the coming of the festival itself, these are also minor holidays. The three days before Shavuot are marked as the days during which the Jews were forbidden to approach close to Mount Sinai. The one day that remains, the day after the New Moon, also becomes a semiholiday, and is called *Yom ha-Meyubas*, "Choice Day." Its exclusiveness, it is claimed, lies in the fact that on that same day of the week Yom Kippur is bound to fall. But what do children care for the importance ascribed to those days? They are satisfied that they are free and attend school for only half the day. . . .

Even in school the instruction is festive and breathes the spirit of the holiday. The children are taught the Book of Ruth. So clear is the imagery thereof that they are carried back to the days of old, when Jews reaped the harvest of the fields of their own land.

The older children sit around a long table with the teacher and study the Book of Ruth. But their thoughts are not on their studies; they are thinking of Bethlehem, the town where David was born and spent his childhood. They imagine they are standing at harvesttime in the fields that surround the town. Gentle breezes blow from the hills of Judah. The fields are filled with the freshly cut sheaves. They hear the whir of the reaping scythe, and the song of the workers in the fields. And everywhere is the pleasing aroma of the newly fallen gleanings which Ruth is gathering in the fields. . . .

[On Shavuot eve,] after feasting the congregation goes to the *bet ha-midrash*, the house of study, to spend the entire night reading *Tikkun*. The children, alas, must go to bed. They are extremely envious of their older brothers and their parents who stay awake all night in the synagogue and pray at the earliest service in the morning. . . .

Only half of the second evening of Shavuot is spent in the

synagogue. But this time the congregation recites, not *Tikkun*, but the psalms of David. The practice of staying awake in the synagogue on this night is not bound up with the giving of the Torah, as is the first night, but with a tradition that King David died on Shavuot.

On the long table in the house of study burns a great memorial candle. Around the table sit pious Jews, dressed in their holiday best, holding copies of the Psalms in their hands. The flame of the candle, large enough to last twenty-four hours, flickers above them as they read and chant the psalms, the songs of David, king of Israel, and in this manner observe the anniversary of his death. Translated by Samuel Jaffe.<sup>10</sup>

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\* *Pentecost in Svislovitz*

SHMARYA LEVIN

Clear in my memory is the first Pentecost of my *beder* years and the preparations for it. My mother told me for the first time of the giving of the Torah to the children of Israel: of Mount Sinai, wrapped in sheets of fire, and clouds of smoke; of the tablets of the Law, engraved with exactly the same letters as I was learning to read in *beder*, telling the Jews forever and ever what they might and what they might not do. Her voice was proudest and happiest when she told me of that *rebbe* of old, the teacher of the whole Jewish people, Moses: how he delivered us from the hands of the gentile, how he divided the sea for us, so that the waters stood up on either side like the fir trees on the royal road that led from Svislovitz to Pinsk and Bobrusik. So dry was the passage left between that the children of Israel did not even have to take their shoes off. Then she told me how Moses had led us through the wilderness abounding in scorpions and snakes, with the pillar of fire before us on the march. She explained the incident of the wilderness very simply: Moses wanted to teach us, during those years, all of his Five Books, the Pentateuch, just the ones I was learning in *beder*. And the wilderness was good because no gentiles were there to interrupt the lessons.

Mottye the *melamed* told us the same story, but Mother's way

for how can we bring the firstfruits of the season in the desert? We whitewashed our dining room—the large tent—and decorated it with greens that we brought from a nearby town. In the center we hung an inscription: "Those who sow with tears will reap in gladness." We read the passages in the *Aggadab* that relate to the holiday and someone played the flute while we sang in chorus. It looked as if this was a party in the kibbutz, instead of a party of soldiers. At the end there was a farewell speech by the commanding officer, who is going on a short leave. He said some very moving things, about his feelings among us on this holiday and about how proud he was to be with us. At the end we broke into a *hora* just the way we do at home. Outside, in the moonlight, we formed a circle and even A——, from Kfar Giladi, danced with us, in spite of the fact that his position as sergeant major embarrasses him not a little.

Translated by Hilda Auerbach<sup>14</sup>

\* *The Torah Is Accepted Again in Buchenwald*

S. B. UNSDORFER

Strangely enough it was on the pyre of the camp, in that hellhole of Buchenwald, that I received my first injection of vitamin R—Religious Revival.

A few days before our scheduled departure for Czechoslovakia, the camp loudspeakers blazed out an announcement that the Jewish chaplain to the U. S. forces would be conducting religious services in the evening to mark the festival of Shavuot—the anniversary of the receiving of the Law by the Jewish people on Mount Sinai.

Having lost my handwritten diary, as well as my *Haggadab*, during the march from Nieder-Orschel to Buchenwald, this announcement came as a pleasant yet disturbing surprise.

Since my childhood I had always looked forward eagerly to the arrival of our wonderful and inspiring festivals, and particularly so in the tragic war years. But I wondered whether we weren't

being put to a test too soon. Who among those thousands of physical and mental cripples would want to attend services and prayers so soon after their tragic experiences? The Festival of the Receiving of the Torah! Within a few weeks after liberation, religion, which had seemed to do so little for us, was now challenging us and our loyalties.

But just as you cannot measure the physical strength of an oppressed people, so you cannot gauge its spiritual wealth and power.

On that evening, Buchenwald staged a fantastic demonstration of faith and loyalty to God. Thousands upon thousands of liberated Jews crowded into the specially vacated block for the first postwar Jewish religious service to be held on the soil of defeated Germany. The *Musulmänner*, the cripples, the injured, and the weak came to demonstrate to the world that the last ounce of their strength, the last drop of their blood, and the last breath of their lives belonged to God, to Torah, and to the Jewish religion.

As Chaplain [Herschel] Schacter intoned the evening prayers, all the inmates in and outside the block stood in silence, reaccepting the Torah whose people, message, and purpose Hitler's Germany had attempted to destroy. Jewish history repeated itself. Just as our forefathers who were liberated from Egypt accepted the Law in the desert, so did we, the liberated Jews of Buchenwald, reaccept the same Law in the concentration camps of Germany.<sup>15</sup>

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\* *Shavuot in the Soviet Union*

JOSHUA ROTHENBERG

While Shavuot is from the religious point of view as important and meaningful a holiday as the other two festivals of Sukkot and Passover, it is not associated with symbols and symbolic rites such as the *matzah*, *etrog*, and Sukkot booths. The decorating of houses and synagogues and eating of dairy dishes on Shavuot is an observed custom but has not the power of a religious injunction. For that reason Shavuot has not attracted as much attention from

Soviet authorities or Soviet antireligious propagandists as have other Jewish holidays.

Attendance of worshippers at the Shavuot prayers is, as a rule, not very large, except on the second day of the holiday when *Yizkor*, the prayer for the departed, is recited (any occasion when *Yizkor* is said attracts many worshippers). Whereas 400 to 500 persons was the average number of worshippers on the first day of Shavuot in the large synagogues of Moscow and Leningrad, the number of worshippers in the Moscow synagogue on the second day of Shavuot was 2,500 [in 1964], as reported in the Israeli press.<sup>16</sup>

\* *Shavuot Services in Newport, R. I., May 28, 1773*

EZRA STILES \*

Pentecost. Went to the Synagogue at ix [ours] A.M. At reading the Law the Rabbi [Hajim Isaac Karigal of Hebron] was desired and read the Ten Commandments. But before reading the Law and the Prophets the Rabbi went to the Desk or Taubauh and preached a Sermon about 47 minutes long in Spanish. It was interspersed with Hebrew. His Oratory, Elocution, and Gestures were fine and oriental. It was very animated. He exhorted them not to perplex themselves with Traditions and Criticisms, but to attend to certain capital points and principal points of Religion—he expatiated upon the Miseries and Calamities of their Nation in their present Captivity and Dispersion and comforted them under their Tribulations by the assured Prospect of the Messiahs Kingdom—he exhorted them not to be discouraged but persevere &c—he showed that Calamities and sufferings were not Evidence of their being forsaken of God—that Adversity and Judgments were the common Lot of all Nations Kingdoms and Countries—and instanced in the Desolation made by the Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius near Naples in Italy which he said he had seen, and beheld the Deluge of liquid Matter, flowing and carry-

\* Minister in Newport who later became president of Yale University.

A

# S E R M O N P R E A C H E D A T T H E S Y N A G O G U E,

In NEWPORT, *Rhode-Island*,

C A L L E D

“The SALVATION of ISRAEL :”

On the Day of P E N T E C O S T,  
O r F E A S T of W E E K S,

The 6th day of the Month *Sivan*,

The year of the Creation, 5533 :

Or, *May 28, 1773.*

Being the ANNIVERSARY

Of giving the LAW at *Mount Sinai* :

BY THE VENERABLE HOCHAM,

THE LEARNED R A B B I,

*HAIJIM ISAAC KARIGAL,*

Of the City of HEBRON, near JERUSALEM,  
In the HOLY LAND.

*NEWPORT, Rhode-Island*: Printed and Sold by  
S. SOUTHWICK, in Queen-Street, 1773.

14. Title page of sermon preached by Rabbi Hajim Isaac Karigal on Shavuot, 1773, at the synagogue in Newport, R. I.

seems to have held confirmations every year after the custom was started.<sup>18</sup>

\*

### \* *Shavuot on a Farm in Connecticut*

ISRAEL KASOVICH

Our first holiday on the farm was Shavuot. All around us was a sea of verdure and everything was in bloom. I told my children that this holiday commemorates the giving of the Torah to the children of Israel at Sinai—a Torah which teaches us to live on fair and brotherly terms with our fellowmen; and who could do this so well as the farmer with his unique mode of life? I described to them how our ancestors, the Jewish farmers of Palestine, used to go to Jerusalem for Shavuot, bearing the fairest fruits as offerings to the Temple; how the hills of Judea would resound with the sweet Hebrew songs of the brave, proud Jewish farmers; and how the priests and leading men of Jerusalem would come out to meet their brothers, whose labor fed the whole nation, and escort them with great pomp to the Temple. And I related to them how, when I was a little boy and went on the eve of Shavuot to other men's fields to pluck some blades of grass and twigs with which to decorate our house for the holiday, gentile peasant boys threw stones and set their dogs at me. And now we were living in a free country among our own green fields and woods, and I was proud to hold our Torah in one hand and a plow in the other.

Translated by Maximilian Hurwitz<sup>19</sup>

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### \* *The Festival in Haifa*

GERSHON AHITUV

The preparations for the great day were noticeable in Haifa on the eve of Shavuot. The streets and the houses were decorated

with greenery and national flags. Crowds of people in festive mood, including groups of youth and children who had come from other parts of the country in order to take part in the festivities, filled the streets and the festival atmosphere permeated the city. On both sides of the streets leading to the square on which the ceremony was to take place, two large gates were erected, adorned with the inscription *Barukhim bu-baim* (Blessed are they who come). One gate took the shape of two winged lions, and the second was in the form of a gigantic bunch of grapes with two doves stretching their wings on both sides.

The platform for the bearers of the firstfruits was set up in the courtyard of the Technion. It was ornamented with symbols connected with the festival and a representation of the Temple. The celebration began with the procession of the bearers of the firstfruits. All the villagers of the Valley of Jezreel, the Valley of the Jordan and the Galil were represented, each village trying to bring forth the best that it had produced in the past year. There were carts laden with hay, barley, wheat, vegetable crops, chickens, sheep, and calves. The offerings, which in ancient days were brought to the priest and the Temple, were now made to the Keren Kayemet le-Yisrael (Jewish National Fund).

After passing through the streets of the city the celebrants reached the platform and were received with loud applause by the thousands of people who crowded both sides of the streets, and the roofs and balconies of the houses.

On the platform there took place a pageant of the bringing of the firstfruits in ancient days, showing the men of the Galil leaving their villages to go up to Jerusalem, being met by men of the Negev and Gilead on the way, and forming with them one great procession, composed of large numbers of people with their cattle, their donkeys and their camels, laden with sheaves of corn and baskets of fruit. Next the spectators could see the men of Jerusalem, headed by the priests, coming out to meet them, welcoming them with singing and dancing and escorting them with rejoicing to the Temple.

The children also played their part in the festivities. Thousands of children garlanded with leaves and flowers walked in procession between the rows of spectators, bringing their offerings. Fourteen boys, clad in white clothes, and fourteen girls, dressed in blue robes, representing Levites, received the firstfruits from



The Messiah has still not come. There are only the agonies of the Messiah. Therefore the form of renewal of our lives and the bringing of the firstfruits is still not complete. It accords with this period; it is only the beginning of the ancient form, which will be complete when the redemption is complete. . . .

"Let us not forget that the national chain of the people begins with the festival which we are celebrating today, the festival of Shavuot. This was not only a festival of nature, the Festival of the Firstfruits of soil and toil. This is the day of the 'Giving of the Torah,' and on that day we became a nation. We cannot separate these two festivals. In one day we were created a nation and became a people tilling its land with the sweat of its brow."<sup>20</sup>

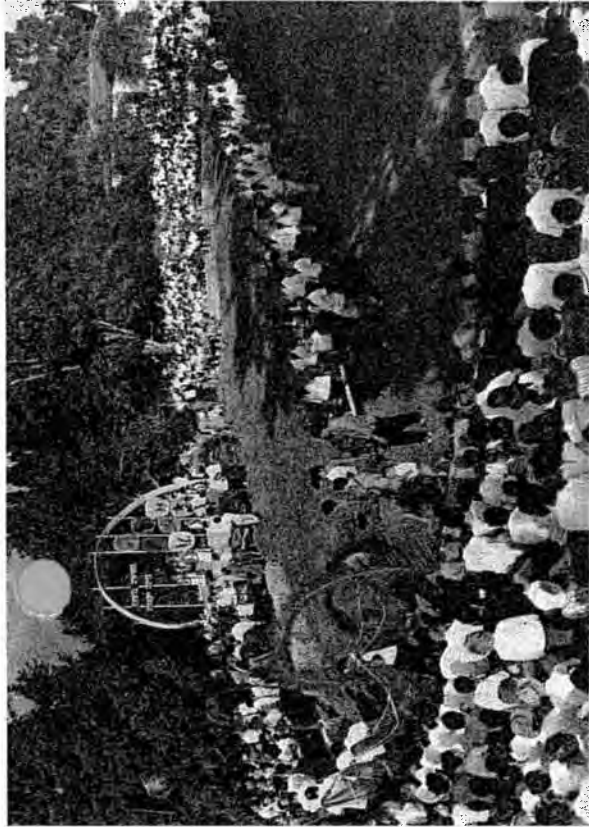
\* *Bikkurim in Kibbutz Matzuba*

GERSHON AHITUV

The sea is wide and still during the hot month of Sivan. From behind the copse that faces the road there approaches a red tractor, pulling a wide platform laden with freshly cut fodder. Aboard are a host of little children wearing their holiday clothes, decorated with greenery. Immediately following you see a procession of people attired in holiday costume, some walking, others traveling in vehicles.

The entire cavalcade is decked out in fresh foliage. They move slowly, the tractors and machines, the horse- and donkey-drawn wagons. The wagons are filled with workers in high spirits, dressed in their working clothes, carrying their tools and the fruits of their labors. There are broad-shouldered plowmen; workers from the orchards and vineyards wearing their wide-brimmed hats; sun-tanned vegetable gardeners and poultrymen carrying baskets of chickens and eggs; drivers and beekeepers.

Among them on foot are the dairy workers and the foddermen pulling a little bull calf. There are those who work in the banana orchards, two of them carrying a weighty bunch of ripe bananas, fastened to poles; the landscape gardeners adorned in flowers; the mushroom growers with their produce. Following



15. A *bikkurim* festival in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, Israel.

the children. The "Levites" sang and declaimed the formula beginning "My father was a wandering Aramean," continued with singing of biblical verses connected with the occasion, and concluded with the "Dance of Sheaves."

In 1932 when Menachem Ussishkin, at that time at the head of the Keren Kayemet, accepted the firstfruits brought forth by the children of Israel, he emphasized the importance and significance of the festival in the following words:

"You, children of Israel, have brought the firstfruits of your soil, the fruits of your toil, to the supreme body for the redemption of the land of our fathers. Our forefathers two thousand years ago also brought forth firstfruits on Shavuot, but then they brought their firstfruits not to Haifa, the City of the Future, but to Jerusalem, the Eternal City; not to Mount Carmel, but to Mount Moriah. And they gave the fruits not to the Jewish National Fund, but to the holy Temple.

"Nevertheless, I have consented to accept from you your firstfruits in the form in which you have brought them today for this reason: the same form was customary in that period when our people lived as a free nation in its own homeland. Our times today are not the same as that period, to which we aspire, which we hope to attain, for which we long. Our redemption is still not the complete redemption, but the beginning of the redemption.

# A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs

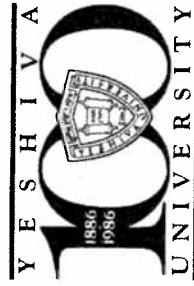
The Ritual Practices of Syrian, Moroccan,  
Judeo-Spanish and Spanish and Portuguese Jews  
of North America

HERBERT C. DOBRINSKY

אוצר דינים ומנהגים של יהודי ספרד

מאת

הרב צבי קלמן (הרב רט) דאברניסקי



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Tefillin Illustrations



Figure 1  
Ashkenazi

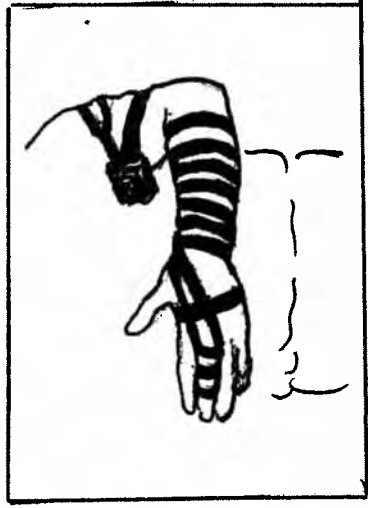


Figure 2  
Sephardi



Figure 3  
Nusah Sephard (Hasidic)

Sarah Schechter

ATLAS OF  
MEDIEVAL  
JEWISH  
LITERATURE

HAIM BEINART



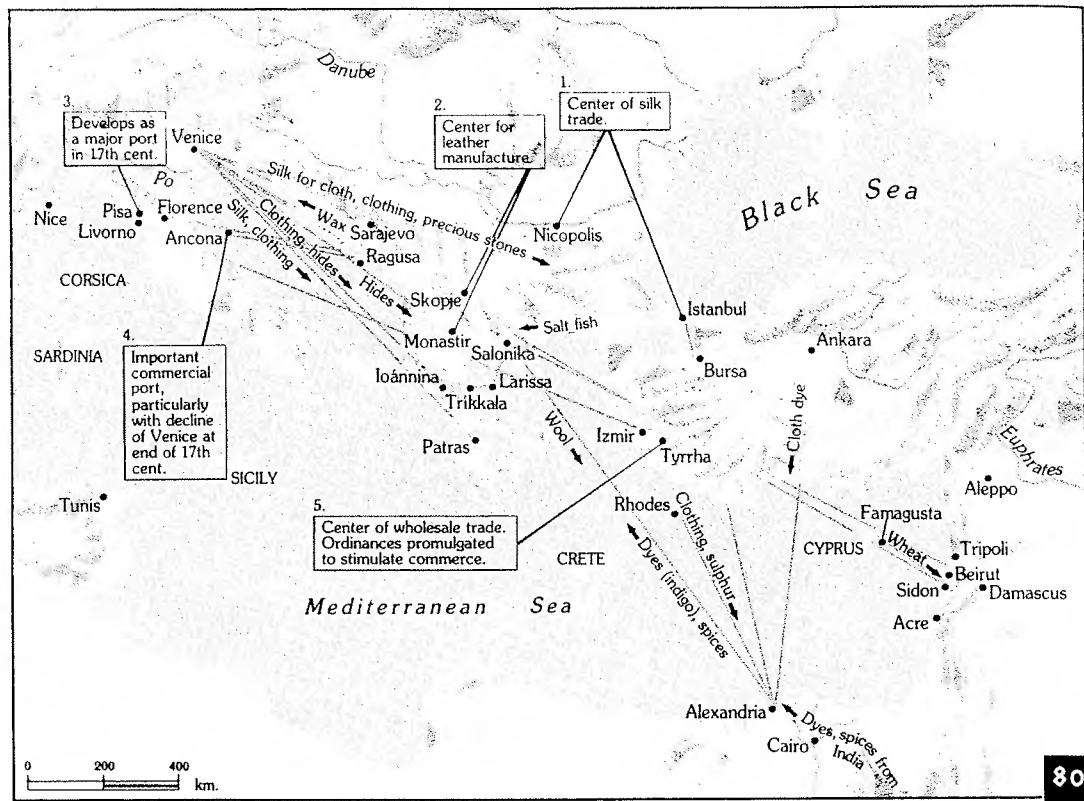
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Ottoman army Janizaries from the 16th century.



## IMMIGRATION TO THE HOLY LAND Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The instability stemming from frequent changes of rule in Palestine, the harassment encountered there by Jews, and the heavy taxation imposed upon them all failed to deter Jews immigrating to the country. The immigration wave of the sixteenth century brought new life to the local Jewish population that is described in the accounts left by pilgrims. The Jews resided in a few towns, chiefly Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and in some agricultural villages in Galilee. For hundreds of years the Jews of Italy played a special role in strengthening Palestine's Jews by direct support to the communities and by serving as a transit station en route for the immigrants.

Some of the refugees from Spain as well as kabbalists came in the hope of imminent redemption.

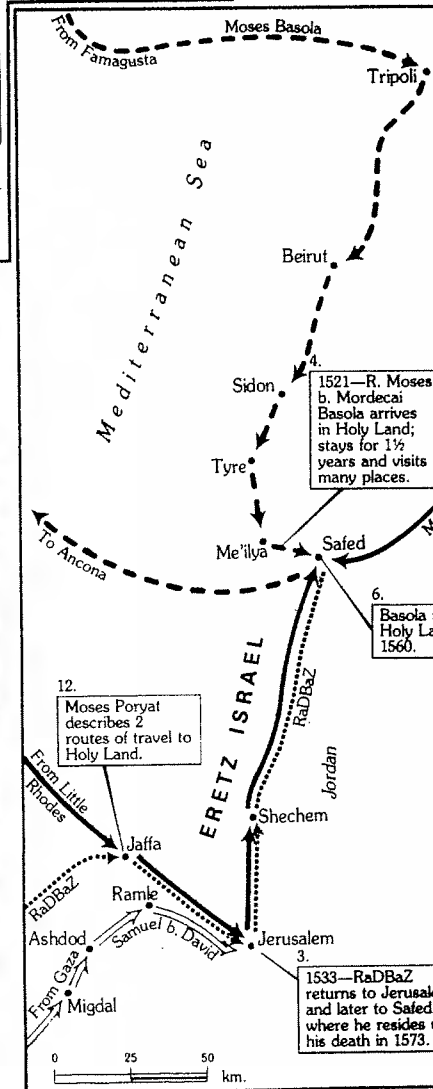
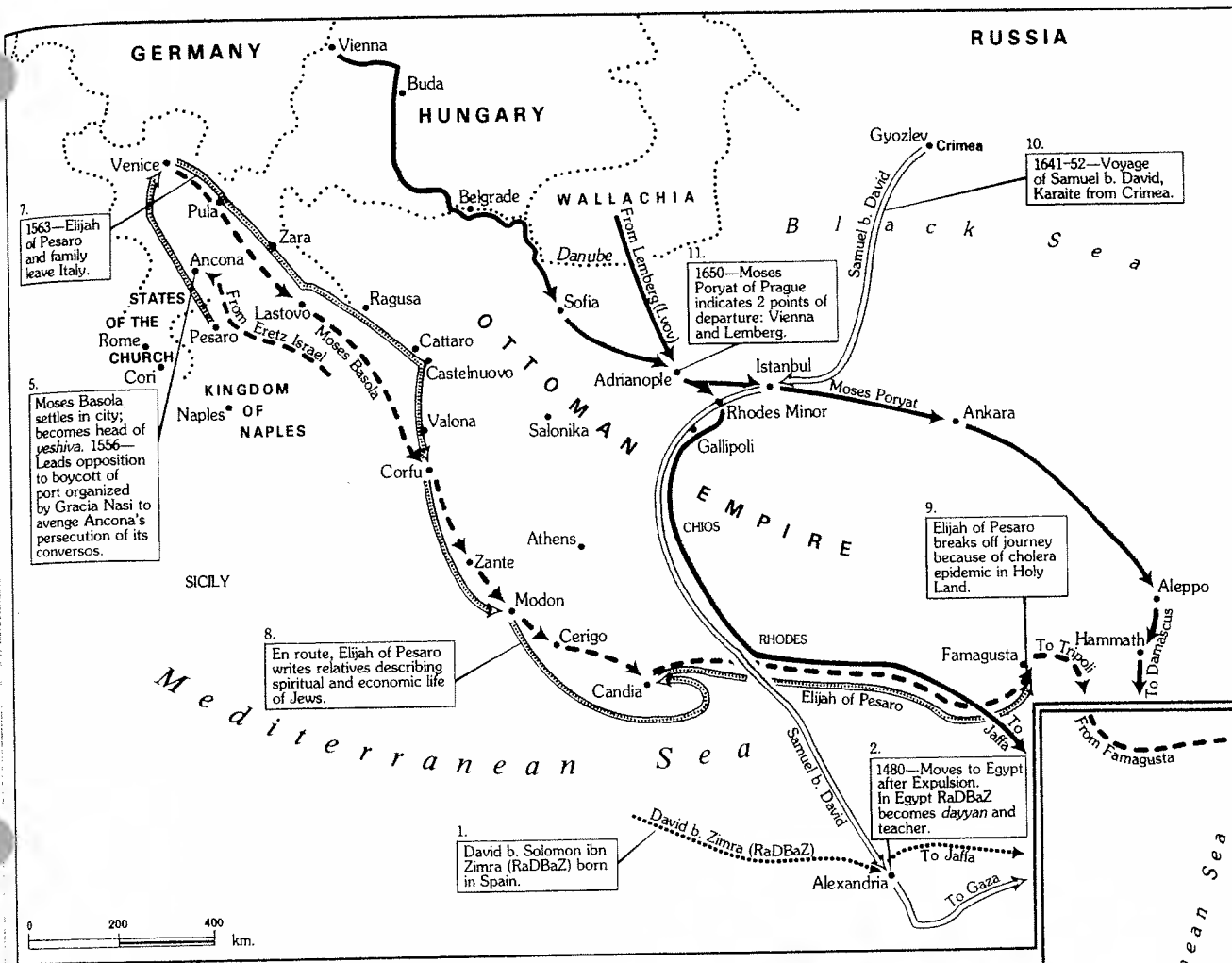
Safed of the sixteenth century had an established and growing Jewish community and was the home of many great scholars, among them Jacob (I) Berav, Joseph Caro and Moses Trani. In 1548, nineteen hundred taxpaying families, of whom 716 were Jewish, lived in the town.

In 1560 Doña Gracia Mendes-Nasi obtained concessions in Tiberias from the sultan (confirmed and extended for Joseph Nasi's nephew, in 1561), intending to rebuild the town and reestablish the Jewish community. Joseph Nasi ordered the

reconstruction of the town's walls (completed in 1565) and the planting of mulberry trees for the silk industry. A call was issued to Jewish communities in the Mediterranean basin inviting them to settle in Tiberias and the entire community of Cori (south of Rome) made preparations to emigrate. After Joseph Nasi's death in 1579 the Tiberias venture was continued by Solomon Abenaes (Ibn Yaish) a Portuguese converso statesman, wealthy merchant and successor of Joseph Nasi at the Turkish court in Constantinople.

The decline in the seventeenth century of the Jewish population in the Holy Land in general and in Galilee in particular reflected the erosion of the Ottoman Empire during this period. The Jewish community of Safed was severely affected by the continuing wars between the Ottoman rulers and the Druzes of Lebanon, as well as by epidemics and a plague of locusts. Despite attempts at reconstituting the Safed community in the 1720s, it never regained its sixteenth-century status and glory. The center of gravity shifted to Jerusalem. Rabbi Isaac ha-Kohen Sholal (Solal), the last *nagid* in Mamluk Egypt from 1502, settled in Jerusalem in 1517. The beginning of the seventeenth century saw a stream of immigrants to Jerusalem, particularly from Italy. The distinguished rabbi, Isaiah b. Abraham ha-Levi Horowitz

# IMMIGRATION ROUTES TO THE HOLY LAND



(called ha-Shelah ha-Kadosh), settled in Jerusalem in 1622.

There was a unique upsurge of support for the Jews of Palestine among Protestants, especially in England and Holland, concurrent with a wave of renewed assistance by the Jewish Diaspora, especially for Jerusalem. The Jews of Italy and the Low Countries were particularly generous.

For many generations the Jews in the Holy Land were dependent upon the financial support of the Diaspora, brought by travelers or immigrants via treacherous routes, often at great risk to their lives. However, such support was inadequate, and the local community was forced to send emissaries known as *shadarim* (from *sheluhei de-rabbanan*) out to the entire Diaspora, east and west, to procure contributions. The despatch of these emissaries attested to the close ties between the Jews of the Diaspora and those of the Holy Land.

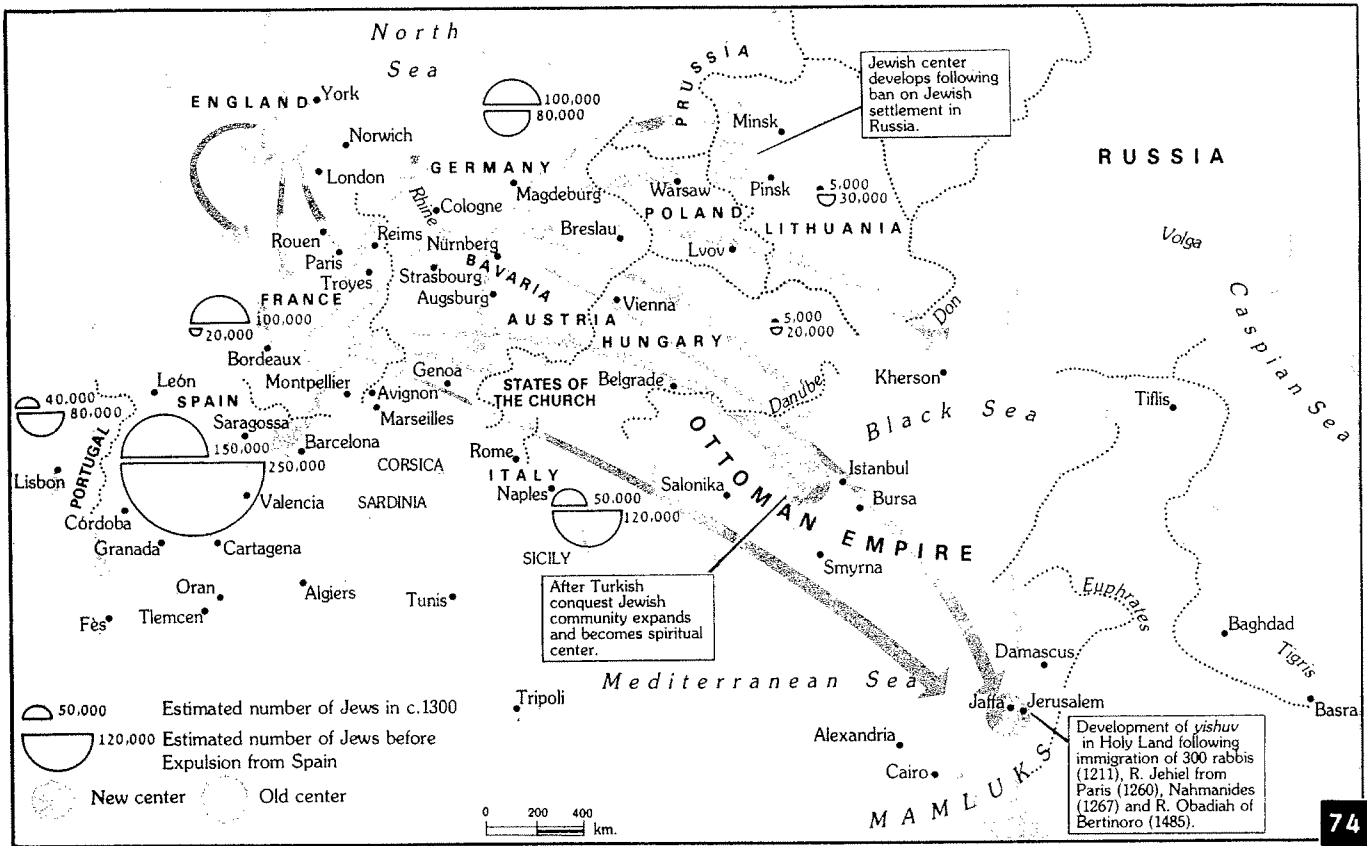


Cover of Torah Scroll from Damascus 1565. Incised copper with silver decoration.

באורי נזר זל מהר טוב וט מעשי קרב הדי קדושים מזה דורה כפי חלק משנה אורו פראב' נעמאב רלמס ומכר לטעור כפי דומן של יז על חוד טום כדמ ומערה שלח רבן כדוממם פ בעמ נחש נש ופסר לו בלשון חכמים ופסר דלעגה כרפח דודן חמב' ..

Signature of R. David ben Zimra (the RaDBaZ).

# From the Thirteenth Century until the Expulsion from Spain



It is difficult to estimate the size of the Jewish population in the Middle Ages. Even were we able to surmise the number of Jews in a particular place, we would still be ignorant of their composition by age and sex or the birth and death rate. We lack not only the absolute numbers but also other factors. It is certain that there were great population fluctuations resulting from expulsions, or from persecutions and massacres, which often destroyed entire communities. Therefore any estimate can be based only upon actual available statistics such as tax records or martyrology lists. These figures are more or less accurate but relate only to a particular time and place. It is clear that we are dealing primarily with an urban Jewish population having diverse occupations which differed from place to place.



Jewish figures from the 15th century.

## MAJOR EXPULSIONS

- 1290 Edward I expels Jews of England
- 1306 Philip IV expels Jews of France (Louis X readmits Jews for a twelve-year period)
- 1322 Charles IV again expels Jews from France
- 1367 Expulsion from Hungary
- 1381 Expulsion from Strasbourg
- 1394 Charles VI expels Jews of France
- 1421 Expulsion from Austria
- 1426 Expulsion from Cologne
- 1439 Expulsion from Augsburg

- 1450 Expulsion from Bavaria
- 1453 Expulsion from Breslau
- 1467 Expulsion from Tlemcen
- 1483 Expulsion from Andalusia
- 1492 Expulsion from Spain
- 1492 Expulsion from Sardinia
- 1493 Expulsion from Sicily
- 1495 Expulsion from Lithuania
- 1496 Expulsion from Portugal (replaced in 1497 by forced conversion)

## England

The statistical information on England relates only to the period of the expulsion. Basing himself on tax records, the historian Georg Caro (1867–1912) estimated the size of the Jewish population in 1280 to 1283, — that is, before the expulsion — at between 2,500 and 3,000. This is a considerably smaller figure than is arrived at by various other calculations, which place the number at between 15,000 and 17,500. The historian S. W. Baron (1895–1989) assumed that the correct figure lies between the two estimates. In London there were apparently no more than 2,000 to 2,500 Jews and the bulk of the Jewish population resided in the rest of England. Therefore it would seem that the total number of Jews in England at the time of expulsion (1290) was about 10,000 — a very small number in relation to the general population, which is estimated at 3,500,000.

## France

The statistics for French Jewry are also meager. In the south of what is today France, there was a dense Jewish population. According to Benjamin of Tudela, the town of Arles had two hundred Jewish families when he stopped there in 1160, while in 1194 the Jews were more than 25 percent of the town's population. A similar situation existed in the town of Tarascon. On the other hand, in September 1341, King Robert found that there were 1,205 Jews living in 203 houses in Aix-en-Provence, that is, no more than 10 percent of the general population. Narbonne experienced a decline in Jewish population and in 1305 there were no more than 1,000 Jews in comparison to 15,000 residents (about 7 percent). Toulouse had 15 Jewish families in 1391 and the situation was similar in Béziers, Albi and other towns in southern France. Only in the port town of Marseilles was there a large Jewish community. In 1358 at Avignon, 210 heads of Jewish families swore allegiance to the pope. Its Jewish population grew toward the end of the century and in 1414 the community requested permission to enlarge the area of the cemetery. In the 1490s refugees from Spain arrived at Avignon, but it is still difficult to calculate the size of the Jewish community in a town which was one of the largest in Europe, having 30,000 inhabitants in 1355. Carpentras had 64 Jewish family heads in 1276 and despite the expulsion in 1322, the community grew to 90 family heads in 1343. In 1486 the townspeople exerted pressure to reduce the area of the Jewish quarter, whose members in 1476 numbered 12 percent of the town's population.

In northern France, in the town of Troyes there were no more than 100 Jews during Rashi's time (1040–1105). While the expulsion of 1182 put a halt to Jewish population growth it did not affect the Jews of Champagne, Burgundy, Poitou and Normandy. In 1182 there were equal numbers of Jews and Christians residing in Paris. There was a large concentration of Jews residing in Villejuif near Paris, however, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries their numbers in Paris were on the decline. Jews resided in hundreds of small towns and the historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) estimated that in 1306 there were 100,000 Jews who were expelled by Philip IV the Fair.

## Germany

Germany's Jewish population increased between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. During the subsequent two hundred years the population grew only gradually. The Hohenstaufen rulers founded many towns that attracted Jewish settlers. The number of Jews massacred in Mainz during the First Crusade is indicative of the size of this major Jewish community. Jewish sources give a figure of 1,100 to 1,300 killed, while Christian sources cite 1,014. The Nürnberg Jewish community is recorded in a tax list from 1338 as having 212 persons decreasing to 150 by 1449. Another reliable demographic source is the Nürnberg *memorbuch* in which the names of the 628 martyrs of the Rindfleisch massacres in 1298 were recorded. Apparently the community recuperated since the massacres of 1349 claimed 570 victims. To these numbers one must add those Jews who escaped. The community numbered some 1,000 in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nürnberg recovered after the Black Death and became one of the largest communities in Germany. In 1498, when the Jews were expelled from the town, it had a population of about 20,000.

According to S. W. Baron the total Jewish population of Germany and Austria at the beginning of the fourteenth century was about 10,000. In 1500 there were in all of Germany (the Holy Roman Empire) about 12 million people. Therefore the percentage of Jews was very small. Because the Jewish population was primarily an urban one, it is difficult to calculate the population of every town and village.

## Italy

The demography of Jews in Italy differed considerably in the north and the south. In the 1260s Benjamin of Tudela found 500 families (or taxpayers) in Naples, 600 in Salerno, 500 in Otranto, 300 in Capua, 300 in Taranto, 200 in Benevento, 200 in Melfi and 200 in Trani. He found 20 families in the port of Amalfi — at this time the town was in a depression. In this period Sicily was heavily populated with Jews: 20 in Messina, 1,500 families in Palermo — the largest single concentration of Jews in southern Italy. Until the expulsion of 1493 Sicily was the center of Italian Jewish life. Palermo and Syracuse had about 5,000 Jews each at the time of the expulsion. Therefore, Nicolo Ferorelli estimated the number of Jews in Sicily at about 50,000 (1492). This figure seems accurate, since Attilio Milano (1907–1969) arrived at a figure of 37,046 Jews for Sicily — with its 45 communities, and Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria. There was also a community in Sardinia during the period of Aragonese rule. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the community of Rome developed considerably (in 1527 there were 1,738 Jews). Venice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the largest and most important of the northern communities, numbering several hundred Jews.

During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the Jews of Italy migrated from place to place, achieving a degree of communal organization similar to that achieved by the Jews of Ashkenaz and Spain in the thirteenth century.



southern towns in 1492 to 1511 shifted the Jewish center of gravity to Rome and northward, where the Jewish population was about 25,000 to 30,000, a figure that remained unchanged for several centuries.

of 1492, Jews from Spain reached North Africa. In Asia concentrations of Jews could be found in Iran and Iraq and it is reasonable to assume that they numbered several thousands. We have no information about the size of sixteenth-century Jewish communities in Yemen, the Ottoman Empire, Byzantine Asia Minor and Palestine. However, we know that the revival of the Jewish *yishuv* in Palestine in the sixteenth century brought with it a substantial increase in the number of Jews in the Holy Land.

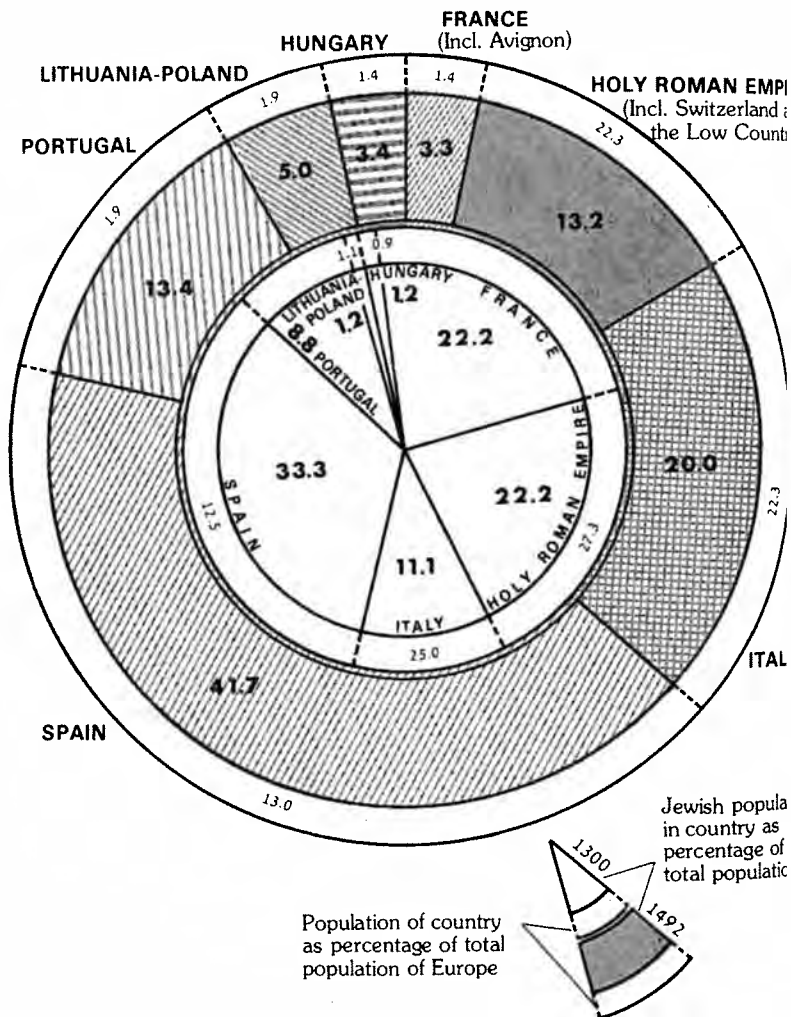
## Spain

The Jewish population of Castile grew from 60,000 in 1300 to 160,000 by 1492. By contrast the Jewish population in Aragón decreased to 75,000. Navarre had 15,000 Jews. A knowledge of the number of Jews in Spain in 1492 is an essential factor in estimating the size of the Jewish population of Europe, Asia and Africa from the sixteenth century onwards. The number of Jews expelled from Spain has been estimated by both Jewish and Christian sources. The priest-historian Andrés Bernáldez, a contemporary of the expulsion period, estimated that in 1492 there were 35,000 heads of family in Castile and 6,000 in Aragón. One Jewish document calculates 50,000 heads of family, while another estimates that 53,000 were expelled. Isaac Abrabanel (1437-1508) estimated the number that left and crossed the Portuguese border on foot at 300,000 "young and old, children and women," which would mean that in Castile there were between 150,000 to 200,000 Jews at the time of the Expulsion. Another method of calculation is by the size of the communities. For example the Jewish community of Cáceres in Estremadura numbered 130 persons and in the neighboring Talavera de la Reina between the years 1477 and 1487 there were 168 families, these numbers being typical of many other communities. A conservative estimate of the Castilian communities will show that between 1486 and 1491 there were 14,400 to 15,300 families. Estimating six people per family we would reach a figure of under 100,000. If we add to the number of Jews who left Spain some of the conversos, we will arrive at the total Jewish population towards the end of the fifteenth century. A further source of information is the tax paid by the refugees crossing the Portuguese border, each of whom had to pay eight cruzados for permission to cross over and to reside for eight months in the kingdom of Portugal. Here a figure of 120,000 can be reached. We also know that those who went to North Africa in hired ships numbered approximately 50,000. Several thousand refugees crossed the border of the kingdom of Navarre in 1493, having been given certificates of passage and protection so that they might get to Spanish ports whence they could embark. About 50,000 Jews went to Italy and several thousand to Avignon. All these figures bring us close to the estimate of 200,000.

These figures refer only to the Jews of Europe to whom we must add the Jews of Poland-Lithuania estimated at about 50 to 60 communities (30,000 persons) in the fifteenth century. Hungary and the Balkans had very few Jewish communities until the arrival of the Spanish refugees.

By comparison with our knowledge of European Jewish demography we are in the dark concerning the number of Jews in North Africa (including Egypt) and Asia. North Africa had sizable Jewish communities in the tenth and eleventh

## JEWISH POPULATIONS IN EUROPE (By Percentages)



	1300	1492
Total population	44,000,000	53,800,000
Jewish population	450,000	600,000
Jews as percentage of total population	1.02	1.22

# THE EXPULSION ORDER

Don Fernando and Doña Isabela ... by the Grace of God ... etc. ... To the Prince heir don Juan, our very dear and beloved son, to the Infantes, Prelates, Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Masters of Orders, Priors, Ricos omes, Commanders, Alcaldes of Castles and Fortified houses of our Kingdoms and Domains, to all Councils, Alcaldes, Alguasils, Merinos, Calealleros, Escuderos, officials and notables of the very noble and loyal town of Avila, and all the other towns, villages and places of its Bishopry, and to all other Archbishopries and Bishopries and Dioceses of our Kingdoms and Domains, and to the Aljamas of the Jews in the named town of Avila and to all other towns, villages and places of its Bishopry, and to all other towns and villages and Places of our Kingdoms and Domains, and to all other Jews and persons, males and females of any age, and to all other persons of any standing, dignity, preeminence and state they may be, to whom the contents of this Order may concern in any way, grace and greetings.

Know indeed or you must know, that we have been informed that in our kingdoms there were some bad Christians who judaized and apostatized against our holy Catholic Faith, mainly because of the connection between the Jews and the Christians. In the Cortes of the past year which we held in Toledo in 1480, we ordered the separation of the above-mentioned Jews in all cities, villages and places in our kingdoms and domains, and to give them Jewish quarters and separate quarters where they should live, hoping that through this separation the matter would be remedied. We further ordered that an inquisition be held in our kingdoms and domains. As you know, this was done and has been the practice for more than twelve years and through it, as is well known, many sinners have been found by the inquisitors, churchmen and many other secular authorities.

Thus the great damage caused to Christians by their participation, connection and conversation they had and are having with the Jews which is proven which they do to subvert and remove from our holy Catholic Faith the devoted Christians and apart them from it and attract and pervert them to their damned faith and opinion instructing them in their ceremonies and observances of their law, organizing meetings in which they read to them and teach them in what they have belief and keep according to their Law, circumcising them and their children, providing them with books in which they recite their prayers, informing them when they have to fast in their fasting days, coming together for readings and teaching them histories of their Law, notifying them the days of their holy days to come, informing them how they are to be observed, giving and bringing from their homes Matzoth and meats slaughtered according to their rituals, advising them from what to abstain in food and in other matters in observance of their Law, convincing them as much as they are able to observe and keep the Law of Moses, making them to understand that there is no other Law nor truth, but theirs, which has been proven through many confessions by the Jews themselves as well by those whom they perverted and deceived, which all caused great damage in detriment of our holy Catholic Faith.

Although we were informed about this beforehand and we know that the real remedy to all the damages and inconveniences is to separate the said Jews and the Christians in all our kingdoms and to expel them from our realm. We had thought it sufficient to order them out of the cities and villages and settlements in Andalusia, where they had already caused great damage, thinking that this would be enough for those living in other cities, villages and places in our kingdoms and domains who would stop acting and sinning as described above.

And because we are aware that this matter, and punishments inflicted on some of these Jews who were found guilty of these great sins and transgressions against our holy Catholic Faith, proved to be insufficient as a complete remedy, in preventing and remedying the great sin and transgression against the holy Catholic Faith and religion; it is not enough for a full remedy in order to cease this great offence to the faith, since we have discovered and seen that Jews pursue their evil and damaging intentions wherever they are found and are in touch; in order that there should be no further damage to our holy Faith, both through those whom God preserved so far and those who failed, but reformed their conduct and were brought back to the fold of the holy Catholic Church — our Holy Mother — and what is bound to happen bearing in mind our human weakness and the deceit and intrigues of the Devil who is continuously fighting us, something that can easily occur, we have decided to remove the main cause for this through the expulsion of the Jews from our kingdoms. Whenever a grave and detestable

crime is committed by any member of any society or group, it is proper that that society or group be dissolved or that the low disappear or suffer for the sake of the lofty, the few for the sake of the many. Those who corrupt the good and decent life in towns and villages and contagiously injure others, they should be expelled from these places. If for matters far less consequential which may cause damage to the state we act this way, all the more so for a very serious crime, one of the most dangerous and contagious crimes as this is.

Therefore, in consultation and agreement with the clergy, the higher and lower nobility in our realm, other men of science and conscience from our Council and having deliberated much on the matter, we have agreed to order the expulsion of all Jews and Jewesses in our kingdoms. Never should any one of them return nor come back. We have therefore issued this order. Thus we order all Jews and Jewesses of any age, who live, dwell and are found in our kingdoms and domains, whether born here or elsewhere, and are present here for any reason, must leave our kingdoms and domains until the end of the next month of July this year, together with their sons and daughters, their male and maidservants and their Jewish relatives, old and young, whatever their age. They should not dare to return and live where they previously lived, not for passage or in any other form, under a penalty, that if they fail to do so and to obey the order, and if they are found living in our kingdoms and domains, or come here in any way, they should be put to death, their property being confiscated by our Court and Royal Treasury. These punishments will be inflicted on the basis of the act and law, without trial, verdict and proclamation.

We order and prohibit that no man in our kingdoms, whatever his status, position and level should receive under his protection, should accommodate or defend, openly or secretly, any Jew or Jewess, from the above-mentioned date, the end of next July and onwards, for ever, neither in their lands nor in their houses, or anywhere in our kingdoms and domains, under the penalty of having their property, their vassals, their fortresses and any other thing that passes in inheritance confiscated. They will also lose any acts of mercy they have from us to the advantage of the Court and Royal fisc.

In order that these Jews and Jewesses can sell in a proper way their goods and property during this time until the end of the month of July, we take them and their property, throughout this period, under our protection, auspices and royal defense, so that during this period until the last day of July, could securely move around, sell, exchange or transfer their movables and land, and decide freely and willingly anything connected with them. During this period no harm, evil or injustice should be inflicted on the people and their property against the law, under a penalty against anyone who contravenes the royal safety of the kingdom.

We hereby as well authorize and permit these Jews and Jewesses to take out from our kingdoms and domains their property and goods, by sea or land, as long as they do not take away gold, silver and coins and any other article forbidden by the law of the kingdom, apart from goods which are not prohibited and exchange bills. We also instruct all the Councils and Courts of Justice, the regidores, the *caballeros* and *escuderos*, the officials and notables in the city of Avila, and cities, villages and other places in our kingdoms and domains, all vassals who are under our dominion and natives, that they should keep and fulfil our order and everything written in it, do and give any help and support to anyone who needs it, under the penalty of losing our mercy and having all their property and positions confiscated by the Court and Royal Treasury.

In order that this may reach everyone, and that no one should pretend ignorance, we command that our order be proclaimed in the usual places and squares in this city and major cities, in villages and places in the bishop's domain by the herald and in the presence of the notary public.

No one should act against this under penalty of our mercy and deprivation of all offices and confiscation of his property. And we order any person who would be summoned to appear before us in our Court, wherever we may be, from the day of summons till fifteen days coming, and under the same penalty to appear. And we order any notary public who will be summoned for it, to present the order stamped by his seal so that we shall be informed how our order is carried out.

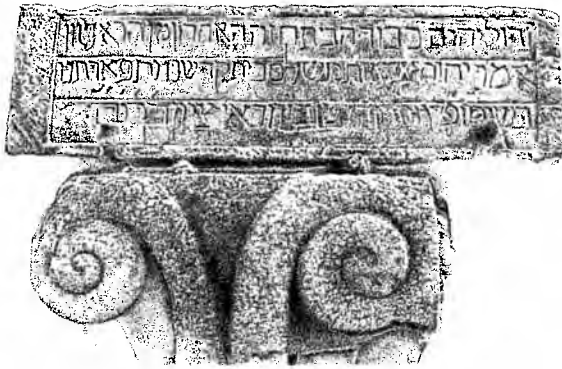
Given to our city of Granada, the 31st of the month of March in the year 1492. I, the King and I, the Queen. I, Juan de Coloma, the secretary of the King and Queen our Lords, have written as ordered.

EMPIRE and countries)

ITALY

population as a percentage of population

The expulsion order came as a surprise to the Jews of Spain. During the month of April unsuccessful efforts were made to rescind the edict, in which Micer Alfonso de la Caballeria among others was involved. On 1 May the edict was promulgated in Castile, and two days earlier in Saragossa. The Jews were allowed three months to wind up their affairs and leave Spain. Spanish Jewry immediately began to prepare to leave. Among those who left for Italy was the family of Don Isaac Abrabanel from the port of Valencia. Compelled to forgo loans he had advanced to the crown, he was permitted to take gold, silver and jewelry out of the country although this was forbidden in the edict. Others attempted to smuggle their valuables out. The authorities were interested in a calm and orderly expulsion. Various personalities, among them descendants of conversos Luis de Santangel and Francisco Pinelo, negotiated with and gave guarantees to ship captains for chartering vessels to carry the evacuees to North Africa and other places. This was a trying period for the communities whose leaders had the additional task of disposing of community property — synagogues, schools, public ritual baths (*Mikvaot*), and cemeteries etc.



Capital of a column from a synagogue that was to be inaugurated in 1496/7 in Gouveia, Portugal.

The value of property declined drastically; houses, fields and vineyards were sold for the price of a donkey or a mule. In contrast, the price of cloth and silk rose because the refugees were allowed to take such goods with them. The Christian at first hoped for a loss of faith on the part of Spanish Jewry and a subsequent readiness to convert and remain in the land where they had resided for close to fifteen hundred years. They were astounded by the Jews' spiritual fortitude as they left for the ports of embarkation with hymns on the lips.

Jews were forbidden ever to return to Spain on pain of death unless they were prepared to convert to Christianity. As a result, Spain was without Jews for hundreds of years. The Spanish expulsion served as a model for expulsions in Lithuania (1495) and Portugal (1496), though the latter was changed by King Emanuel (Manuel) I (1495–1521), for the forced conversion of the Jewish population.

Contemporary descriptions of the hardship and suffering of the banished Jews produced epics unequalled in the annals of human history.

"I heard it told by elders, exiles from Spain, that a certain ship was smitten by pestilence and the owner cast the passengers ashore on a desolate site. Whereupon most of them died of starvation, a few attempting to walk until they could find a place of habitation. One Jew among them with his wife and two sons struggled to walk and the woman being barefooted swooned and expired, while the man, carrying his sons, both he and they collapsed from hunger and upon recovering from his swoon, he found the two boys dead. Arising in great distress he cried 'God of the Universe! You do much to cause me to abandon my faith. Know you that despite those who dwell in Heaven, I am a Jew and will remain a Jew, despite all you have brought upon me or will bring upon me.' And so saying he gathered dust and grass, covered the youths, and went to seek an inhabited place."

From Solomon Ibn Verga (late 15th–early 16th centuries), *Shevet Yehudah*, Hebrew edition by A. Schochat, Jerusalem 1947, p. 122.

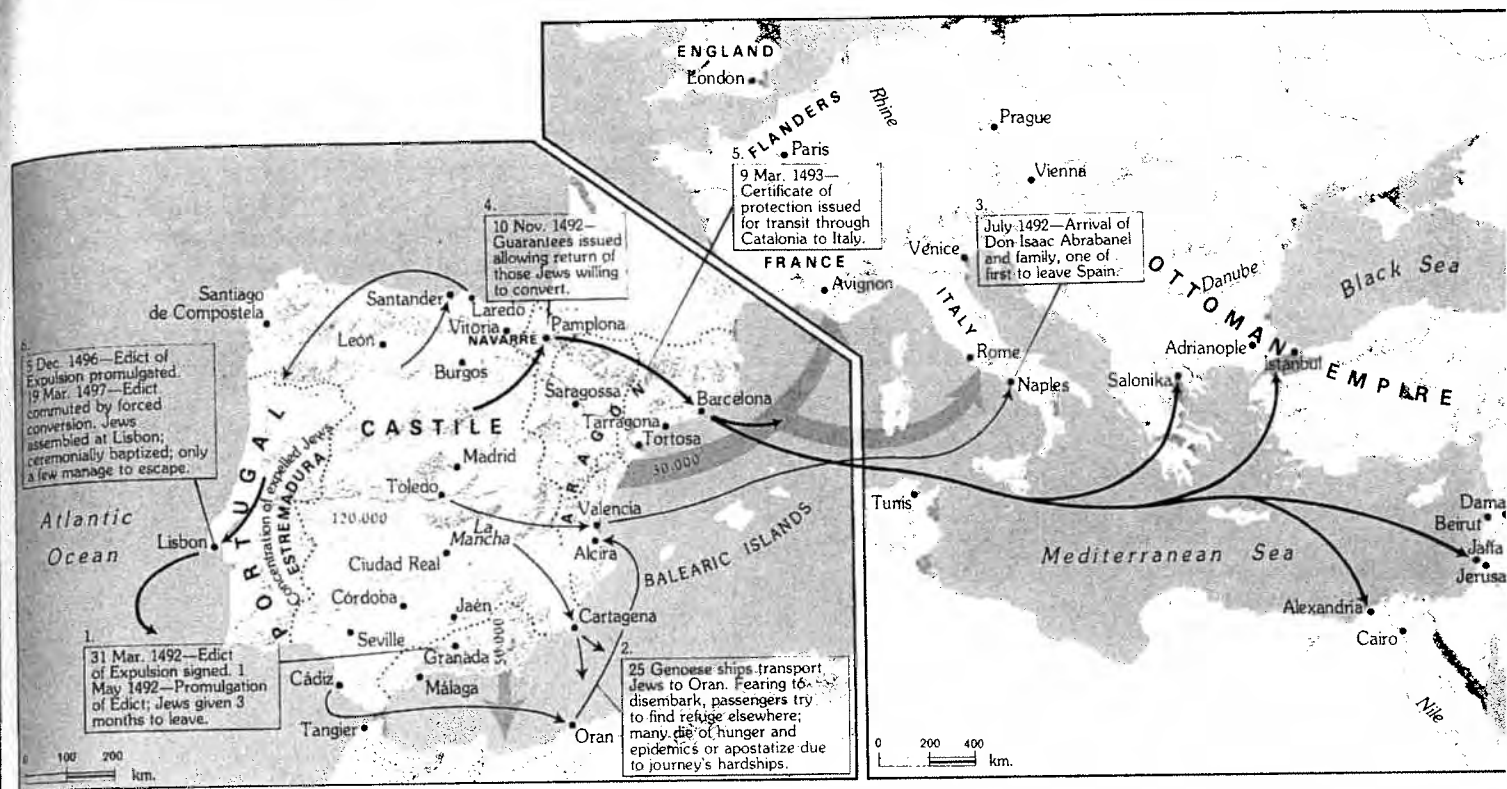
## JEWISH EXODUS FROM SPAIN AND PORTUGAL 1492–1497

The Expulsion from Spain altered the map of Jews in Europe, creating a Diaspora within a Diaspora — Spanish Jewish communities formed within existing Jewish communities. This situation poses two questions. How many Jews left Spain and what were their destinations? It is difficult to calculate the number expelled, but an estimate may be hazarded, on the basis of the number of Jewish residents in various places. The majority of Spanish Jews in the fifteenth century resided in Castile. A conservative estimate of this population is 30,000 families, that is, between 120,000 to 150,000 people. In Aragón the estimate is about 50,000 people. This gives us a total of 200,000 expelled — an approximate estimate given in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources.

Most of those banished went to Portugal, where they

were offered a temporary eight-month haven for the per capita price of eight cruzados. Twenty-five ships led by Pedro Cabron left Cádiz for Oran but the Jewish passengers fearing to disembark — despite the reassurance of a Genoese pirate named Fragosso — returned to Asilah in North Africa. Storms forced the ships to anchor at Cartagena and Málaga where many of the Jews converted while others died of an epidemic. Those who disembarked at Asilah remained there until 1493. They were joined by a group of Jews who had settled in Portugal and were now on their way to the east (except for 700 heads of family who went to Morocco), paying a considerable sum of money for this privilege.

Other refugees went to North Africa, Italy and further eastward. Some went to the papal state in France. Their



journeys were beset with hardship, suffering and affliction, robbery, extortion, and even murder. Many lost their lives on the way.

A cruel fate awaited those Jews who fled to Portugal. John II (1481–1495) accepted 600 wealthy families and skilled craftsmen, granting them permanent residence; others, who were given only temporary residence, were enslaved if they failed to leave on time.

The reign of John II's successor, Manuel I (1495–1521) was a tragic one for the Jews of Portugal. Isabella, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, agreed to marry him on condition that he rid Portugal of the Jews. Thus on 5 December 1496 the edict of expulsion was promulgated, the text being an abridged copy of the Spanish edict. In February 1497 Jewish children up to the age of fourteen whose parents intended emigrating, were seized and forcibly baptized. Soon the age limit was extended to twenty, and Jews began to flee the country in every possible way. Many children were detained and transferred to the Portuguese colony on the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea off the African coast, where they were cruelly ill-treated and most of them died in the jungle.

On 19 March 1497 the expulsion edict was replaced by forced conversion, a change in policy which possibly stemmed from the desire to retain the Jewish population within a sparsely populated nation of about one million people that had recently undertaken large settlement commitments in western Africa. The act of conversion was accomplished through deception, by assembling at Lisbon, the only officially-sanctioned port of embarkation, all those wishing to leave. Those assembled were then ceremonially baptized and declared citizens of the realm. Only a few, among them Abraham b. Samuel Zacuto, were able to resist

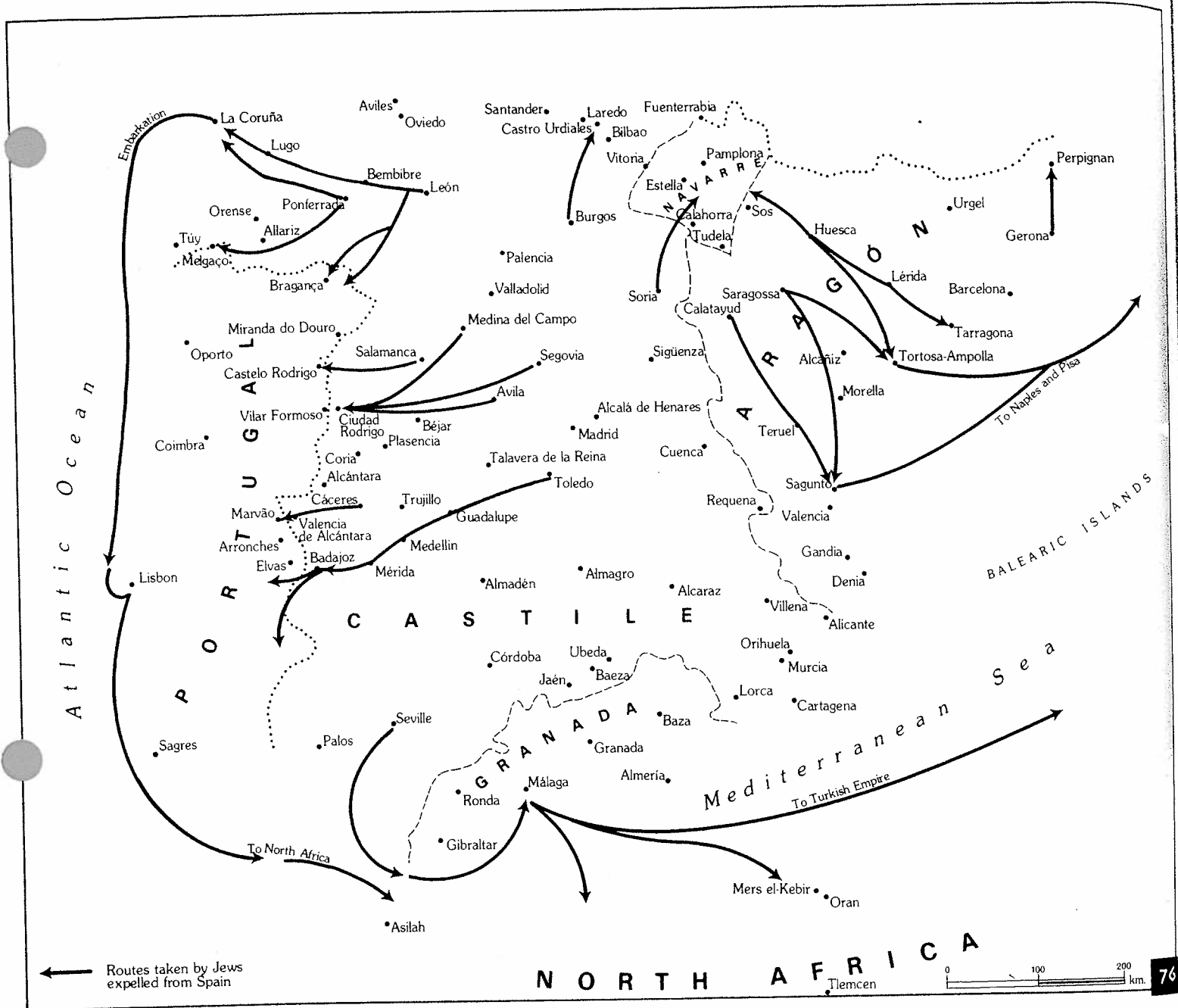
and later escaped. On 30 May 1497 the king issued orders that those who converted should be safe from persecution and from the Inquisition for a twenty-year period. From this it would appear that Manuel I was already contemplating the institution of a national inquisition modeled on that of Spain.

Many new communities were established by the Spanish exiles in the Mediterranean basin, the Ottoman Empire proved particularly congenial to Jews and conversos, who developed a comprehensive spiritual network in their communities. The Holy Land also attracted the Spanish exile; and its conquest by the Turks (1517) served as a fulcrum for the expansion and development of the Jewish communities in the country.

"And I Judah, son of my lord the wise and pious R. Jacob may he rest in peace, while residing in Spain savored a smidgen of honey, mine eyes saw the light and my mind was given to seek wisdom and inquire thereof. I went from strength to strength gathering all that was found in the aforementioned book, gleaning a morsel here and a morsel there until I possessed most of what it contained. In true faith I believe it was this knowledge that enabled me to withstand the terrible hardships that befell me upon my expulsion from Spain; and that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle; to relate all the hardships, from I know not the numbers thereof but of some I will tell and I shall speak the praises of the Lord.

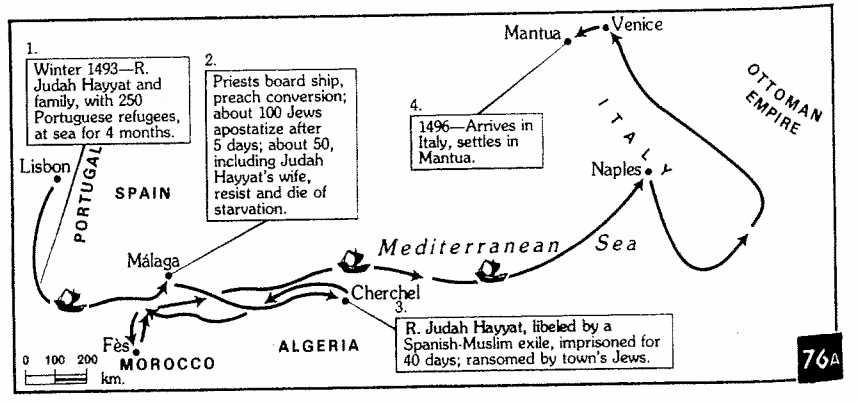
We traveled, I and my family, with 250 other souls in one vessel, in mid-winter 1493, from Lisbon the great city of the Kingdom of Portugal at the command of the king. The Lord struck us with pestilence to fulfill his word 'I will smite them with pestilence and destroy them...' and this was the reason why no place would receive us — 'Depart ye! unclean! men cried unto them' and we left wandering ceaselessly, four months on the sea with 'meager bread and scant water'."

R. Judah Hayat, Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut, Mantua, 1558, introduction.



Routes taken by Jews expelled from Spain

### THE WANDERINGS OF R. JUDAH HAYYAT





In Catalonia, where most of the Jewish communities were destroyed, the riots were accompanied by a revolt of the indentured artisans and peasants against their lords. However, this revolt was only a secondary factor in the crusade against the Jews, although the authorities were wary of its side effects. The crown took advantage of the disturbances: the king of Aragón, John I (1387–1395) ordered an inventory of the property of Jews killed in the riots who had no heirs, since it was the custom in those days for the crown to inherit such property.

Two communities in the kingdom of Aragón were unharmed — those of Saragossa, the capital and royal residence, and Perpignan. In Saragossa Rabbi Hasdai Crescas was active and instrumental in organizing the defense of the town's Jews, collecting money to hire one of the nobles, Francisco d'Aranda, and his troops for this purpose. At the end of 1391 the king left Saragossa to tour the kingdom and pacify the population. Every place he visited he began negotiations

on the size of fines to be paid and the procedures for procuring a royal pardon. The population of a number of towns succeeded in placing the blame for the riots on the Jews.

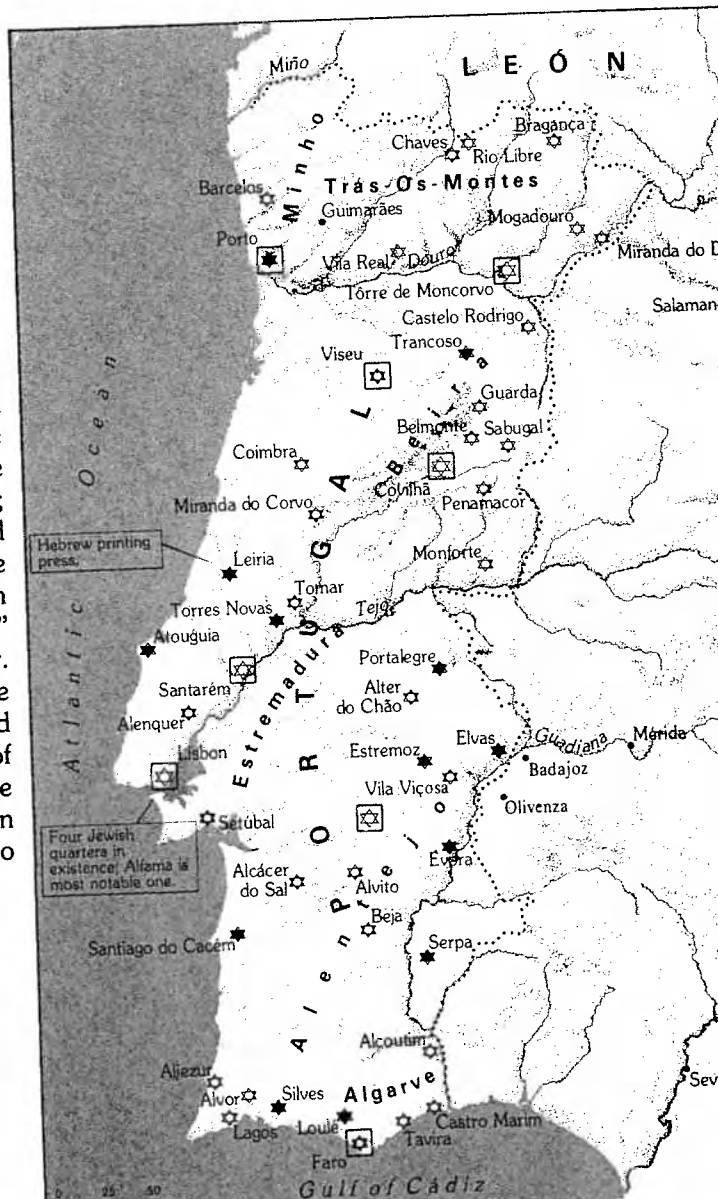
Very few Castilian Jewish communities were spared; even the large ones disappeared as if they had never existed. Only Navarre escaped almost unscathed from the riots. But the Jews were attacked during the riots of 1328.

Many Spanish Jews saved their lives by apostasy, so that entire communities together with their leaders were obliterated. Even great Jewish personalities converted prior to the riots of 1391, some of them under the influence of Fria Vincent Ferrer. This gave rise to a new phenomenon: the creation of a community of conversos who wished to return to Judaism and who secretly practiced Jewish observance alongside openly professing Jewish communities that began to recuperate and rebuild their lives during the fifteenth century.

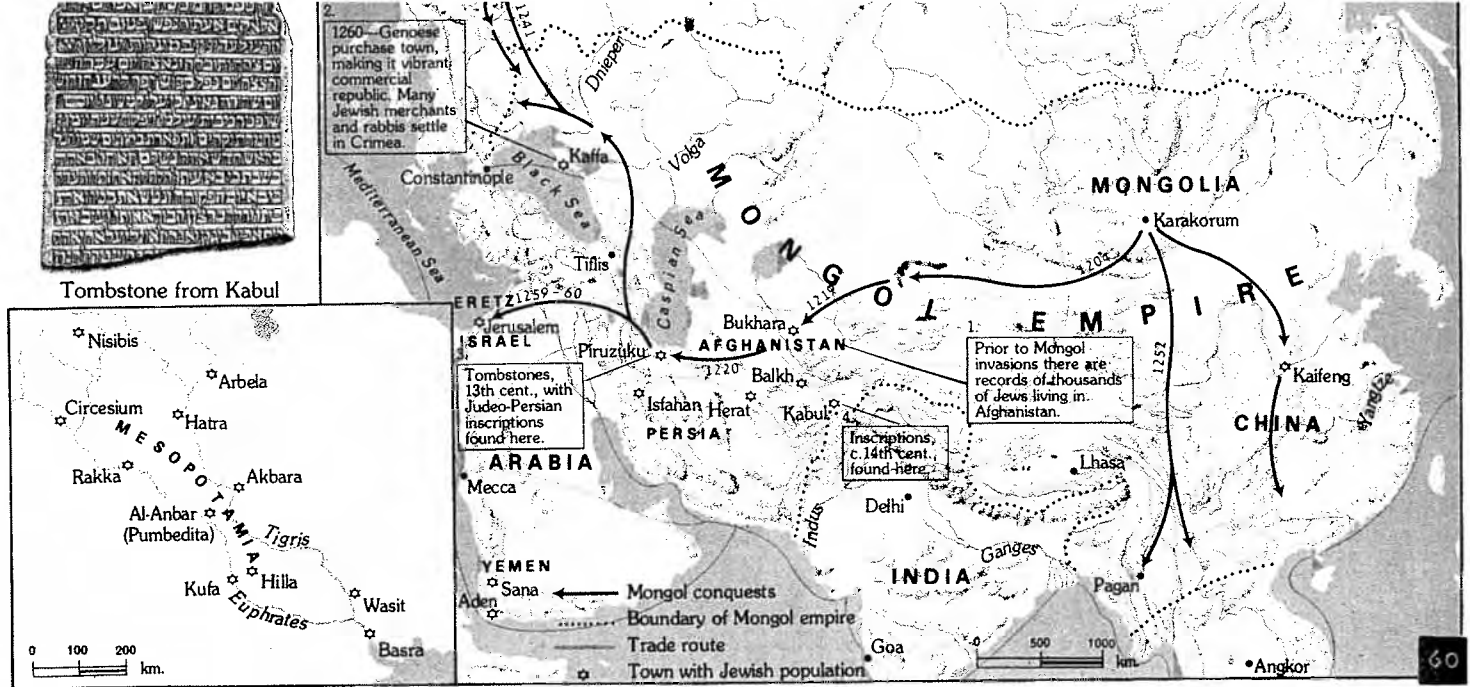
## JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN PORTUGAL Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

Ever since Portuguese independence, during the reign of Afonso III (1248–1279), the Jewish communities of Portugal developed their own unique organizational structure. The crown appointed a single head of all the Jews in Portugal called the *arrabi mór*, who in turn appointed seven regional heads, or *arrabi menors*, each heading one of the seven regional divisions of Portugal. The *arrabi mór* had a wide range of authority in supervising Jewish communal life. He was the intermediary between the crown and the community; he represented the latter before the crown and conveyed the crown's wishes to the community. He also advised the crown on matters of taxation and obligations imposed on the Jewish community. However, he was not a "chief rabbi" in the conventional sense, but rather a crown administrator.

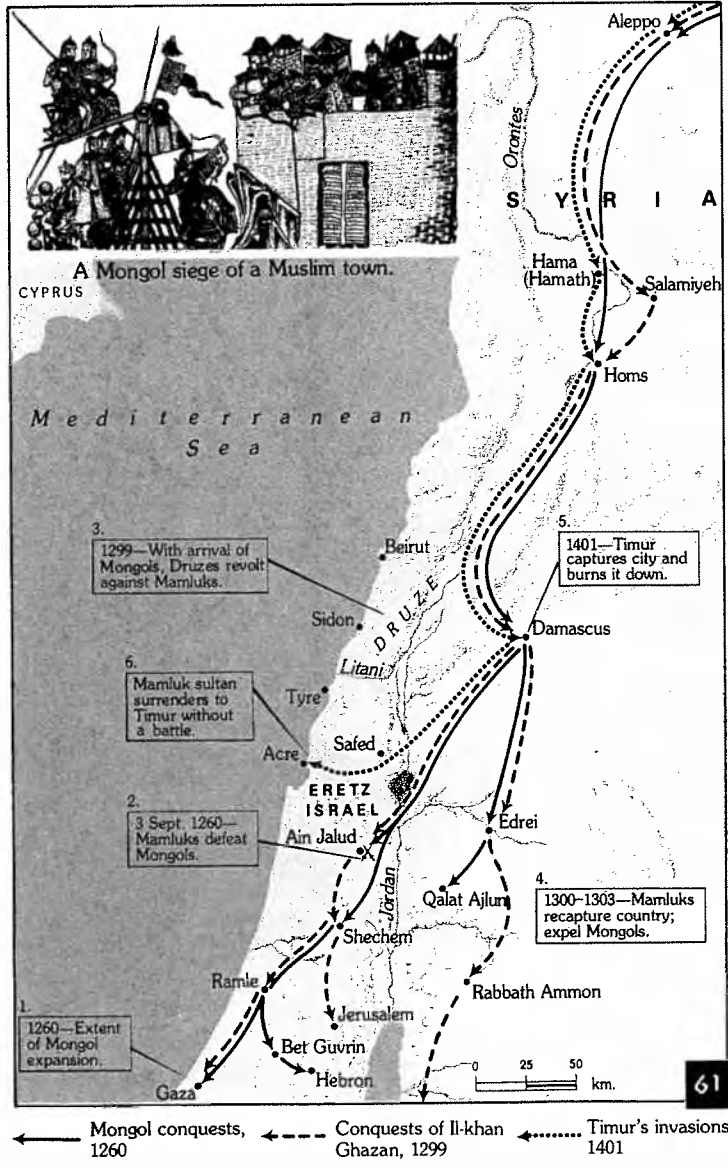
The fourteenth century was relatively tranquil for the Jews of Portugal notwithstanding anti-Jewish agitation and church pressure, for example, with regard to the wearing of identifying badges and restriction of residence. Although the anti-Jewish atmosphere fomented by the church resulted in the massacres of 1449, Jewish communal life continued to function unperturbed.



- ☆ Jewish community in 13th cent. (1279-1325)
- New Jewish settlement in reign of Afonso IV, 1325-1357
- New Jewish settlement in reign of Pedro, 1357-1467
- ▲ New Jewish settlement in reign of Ferdinand, 1367-1383



## THE MONGOLIAN INVASIONS OF PALESTINE

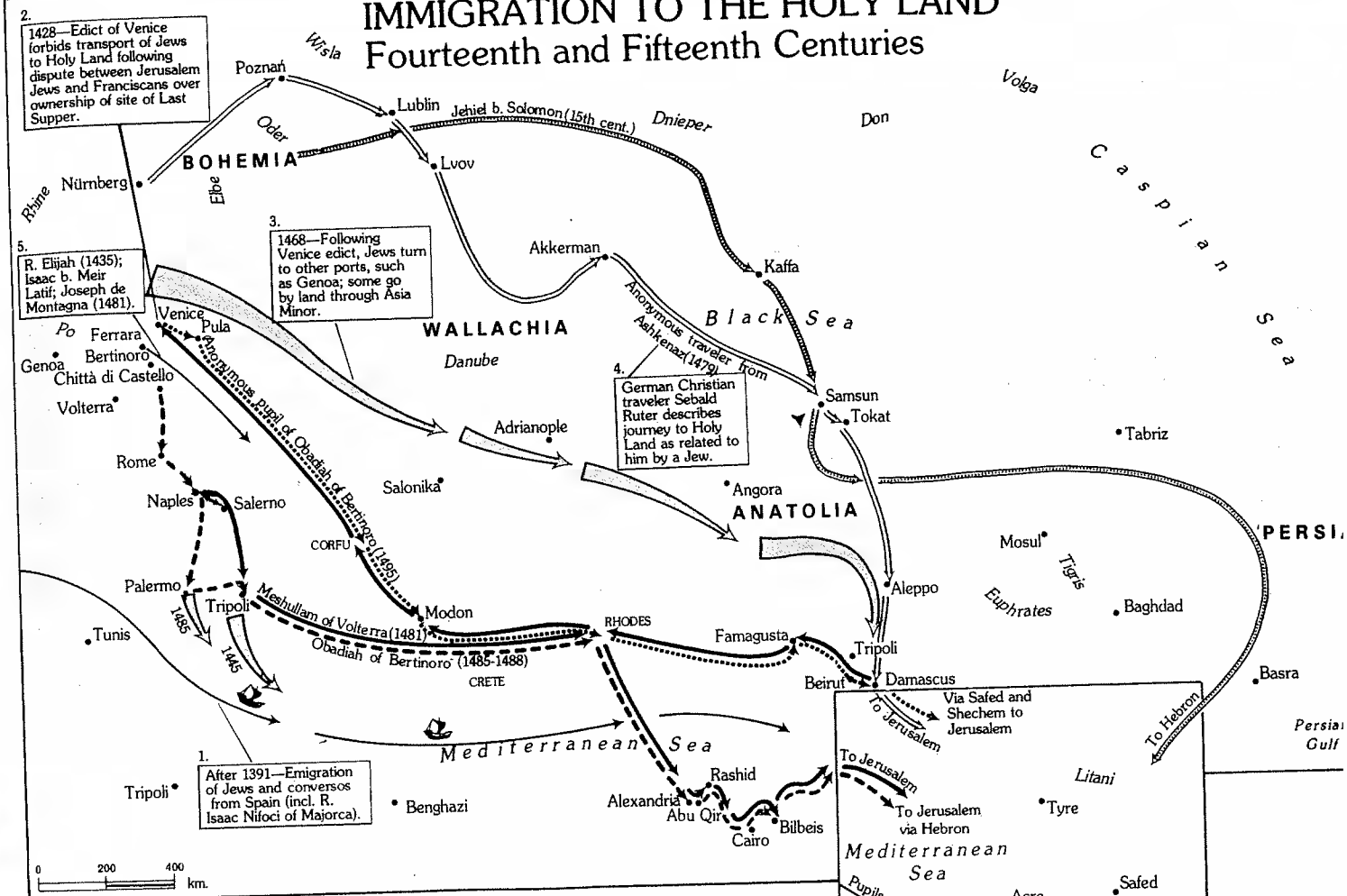


The Mongol invasion of Europe and the Middle East from the end of the twelfth century brought radical changes to those areas. Nations were destroyed and whole populations annihilated. The world was engulfed by a powerful wave of conquest the like of which it had never known before.

Before the death of Genghis Khan (1227) the Mongols had reached the Dnieper in Europe and in 1421 they crossed the Oder, annihilating a German and Polish army in a battle near Liegnitz. In 1258 the Mongols, led by Il-khan Hülegü, conquered Mesopotamia, from which they proceeded to Palestine, reaching Gaza in 1260. In September 1260, at the battle of Ain Jalud (Ein Harod) in the Valley of Jezreel, they were decisively defeated by Baybars and the Mamluk army, thus ensuring Mamluk rule over Palestine. In 1299, under the leadership of Il-khan Ghazan, they launched an invasion with the aid of an Armenian army and Druzes from the Lebanon. At the end of the fourteenth century the Tartar prince Timur (Tamerlane) revived the Mongol empire and in 1401 conquered and set fire to Damascus. Palestine surrendered without battle, accepting the Tartar yoke until the death of Timur in 1405.

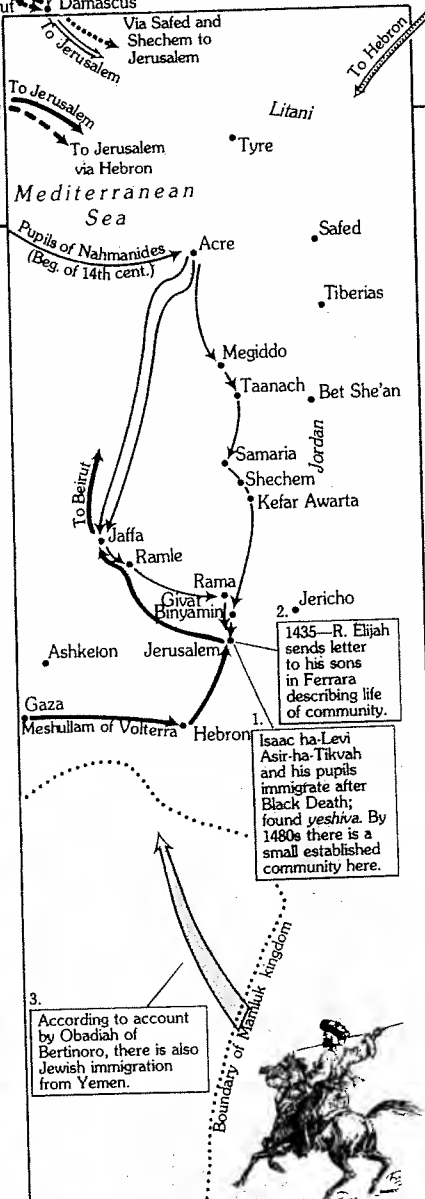
The Mongol campaigns directed against Muslims in the east as well as their expansion in Europe caused great dread both in the east and in the west. The Muslims in the east were the chief victims of these campaigns although in the course of events the Mongols became closer to Islam, some even converting. The Jewish communities were saved in a number of places, including Baghdad (1258), Aleppo (in 1260 Jews found asylum in the central synagogue, which was left untouched) and Damascus. The Mongol invasions aroused messianic hopes for an imminent redemption among the Jews of Italy and Spain. Some believed the Mongols to be descendants of the ten tribes. In Christian Europe some Jewish communities were suspected of contact with the Mongols, and accused of being associated with their invasions and devastations. The Jewish communities in Silesia and Germany suffered from the Mongol advance westward.

# IMMIGRATION TO THE HOLY LAND Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries



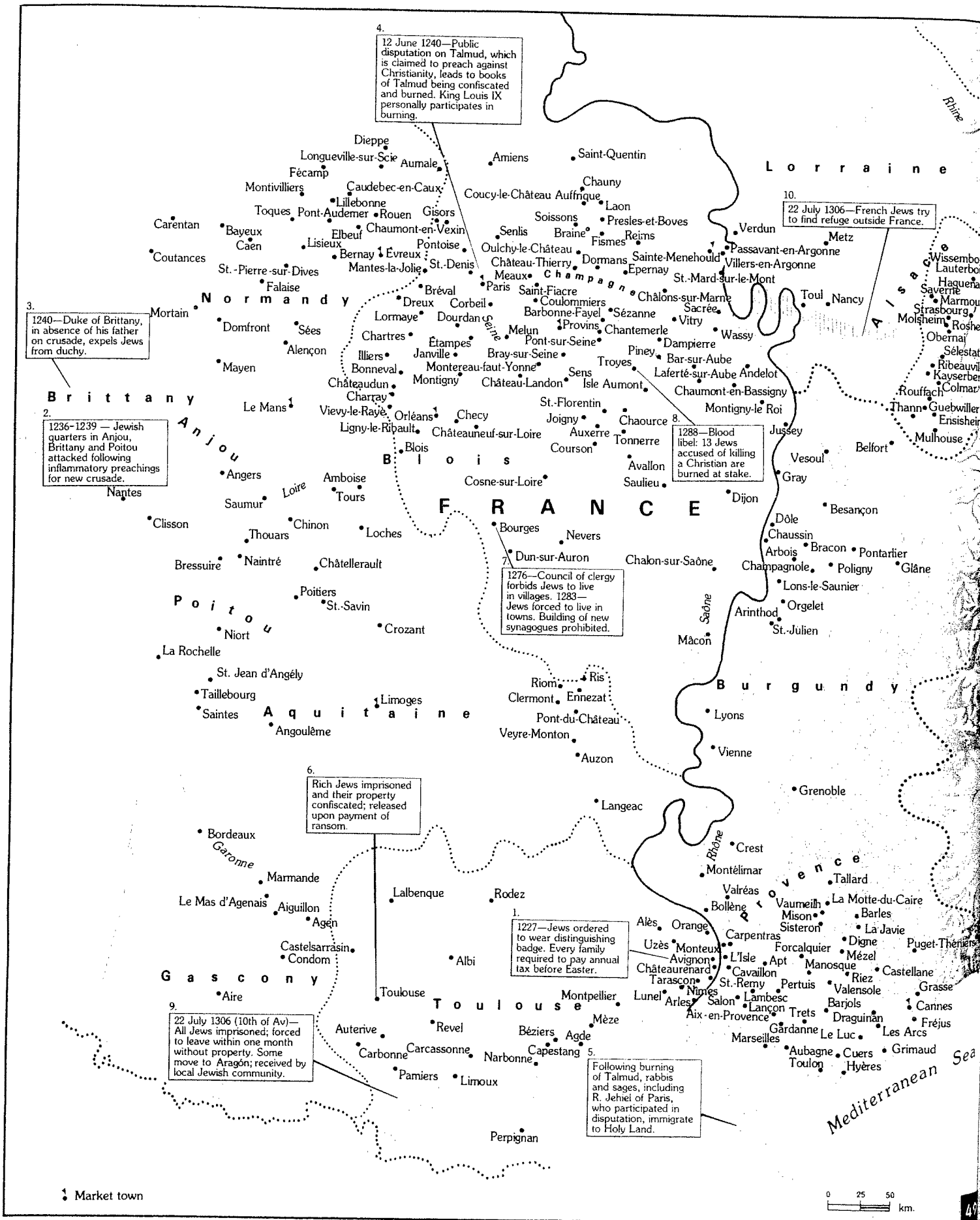
The massacres in 1391 in Spain increased the number of immigrants to Eretz Israel. Among the newcomers, of whose travels we do not have details, were many conversos, such as Isaac Nifoci of Majorca. They went to Palestine despite the difficult living conditions and the persecutions of the Mamluk regime. Jews came not only from Spain but also from Ashkenaz. Two important personalities from Italy came in the 1480s: Meshullam of Volterra (1481) and Obadiah of Bertinoro (1485). The involvement of the latter in the life of the Jerusalem community was both considerable and significant. Every traveler had to choose his own way from among the existing routes to Palestine, a particularly difficult task after the Venetian edict against transporting Jewish travelers to the Holy Land.

Some travelers wrote reports on their journey, describing not only the communities of Jerusalem and Safed but also those encountered on the way, thus leaving noteworthy accounts of Jewish life in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora.



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Thirteenth-century France underwent a process of centralization and the increased power of the king caused a worsening in the condition of the Jews. The years 1236 to 1239 were characterized by a revival of anti-Jewish feeling together with preachings for a new crusade. Jewish quarters in Anjou, Poitou and Brittany were attacked, prompting an order from Pope Gregory IX in 1236 to the bishops of France to denounce the assaults, despite his usually unfavorable attitude toward the Jews.

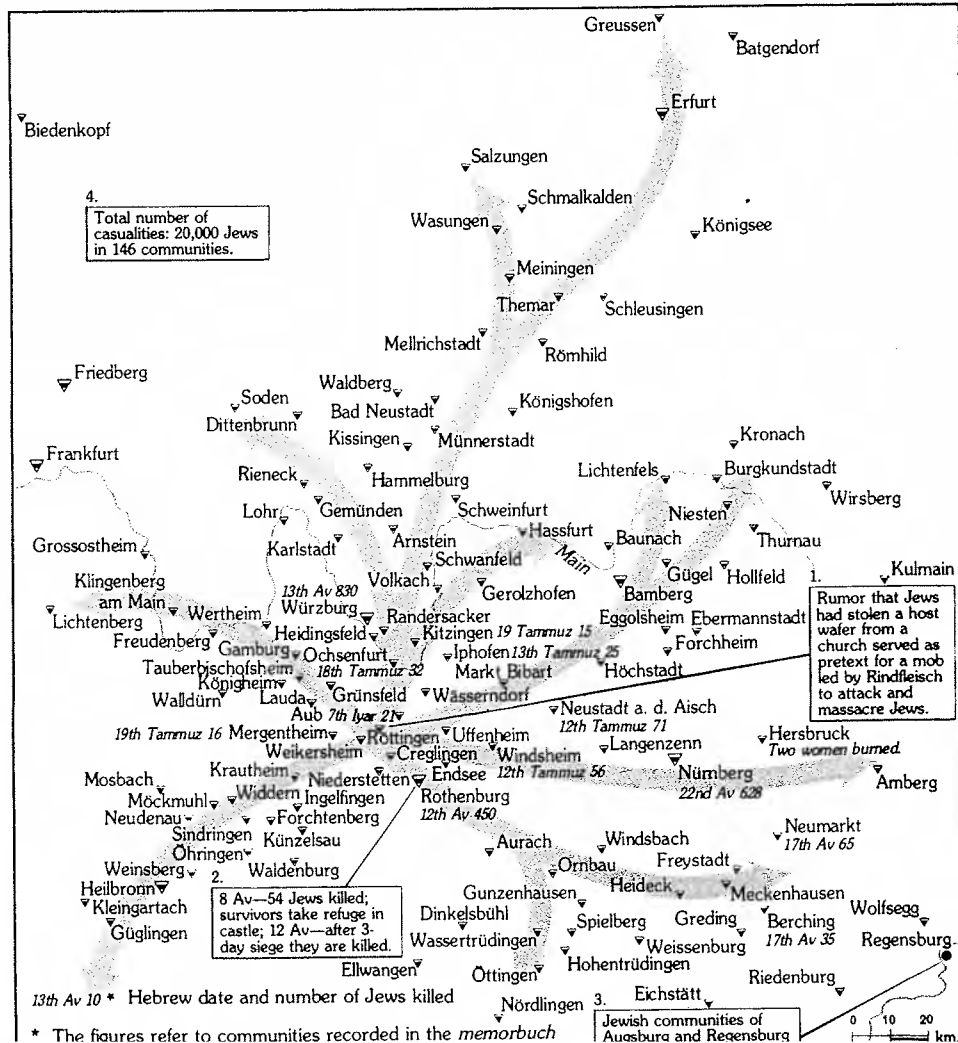
The expulsion of the Jews from England made a profound impression in France. Philip IV the Fair ordered the expulsion of the Jews in 1291 and again on 6 June 1299, but his orders were not implemented. The crown forbade the expelled Jews from Gascony (an English possession) and England to enter France and, judging by Philip's policies and extortionary methods, Jewish expulsion from France was inevitable. Thus in 1306 Philip ordered their expulsion from all districts under his control. This order and its purpose were similar to the expulsion of 1182, except that in 1182 it was ordered by a boy king (Philip Augustus) who depended upon irresponsible advisers, while in 1306 it was a well-calculated decision. The 1182 expulsion encompassed a relatively small area of France while that of 1306 covered all the areas of the king's domain, which was most of France. Philip the Fair hoped to achieve great financial gain from the expulsion of the Jews and the seizure of their property.

A small number of those expelled moved to Gascony while the majority were welcomed by the kingdoms of Aragón (including Provence) and Navarre (Barcelona took in sixty families). In 1315 they were allowed to return, only to be finally expelled in 1394.



King David, from an illuminated manuscript, eastern France, 1280.

## THE RINDFLEISCH MASSACRES 1298



# THE JEWS OF ENGLAND UP TO THE EXPULSION

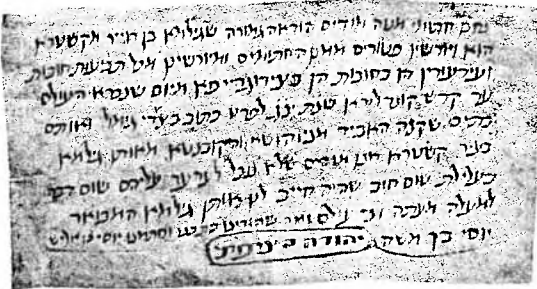
The history of the Jews in England in the thirteenth century can be described as one of persecutions and oppression by the state and the population at large. The state and the English church had, from the beginning, intended to convert the Jewish community to Christianity and for this purpose a home for converted Jews (*domus conversorum*) was established in London in 1232.

The tax policy toward the Jews was one of merciless exploitation. King Edward I (1272–1307) approved the church's attempts at converting Jews. Many towns expelled the Jews, while others received privileges permitting them "not to tolerate Jews." (Leicester was the first to receive such a privilege in 1231.) The Jews moved to towns owned by Edward I after being expelled in 1275 by Eleanor, the queen mother, from the towns in her possession. However, local expulsions did not cease.

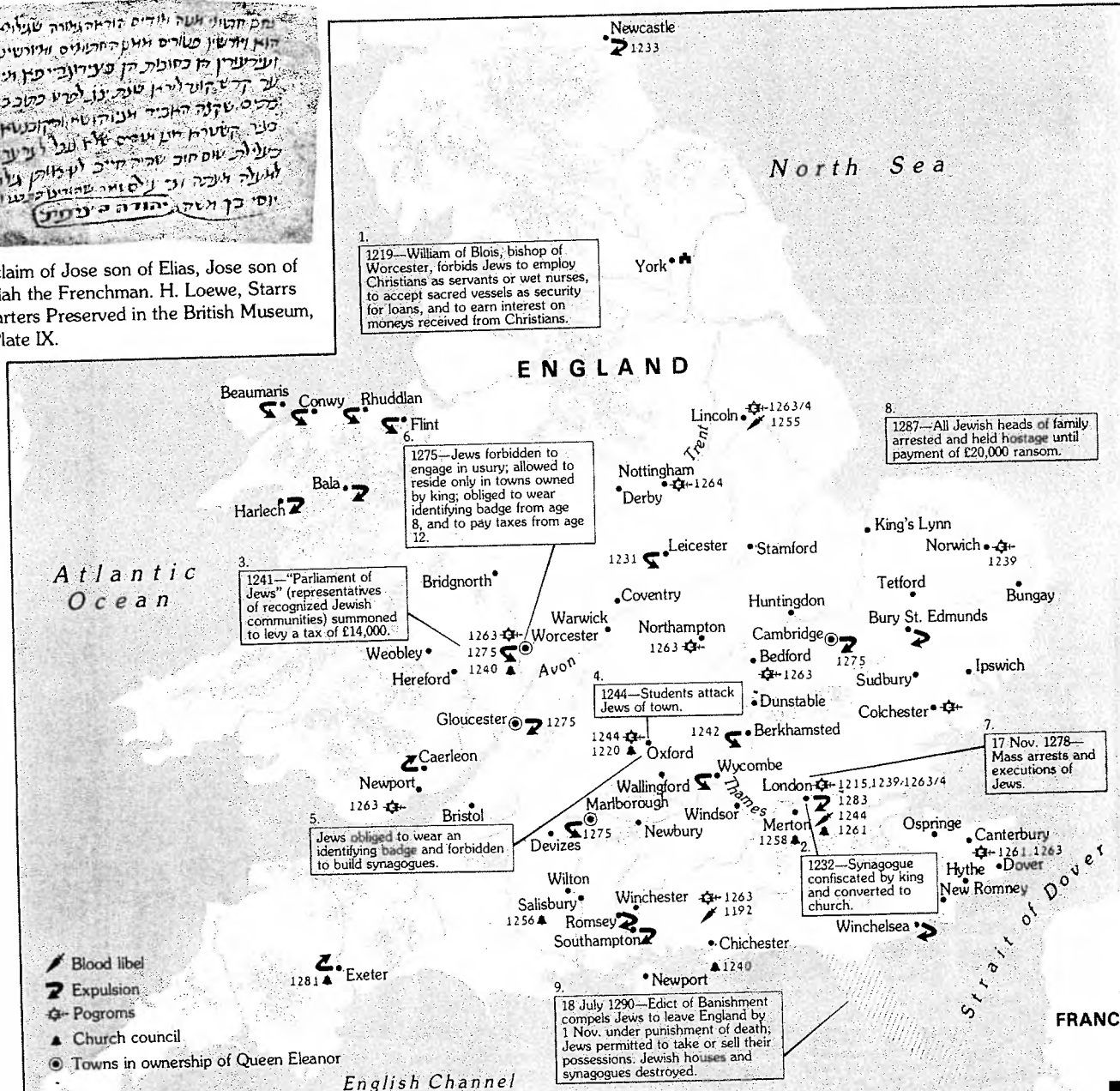
In 1275 Edward I issued a decree, *Statutum de Judaismo*, in which he endeavored to change the occupations of his

Jewish subjects from moneylending and usury to crafts and agriculture. The attempt failed because by that time the Jewish community was completely impoverished. Pressured by the townspeople he ordered the *archae* (chirograph chests) containing records of their debts to the Jews to be closed. It soon became clear that there was nothing left to extort from the Jews.

On 18 July 1290 Edward issued an edict for the banishment of the Jews from England by the beginning of November. The Jews were allowed to take only their personal possessions; the rest of their property was confiscated. To replace the loss of income the crown was authorized by parliament to levy a tithe on ecclesiastical property and a 15 percent tax on the property of the nobles and citizens. These taxes were but a pittance in comparison to those paid by Jews a hundred years earlier. The number of Jews expelled has been estimated at four thousand, most of them going to France and Ashkenaz.



A Hebrew quitclaim of Jose son of Elias, Jose son of Moses, and Judah the Frenchman. H. Loewe, Starrs and Jewish Charters Preserved in the British Museum, London 1932, Plate IX.

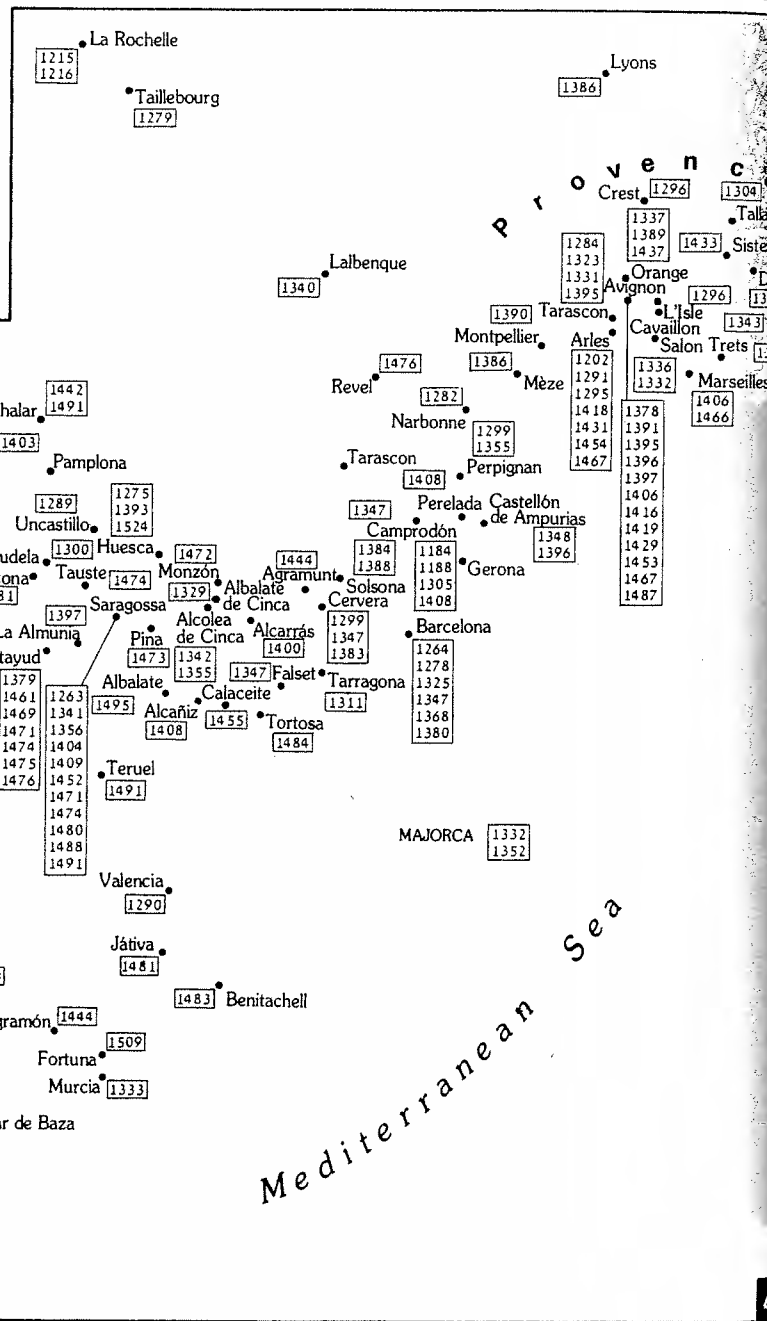
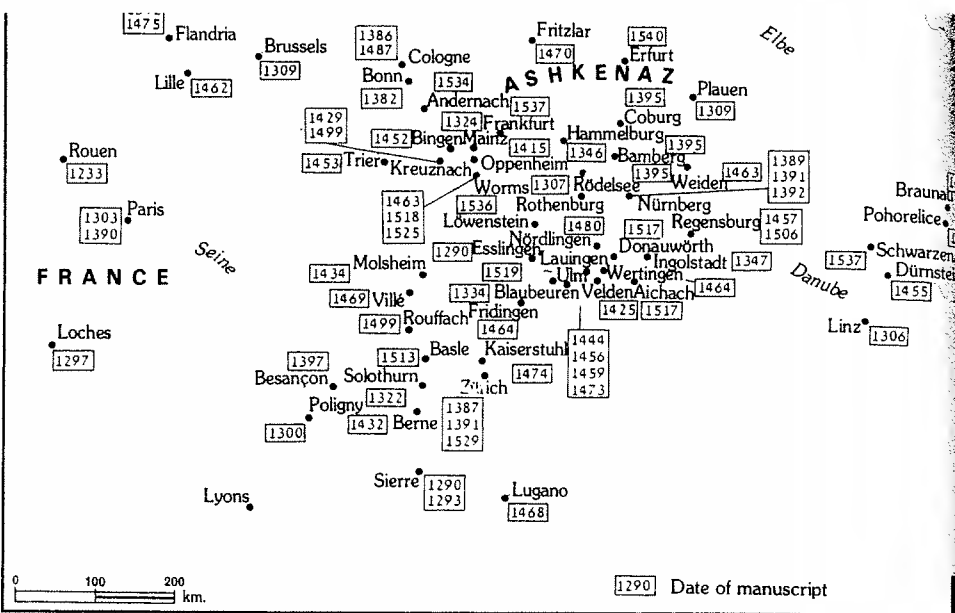


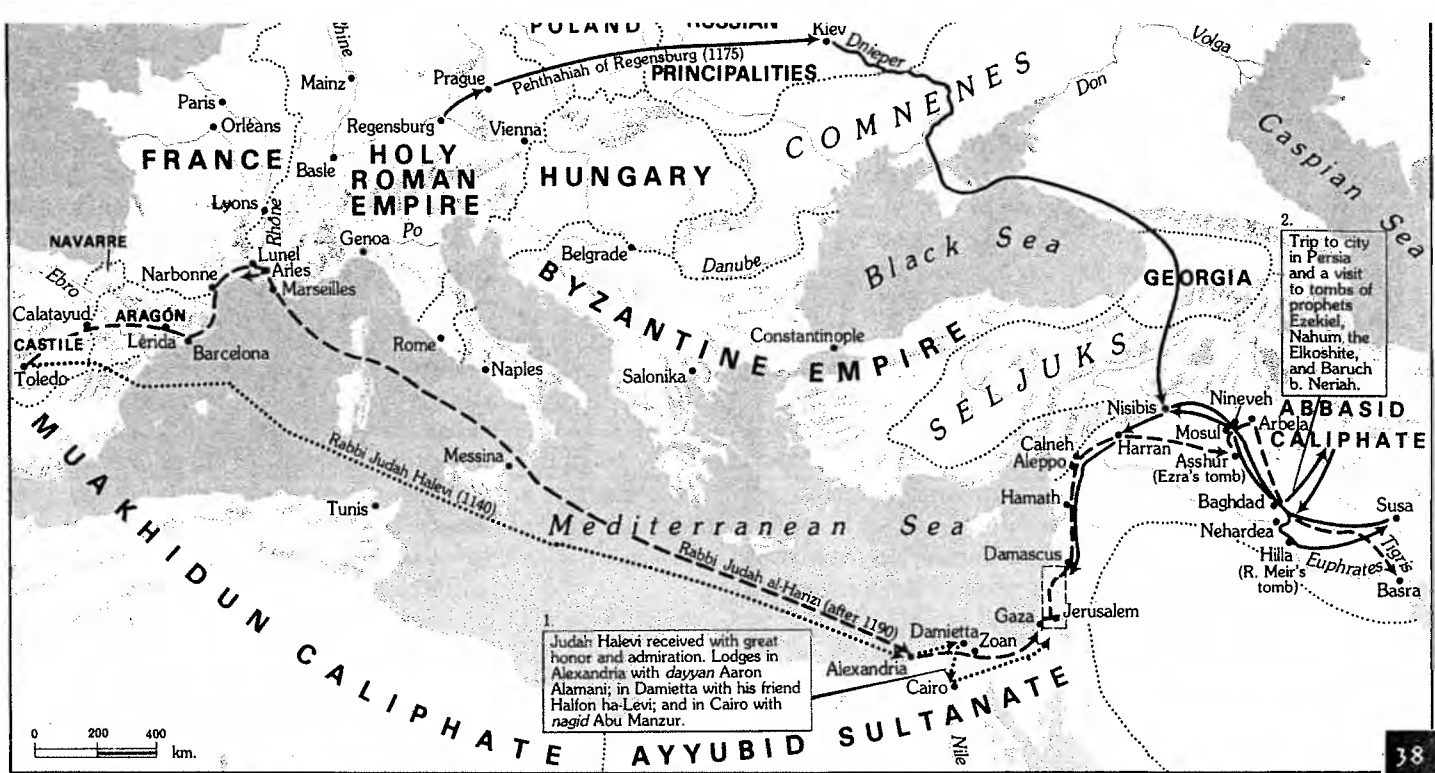
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Illuminated page of prayer for Yom Kippur in second volume of Worms Mahzor, Germany, c.1270.

In various Jewish communities scribes were engaged in copying books required for study and reference. The profession developed as patrons employed scribes to copy books especially for them.

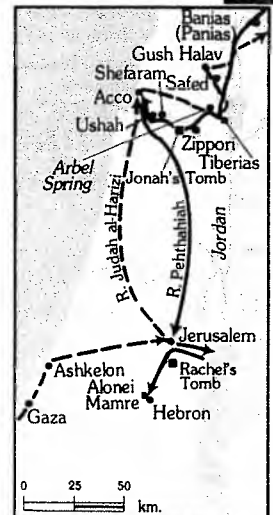




The synagogue established by Nahmanides upon his arrival in Jerusalem (apparently a Crusader structure).



Interior of the Nahmanides synagogue with restored pillars.



## JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE HOLY LAND Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries

The continuous arrival of Christians from Europe did not substantially alter the life style of the country, since they did not establish permanent settlements. The land was desolate and even the crusaders' seignorial system was unable to provide adequate livelihood. During the crusader period there were a number of rural Jewish settlements which had probably already been established during or before the Arab period. In the second half of the twelfth century Jews were living in Tiberias, the capital of the "Principality of Galilee," and in Safed, the important stronghold of Galilee. Both these cities were surrounded by Jewish villages.

Until Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem, Jews, with the exception of a few families, were forbidden to reside in the city. Nevertheless, when Benjamin of Tudela visited Jerusalem he found Jews engaged in the craft of dyeing, for which they had purchased a monopoly from the king. These Jews resided either near the king's palace or near the Citadel (David's Tower).

Tyre, Sidon and Ashkelon had the largest Jewish communities in the country. According to Benjamin of Tudela, about five hundred Jews resided in Tyre and two hundred in Ashkelon. Karaites and Samaritans also resided in these cities. Acre, Beirut and Caesarea also had a substantial Jewish populations. The crusader conquest opened a period of economic development from which the Jews benefited. Various crafts constituted their major source of income. (In Tyre, for instance, Jews manufactured glass and were tradesmen.) The settlers in the reconstituted *yishuv* (the Jewish population in Eretz Israel) continued to maintain contact with their countries of origin, from where they had come in the wake of the crusaders. The importance of Rabbi Judah Halevi's *aliyah* (immigration) lies not only in its indication of a yearning for Eretz Israel but also in its illustration of the possibility of putting that yearning into practice.

Benjamin of Tudela was the first Jewish traveler to reach



the Holy Land in the 1160s. In about 1175 Pethahiah of Regensburg set out on his journey to Eretz Israel. The *aliyah* in 1209 of a group of rabbis and their pupils, headed by Rabbi Samson b. Abraham of Sens, gave a considerable impetus to the revival of the *yishuv*. In 1216 Judah al-Harizi was on a visit to the Holy Land and met "the group who came from France," headed by Rabbi Joseph b. Baruch of Clisson and his brother Meir. The Disputation of Paris (1240) and the public burning of the Talmud caused Rabbi Jehiel of Paris and his son to migrate, while the Barcelona Disputation in 1263 caused the Ramban (Nahmanides) to migrate in 1267.

When Rudolf I of Hapsburg, king of Germany, attempted to assert royal authority over the Jews through additional taxation, thousands of Jews, led by the Maharam (Rabbi Meir b. Baruch of Rothenburg), decided to leave Germany. In 1286 Rudolf issued orders to prevent this emigration; the Maharam was arrested while attempting to leave and delivered to Rudolf who had him imprisoned. Rudolf demanded a huge ransom for the Maharam. But the latter refused to be ransomed on the grounds that this would serve as a precedent for the authorities to imprison rabbis and leaders of the community in order to extort large sums of money from them. He died in prison in 1293.

Jews also migrated to the Holy Land from North Africa and Egypt. Ashkelon was the focus for this *aliyah*.

In 1209–1210 the Babylonian exilarch visited Eretz Israel (possibly David b. Zakkai II, exilarch in Mosul). From his visit we learn that Safed was a "state," that is, the center of Jewish settlement in the Galilee. Little is known about the Jewish community in Tiberias; Benjamin of Tudela described it as having "about fifty Jewish families." An old tradition relates that the disciples of Maimonides, who died in Fustat in 1204, brought his remains for reburial in Tiberias. Tiberias had favorable conditions for Jews to settle and for the revival

of its *yishuv*.

The beginning of the thirteenth century saw a strengthening of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Rabbi Jehiel b. Isaac ha-Zarefati resided there and maintained contact with the Jewish community of Fustat. Controversies within the community were not resolved until 1240. In 1244 the city was sacked and destroyed by the Khwarizmi Turks.

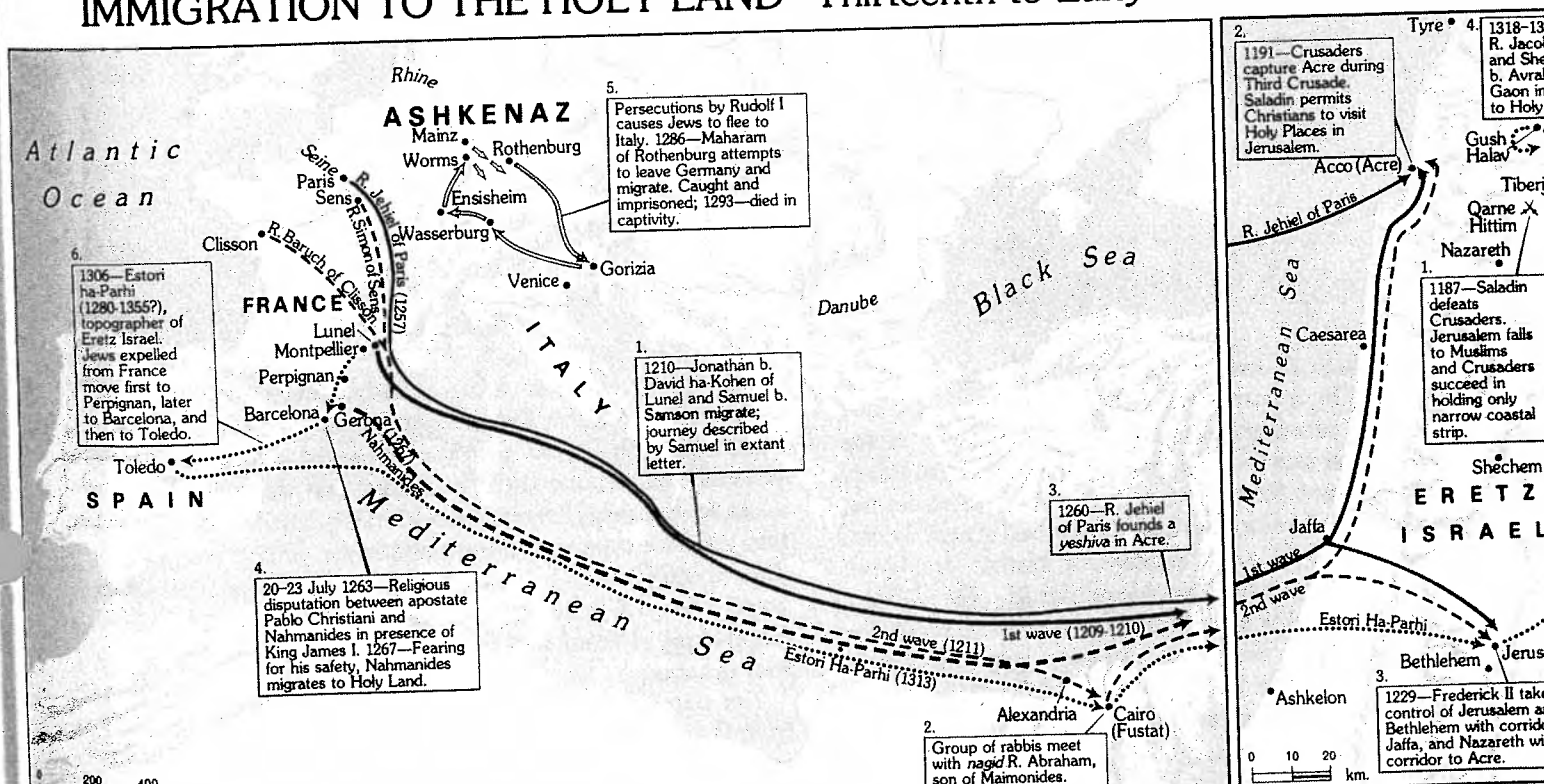
When the Ramban came to Jerusalem in 1267 he found it in a state of ruin. The *minyan* (quorum) of Jews who gathered for prayers on the Sabbath were "the *she'ar yashuv*" (the remnant that returned — cf. 1 Samuel 7:3). He had a Torah scroll brought from Shechem and renovated a building for use as a synagogue. In 1268 he moved to Acre, where he died in 1270.

Acre was a large and important Jewish center in the thirteenth century. It had a Jewish quarter and a "Jews' house" in 1206. When the newly crowned king of Jerusalem, John of Brienne, visited Acre, he was received by representatives of the Frankish and Greek communities and by members of the Jewish community holding a Torah scroll. Judah Al-Harizi described the community as ignoramuses "not a man among them who could stand in the breach," and this despite the arrival of three hundred rabbis from France and England in 1211.

The Muslims conquered the city in 1291 and massacred its Christian and Jewish inhabitants. One of the survivors who reached Spain, Rabbi Isaac of Acre, described the destruction. Among those killed was Rabbi Solomon, the grandson of Rabbi Simon of Sens. The Jewish captives were apparently brought to Egypt where they were ransomed by the community.

The impoverished state and status of the *yishuv* continued until the immigration waves of the fourteenth century inaugurated a process of regeneration.

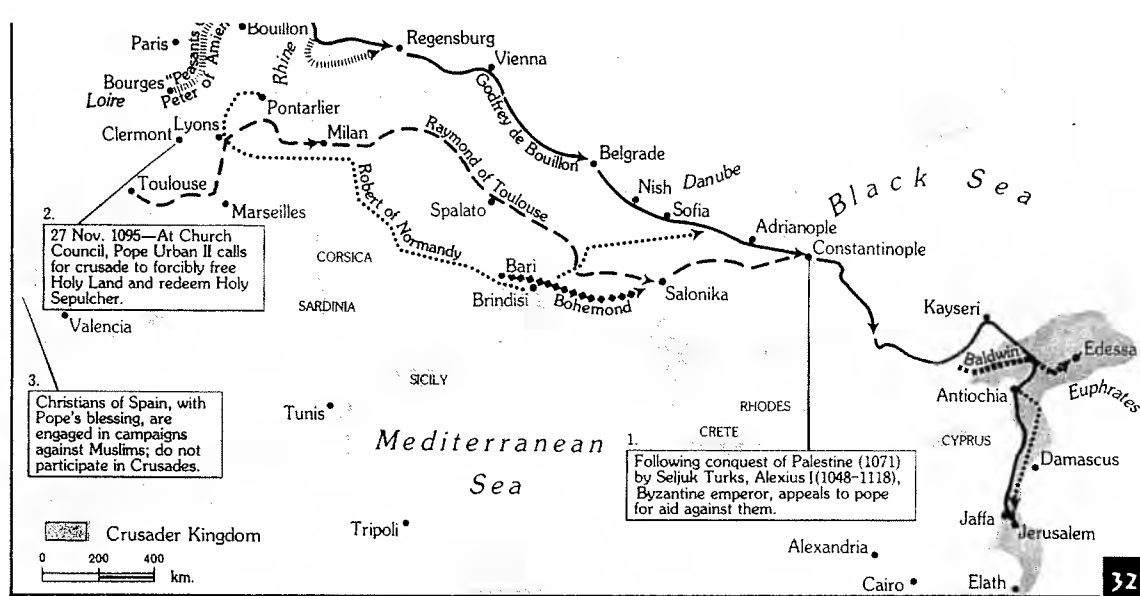
## IMMIGRATION TO THE HOLY LAND Thirteenth to Early Fourteenth Century



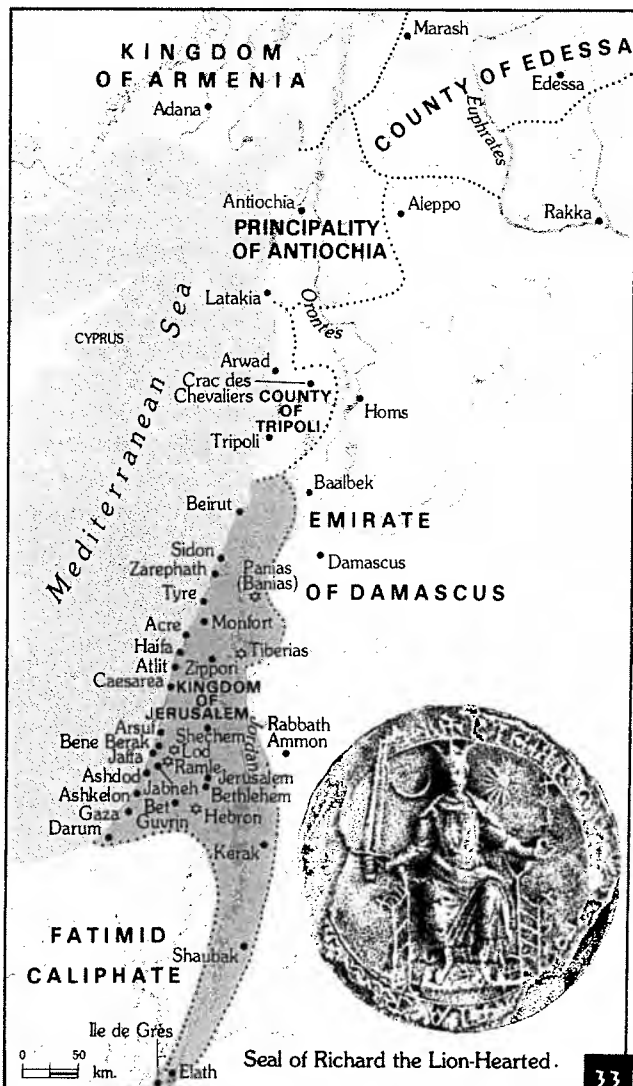
# CRUSADE 1096 to 1099



Crusaders



## THE CRUSADER KINGDOM IN ERETZ ISRAEL



"On Rosh Hodesh Sivan, The day the Israelites were summoned to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, those who remained in the bishop's courtyard trembled; the enemies molested them as they had done to the first group, and then put them to the sword. The victims, fortified by the courage of their brethren, died for kiddush ha-Shem, extending their necks to the sword. There were some who took their own lives fulfilling the words of the prophet "when mothers and babes were dashed to death together;" and father fell upon his son. Each his brother did despatch, his kinsman wife and children, also the bridegroom his betrothed, and a merciful woman and her only child. And all with willing hearts accepted the heavenly judgment, making peace with their master they shouted Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."

A.M. Habermann, Sefer Gzerot Ashkenaz ve-Tsafat, Jerusalem 1946, p. 29

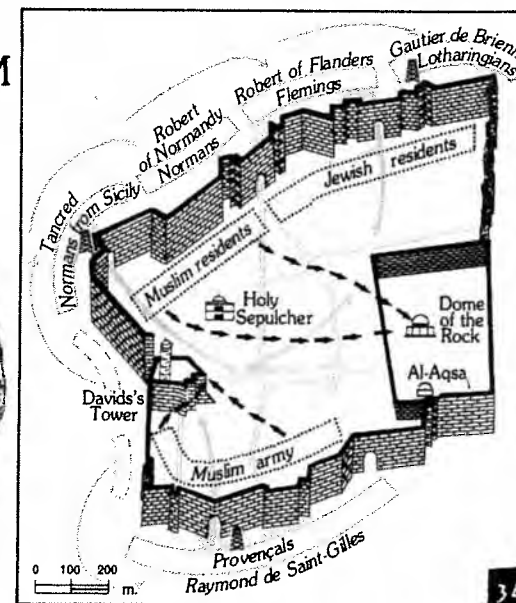
"While sundered children lay twitching in heaps,  
They hasten to slaughter the others who wallow in their blood,  
Strewn on the floor of Your Sanctuary,  
They will seethe before Your eyes forever."

David b. Meshullam of Speyer: God! Be not silent on my blood, penitential hymn for eve of the Day of Atonement.

## THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM June 7th to July 15th, 1099



Seal of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

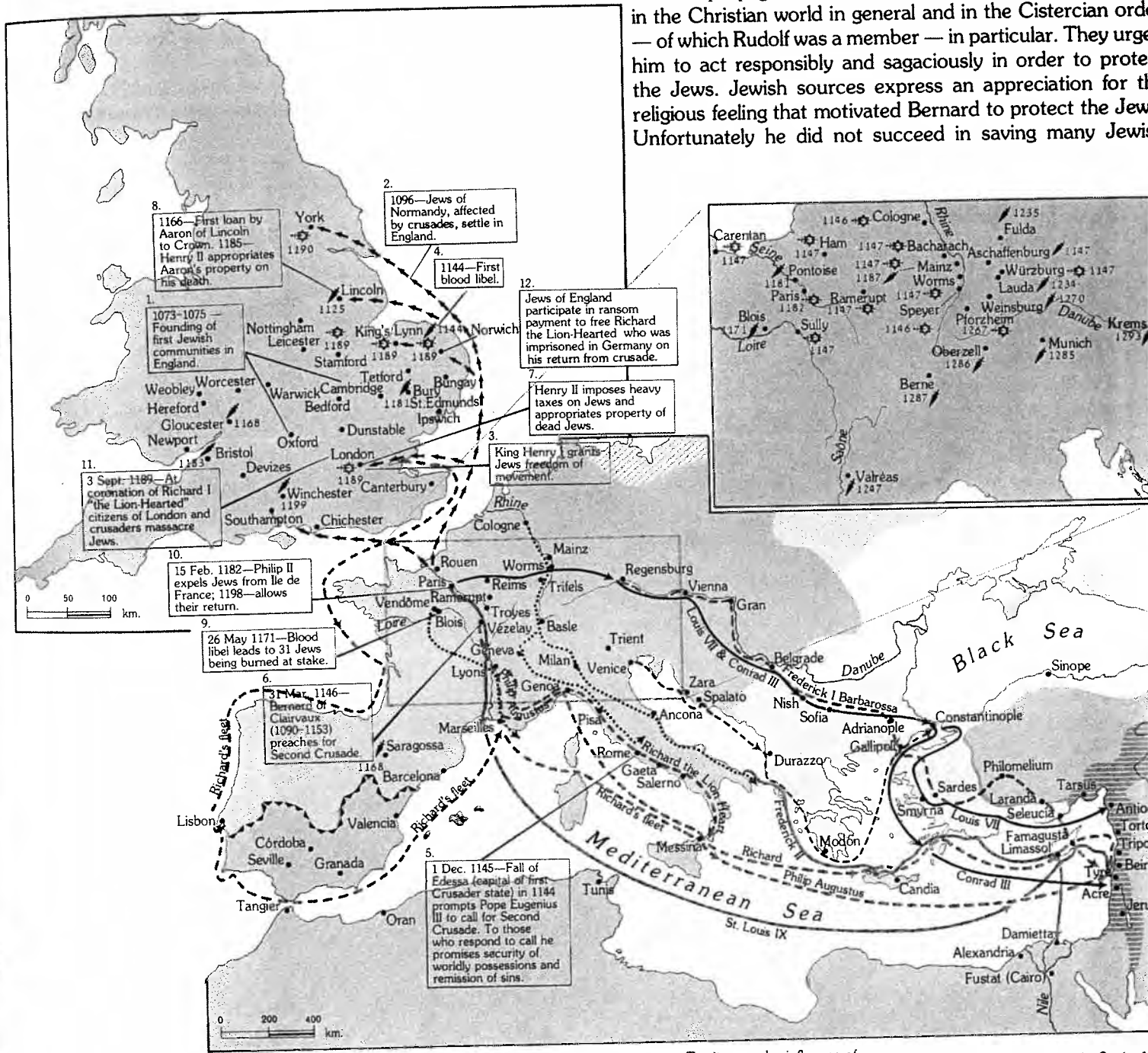


# FROM CRUSADE TO CRUSADES

One whole year elapsed after the fall of Edessa (1144) before a delegation arrived at the court of Pope Eugenius III (1145–1153) in Italy, with a request for aid. In December 1145 the pope issued a bull calling for a Second Crusade and promised those who answered the call an abeyance of their debts and cancellation of the interest. This cancellation particularly affected Jews engaged in moneylending. The pope also declared that participation in the crusade was equivalent to a “sacrament of repentance” and anyone joining a crusade who in his heart repented of his sins would be purified and absolved from the punishment due for those sins. However,

there was little response until Bernard of Clairvaux became active. He appeared before a large assembly of French noble including King Louis VII at Vézelay on 31 March 1146. His rhetoric electrified the assembly, who soon pledged to take up the cross. He continued preaching the crusade for about a year in the Rhenish towns and in 1147 persuaded the German king Conrad III (1138–1152) to take up the cross. During this period a fanatical Cistercian monk called Rudolf was stirring the masses of the Rhineland to massacre Jews.

Once again the Jewish communities faced a repetition of the massacres of 1096. This time, however, the ecclesiastical and political heads of state intervened, fearing that unbridled mob violence might turn against them. They appealed to Bernard of Clairvaux as the person responsible for the crusade propaganda and as a man of stature and authority in the Christian world in general and in the Cistercian order — of which Rudolf was a member — in particular. They urged him to act responsibly and sagaciously in order to protect the Jews. Jewish sources express an appreciation for the religious feeling that motivated Bernard to protect the Jews. Unfortunately he did not succeed in saving many Jews.



Crusades:	←····→ 1202-1204	⊛	↔	The Reconquista in Spain, 1189-1192
←	←····→ 1212	⊛	⊛	Crusader kingdom
←····→	←····→ 1228-1229, 1248-1254	⊛	⊛	Blood libel / Massacres



...man, Galy, Careman and Hamerupt had begun before the crusaders reached Germany. Rabbenu Tam (Jacob b. Meir Tam, c. 1100–1171) was among the wounded at Ramerupt. It was fortunate that Louis VII of France did not heed the counsel of Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (c. 1092–1156), who, in a vitriolic and vituperative letter unprecedented even for the Middle Ages, called for the total annihilation of the Jews.

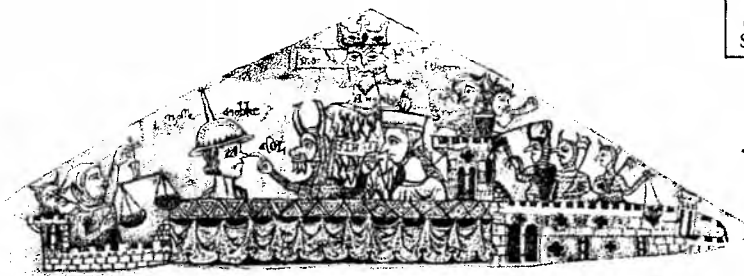
In England King Stephen (1135–1154) protected the Jews. In Germany the Jewish communities attacked were those of Cologne (only a few Jews were saved by hiding in the Wolkenburg fortress), Worms, Mainz, Bacharach, Würzburg and Aschaffenburg. The rioting against the Jews ended in the summer of 1147.

The Jewish communities of France continued to be persecuted in the period between the Second and Third crusades. An example was the blood libel against the Jewish community of Blois in 1171. In 1182 the Jews were expelled from the kingdom of France by King Philip Augustus (1179–1123). All debts owed by Christians to Jews were annulled and the Jews were forced to pay a fifth of the debt to the state treasury. In 1198 Philip Augustus authorized their return and established a special department in his treasury to deal with the Jews, as had been done in England.

The crusader defeat at the battle of Hittin (1178) and Saladin's capture of Jerusalem aroused enthusiasm for a new crusade (the Third). Popes Gregory VIII (1187) and Clement III (1187–1191) called for Christians to save the Holy Land. Once again the crusade had its preacher, Henry of Albano, a monk from the Clairvaux monastery, who was aided by the monk Joachim of Fiore, who spent the winter of 1190–1191 in Palestine. The Jews of Mainz, Speyer, Worms, Strasbourg and Würzburg, through which the crusaders were destined to pass, decided to abandon these towns for places removed from the crusader route. Frederick I Barbarossa (emperor 1152–1190) and his son Duke Frederick of Swabia protected the Jews. Even the church intervened on their behalf and undoubtedly both these factors were instrumental in saving the Jews.

In England the crusade was closely linked to the personality of King Richard I "the Lion Hearted" (1189–1199). During an eight-month period (in 1189–1190) the Jews of England suffered from a wave of massacres. Most of the London Jewish community was destroyed. In February–March 1190 most of the rural Jewish communities were destroyed. The massacres were well organized and presaged the eventual expulsion of the Jews from England.

The Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), initiated by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), ended without achieving its goal.



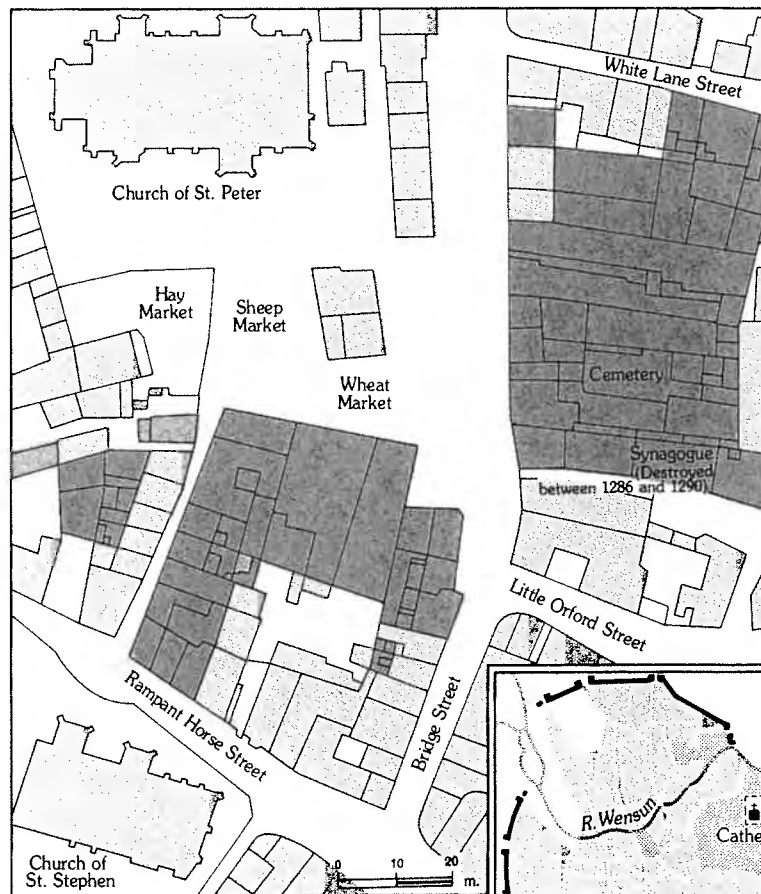
Caricature of English Jews from document dated 1233 showing Isaac son of Jurnet of Norwich (with crown) and members of his household.

...as "a return of Samaria to Zion," but his hopes were not fulfilled. This crusade set out for Constantinople but was redirected to Egypt by the Venetians in order to settle some political scores. After this crusade, Germany was endangered by the Children's Crusade (1212), which marched through northern France and the lower Rhineland. The crusade ended dreadfully, as unscrupulous merchants sold the children as slaves in Egypt.

The Fifth Crusade (April 1217–July 1221), the goal of which was to free the Christians in Muslim captivity, was also unsuccessful. Frederick II (1198–1250) and John of England (1199–1216) were both supposed to participate in the Sixth Crusade but only Frederick arrived in the Holy Land some years later (1228) and stayed in Jerusalem. In 1248 Louis IX (St. Louis, king of France 1226–1270) led the Seventh and last crusade which was also unsuccessful.

The Jews of Europe were no sooner free from the nightmare of the crusades than they found other disasters in store for them.

## THE CITY OF NORWICH



Christian caricatures of English Jews.

- Jewish houses and courtyards
- Church property
- Area of detailed map

## ASHKENAZ Up to 1096

Otto I "the Great" (936–973), the Holy Roman Emperor, and Otto II (973–983) were favorably disposed toward Jews settling in their empire. In fact these were the formative years of the German Jewish communities. Henry II (1002–1024) at first confirmed the rights of the Jews of Merseburg (1004) in their relations with the bishop of the city. However, in 1012 the Jews of Mainz were expelled. Some say this was due to the incident of the priest Wecelinus converting to Judaism; others relate it to the burning of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim. The decree was soon revoked, apparently after the intervention of Rabbi Jacob b. Jekuthiel with Pope Benedict VIII (1012–1024).

Mainz was the capital of the state and it was natural that Jews should have dealings with the ruling authorities in many spheres and that these dealings should affect the Jews in other parts of the state. A Jewish community existed in Mainz in the tenth century and perhaps even slightly earlier. The arrival of Kalonymus and his Lucca family inaugurated a period of efflorescence.

Speyer was ideally situated, not only on the Rhine but also on an old Roman road. The official beginnings of its Jewish community date from the time of Bishop Ruediger (1073–1090), who granted the Jews privileges in 1084. Ruediger was a major supporter of Henry IV in the Investiture Controversy. His successor, Johann (1090–1104), continued his predecessor's policies in his relations with the Jews of Speyer.

The significance of Ruediger's privileges granted to the Jews of Speyer transcends their actual value for the community. They were approved in 1090 by the emperor Henry IV and eventually served as a model for many privileges granted to the Jews by other German rulers and in other European countries. The privileges determined the way of life of the Jews and their relations with their Christian neighbors. From what was allowed the Jews in the privileges we can infer what was forbidden. The Jews were obliged to pay a protection tax. In due course, their legal status was defined as belonging to the crown or the state treasury and this implied their subservience to the crown.

Worms was another important community. Construction of its synagogue began in 1014 and was completed in 1034. Shortly afterwards a Jewish neighborhood is mentioned in documents. The local Jews supported Henry IV in the investiture question and were rewarded, together with the other citizens of the city, with tax privileges. The commercial contacts of the Jews of Worms extended to Frankfurt, Goslar and other places. From the mid-eleventh century, Worms and Mainz were the Torah study centers of Ashkenaz.

The Jewish neighborhood in Cologne is first mentioned during the term of office of Archbishop Anno (1056–1075). Apparently the synagogue was built in the second decade of the eleventh century, though archaeological remains support a claim that the building is from the end of the tenth century. Relations between Jews and Christians in Cologne were



satisfactory during the eleventh century. Archbishop Anno seems to have used the services of Jewish moneylenders. It is known that many Jews brought their goods to the triannual trade fairs in Cologne. Apparently they had a privilege to do so and must have also had protection and exemption from travel tax.

There were smaller Jewish communities in the district like Trier and Metz. Many Jews in this region owned vineyards. Troyes was known for its leather industry and the Jews of that city were known for their manufacture of parchment.

The spring of 1096 saw a bustle of activity related to the march eastward. Peter the Hermit from Amiens was the chief agitator and preacher for launching the First Crusade. The march of the peasants was the factor that confronted the Jews with a choice between conversion and death. Rabbi Solomon b. Samson, a contemporary Jewish chronicler, describes the massacres of 1096, and cites the cries of the mob: "As they passed through towns where there were Jews they said to one another: 'We are going on a distant journey to seek the [Gentile] house of worship [reference to the Sepulcher of Christ] and to exact vengeance on the Ishmaelites. Yet here are the Jews dwelling in our midst whose forefathers slew him and crucified him without reason. First let us take vengeance on them and destroy them as a people, so that the name of Israel shall no longer be remembered, or so that they should be like us and submit to the son of depravity [Jesus].'"

The Jewish communities, in a state of dreadful apprehensiveness, circulated letters warning of the impending danger and advising on various measures of defense. Peter the Hermit arrived at Trier bearing a letter from the French Jewish communities requesting that their coreligionists in Germany give him and his crusaders money and provisions. The Trier community responded and was thus saved. Perhaps one could infer from this that there was a possibility of avoiding the tragic results by paying a suitable bribe to the leaders

of the crusade. However, this could only have succeeded with a leader who had the power to control the mob. Such was not the case with the leader of another contingent of crusaders, Godfrey of Bouillon, who was destined to become the first ruler of the crusader kingdom in the Holy Land. A rumor spread that Godfrey had vowed to exact vengeance on the Jews for the blood of Jesus. The Jews of the Rhine communities turned to Kalonymus, the *parnas* of the Mainz Jewish community, asked him to intervene with Henry IV, who was in northern Italy at the time, and requested him to order Godfrey to desist from his plans. However, before Henry's orders reached him, the bloody events took place. Henry ordered his vassals to protect the Jews and guarantee their safety. The Jews of Mainz and Cologne appealed directly to Godfrey and payed him five hundred pieces of silver to dissuade him from his intentions. Godfrey, having succeeded in his extortion, informed the king that he had no intention of harming the Jews.

The first attack on the Jews of France was by Volkmar and his followers, who then went on to Prague, arriving while Vratislav II (1061-1092), king of Bohemia was fighting in Poland and Cosmas the bishop of Prague was acting as regent. Volkmar gave the Jews of the city a choice between apostasy or death. Many chose to die for *kiddush ha-Shem* (sanctification of God's name); the few that converted later returned to Judaism.

While the Jews of Prague were undergoing their terrible ordeal, the Jewish communities of the Rhine were faced with a similar trial. On 3 May 1096, William, viscount of Melun, surnamed the Carpenter, attacked Speyer at the head of his followers.

The Jewish community was saved by Bishop Johann, who sheltered the Jews in his palace. Those killed were "eleven holy souls who first sanctified their Creator on the holy Sabbath and did not desire to foul the air with their stench. And there was a graceful, prominent woman who slaughtered herself for *kiddush ha-Shem*. And she was the first of the slaughterers and slaughtered amongst all the communities" (*Sefer Gezerot*, p. 25). On 18 May, William and his cohorts arrived at Worms. Here too Bishop Alebrand attempted to protect the Jewish community by transferring some of them to his palace. Most of the Jews who were left in the city were massacred. After a week, William informed the

Jewish community that he could no longer lay siege to the city and demanded that they submit to baptism. Most of the community was destroyed. A week later William arrived at Mainz, linking up with Count Emich (Emicho) of Leisingen. Emich claimed that divine revelation ordered him either to convert the Jews or to destroy them. The brigands then forced their way into the palace of Archbishop Rothard, who was a relative of Emich. The tragic story of the Jewish community of Mainz is one of the great heroic chapters in the history of the Jewish people. Its members exemplified the ideology of *kiddush ha-Shem* and whole groups sacrificed themselves as one for their religion and their faith. They saw themselves as a generation chosen to be tested and they were proud to be able to pass the test.

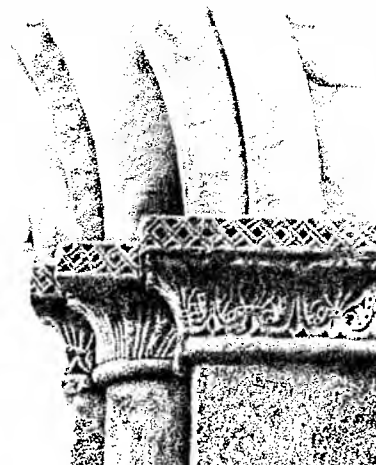
Mainz was not the end of the tragic story. Emich and his followers next moved on to Würzburg and Nürnberg and then to Regensburg, where they arrived on 10 June 1096. Meanwhile, mixed bands of new crusaders composed of English, Flemings and Lotharingians gathered at Cologne intending to attack the Jews. The archbishop of the city together with some of its citizens attempted to hide the Jews in the fortress and afterwards to disperse them in the surrounding villages. The brigands contented themselves with plundering Jewish property. For about three weeks the Jewish refugees from Cologne succeeded in finding shelter in their hiding places. However, on 23 June they were discovered in Wevelinghoven, on 24 June in Neuss, and on 30 June in Mörs. Those Jews who did not undergo baptism by force or by consent died for *kiddush ha-Shem*.

During this period a band of French farmers who had attacked the Jews of Rouen at the end of May reached Cologne. In mid-June the Jewish communities of Trier and Metz were slaughtered.

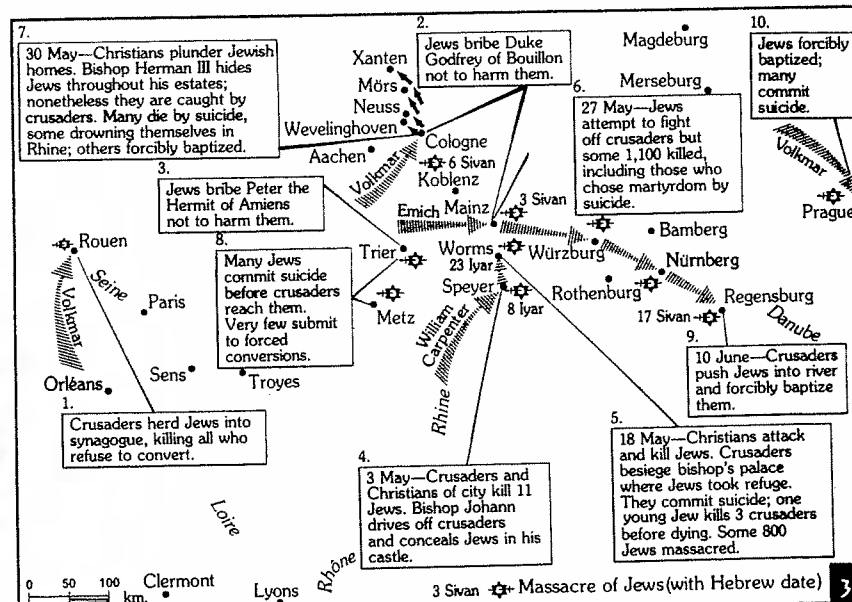
The destruction of the Ashkenaz communities was almost total. Most of the scholars of Mainz and Worms, the two most important centers, were killed. This was the major reason for the transfer, during this period, of the Jewish cultural center to northern France.

The path of the crusaders was a bloody one. Their goal in the Holy Land was Jerusalem and it was there that the Jews, together with the Muslims of the city, fought for their lives. After losing the battle, the entire Jewish community was slaughtered.

## THE MASSACRES OF 1096: "GEZEROT TATNU" (4856)



Columns of a synagogue



prosper during the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman II (822-852). Despite many revolts he built a network of fortifications to defend his kingdom against the Christian incursions and concluded treaties with various Muslim princes. Thus he was able to withstand the Norman invasions of the coastal cities. He also found time to devote to cultural matters and began constructing public building in Córdoba and other places. These buildings are the pride of Spain to this very day. Córdoba also became a center for Jewish spiritual and cultural activity.

At the end of the tenth century, Jacob and Joseph ibn Jau were appointed heads of the Jewish community. Jacob was appointed *nasi* (leader) of all the Jews living in Muslim Spain and in those areas of Morocco and Algeria that were under Muslim Spanish suzerainty. The brothers were wealthy silk merchants and manufacturers. Jacob was appointed tax collector and was allowed to appoint rabbinical judges. Hisdai ibn Shaprut was another major figure in Spanish Jewish life.

Muslim Granada was consolidated in the eleventh century and included the whole of the southeastern part of the peninsula. Rabbi Samuel b. Joseph Halevi ibn Nagrela (Samuel Ha-Nagid) was an outstanding leader of the Jewish community in Granada. Born in Córdoba in 993 he fled to Málaga in 1013 in the wake of the Berber conquest. He had a fine Jewish and general education, including training in Arabic, and soon made a name for himself as a teacher and Arabic stylist to whom people turned for letterwriting skills. Samuel was appointed to the staff of the vizier of Granada. One of his first tasks in Granada was to collect taxes in some of the districts. He soon succeeded in obtaining an important position in king Habbus's administration as minister of finance and later as vizier. His position at court was strengthened during the reign of Badis, son and successor of Habbus. Samuel successfully commanded the king's army from 1038 to 1056. Samuel viewed all his military victories as signs of divine intervention and all of his activities as part of a divine mission in which he was an emissary sent by the Lord to

a fervor and loyalty uncommon among Christians at the time. Samuel corresponded with Rabbi Nissim of Kairouan (whose daughter married his eldest son Jehoseph), with R. Hai Gaon, with the heads of the *yeshivot* in Palestine and with the heads of the Jewish community in Egypt. In Spain he maintained a close relationship with, and was patron of, the *paytan* Isaac ibn Khalfun and the poet and philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol. He exchanged poetry with both of them. In addition to being a poet he was a halakhist and composed a major work in *halakhah*. He was also known as a philologist and writer of theological tracts. During his lifetime there was economic prosperity in Granada, which had many Jewish merchants and craftsmen. The Jewish population of Granada was estimated at five thousand and it was no wonder that the Muslims called the city *Gharnatat al-Yahud* ("Granada of the Jews"). The yeshiva at Granada had many well-known scholars.

In the Muslim area of northern Spain there was a large concentration of Jews in Saragossa. The rulers were the Banu Tujib dynasty, who maintained proper relations with their Christian neighbors in the city. In the second half of the eleventh century a new family, Banu Hud, came to power, originating from Yemen. The city became one of the richest in all of Spain. Most of the Jewish inhabitants were either furriers or were engaged in the flax, clothing and leather industries. In the environs of Saragossa Jews were engaged in farming and viticulture; they traded with the merchants of Barcelona and southern France. The community had a great number of Torah scholars, doctors and intellectuals. At the ruling court there was an atmosphere of tolerance and Jews found ways of serving these rulers. In the 1030s Abu Ishaq Jekuthiel b. Isaac ibn Hasan served as adviser to King Mundhir II. Jekuthiel had a broad Torah and secular education. He was patron to Torah scholars and poets. In 1039 he was executed by the last of the Banu Tujib kings.



An ivory vessel from 10th-century Spain. The original is in the museum of the Hispanic Society in New York.

## RECONQUISTA: THE RECONQUEST Until the Middle of the Twelfth Century

Indecisive wars and battles were fought over a period of several hundred years between Muslim and Christian prince. Charlemagne helped the Christians create a frontier buffer zone, Marca Hispanica, between Muslim Spain and Carolingian France. Barcelona was one of the first cities in which Christian rule was consolidated. It was in this district that Jews developed extensive operations in commerce and leasing of fields and vineyards. Landholding was either outright ownership (*allodium*) or by tenancy. Jews often made land transactions with bishops or monasteries, and also with diocesan and parochial churches, the deeds of transfer being written in Hebrew or at least bearing a Hebrew signature.



Jews developed various spheres of economic activity in the city of Barcelona and in their own neighborhood, which came to an end during riots in 1391. In addition to the official writs of privileges which regulated Jewish life in Barcelona, there was a more ancient writ known as the Book of Usatges (Book of Usage) which defined the legal status of the Jews and was composed between 1053 and 1071. Among its many laws was one which stated that the punishment for doing bodily harm to a Jew or for killing him would be determined by the king. This meant that the Jews were dependent upon the good will of the ruler. The church councils of Gerona (1067-1068 and 1078) forced Jews who purchased land from Christians to pay a regular tithe to the church.

Ordoño I (850-866) invaded the region between Salamanca and Saragossa. He was very active in resettling the north of Spain and chose León as his capital. His son, Alfonso III (866-909), continued his father's policies and conquered territories in northern Portugal only to lose them to the Muslims. Internal dissension and factionalism forced him to halt the Christian advance. Perhaps he was also deterred by the Muslim king 'Abd al-Rahman III, who was then the ruler of Andalusia. During the reign of the King Ramiro II (931-950), Count Fernan González of Castile rebelled against the king and from this point the history of Castile actually begins. Ramiro concluded a pact with Tota, queen of Navarre (who negotiated with Hisdai ibn Shaprut). The Jews in Castile were also apparently dependent upon the good will of the ruler. Killing or wounding a Jew was punishable by a heavy fine payable to the ruler, as though the Jews were his property. In fact the regulations in this matter differed in each city

and district. The special circumstances of Jewish life exemplified by the riot of the inhabitants of Castrojeriz 1035. In order to develop the district King Sancho III Great, encouraged the Jews to settle on the land, despite opposition of the Christian population in the district. Upon death in 1035 the Christian inhabitants of Castrojeriz b into one of the king's estates in Burgos, killing sixty J Jewish settlement in the rural districts not only required approval of the ruler but was dependent upon his phy ability to protect these settlers. The settlements thems were on royal lands and were known as *villa nova de Juc* Such settlements were established in Navarre and Araç

Ferdinand I unified Castile, León and Galicia under crown (1037), thus creating the largest kingdom in Spair reign of his second son, Alfonso VI (1065-1109), coin with the momentous events in Europe during the First sade. During this period the behavior toward the Je Christian Spain was entirely different from that in the r Europe. Alfonso VI, who assumed the title of Emperor Spain, carried the battle standard against the Muslims preoccupation with the Reconquista, in which he emp French knights, was probably one of the reasons wh Jews were not massacred like their brethren in other of Europe.

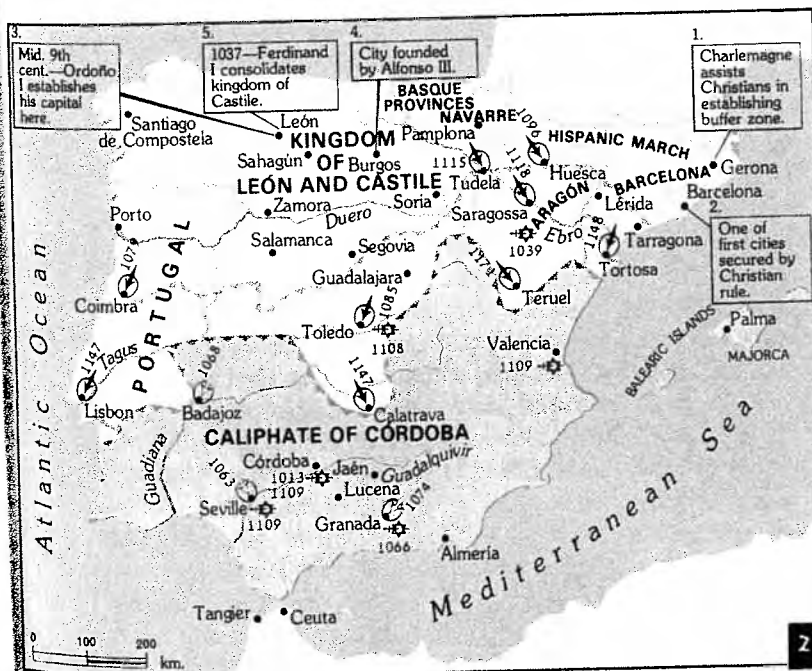
The services rendered by the Jews to the ruling i stood them in good stead. The Jews of Spain, who more numerous than their brethren in Ashkenaz (Fr Germany), remained where they were after the Muslim r southward. Those Jews who occupied important posts local civil administration of the various Arab emirates destined later to play a vital role in establishing the r the Christian victor.

Alfonso VI defeated the rulers of Seville, Badajo Granada and forced them to pay him tribute. He also quered Coimbra in Portugal and assisted in establishi Portuguese kingdom.

On 6 May 1085 he captured Toledo and in the terms pitation he promised the Muslims that he would honc rights and their mosques. However, only two gener later the Muslims were forced to leave their dwellings city, and the main mosque was converted to a church Twelfth-century documents from Toledo attest to a Muslim population. The Jews of the city continued in the southwest corner of the city which also conta fortress. (Remains of Jewish edifices have been prese this day.)

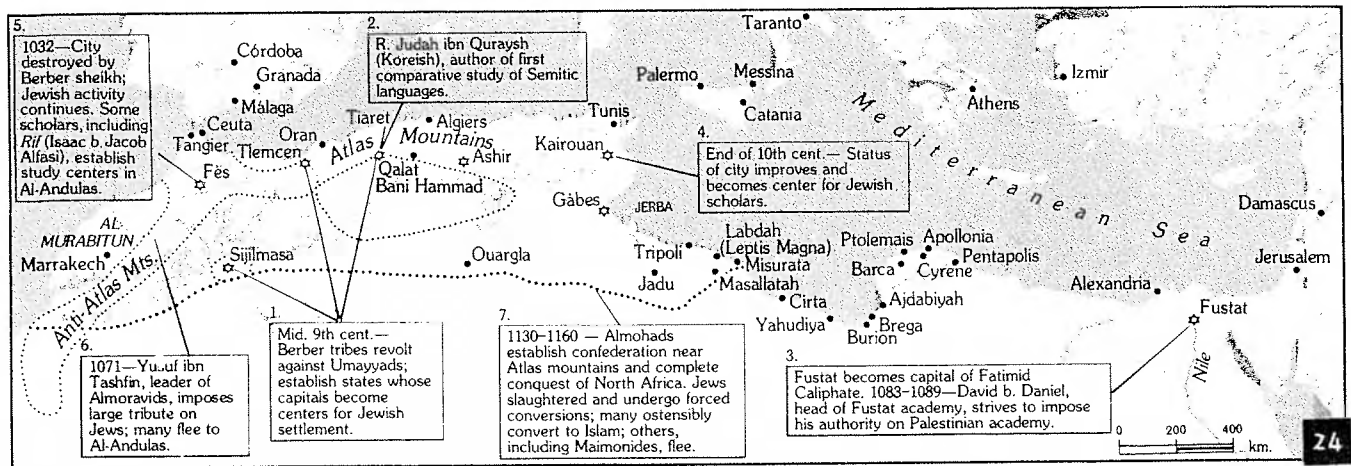
The Jews were fortunate in having a personality like Nasi Ferruziel (called Cidellus). He held office in th court and was active on their behalf. He was born in in the kingdom of Granada, and became the physi Alfonso VI, and *nasi* of all the Jews residing in Al kingdom. He assisted the Jews of Guadalajara when 1 was captured by Alfonso and also aided the Jew migrated from the south to the north. The large in and around Toledo that he owned were confisca the crown after his death. Extant royal documen his signature in Latin characters as a witness verify contents of the document. His signature also app a purely political document, *Privilegium immunitatis* 1110, one year after the death of Alfonso VI. Joseph a a firm stand regarding internal politics and ruthlessly c

## THE RECONQUEST



Conquest of city by Christians, with date

# Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries



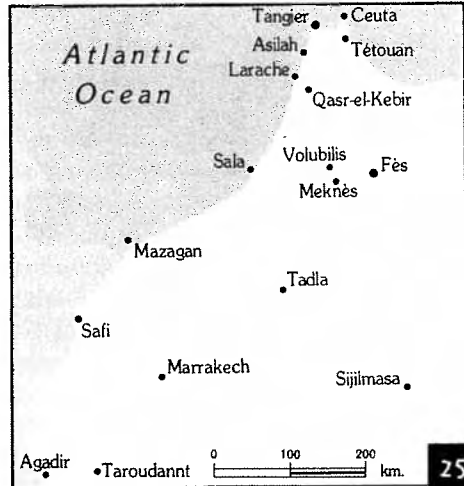
- ⊛ Center of Torah and Jewish life
- ⊙ Berber tribal areas in 9th cent.
- ⊔ Furthest extent of Almohads (al-Muwahhidun)

The status of the Jews in North Africa as in all other Islamic states was that of a “protected people” (*dhimmi*). The first hundred years of Muslim conquest were rather turbulent; there was no *Pax Islamica*. Naturally this affected Jewish life. During the waning of the Umayyad dynasty and the dawning of the Abbasid rule, a confederation of Berber tribes revolted against the Arab rulers in Kairouan and western Tripolitania. Ibn Rustam, one of the leaders of the revolt, fled and established a new state in central Algeria with its capital at Tiaret. At the same time, another group established a kingdom in the city of Tlemcen. Another Berber tribe established a state in the Tafilalet Oasis, with its capital at Sijilmasa. Despite religious differences, these states became important Jewish centers. Tiaret was the residence of R. Judah ibn Quraysh (Koreish), a well-known ninth-century philologist and renowned author. Jews lived on the island of Jerba, in the region of Jerid to Gabès, and in the area of M’zab, and Ouargla.

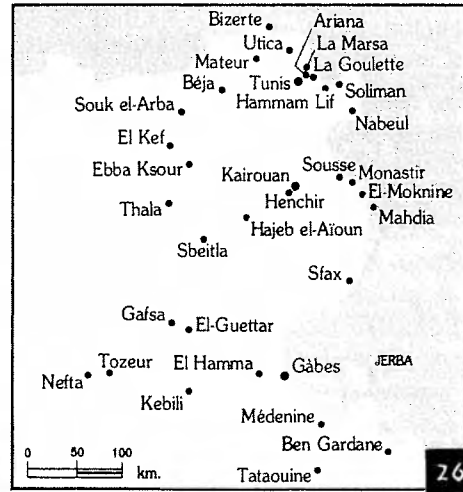
When Egypt was conquered and the caliphate established there, Kairouan became “the grand trading center in Africa,” as it was designated in a legal document of 978, and a center for Jewish scholars. With the weakening of Fatimid rule in North Africa, government was transferred to the Zirids in Kairouan.

Yusuf ibn Ziri, a Berber and founder of the dynasty, was a loyal servant of the Fatimids in the days when they ruled the Maghreb. He appointed his sons as governors in various places. Eventually they grew strong and severed their relations with the Fatimids in Cairo, recognizing the sovereignty of the Abbasids in distant Baghdad. Soon they established their city of Ashir and Jews from various places were brought there. Rabbi Sherira Gaon and Rabbi Samuel b. Hofni corresponded with Jews of Ashir. Kairouan was not exclusive in its special status as a center for Torah learning and Jewish life. In southern Tunisia the city of Gabès was famous as a “mother city in Israel” and a Torah center. Fès’s status as a Torah center was determined by the residence there in the eleventh century of R. Isaac b. Jacob, known as Alfasi author of the *Rif* (born c. 1013 in Qalat Bani Hammad in Algeria, and died 1103 at Lucena in southern Spain). Alfasi was one of the architects of Torah study in Spain and among Jewry in general.

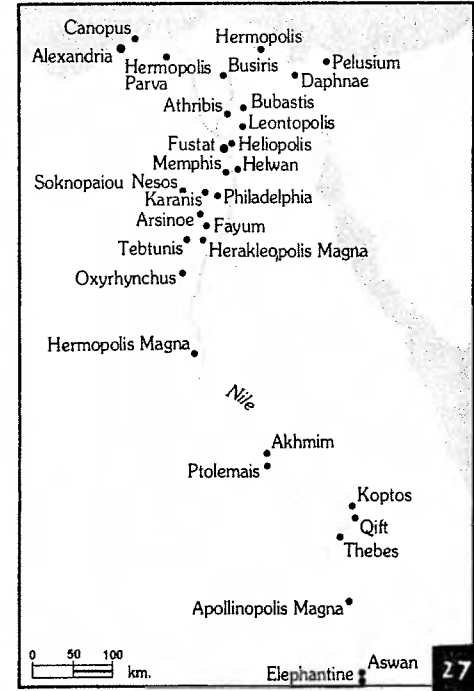
## MOROCCO



## TUNISIA



## EGYPT

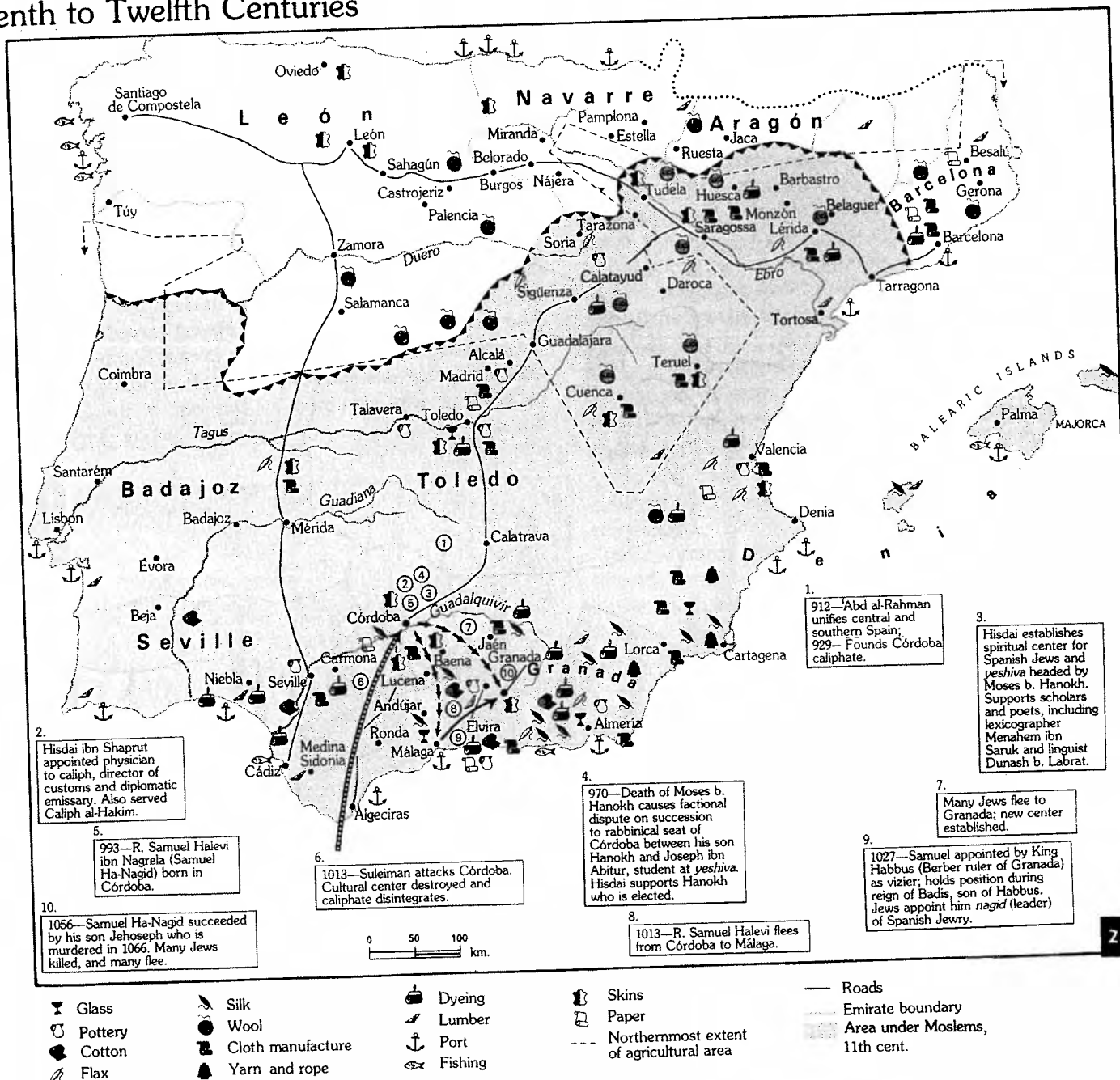


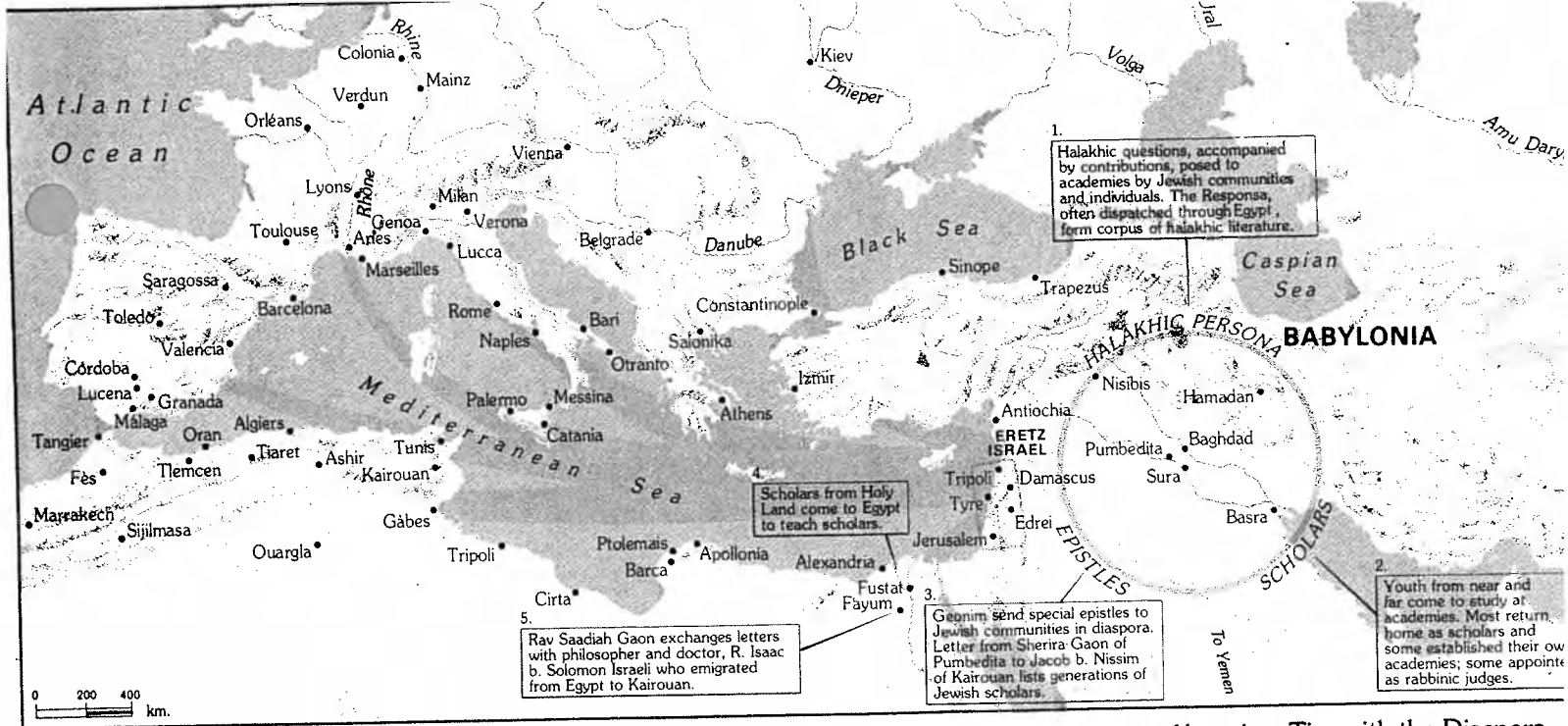
In 1032 Fès was captured by one of the Berber sheikhs who destroyed the town and its Jewish quarter and massacred many of its Jews. However, neither this disaster nor those that preceded or succeeded it arrested Jewish activity. The scholars of Fès continued to correspond with the geonim of Babylon on matters of *halakhah* and the Babylonian geonim, Rabbi Sherira, Rabbi Hai and Rabbi Samuel b. Hofni would send their responsa to "Abraham" or "Tanhum." It is possible that these two were heads of the community and its judges. Several important scholars from Fès moved to Spain where they were among the founders of Torah study centers. The Muslims of that period saw Fès as a Jewish town. Even the Jews of Taret and Sijilmasa maintained contact with Babylon and the geonim of Palestine. Berber troops, Umayyad armies from Spain, and Fatimid soldiers caused great destruction in these towns. Despite this, however, there was a resurgence of Jews in these towns. Many engaged in international trade

with distant lands. Perhaps the geographical importance of these towns contributed to continuing Jewish settlement. Kairouan played a central role in Jewish relations and contact with Babylon.

In northwestern Africa a number of Berber tribes joined forces to form a religious, social, and military confederation called al-Murabitun, known as the Almoravids, whose doctrines favored a more radical religious orthodoxy. Their leader, Yusuf ibn Tashfin (who founded Marrakech in 1062), set out on campaigns of conquest in Africa and Spain. In 1071 he forced the Jews in his North African domain to pay a huge tribute of 100,000 dinars. Such taxation may explain why so many Jews left North Africa for Spain. However, the rule of the Almoravids cannot be compared to the reign of the Muwahhidun (Almohads), who emerged in the twelfth century and destroyed many Jewish communities.

## MUSLIM SPAIN: ECONOMY AND CENTERS OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT Tenth to Twelfth Centuries





The contacts between the Babylonian geonim and the Diaspora were numerous and widespread. The gaonate became the spiritual and halakhic center for Jewry, issuing instructions and guidance both to the eastern and western Jewish communities. The Diaspora connection was important for establishing a consensus regarding halakhic doctrine. Instrumental in achieving this goal were the emissaries sent by the geonim to the Diaspora — students from the Babylonian academies and Rabbinical judges ordained by the geonim. They were the vanguard of the movement that helped create and maintain the Jewish halakhic consensus during the life span

of the Babylonian centers of learning. Ties with the Diaspora also found expression in the financial support extended by the Jewish communities to the academies, considerable correspondence about which was found in the Cairo Genizah. These relations also helped to foster international commercial ties in which Jews played a very important role.

Other communities, chiefly in Italy and Germany, had very close ties with the academies in Palestine and they adopted the Palestinian (Eretz Israel) tradition primarily in matters of liturgical poetry.

## THE GEONIM OF ERETZ ISRAEL; AND ALIYAH TO ERETZ ISRAEL

General Jawhar conquered Palestine on behalf of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz after subjugating Egypt in 969. The Fatimids were a branch of the Shi'ite sect who ruled over a Muslim population that was predominately Sunni, and were, therefore, considered foreigners in Palestine, Egypt and Syria. Paltiel (d. 975), a Jew of Oria, served as physician to al-Mu'izz during the conquest of Egypt and was responsible for provisioning the Fatimid army. From his position of influence he was able to assist the Jewish community and when he died he was buried in Eretz Israel. During most of the Fatimid period the rulers employed many Jews, among them the Jewish convert to Islam Yaqub ibn Killis (vizier to Caliph al-Aziz from 978-990), who also aided the Jewish community. The Jewish community in Eretz Israel prospered under Fatimid rule, particularly the large communities of Tyre and Sidon. Jerusalem, Tiberias and Ramle were large and important Jewish centers; small Jewish settlements existed in Transjordan. However, prosperity did not last and in 996 the Fatimid throne was occupied by Caliph al-Hakim (996-1021) who persecuted non-Muslims. To make matters worse, there were calamitous earthquakes in 1034 and 1067 in which

Ramle was particularly badly hit. Eretz Israel as a whole had its share of al-Hakim's harassment but Jerusalem had a double portion with the caliph's Nubian troops wreaking their violence upon Jews and destroying their synagogues. Many Jews were openly killed and survivors were subjected to hard labor.

It was during this period that the Great Yeshiva of Jerusalem moved to Ramle. From 1024 to 1029 an enormous sum of money was cruelly extorted for the state coffers from the Jews of Jerusalem and from the Karaites who had resided in the city for over a hundred years. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem ceased. Only about fifty Jews resided in the city.

The situation improved somewhat during the reign of al-Hakim's successor, al-Zahir (1021-1034), and the Jewish population slowly recovered. However, the disaster of the crusades would follow in 1099.

Despite the dangers on land and sea, Jews continued to make pilgrimages to Eretz Israel, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles. Their destinations were chiefly Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives and Hebron. With them came Jews who wished to settle in Jerusalem. Among the settlers were



*Avelei Zion* ("Mourners of Zion"), people who "abandoned their families, repudiated their lands of birth, left cities and dwelt in the mountains." "People from the east and the west" who "set their sights on settling in Jerusalem, forsook their possessions and renounced the temporal world." The Karaite scholar, Sahl ben Mazliah, relates that "Jerusalem at this time was a haven for all who fled, a comfort for all mourners and a repose for the poor and humble; wherein resided servants of the Lord who were gathered unto her, one from a town, another from a family; wherein resided dirge singer and eulogizers in Hebrew, Persian and Arabic."

Ramle was an important center for Jews from Babylon, known as *Knesset al-Iraqi'in*, just as Jews from Eretz Israel who lived in Egypt were known as *Knesset al-Shami'in*. The Karaites had their own synagogue in Ramle. Eretz Israel also served as a transit point for Jews emigrating from east to west.

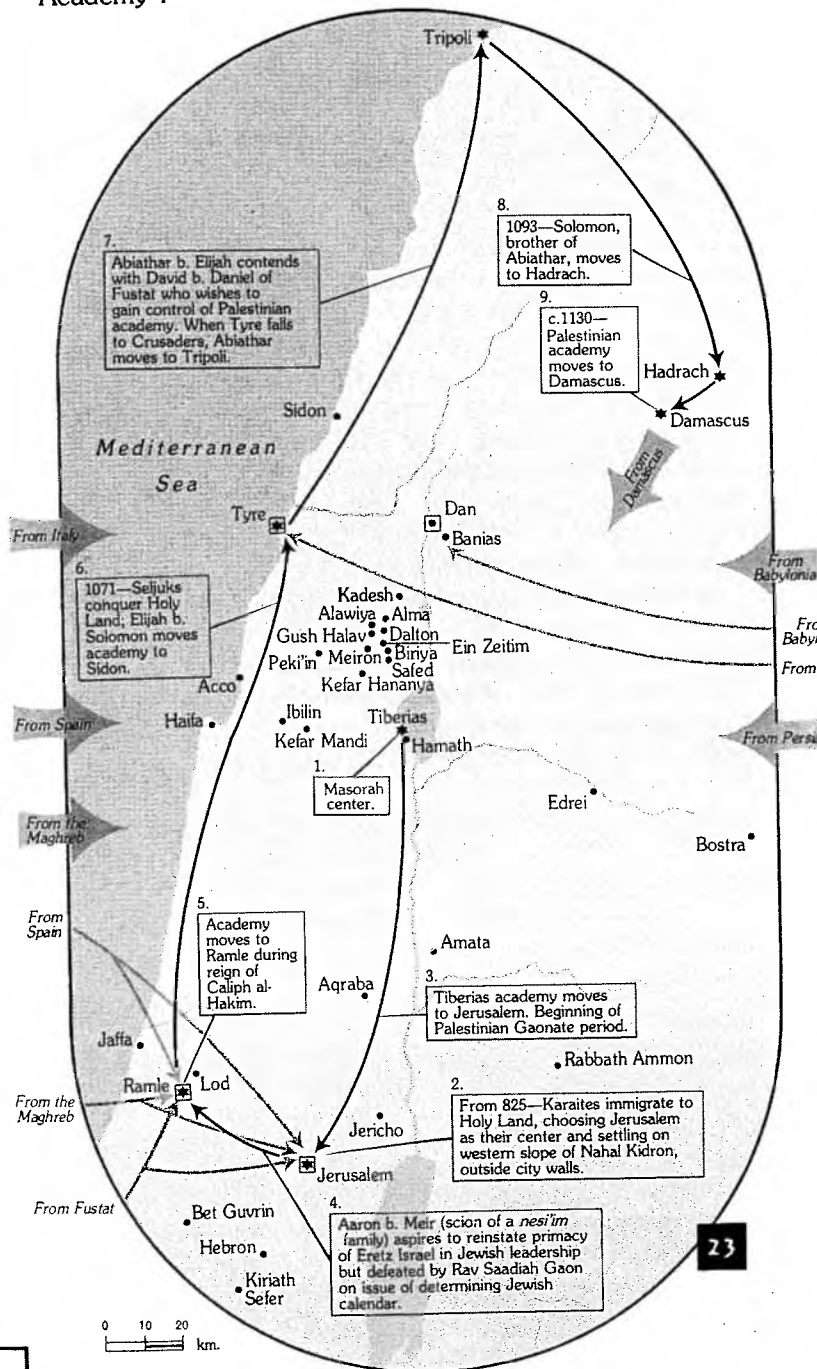
Bedouin invasions and disturbances in 1029 and 1030 did not hinder Jewish emigration even from Spain, as is attested in a letter sent from Jerusalem to Toledo in 1053 describing the "Sephardim" who resided in Ramle and Jerusalem with their wives and children. Even the Sephardic scholar Joseph ibn Abitur intended to leave Spain and emigrate to Eretz Israel, but one of his friends advised him to go first to Egypt. The story of Rabbi Judah Halevi's *aliyah* typifies a trend among many Jews in those days. Immigrants also came to Eretz Israel from North Africa and Syria. Close ties existed between the Jews of Tripoli and Eretz Israel. Wills from Italy, Egypt and North Africa bear witness to the custom of interring the bones of Jewish dead in the Holy Land. There were, however, still many Jews who left Eretz Israel. Those who emigrated to Egypt established communities, such as in Alexandria. Many of the émigrés were learned men and graduates of *yeshivot* and it is reasonable to assume that the educational needs of the Diaspora communities were what motivated them to emigrate in order to teach the Torah.

In contrast to the lack of livelihood in Jerusalem, Ramle was a commercial center, and one of the resident Jews held the title of "The Merchants Clerk." He apparently served as a third-party trustee for disputed property or perhaps he was the "Head of the Merchants," as indicated by the Arabic form of this title. In Tyre Jews were engaged in glass blowing and some were shop owners. Here too the Jews had a functionary called "The Merchants Clerk." Tyre was no less an important Jewish center than Ramle, and when the Seljuks conquered Jerusalem in 1071, the Palestinian academy transferred to Tyre. Jews living in the coastal towns seem to have been better off than those residing in the center of the country (excluding Ramle). Jews were engaged in many trades and particularly dyeing, in which they had a monopoly.

Their financial hardships were further aggravated by the burden of taxes; Jerusalem bore the heaviest tax load.

During this period Eretz Israel was renowned for its geonim

and its centers of learning. Because of the difficult local conditions, its gaonate was overshadowed by the prosperous Jewish Diaspora of Babylon. A number of geonim in Eretz Israel were members of the ben Meir family, the most important being Aaron b. Meir. The gaon Solomon b. Judah was the head of the community from 1027 to 1051. The gaon Daniel b. Azariah was related to the Babylonian exilarch, David b. Zakkai. The last of the geonim in Eretz Israel were Elijah b. Solomon and his son Abiathar. The latter, who lived during the period of the Crusades, moved to Tripoli where he died in 1109. The Palestinian academy moved to Damascus where it continued to function for about a hundred years under the name "Hatsevi Academy" or "Eretz Hatsevi Academy".



## THE GAONATE OF PALESTINE

c. 844-915	Zemah
c. 915-932	Aaron b. Moses ben Meir
c. 932-934	Isaac (son of Aaron?)
c. 934-948	Ben Meir (brother of Aaron)
c. 948-955	Abraham b. Aaron
c. 933-926	Aaron
933-	Joseph ha-Kohen b. Ezron
(2 years)	?
(30 years)	?

988-	Samuel b. Joseph ha-Kohen
...	Yose b. Samuel
...	Shemaiah
1015	Josiah b. Aaron b. Abraham
1020-1027	Solomon b. Joseph ha-Kohen
1027-1051	Solomon b. Judah
1051-1062	Daniel b. Azariah
1062-1083	Elijah b. Solomon b. Joseph ha-Kohen
1084-1109	Abiathar b. Elijah

- \* Center of Academy
- ← Passage of Eretz Israel Academy
- ← Pilgrims
- ← Direction taken by immigrants
- Major communities where pilgrims settled

gent man, robust, and, by common consent, the very best of bowmen, whether Greek or barbarian. This man, observing that a number of men were going to and fro on the route and that the whole force was being held up by a seer who was taking the auspices, inquired why they were halting. The seer pointed out to him the bird he was observing, and told him that if it stayed in that spot it was expedient for them all to halt; if it stirred and flew forward, to advance; if backward, then to retire. The Jew, without saying a word, drew his bow, shot and struck the bird, and killed it. The seer and some others were indignant, and heaped curses upon him. "Why so mad, you poor wretches?" he retorted; and then, taking the bird in his hands, continued, "Pray, how could any sound information about our march be given by this creature, which could not provide for its own safety? Had it been gifted with divination, it would not have come to this spot, for fear of being killed by an arrow of Mosollamus the Jew." [Josephus, *Against Apion* I, 201-204.]

The Jews and their Scriptures were beginning to impinge on the pagan world to a degree that had not been possible previously. Armed with the idea of bearing witness to the one God and the expectation that paganism was finished, a highly unusual people and their religion were not going to be ignored, nor were they going to let themselves be ignored.

## P A R T T W O

# From the Hellenistic Period to Late Antiquity

**PART 2. HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN ERAS.  
FROM THE MACCABEAN REVOLT TO THE REDACTION OF THE MISHNAH**

General History	Jewish History	General History	Jewish History
<p>63. Beginning of civil wars between claimants to the Seleucid throne, eventually leading to the decline of the Seleucid state.</p> <p>46. Imposition of Roman control on Greece and Macedonia.</p>	<p>163-140. Continuation of the Maccabean struggle against the Seleucids, despite the end of the religious persecutions.</p> <p>161. Judah the Maccabee is killed and his brother Jonathan becomes leader of the Maccabean forces.</p> <p>140. Jonathan is killed; an assembly in Jerusalem recognizes his brother Simon as High Priest and ethnarch of independent Judea, these offices to be hereditary in the Hasmonean family thereafter.</p> <p>134-104. Rule of John Hyrcanus, Simon's son.</p> <p>104-103. Rule of Judah Aristobulus, John Hyrcanus's son.</p>	<p>1 CE</p> <p>14-37. Tiberius, Roman emperor.</p> <p>37-41. Gaius Caligula, Roman emperor.</p> <p>41-54. Claudius, Roman emperor.</p> <p>54-68. Nero, Roman emperor.</p> <p>69-79. Vespasian, Roman emperor.</p> <p>79-81. Titus, Roman emperor.</p> <p>81-96. Domitian, Roman emperor.</p> <p>96-98. Nerva, Roman emperor.</p> <p>98-117. Trajan, Roman emperor.</p> <p>100 CE</p> <p>114-117. Trajan invades Parthian Mesopotamia but is forced to retreat.</p> <p>117-138. Hadrian, Roman emperor.</p> <p>138-161. Antoninus Pius, Roman emperor.</p> <p>161-180. Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor.</p> <p>180-192. Commodus, Roman emperor.</p>	<p>66-70. Jewish revolt against Rome, ending in Roman reconquest of Judea and the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Second Temple.</p> <p>74. Fall of Masada, the last rebel stronghold.</p> <p>70s. The rabbinic council, the Sanhedrin, reassembles in the town of Yavneh.</p>
<p>65. Pompey's victory over the king of Pontus leaves all of Asia Minor and Syria in Roman hands.</p> <p>48. Julius Caesar defeats Pompey and becomes the most powerful political figure in Rome.</p> <p>44. Assassination of Julius Caesar.</p> <p>42. Mark Anthony and Octavian defeat the anti-Caesar party at Philippi; Anthony takes control of the eastern half of the Roman empire, Octavian of the western.</p> <p>31. Octavian defeats Anthony at Actium; end of the Roman civil war. Octavian (Augustus) becomes emperor.</p>	<p>103-76. Rule of Alexander Jannaeus, John Hyrcanus's second son. Extension of Judean control over most of Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Civil war between John Hyrcanus and the Pharisees.</p> <p>76-67. Rule of Salome Alexandra, wife of Alexander Jannaeus. She makes peace with the Pharisees.</p> <p>67-63. Struggle between Salome's two sons for the throne of Judea.</p> <p>63. The Roman general Pompey supports Hyrcanus and captures Jerusalem for him. Hyrcanus becomes High Priest; his advisor Antipater becomes administrator of Judea.</p> <p>40. The Parthians invade Judea; Antipater's son Herod flees to Rome, where he is recognized as king of Judea.</p> <p>37. With the help of a Roman army, Herod recaptures Jerusalem and regains control of Judea.</p> <p>37-4. Reign of Herod as Roman client king of Judea.</p> <p>4 BCE. Division of Herod's kingdom between three of his sons.</p>	<p>114-117. Revolt of Jews in Egypt, Cyrene, Cyprus.</p> <p>132-135. Jewish revolt in Judea under Simon bar Kokhba.</p> <p>135. Beginning of a period of severe anti-Jewish persecutions in Palestine; martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva and other scholars.</p> <p>140s or 150s. End of the persecutions; the Sanhedrin reassembles in the Galilee.</p> <p>c. 170-217. Judah I is patriarch (Nasi) of the Sanhedrin and recognized leader of the Jewish people in the Roman empire. Under his auspices is redacted the Mishnah, the basic code of rabbinic law.</p>	

Chart 2. (con't)

Roman Empire	Jews in the Roman Empire	Jews in the Persian Empire	Persian History
<p>475-476. Romulus Augustus, the last Roman emperor in the West.</p> <p>The Eastern Roman Empire. 408-450. Reign of Theodosius II; preparation of the first major code of Roman law.</p> <p>Christianity. 5th-6th centuries. Creedal controversies over the nature of Christ (Arian and Monophysite heresies).</p>	<p>c. 600. Pope Gregory defines papal policy toward the Jews.</p>	<p>c. 455-475. Persecutions of Jews; synagogues and academies closed.</p> <p>c. 500. Re-establishment of Jewish institutions; redaction of much of the Babylonian Talmud.</p>	
<p>500 CE</p> <p>The West.</p> <p>529. Establishment of the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy.</p> <p>590-604. Pope Gregory the Great.</p> <p>The East.</p> <p>527-565. The Emperor Justinian reconquers parts of the western Mediterranean. (They are lost after his death.) Publication of the Justinian Code of Roman law.</p>	<p>520s. The king of Himyar in southwestern Arabia converts to Judaism; Himyar is subsequently conquered by Christians and, later in the century, by Persians.</p> <p>6th century. Babylonian sages (the <i>Saboraim</i>) add comments and notes to the text of the Babylonian Talmud.</p> <p>589. Traditional date for the beginning of the Geonic period.</p>	<p>531-578. Khosrau I, the Sassanian ruler, reorganizes the Persian state.</p>	<p>589-628. Rule of Khosrau II, last major king of the Sassanian dynasty.</p>

# CHAPTER 4

## The Hellenistic Diaspora and the Judean Commonwealth to 70 CE

The political geography of the Near East underwent two major shifts during the period to be studied in this chapter. The Hellenistic dynasties founded by Alexander the Great's generals in the early third century had, by the mid-second century, passed their prime. Weakened by military defeats, native revolts, and dynastic strife, the Macedonian rulers lost one outlying region after another to a new set of states, including the Parthians in Iran (who later occupied Mesopotamia also), the kingdoms of Pergamum, Pontus, and Armenia in Asia Minor, the Nabateans in Trans-Jordan and adjacent semidesert areas, and Judea after the Maccabean revolt. Only about a century was to elapse until the fragmentation of the Near East was put to an end by Rome. The last great empire of ancient times was already the single most powerful Mediterranean state after crushing Carthage in 202 BCE, leaving Rome in complete control of the West. The East was to fall under its domination in stages: first, when Rome undermined the Seleucids through support for smaller states breaking away from their rule; then by conversion of these kingdoms into Roman protectorates; finally by the imposition of direct Roman rule. In 148 BCE Macedonia was to become a Roman province and the city-states and leagues of mainland Greece taken under Roman supervision. In 133 the kingdom of Pergamum was to pass into Roman hands, followed by other parts of Asia Minor. Syria was to be annexed in 64 BCE by the Roman general Pompey, who was to make Judea a Roman dependency

Greek philosophy already brought much closer to radical monotheism. Many rabbinical statements about God's attributes, divine providence and human freedom, the reasons for the mitzvot, and the nature of the messianic age would be reinterpreted in a rationalistic light to show that natural science and revealed religion could coexist in harmony. Other elements of the aggadah would be fused with Greek metaphysics to produce a speculative mystical tradition (the *Kabbalah*), drawing on the names of God's names and on the role of man in actualizing deity in the world and in bringing divine judgment and divine mercy into balance. The sociopolitical setting of these later developments will be the subject of the next chapter.

## PART THREE

# The Middle Ages and Early Modern Times

CHART 3A. MEDIEVAL PERIOD, 600-1200

General History	The Jews Under Islam	The Jews Under Christendom	General History	The Jews Under Islam	The Jews Under Christendom
<p>600</p> <p>622. The Hegira: Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina.</p> <p>632. Death of Muhammad.</p> <p>630s-640s. Arab conquest of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Persia.</p> <p>661. Consolidation of the Umayyad dynasty of caliphs, which ruled the Arab empire to 750.</p>	<p>c. 618-670. Bustanai, the first exilarch of the Arab period.</p>	<p>614. Jews return to Jerusalem during Persian invasion of Palestine; Byzantine reoccupation in 629 is followed by Christian reprisals.</p> <p>612. Beginning of repeated issuance of anti-Jewish legislation and persecutions in Visigothic Spain, culminating in outlawing of Judaism in 694.</p>	<p>800</p> <p>814-840. Reign of Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne.</p> <p>843. Treaty of Verdun, dividing the Frankish empire into three parts between the heirs of Louis the Pious.</p> <p>813-833. Al-Mamun, Abbasid caliph; cultivation of natural sciences, theology, and philosophy at Baghdad.</p> <p>9th-10th centuries. Raids, migrations, invasions by Northmen (Vikings).</p> <p>899. First appearance of Magyar raiders in central Europe.</p>	<p>c. 825. Authority of the exilarch over the gnomim begins to decline.</p> <p>830-860. Benjamin of Nahawend; considerable growth of Karaism.</p>	<p>Early 9th century. Jewish traders given favorable privileges as "merchants of the palace" by Louis the Pious.</p>
<p>700</p> <p>711-715. Muslim conquest of Spain.</p> <p>733. Battle of Tours; defeat of Muslim invasion of France by Charles Martel.</p> <p>750. Abbasid dynasty of caliphs. (The Abbasids lose political power after 940 but last to 1258.)</p> <p>756. Independent Umayyad caliphate of Cordova in Spain.</p> <p>786-809. Harun al-Rashid, Abbasid caliph.</p> <p>780-800. Western North Africa breaks away from Abbasid rule.</p> <p>800. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, crowned Roman emperor in the west by the Pope. (Charlemagne ruled 768-814.)</p>	<p>c. 740. First conversions to Judaism among Khazars on the Volga River.</p> <p>Mid-8th century. Jewish messianic movements in the Middle East.</p> <p>762-767. Anan ben David's break with the Rabbinites; beginnings of the Karaite tradition.</p> <p>c. 757-761. Yehudah, gaon of Sura.</p>	<p>797. Charlemagne sends Isaac the Jew as an emissary to Harun al-Rashid.</p>	<p>911. Rollo the Viking granted a fief by the Frankish king in what was later Normandy.</p> <p>962. Otto I the Great, ruler of Germany, crowned Roman emperor in the West by the Pope. (Otto I ruled 936-973.)</p> <p>969. The Fatimid dynasty of caliphs in Tunisia conquers Egypt. (The Fatimids rule Egypt to 1171.)</p> <p>987. Hugh Capet crowned king of France; end of the Carolingian dynasty and beginning of the Capetian.</p> <p>989. Conversion of Prince Vladimir of Kiev to Greek Orthodox Christianity.</p>	<p>882-941. Saadia, gaon of Sura and Jewish philosopher.</p> <p>10th-11th centuries. Karaite academy in Jerusalem.</p> <p>915-970. Hisdai ibn Shaprut, government administrator and patron of Jewish learning at Cordova.</p> <p>968-1006. Sherira ben Hanina serves as gaon of Pumbeditha; author (c. 987) of a letter narrating how the Mishnah, Talmud, and other rabbinic works were compiled.</p>	<p>c. 960-1028. Gereshom ben Judah of Mainz, one of the first great Ashkenazic talmudists.</p>

Chart 3A. (con't)

General History	The Jews Under Islam	General History	The Jews Under Islam	The Jews Under Christendom
<p>1000</p> <p>980-1037. Avicenna, Muslim physician, scientist, and philosopher.</p> <p>1066. Norman conquest of England.</p> <p>1077. Penance of the emperor Henry IV before Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) at Canossa, part of the struggle between Holy Roman empire and papacy.</p> <p>1085. The king of Castile captures the Toledo from the Muslims, leading the Berber sect and dynasty of the Almoravides into Spain.</p> <p>1095. Pope Urban II calls for the first crusade to reconquer Palestine from the Seljuk Turks.</p> <p>1033-1109. Anselm of Canterbury; beginning of growth of Western scholasticism.</p>	<p>1008. Jews of Egypt persecuted by al-Hakim.</p> <p>993-1056. Samuel ibn Nagrela, vizier and Jewish poet, scholar, and patron at Granada.</p> <p>1004-1038. Hai ben Sherira, last important gaon in the East.</p> <p>c. 1020-1057. Solomon ibn Gabirol, poet and first important Jewish philosopher in Spain.</p> <p>c. 1055-1135. Moses ibn Ezra, Hebrew poet and literary critic.</p> <p>1075-1141. Judah Halevy, physician, poet, and philosopher.</p> <p>1089-1164. Abraham ibn Ezra, poet, astronomer, physician, biblical commentator.</p>	<p>1189-1192. The Third Crusade.</p> <p>1152-1190. Reign of Frederick I Barbarossa, Holy Roman emperor.</p> <p>1154-1189. Reign of Henry II Plantagenet in England.</p> <p>1189-1199. Richard I, Coeur de Lion, king of England.</p>		<p>c. 1150-1217. Judah he-Hasid of Regensburg, an Ashkenazic pietist.</p> <p>1144. Ritual murder charge at Norwich.</p> <p>1171. Blood libel at Blois, the first in France.</p> <p>1182-1198. Expulsion of Jews from the royal domain in France by Philip II Augustus (ruled 1180-1223).</p> <p>1190. Massacre of Jews at York.</p>
<p>1100</p> <p>1079-1142. Peter Abelard, French scholastic theologian.</p> <p>1126-1198. Averroës, Muslim physician, philosopher, commentator on Aristotle.</p> <p>1145-1150. The Almohades, a Berber dynasty, invade and conquer Muslim Spain.</p> <p>1147-1149. The Second Crusade.</p> <p>1187. Saladin captures Jerusalem from the Christians.</p>	<p>c. 1110-1180. Abraham ibn Daud, philosopher and historian.</p> <p>1135-1204. Moses Maimonides, physician, legislator, and philosopher.</p> <p>1146. Beginning of persecution of Jews in Muslim Spain by the Almohades.</p>	<p>c. 1100-1171. Jacob ben Meir Tam, one of the first of the tosafists.</p> <p>c. 1125-1198. Abraham ben David of Posquières, a tal-mudist of southern France.</p> <p>c. 1160-1235. Isaac the Blind, son of Abraham ben David of Posquières and early kabbalist.</p>		



guages. Each set of instructions preceding the enactment of a particular ceremony, such as *Kaddish* or *Ureḥaz* or *Karpas*, also provides instructions in Ladino which are sung in a chant by everyone present.<sup>105</sup>

It is not necessary in the Judeo-Spanish tradition for a *child* to ask the Four Questions. In fact, the entire Haggadah is said in unison by everyone around the table. Some, however, have adopted the custom of having a child ask the Four Questions, because it is such a popular notion today.

It should be noted that the *Mah nishtanah* is in a different order and follows a more correct chronological order as reflected in the actual observances at the Seder. (See above, p. 256, for the English translation of the Four Questions.) The first question, therefore, is *Ein anu metabelin afilu paam aḥat*. The second question is, *Anu okhelin hamez umazzah*. The third question is, *Anu okhelin shear yerakot*, and the last question has a difference in text, which is, *Anu okhelin veshotin* [We eat and we drink] *bein yoshevin uvein mesubin vehalay-la hazeh kulanu mesubin*. In order to arouse curiosity before the recitation of the *Ma nishtanah*, the entire Seder plate is removed from the room, which arouses the children to ask, "Why is it being done?" And at this point the Four Questions are asked. Before the answer, *Avadim hayinu*, the plate is replaced on the table.<sup>106</sup>

After the Seder is under way, at the portion in the Haggadah where we read, "*Bekhol dor vador hayav adam lirot et azmo ke'ilu hu azmo yaza mimizrayim*," the head of the household who is conducting the Seder throws the napkin containing the *Afikoman* over this shoulder and he walks out of the room, returning with a belt which is tightened, a cane in his hand, and this sack containing the *Afikoman* over his shoulder. This charade is to demonstrate how our ancestors went out of Egypt. When he walks back into the dining room with the special outfit, he makes the declaration, "*Kakha asu Yisrael kesheyažu mimizrayim. Mishearotam zerurot besimlotam al shikhman . . . uve-nai Yisrael asu kidvar Moshe*" (paraphrasing Exodus 12:34-35). Everyone present then asks, "Where do you come from?" to which he answers, "I have come from Egypt." They then ask, "To where are you going?" and he responds, "I am going to Jerusalem." Then everyone declares in unison, "*Leshanah habaah biYerushalayim habenuya*," which means, "May we celebrate next year in the rebuilt city of Jeru-

salem." This dramatic reenactment of the exodus from Egypt is to stimulate the curiosity of the children and to encourage them to ask questions about the exodus from Egypt.<sup>107</sup>

Each member of the family then takes the opportunity to carry the *Afikoman* over his shoulder in the enactment of the ceremony showing that the Jews were traveling from Egypt to Jerusalem. There is no tradition of hiding or stealing the *Afikoman*. The *Afikoman* was regarded as a *segula* and was coupled together with a piece of *mazzah yayin* (*mazzah* made from flour and wine, or eggs), and this would be kept as a protector of the house against evil from year to year. Each Erev Pesah, they would change the pieces of *mazzah* and replace them that night with the new *mazzot*, which would be kept for the whole year until the next Erev Pesah. This resembles the procedure for maintaining the *mazzot* in the synagogue for *eruvei hazerot* (which permits one to carry within the designated boundary on the Sabbath).<sup>108</sup>

The portion of the *Eser makot* (Ten Plagues) is recited in both Hebrew and Ladino. The wine is poured into a large *legen* (special basin), and the wife brings in a pitcher of water for the head of the household to wash his hands after pouring the wine for the Ten Plagues and for *Dezakh*, *Adash*, and *Be'ahav*. The pouring out shows the sadness of the Jews at the Almighty's killing of the Egyptians in order to get Pharaoh to free the Jews, and depicts how with each drop of wine our happiness (which wine symbolizes) is diminished. No one is permitted to look at these drops of wine,<sup>109</sup> which have been poured into a basin.<sup>110</sup>

The chant for the *Hallel* is different from the regular chant for the rest of the Haggadah.

The Judeo-Spanish, like all other Sephardim, recite the *Bore peri hagefen* blessing only *twice* over the Four Cups of wine. The first time is for the *Kiddush*, and the second time is at the completion of the *Birkat hamazon* (Grace after Meals).<sup>111</sup>

After the conclusion of the Seder, the family says the *Ehad mi yodeya*, found in the last portion of the Haggadah, in Spanish and possibly even in Turkish and Greek.<sup>112</sup> Many also say the *Had gadya* in Ladino as well as Hebrew.<sup>113</sup>

At the conclusion of the Haggadah, it is permitted, according to the Judeo-Spanish tradition, to drink Turkish coffee. This is in order to keep the individual awake so that he can recite all the chapters of



*hir hashirim* which are distributed to the various members of the household for recitation that night.

There is no *Kos shel Eliyahu hanavi* (Fifth Cup for Elijah the prophet) among the Judeo-Spanish,<sup>114</sup> nor is it their custom to open the door for Elijah at the portion of *Shefokh hamatekha al hagoyim*.<sup>115</sup>

On the eve of Shevii shel Pesah, there is a special *Tikkun Leil 'hevii shel Pesah*, which is found in *Kerit Moed* (which is recited at ome). This is a special *limud* in which all the males get together in he home to recite and read this special portion for the *limud*. They hen go to the synagogue to pray the morning service.<sup>116</sup>

The special *piyut*, *Az yashir Moshe*, is recited before the Sefer orah is taken from the Ark on the seventh day of Pesah (as on Shabbat at Shira).

There are beautiful customs enacted by the grandfather (or the ather) at the conclusion of the last night of Pesah. They pick some resh grass and bring it home. Some then throw the grass, money, and rapped candy on the floor for the children to pick up. This ceremony is called *Prasa-in-agua levadura*, to which there is a special ditty.<sup>117</sup> This ceremony symbolizes that one may now eat the wheat of *hamez* nd expresses the hope for a good summer and "a green [productive] ear."<sup>118</sup> In some communities the grandfather or father holds the rass over the heads of his wife and children and recites, "*Kezemah asade netatikh vatirbi vatigdeli*," meaning, "May you grow as sound nd healthy as the grass in the meadow!" (Ezekiel 16:7).<sup>119</sup> Some tain a piece of *mazzah* because of its alleged power to stop a hail or torm. Before going abroad, they would take the piece of *mazzah* and lace it in their pocket to help safeguard them as they cross the seas. This piece of *mazzah* represents the guardianship of the Almighty, Who had watched over the Jews as they were liberated from Egypt as le brought them through the Red Sea which He split for them. This is onsidered a *segula* for a safe trip.<sup>120</sup>

The Judeo-Spanish do not in any way celebrate the Maimuna.

#### *Sefirat HaOmer*

The *Sefirat HaOmer* is counted beginning on the second night of esah. There is a special *Leshem yihud* which is recited by the Judeo-panish Jews.<sup>121</sup>

The formula for the blessing for the counting of the *Omer* is, . . . *Vezivanu al Sefirat haOmer. Hayom [thirty-third day] shelosha usheloshim yom laOmer shehem arba'ah shavuot vehamisha yamim.* On the second night of Pesah (the first night of the *Omer*), salt (in a little bag) is held by the head of the family as a *segula* against the evil eye. This is observed by other groups as well.

After the counting, the *Harahaman hu yahazir avodat beit hamikdash limkoma bimhera beyameinu* is recited. *Sefira* marks a period of semimourning, which precludes participation in any form of *sema-hot*, weddings, taking of haircuts, and shaving, etc. On the six Sabbath baths between Pesah and Shavuot, the *Pirkei Avot* are sung, a chapter each week, by the *hazzanim*, who sometimes compete in the singing of the special tunes for the pleasure of the congregants. This is followed by the *derasha* of the rabbi on *Il perek* (the chapter of the *Ethics of the Fathers* being studied). The period of mourning marked by *Sefirat HaOmer* begins immediately after Passover and extends through the thirty-third day (Lag LaOmer), which is included in the time when happy events are prohibited. From the thirty-fourth day until Shavuot, all festivities are permitted which had been prohibited during *Sefira*. However, in some communities, to avoid conflict with Ashkenazi congregations, the holding of weddings, etc., is deferred until the *Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah* (three days prior to Shavuot).<sup>122</sup>

On the fourteenth of Iyar, the congregation is instructed to have their families eat a piece of *mazzah* on this day to mark the occasion of Pesah Sheni (Second Passover). This was jokingly referred to as *Pesah de loz tinyosoz* (for the sick), since it was originally instituted for those who could not observe the real Pesah at its appointed time on the fourteenth of Nisan.<sup>123</sup>

Lag LaOmer (the thirty-third day of the *Omer*) is marked by a special *Hilula deRabi Shimon bar Yohai. Hilula* means "wedding." The term symbolizes the joy of complying with the request of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai that everyone rejoice on the night of his *Yahrzeit*. He died a happy man because he had completed his work on the Zohar. The Midrash compares him to Moshe. He was reasonably assured that, because of the kind of life he had led, he would be accepted into the celestial abode, which made him happy.<sup>124</sup> He wanted everyone else to share the happiness he experienced as he died, so he commanded that they observe a *hilula* to mark his passing.<sup>125</sup>

Everyone is, therefore, invited to come to the synagogue, where a candle is prepared for each one to light in memory of the sainted Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, for which honor each person contributes money. (There is a special *limud* of the Zohar with the reading of the *Idra Zuta* recited completely, by different members of the congregation who are qualified to read this portion. The service is chanted with its traditional melody for this night, and the counting of the Omer for the thirty-third day of the *Omer* is chanted in a special rendition to mark the occasion.) As the candles are kindled in memory of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a *hilotula* is enacted. They sing a special song entitled *Bar Yohai nimshahita ashrekha shemen sason mehavirekha*.<sup>126</sup> There were also communities where they sang a song of longing for Tiberias in Ladino.<sup>127</sup> The *hilotula* would conclude with the distribution of special candles and cakes prepared for the occasion.

It is the custom in some Judeo-Spanish congregations to bury on the day of Lag LaOmer all items which have to be put in the *geniza* in the cemetery. This custom is probably intended to induce people to go to the cemetery, so that while there they can visit the graves of their special *zaddikim* and pray for their own well-being. The burial of the remnants in the *geniza* is followed by a *seudah shel mizvah* (banquet) in the special chapel house at the cemetery.

In Bulgaria, Lag LaOmer was called *Yom hashekel* by the Zionists, since this was the day on which they collected dues for the International Zionist Organization.<sup>128</sup> In Israel it is a widely observed custom to visit the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai in Meron on Lag LaOmer.<sup>129</sup>

#### As Practiced by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews

A full month before Passover, preparations for the Festival begin. Children in the school are taught the Four Questions and become familiar with the Haggadah. Right after Purim, the women begin the tedious job of cleaning the house for Passover and the traditional spring cleaning.<sup>130</sup>

The Spanish and Portuguese Jews follow the tradition of refraining from eating *mazzah* from Purim until Passover.<sup>131</sup>

The standard procedure for *mekhivrat hamez* is observed. The rabbi serves as the agent to sell all leaven on behalf of the congregants to a non-Jew.<sup>132</sup>

The Seder is known as the *Haggadah* by Spanish and Portuguese Jews.<sup>133</sup>

*Mazzah shemurah* is used for the first two days of Pesah, at least for the *Haggadat* (home evening services).<sup>134</sup>

The Shabbat Hagadol *derasha* (halakic lecture) is not part of the tradition of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. The rabbi's sermon is usually devoted to a Passover topic on the Sabbath preceding Pesah (Shabbat Hagadol), but it is not the kind of highly technical dissertation for which the Shabbat Hagadol *derasha* has come to be known in other communities.<sup>135</sup>

The *siyum* for the Fast of the First-Born takes place on Ereb Pesah. Wine and cake are served to all the first-born who are present. In the case of a minor *bekhor* (first-born), the father should fast for the child. (Girls who are first-born were not required to fast, nor is their father required to fast for them.) The father of a minor can avoid fasting by coming to the *siyum* on behalf of his minor son.<sup>136</sup>

In Amsterdam it had been their custom to fast on Ereb Pesah and not to free themselves from this obligation by participating in a *siyum*. They would read *Vayhal* at *Minha* in a special service for the first-born.<sup>137</sup>

The food eaten on Ereb Pesah is usually limited to cooked vegetables, fresh fruit, and eggs.<sup>138</sup>

*Bedikat hamez* is conducted in a simple fashion by searching for some *hamez* (some is always prepared in advance to avoid a blessing in vain, but there is no need for ten pieces of bread to be hidden, according to their tradition). The search is conducted with a candle and a feather. The *hamez* is burned the next morning (*biur hamez*).<sup>139</sup>

On Pesah there is no prohibition against putting *mazzah* and water together, as among extremely observant Ashkenazim.<sup>140</sup>

The Spanish and Portuguese Jews are permitted to eat rice on Pesah by tradition. However, many refrain from doing so in this country in order to be able to invite others who abstain from eating rice to their homes during the Passover period. *Kitniyyot* (beans) were not eaten in Holland or Surinam, and they are not eaten in the Spanish and Portuguese traditions.<sup>141</sup>

There is no specific role played by the man in preparing for the *Haggadah* (the home service, or Seder).<sup>142</sup> It varies from house to house. The complete *Hallel* is recited at the conclusion of the *Arbit* service on the first and second nights of Pesah in the synagogue.<sup>143</sup>

In Holland it was the custom to have three different plates on which to place the major items featured on Passover Eve at the *Haggadah*. Three *mazzot* are placed on one plate. The *karpas*, the dish containing the vinegar, the *maror* (bitter herb), the *hazeret* (romaine lettuce), and the *haroset* are placed on a second plate. The hard-boiled egg (*beiza*) and the shankbone (*zeroa*) with a *kezayit* of meat on it are placed on a third plate.<sup>144</sup>

Among the Spanish and Portuguese, the blessing over the wine is also made only *twice*, even though they drink *four* cups of wine. This is because all Sephardic Jews make only the *Bore peri hagefen* over the *Kiddush* and after the *Birkat hamazon*, since, according to their tradition, the reading of the *Haggadah* is not considered to be an interruption (*hefsek*), which would require one to make a new blessing. This is different from the views of the Rambam, Rabbi Neturay, Rabbi Amram, Rabbi Sherira, Rabbi Hai, Rab Amram Gaon, etc., who consider every cup to be a *mizvah* unto itself.<sup>145</sup>

The *haroset* is made from a mixture of almonds, apples, raisins, spices, and wine. In Surinam, they would add coconut.

The reason that apples and spices are used in the *haroset* is to remind us of the straw and the mortar which the Jews had to make while in slavery in Egypt. The apple is also a reminder of how the women were able to give birth to their children in painless fashion so that they would not be discovered in labor by the Egyptians, who wished to kill every male born. These apples and spices are ground with nuts and dates, etc., all of which have their symbolic meanings.<sup>146</sup>

There is no enactment whatsoever of the drama of the exodus from Egypt by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews at the early part of the *Haggadah*, or at any other time in the Passover evening ceremonies.

The order of the Four Questions is different from the sequence followed by the Ashkenazim, as is true of all Sephardim. In the fourth question, they say, "*Anu okhelin veshotin* . . ." ("On all other nights we eat *and drink* either sitting or reclining").<sup>147</sup>

The Ten Plagues and the three-word acronym describing them are represented by dipping the finger into the wine to drop a little wine for

each of the Ten Plagues, and then, for the additional three words, three more drops of wine<sup>148</sup> are dipped out, making for a total of thirteen drops of wine which are put into a plate.<sup>149</sup>

The tradition of hiding the *Afikoman* has just developed in recent years among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, but it was not their custom in Holland.

The Spanish and Portuguese *Haggadah* officially concludes with the *Nirzah*, which is expressed by the words of *Hasal sidur Pesah kehilkhato* up to *leshana habaa birushalayim*. The *Adir hu* and the other additional songs printed in the *Haggadah* are extraneous. Some have adopted the singing of them.<sup>150</sup>

The American *Haggadah*, which is included in the prayerbook, contains such songs as *Ubekhen vayehi bahazi halayla*, *Ubekhen vamartem zebah pesah*, and *Ki lo na'eh ki lo ya'eh*, as well as other songs which are not necessarily basic to the *Haggadah*.<sup>151</sup>

It is now a custom for the congregation to recite the *Shir hashirim* on the first two days of Pesah prior to the *Minha* service. This is chanted by individual members of the congregation. This is the only time that the *Shir hashirim* is chanted or recited at a public service.<sup>152</sup>

#### *Sefirat HaOmer*

The counting of the *Omer* begins on the second night of Pesah in the synagogue. The *hazzan*<sup>153</sup> counting the *Omer* stands at the side of the reading desk in the same fashion as when a *Haftarah* is recited.<sup>154</sup> The regular Sephardic formula for the counting already described is observed.<sup>155</sup>

In connection with the counting of the *Omer* among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, there are no traditions of distributing salt to each congregant as among the other groups.<sup>156</sup>

On the seventh day of Passover, in the morning, they enact the same procedure as was followed on Shabbat Shira regarding the recitation of the *Vayosha*, *Az yashir*, and the *Ki ba sus Puro*. These are all chanted in the special High Naum Torah cantillation, and the congregant sits for the Torah reading of *Shirat hayam*.<sup>157</sup>

On the first day of Pesah, they recite *Tikkun hatal* (prayer for dew), which is the name for these prayers in the Spanish and Portuguese tradition.<sup>158</sup>

The custom of staying up to learn *Tikkun Leil Shebii*, which was followed in Holland, is not observed in America.<sup>159</sup>

There is no observance of the Maimuna whatsoever among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, to whom this national holiday is completely unknown.

Weddings and public celebrations are permitted during the *Omer* period only on the following days: the entire month of Nisan following Passover; Rosh Hodesh Iyar; Lag LaOmer (thirty-third day of the *Omer*); Rosh Hodesh Sivan; and the third, fourth, and fifth of Sivan (*Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah*).<sup>160</sup>

There is no celebration on Lag LaOmer among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.<sup>161</sup>

# 13

## Yom Haazmaut, Shabuot

As Practiced by Syrian Jews

### Yom Haazmaut

Israel Independence Day is celebrated with the recitation of the complete *Hallel* without a *berakha*. There are no *Tahanunim* recited on that day. Similarly, Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) is observed by the recitation of the complete *Hallel* without a *berakha*. The Damascenes recite only the *Hallel Gadol*, *Hodu LaShem Ki Tob* (Psalms 118), after the *Shaharit* service on Israel Independence Day.

### Shabuot

The synagogue is decorated with many bouquets of flowers on Ereb Shabuot.<sup>1</sup>

The *Arbit* service begins with *Lamenazzeah leDavid mizmor shir yakum Elokim*.<sup>2</sup> Everyone goes home after the Shabuot evening service for the festival meal at home, which is a dairy meal.<sup>3</sup> The two dairy *hallot* are in a special shape and are covered with a type of butter coating. Cookies are topped with a mixture of whipped sweet cream mixed with honey.<sup>4</sup> The meal on the day of Shabuot is a meat meal. Thus, one partakes of both dairy and meat on Shabuot at separate meals; this differs from some other Sephardic groups, who start the meal with dairy, rinse out their mouths after a brief interruption, and then continue with a meat meal.<sup>5</sup>

At about 10 o'clock in the evening, the men go back to study the *Tikkun Leil Shabuot* all night until it is time to pray the *Shaharit* service.<sup>6</sup>

The order of the study of the *Seder leil Shabuot*, which can be found in *Sefer Keriei Moed Tefillat Yesharim*,<sup>7</sup> is as follows:<sup>8</sup> The

# A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs

The Ritual Practices of Syrian, Moroccan,  
Judeo-Spanish and Spanish and Portuguese Jews  
of North America

HERBERT C. DOBRINSKY

אוצר דינים ומנהגים של יהודי ספרד

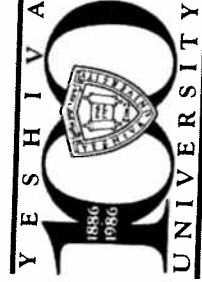
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# 1

## Early Childhood

### As Practiced by Syrian Jews

#### *Zebed Habat (Naming a Girl)*

A girl is named in the synagogue. The father is called for an *alityah*. The *mesader* announces *Abi habat* ("Father of the daughter!") and immediately the congregation chants the *Pizmonim Zebebed Habat*. This celebration of the birth-of-a-daughter ceremony takes place when the rabbi reads, *Yonati behagvei haselah, beseter hamadrega, har'ini et marayikh, hashem'ini et kolekh ki kolekh areb umarekh naveh*, which is chanted in oriental tones and is followed by the special *Mi sheberakh* in which the girl's name is given *Bemazal tob ubishe'at berakha*, etc.<sup>1</sup> This prayer expresses the hope that her parents will derive much joy from her, will see her married and the mother of male children amidst wealth and plenty, etc. The *pizmonim* chanted on the occasion of the *Zebed habat* are in several different *makamot* (musical modes).<sup>2</sup>

A *sabt* (*Kiddush*) and a *seudah* are provided in honor of the naming of the girl for family and friends.

The Syrian community does not abide by the prohibition of Rabbi Yehuda Hehasid not to name children for the living parents.<sup>3</sup> As is the tradition of most Sephardim, names are given for the living, as was done in the Mishnaic period and right through until the Middle Ages.

The order of priority in naming the children for the living follows this formula: The first male child is named for the paternal grandfather, and the second male child is named for the maternal grandfather; the first female child is named for the paternal grandmother, and the second female child is named for the maternal grandmother.

Beyond that, the names may be selected for any member of the family or any friend whom the parents choose to so honor in naming their child.

Generally speaking, the English name will correspond to the name of the grandparent whose Hebrew name has been given to the child. However, in the case of women, many of whom only had Arabic names, there is now a change taking place to provide for the name to be given in Hebrew with a name which reflects the meaning of the Arabic name. Sometimes the names are hyphenated, with the Hebrew and Arabic names adjoining one another. An example of this would be Djamela. This means "beautiful" in Arabic, and in Hebrew it would be referred to as Yaffa, or Djamela-Yaffa. This refers only to the female names. Males were never called by an Arabic name without a Hebrew name. One could be referred to as Shelomo-Selem with the attached hyphenated Arabic equivalent of Solomon, but never would have been named Selem alone. Another example would be Yehuda-Aslan, meaning "lion" in Arabic, which is the equivalent of the Ashkenazi Yehuda-Leib, meaning "lion" in Yiddish. The custom of naming, therefore, would be to call the child by his own name, with the second name as that of his father (once the grandparents have already had names given for them). For example, Albert J. Ades is Albert the son of Joseph Ades. His father, Joseph A. Ades, is the son of Abraham Ades. This is the Sephardic Syrian way of maintaining the connection between the name of the child and the name of the father, e.g., Yosef ben Abraham. Thus, it is always possible to discern from whose family someone originates by the order in which his name is arranged, and one can immediately tell the father and son, grandsons, etc.<sup>4</sup> Family names were often selected from the names of cities, professions, or trades.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Berit Milah (Circumcision)*

When the father is qualified to serve as a *mohel* for his own child, he takes priority. Otherwise, a qualified *mohel* is used.<sup>6</sup>

Qualifications for a *mohel* in the Syrian community include his being pious, a Sabbath observer, and acceptable to the rabbinat as conversant with all of the laws of circumcision. He may not use any kind of clamp whatsoever. He may use a *magen*, which is a loose shield.<sup>7</sup>

The *Berit Milah* is held early in the morning, generally at the *Shaharit* service in synagogue, although it is often held in the home.<sup>8</sup>

The community does not observe a *Shalom Zakhar* on the Friday evening before the circumcision. They do, however, hold a festive religious gathering called, in Arabic, *Shadd-il-Asse*, which means "pulling of the pods" (of the myrtle branches, a shrub [*hadassim*] used for religious observance.)<sup>9</sup> According to Kabbalistic teachings, the myrtle branches serve to protect the newborn male child, as explained in the *Zohar*. Since he is not yet a complete Jew until he is circumcised, a *limud* (a study session) takes place to protect the lad, as instructed in the *Zohar*.<sup>10</sup> Once the *limud* is over, everyone sings *pizmonim* and takes delight in the delicacies which are prepared for the occasion. The order of all the services connected with the *Berit Milah* can be found in the excellent source book entitled *Berit Olam*, which is the authentic source of Syrian tradition in these matters.

There is no special chair for *Eliyahu hanabi* (Elijah the Prophet). Instead, there is a special *parokhet* which has the name *Eliyahu hanabi* inscribed upon it. This is placed on top of a chair which is designated as Elijah's Chair. No one sits in that chair. It symbolizes the presence of Elijah the Prophet at this occasion. At the Syrian *Berit Milah*, there is a beautiful, unique custom connected with the *Seneet Eliyahu hanabi* ("the tray of Elijah the Prophet"). This is a large round tray of several tiers filled with beautiful flowers and lit candles on its many levels. Individual guests place contributions on the tray with the understanding that this is a special good omen. At the conclusion of the *Berit Milah* ceremonies, the tray, with all its contents, is auctioned off to the highest bidder, who may donate as much as several hundred dollars for it. He then distributes the money he paid for the tray to charity and usually includes the money which was on the tray in his charitable contributions.<sup>11</sup> Often, people choose to retain this money on the tray as special *Mamon shel berakha* (blessed money), and they will take small amounts of this money to start a new business, to make a down payment on a new home, to use it for a special purchase, all with the implicit belief that the money being used for the purchase will bring blessing to the endeavor being contemplated.<sup>12</sup>

Among the most popular *pizmonim* chanted are *Yehi shalom beheiteinu (Makam Zeba)*, *Ata ahubi (Makam Zeba)*, *Ma tob ma naim (Makam Zeba)*, *Ahalel veagila (Makam Zeba)*, *Yahon Kel*



*zur behemlato (Makam Zeba), and Eerokh mahlal nibi (Makam Zeba).*<sup>13</sup>

The actual ceremony of the *Berit Milah* is as follows: The father stands holding the baby and he recites, *Sas anakhi al imratekha . . . Az yaalu al mizebahakha parim*. The father then says aloud, *Ashrei tibeḥar utekarev yishkon hazerekha*, to which everyone present responds, *Nisbea betub beitekha kedosh heikkhalekha*. The father then recites, *Im eshkaḥekkh Yerushalayim tishkaḥ yemini tidbak leshoni . . .* (Psalm 137:5-6). The father then chants the *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Eḥad*. He then recites, twice, *Hashem melekh Hashem malakh Hashem yimlokh leolam vaed*, and the people present repeat it after him. He then recites *Ana Hashem hoshia na* (twice), which the people repeat after him, and then he concludes with *Ana Hashem haẓliḥa na* (twice), which those present repeat after him.<sup>14</sup>

The father of the child then declares, *Birshut moray verabotay*, to which they respond, *Birshut shamayim*. The father then recites the blessing, *Barukh ata Hashem . . . vezivanu lehakheniso biberito shel Abraham abinu*. All present respond, *Keshem shehikhenasto labrit kakh tizke lehakhenisehu latorah velamizvot velahupa ulemaasim tobim*.<sup>15</sup>

The *sandak* sits on the chair and places the child on his knees, after which the *mohel* recites, *Ze hakise shel Eliyahu hanabi malakh haberit zakhur latob*. The *mohel* then recites the blessing before enacting the *milah (Vezivanu al hamilah)*. Immediately after the *milah* has been completed, the father recites the blessing *Sheheḥeyanu* according to the (teaching of the) Rambam. This is followed by *Meḥizah b'feh*. The rabbi then recites *Bore peri hagefen* and then takes a fragrance and recites *Bore minei besamim*. The rabbi then continues with the blessing, *Barukh ata Hashem . . . asher kidesh yedid mibeten . . . barukh ata Hashem koret haberit*. The rabbi then recites the prayer, *Elokeinu v'Elokei aboteinu kayem et hayeled hazeh leabiv ule'imo veyikare shemo beyisrael* (and here the child is given a name), *Keshem shenikhnas laberit . . . ulemaasim tobim, vekhen yehi raẓon venomar amen*. This is followed by *Shir hamaalot, Ashrei kol yerei Hashem*, and the *Kaddish*.<sup>16</sup> The *Kaddish* recited at the conclusion is *Kaddish shalem*, and it is said by everyone present who has lost a parent at some time and is thereby permitted to recite the *Kaddish*.

The recitation of the *Kaddish* by all present on the occasion of the *Berit Milah* is to demonstrate that here, on this happy occasion, a new Jewish soul is coming into the fold of the Jewish people to help to replenish the loss of those who are being commemorated by the recitation of the *Kaddish*.<sup>17</sup>

The mother is not present in the same room where the *Berit Milah* takes place. However, she does attend the *seudah shel mizvah* of the *Berit*. It is traditional for her to come dressed in a long white gown. Some of the wine from the cup whereupon the blessing over the wine was recited by the *mohel* is given to the mother as a special honor to her.<sup>18</sup>

The honor of serving as *sandak* is customarily distributed as follows: The first time it is given to the paternal grandfather; the second time it is given to the maternal grandfather; the third time it again goes to the paternal grandfather; and for the fourth, it again goes to the maternal grandfather. It would continue rotating between the grandfathers unless they wish to give the honor of *sandak* to any other cherished members of the family or to a friend whom the father of the newborn child wishes to designate for this great privilege. The honor is usually conferred upon an older person.<sup>19</sup>

The grandmother is usually accorded the honor of being "god-mother," although there is no specific name for her in this ceremony. As a sign of honor, she passes the baby around for some to have the privilege of holding him for a moment. A very special *kibbud* is to give an older brother, an elder in the family, or the rabbi—the honor of placing the baby on the Chair of Elijah. Throughout this ceremony the baby is passed from one to the other on a pillow.

The baby boy is named at the circumcision. He is named, for example, "Moshe ben Aharon Sutton." The family name is thus included in the religious ceremony immediately after the father's Hebrew name.

The *seudah shel mizvah* (religious banquet) is observed with a breakfast (usually dairy) and does not include meat as a part of the celebration. There are no special *Haraḥaman* prayers in the *Birkat hamazon* (Grace after meals) to mark the occasion. The *pizmonim* sung at the meal are the same as those already enumerated.<sup>20</sup>

Because a baby girl is "Jewish" from birth, there is no need for a special ceremony, *limud* (study session), to be held in order to afford

her special protection, as she is already considered to be protected.<sup>21</sup>

There are no special ceremonies in the Syrian community beyond the *Berit Milah*, except for *Pidyon Haben* in the case of a firstborn son. There are no ceremonies marking the child's initiation into Jewish studies or in connection with his first day in school.

#### *Pidyon Haben (Redemption of the First-Born Son)*

The *Pidyon Haben* usually takes place on the evening of the thirty-first day.<sup>22</sup> Aleppoans insist on thirty days plus twelve hours, as they generally do not accept the concept that part of the day is considered as the whole day. Damascenes, however, abide by thirty days and any additional time, so long as it is on the thirty-first night. The mother of the first-born attends the occasion dressed in her bridal gown.

Prior to beginning the *seudah*, the father, mother, and the *Kohen*, through whom the father will redeem the child, sit down at a table to enact the following ceremony:

The *Kohen* asks the mother to make the following declaration in Hebrew: *Zeh beni bekhori lo hipalti*, meaning, "This is my son, my first-born, and I have not miscarried," thus indicating that the *Pidyon Haben* is in proper fulfillment of the Biblical command relating to the need for this ceremony (only required for those who are the first of their mother's womb). The *Kohen* then continues to state in Hebrew, *Zeh haben bekhori hu vehakadosh barukh hu ziva lifdoto shene'emar ufeduyav miben hodesh tifdeh b'erkehha kesef hameshet shekalim beshkel hakodesh, esrim gera hu*.<sup>23</sup>

The *Kohen* then asks the father if he wishes to redeem his son, to which the father responds positively with the traditional formula, *Ani rozeh lifdoto*. The five silver pieces used are always genuine silver. These *shekalim* are given to the *Kohen*. In those congregations where the father buys the Israeli *shekalim* from the congregation, following the ceremony, the father exchanges regular money with the *Kohen* for the return of the Israeli *shekalim*, which he then donates back to the congregation for future use.<sup>24</sup> The essence of the ceremony is that the father recites the blessing *Al pidyon haben*, followed by the *Shehehayanu*.<sup>25</sup> Damascenes also recite the blessing over the spices (*besamim*). The father then gives the coins to the *Kohen*, stating: "This is the redemption of my son, my first-born," and the *Kohen* takes the

five silver pieces from him and declares that he has "received these silver coins in redemption of this son who is now considered as redeemed in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." The *Kohen* concludes by offering the prayer that, just as the child has entered into redemption, so may he enter into the acquisition of Torah knowledge, and may he be taken under the canopy to marry during the lifetime of his father and his mother together with all the House of Israel. The *Kohen* then places his hand upon the child's head and recites the *Birkat Kohanim*,<sup>26</sup> followed by the blessing of *Hamalakh hagoel oti mikol ra*. He then recites the blessing over the wine, drinks from it himself, and gives both the father and the mother some of the wine to drink. *Pizmonim* are sung and the *seudah shel mizvach* ensues.

#### *Adoption*

The most desirable procedure is to be "foster parents" who will raise a legitimately born Jewish orphan in his or her own name and provide for the child as if it were their own. The reward for this is great, as it is stated, "Whosoever raises an orphan is considered by the Torah as giving constant charity."<sup>27</sup> However, the community reluctantly accepts the adoption of non-Jewish children only (although they do not normally otherwise allow the admission of any proselytes). Only in rare circumstances, where all the information about a Jewish child is available, may parents adopt a Jewish child. The preference for a non-Jewish child is in order to avert all problems of *mamzerut*, etc. Notarized documents describing the lineage of the child who has been adopted must be presented to the Bet Din for their approval. The Bet Din will follow up by seeing that the circumcision (in the case of a boy) and *tebila leshem gerut* (immersion for the purpose of conversion) will take place in accordance with Halakha under the supervision of the Syrian rabbinat. The child is immersed in the water of the *mikveh* three times by the father, who stands in the *mikveh* holding the baby. This is usually done for a girl at about the age of three months. Children who were adopted are so advised before the age of twelve. A girl will then go to the *mikveh* again at the age of twelve, and a boy will do the same at the age of thirteen in order to personally "accept the commandments" on their own. Their Jewishness until this time had relied upon the Talmudic dictum (*Ketubbot* 11a, *Baba Meziya* 12a), *Zakhir leadam sheho bifanav* ("one may take favorable

action on a person's behalf without their consent"), which was the rationale behind the first appearance before the Bet Din in early childhood. Now that they are mature, they must answer the questions of the Bet Din affirming their acceptance of the entire Torah and its commandments.<sup>28</sup>

The listing of the adopted children is maintained in the records of the Bet Din. An adopted child may be given the same name as the parent adopting him or her. It is not required that they be called Abraham or Sarah. The fact that the child is a convert to Judaism will be officially denoted by the designation of the child's name as "so and so, the son of Abraham our Father" or, for a girl, "so and so, the daughter of Abraham our Father." Adopted children may, of course, be named for the paternal or maternal grandparents, so long as the formula of their naming includes the name of the Patriarch "Abraham our Father" to signify that they are converts to Judaism. In all official documents, adopted children are referred to as *hager hameumaz* (for a male) or *hagiorat hameumezet* (for a female) in order to avoid any confusion.<sup>29</sup> The adopted child must always have available the adoption certificate presented by the Bet Din in order to confirm his or her Jewishness when called upon for verification of religious status. When the child marries, the Ketubbah will include her name to read in this type of format, *Ribkah bat Abraham abinu veMoshe hamegadla* thereby designating the fact that she was adopted, while giving proper recognition to the father for having brought her up, which is a great *mizvah*. The same formula would pertain to a male.<sup>30</sup>

#### As Practiced by Moroccan Jews

##### Birth

To the Moroccan Jews, a large family is extremely important, and a premium is blatantly placed on the importance of male children.<sup>31</sup> Whenever a child is born, a great deal of joy fills the household and, indeed, the entire community. When a son is born, he is welcomed with the salutation *Barukh haba*, and his father receives the abundance of congratulations from his family and friends with the greeting *Besiman tov*. The birth of a daughter is greeted with the salutation *Mazal tov*, expressing congratulations to the parents.

#### *Zeved Habat (Naming a Girl)*

The naming of a girl is done at home in the Moroccan community. Members of the congregation are invited to the home for the naming ceremony, known as *Zeved habat*. In the naming ceremony, the rabbi takes the infant girl into his hands and he says these Biblical quotations: *Yaalat hen yonati behagvei hasela, Ahat hi yonati, and Vayevarkhu et Rivka vayomeru la ahotenu at hayi leafei revava veyirash zarekh et shaar soneav*, followed by a *Mi sheberakh* in which the girl is named. The text for the naming of the girl is as follows:

Mi sheberakh imotenu Sarah veRivka Rahel veLeah uMiriam hanevia vaAvigayil veEster hamalka bat Avihayil, hu yevarekh et hayalda haneima hazot veyikare shemah beyisrael [here her name is inserted] bemazel tov uvisheat berakha veyigadlah bivriyut shalom umenuha viyazakeh et aviha veet imah lirot besimehata uvehupata bevanim zekharim osher v'khavod deshenim veraananim yenuvun beseiva vekhen yei razon venomar amen.

This is followed with the *pizmon* entitled *Biti kolekh shamati* or *Hakol yashuv leafar*.<sup>32</sup>

The women raise their voices in ululations while the naming of the child is taking place in order to express their great joy at the birth of the lass. A *seudah* takes place after the ceremony.

#### *Berit Milah (Circumcision)*

In Morocco, as soon as a male child was born, the teacher in the *heder* was advised, and he would come with five of his students, who would carry with them various "letters" which would be read to counteract the "evil eye" in order to chase away Lilith, the female demon whose role it was to prey on women in childbirth and their children.<sup>33</sup> These traditions are vividly recalled in America.

Lilith, according to Talmudic tradition, appears after the birth of a child as a female demon with a woman's face, long hair, and wings.<sup>34</sup> Midrashic sources bring various versions of the legend relating to the rise of Lilith. In one of these, she is identified with the mother of all living things, Eve, who was created from earth at the same time as Adam, and who, unwilling to give up her equality, fought with him.

Lilith pronounced God's name and flew away into the air, but was retrieved by the Almighty, Who sent three angels after her and found her in the Red Sea. She was told to return, according to the request of Adam, and was warned that if she did not, one hundred of her sons would die every day. She refused, claiming that she was specifically created to do harm to newborn infants. However, she was ultimately forced to swear that, whenever she saw the image of those angels in an amulet, she would forfeit her power over the infant, who was thus protected.<sup>35</sup>

Another similar legend has Lilith as a demon who kills infants and endangers women in childbirth. Thus, the children from the Talmud Torah would safeguard the newborn child by reading from the "letters" that brought such Biblical sections as *Hamalakh hagoel oti*, *Ben porat Yosef*, *Shir hamaalot esa einay el heharim*, etc. After the children chanted these protective prayers, they would hang the "letters" all around the house where the mother of the newborn child resided. Members of the family would reward the children with candies and they would return to school, having performed their task well.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the perceived danger to any uncircumcised child who was considered vulnerable to harm, friends, neighbors, and family arranged for a *Tahdid* ceremony each night (see below) wherein they read certain phrases to counteract the "evil eye," followed by the singing of *piyutim*.<sup>37</sup> The room where the baby was kept was protected by affixing amulets over the bed and on all four corners and four walls of the room. The text of the amulets written for women who had just given birth to a male child included Psalm 126, and later Psalm 121, as well as the names of the three angels referred to earlier, Snwy, Snswy, and Smnglf, who had gone to do the Almighty's bidding in trying to return Lilith to her husband, Adam.<sup>38</sup> It was they who extracted from her the promise that, whenever their image was seen, she would be powerless against the infant. Thus, the amulet would contain a picture of Lilith with her arms outstretched and bound in fetters. On her body would be written, "Protect this newborn child from all harm." On both sides of her are the names of Adam and Eve and the patriarchs and matriarchs, while above are initial letters of a passage from Numbers 6:22-27, and below from Psalm 121. The text of other such amulets included the story of the Prophet Elijah meeting Lilith on her way to the house of a woman in childbirth "to give her the

sleep of death, to take her son and drink his blood, to suck the marrow of his bones, and to eat his flesh." Elijah excommunicates her, whereupon she undertakes not to harm women in childbirth whenever she would see or hear the names of the angels.

As additional protection against the potential harm which Lilith could cause, the words *Adam*, *Hava*, *Hutz*, and *Lilit* would be written on amulets as if to say, "Adam and Eve will protect this child, and you, Lilith, leave!"<sup>39</sup>

Certain insignia of circles drawn on signs or charts, placed around the room in which the baby was kept with his nursing mother, as well as on the doors, were considered to be protection against the demons.<sup>40</sup> One would walk around the room with a sword at night, especially on the night before the *Berit Milah*, waving the sword as if to kill any present demons, and reciting, *Vihi noam Hashem Elokeinu aleinu umaasei yadeinu konena aleinu umaasei yadeinu koneneihu*. This prayer would be recited as the knife was passed along all the walls, almost as if the would-be demons were clinging to the walls, where they would be destroyed by this sword. This, in essence, is the *Tahdid* ceremony. It was also common to place a knife under the pillow of the mother and the baby.<sup>41</sup>

In the evening, after the chanting of the specific portions to ward off the feared possible danger, one of the men present would take a knife in his hand, a type of sword, and throw it against the walls and in all the corners of the room where the mother and her newborn child slept. While doing so, this Biblical quotation would be recited, "And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him; and the Lord shut him in" (Genesis 7:16). The recitation of this Biblical phrase was considered a potent antidote to the danger which Lilith might bring about.<sup>42</sup>

On the night before the *Berit Milah*, the women friends of the mother of the child to be circumcised the next day would come and spend the entire night with her, consoling her, and protecting her from any evil which might take place on this seventh night after the birth. They assure her that the circumcision pains will pass quickly and that the child will heal in a short while and that he will be well.<sup>43</sup>

On the night prior to the *Berit Milah*, the Chair of Elijah the Prophet is brought from the synagogue (or from wherever it was last used) to the home of the newborn male who will be circumcised the

next morning. The *Kise shel Eliyahu hanavi* is decorated with many kinds of colorful fabrics in honor of Elijah the Prophet. On the eighth day, usually early in the morning, immediately after the *Shaharit* service, the father of the child, the *sandak*, and the *mohel* come to the home of the *baal berit* (the father of the newborn male child). They are accompanied by many of the worshippers who had joined them in prayer at the morning services, who have now come to participate in this happy occasion and in the *seudat miẓvah* which will follow.<sup>44</sup>

In some communities, such as Marrakech, there was a *Ḥebrat Eliyahu Hanavi*. They would bring the *parokhet* (Ark cover) from the synagogue and hang it on the walls of the room in the house where the *Milah* was to take place.

At the *Berit Milah* itself, the *sandak* (called *padrino* in Tangiers) would sit on the Chair of Elijah the Prophet to hold the baby during the surgical procedure. A dish of sand is placed near the *mohel* to signify that the child should be as fruitful as the grains of sand (and also for covering the *orka*). Here, too, at the circumcision, in order to protect the child from the evil spirits, one takes great care to place black hands on the walls of the room and to hang papers covered with protective Biblical quotations on the doors.<sup>45</sup>

The custom for naming a male child follows the same pattern as that of other Sephardim, with the exception of the Jews from Marrakech, who do not name for the living grandfather, as is the custom of other Moroccans. Thus, a Moroccan child will normally be called after his paternal grandfather first; the next child will be named after his maternal grandfather, etc., during their lifetimes. If the child is born on a specific holiday, he is usually given a name which reflects the central theme of the Festival. For example, if he is born on Hanukkah, he will probably be called Nissim; on Purim, he would be called Mordekhai; on Passover, he would be called Moshe, etc. Of course, these names would be given only after the names of the grandparents have already been given.<sup>46</sup>

Special *pizmonim* for the *Berit Milah* are sung at the ceremony.<sup>47</sup> When the father is himself the *mohel* (circumciser), he recites the ancient formula of the blessing for the circumcision of one's son, *Barukh ata Hashem . . . vezivanu lamul et haben*. This was the custom which prevailed in Spain itself until Nahmanides (Ramban) changed it to be the blessing *Al hamilah* even for a father who serves as

*mohel*. The father also recites the *lehakheniso beverito shel Avraham avinu* followed by the *Sheheḥeyanu* on the birth of each child.<sup>48</sup>

Following the usual declaration *Keshem shehikhenasto laberit*, the *mohel* continues with the recitation of *Yehi dam hanimol bikehal emunay*, followed by the blessings over the wine, *Bore peri hagefen*, and over the spice (myrtle), *Bore azei besamim*, and then the remaining prayers to name the child are recited.<sup>49</sup>

In Sefrou, it was the custom to conduct the services on the day of the *Berit Milah* in the home of the child. At the time of the circumcision, the *Kise Eliyahu* was placed close to the *mezuzah* in the house. Unlike Tangiers and other communities, where the *sandak* sat on this Chair of Elijah the Prophet, in Sefrou, they did not sit on the chair. The purpose of putting the chair near the *mezuzah* is to ensure long life for the child, since it states in the Torah, *Uketavtam al mezuzot betekha* (Deuteronomy 6:9) and then it soon says, *Lema'an yirbu yemeikhem* ("in order that your days may be long")—Deuteronomy 11:21). By so doing, it also serves as an obstruction to the would-be "demonic destroyers" who try to attack the child at this time. This protection is further anticipated since in the nearby Biblical quotation it says, *Ki im shemor tishmerun et kol hamizva hazot al shem Hashem shomrekha Hashem zilekha al yad yeminekha*.<sup>50</sup>

Where the family would permit, they auctioned off the honor of *sandak* to the highest bidder and gave the money to *zedekah*. He who purchases the honor sits in the Chair of Elijah the Prophet and holds the baby during the surgical procedure of the *milah*. This could take place only where the elders of the family had been given this honor on previous occasions and would therefore now be willing to give up the honor in order to provide funds for a worthy cause.<sup>51</sup>

In Sefrou, it was also their custom to recite the blessing *Lehakheniso beverito shel Avraham* before the *priyah* (procedure during surgical operation) and after the *priyah* to recite the *Sheheḥeyanu*.<sup>52</sup>

In Sefrou, the custom of making the blessing over the spices, *Bore minei besamim*, after the blessing over the wine is explained by mention of the *Zohar* and Midrashic reasons, such as: When Elijah the Prophet reveals himself, all of the souls stand and shine in their full brilliance, just like the *neshama y'teira* (additional soul) on the Sabbath. When he leaves, they feel sorrowful and therefore they sniff the spices, just as they do on Saturday night in order to uplift their spirits

and to refresh their souls. Another reason for our making the blessing over the spices is: When Abraham our Patriarch was circumcised, the young people of his household placed spices on the hill. They dried up and became wormy under the beating sun, causing them to give off a strong penetrating odor which was accepted by the Almighty as the fragrance of the spices of the altar.<sup>53</sup>

During the week following the child's circumcision, it was the custom of the women in Sefrou to adorn themselves with cummin plants, since the odor which emanates from them was reputed to help heal the skin of the child who had been circumcised.<sup>54</sup>

If for health reasons the *Berit Milah* could not take place on the eighth day, they made certain not to hold it on the fifth day of the week, Thursday, so that the third day following circumcision should not fall on Shabbat. This third day is considered to be the most painful day in the healing process, and, when it can be prevented, the law proscribes the undue suffering of the child on the Sabbath day.<sup>55</sup>

Nowadays, the circumcision ceremonies are held at the synagogue. In former times, the child was accompanied by several youngsters, each of whom carried something relating to the circumcision ceremony. One carried a torch of a dozen candles to represent the twelve tribes of Israel; another, a dish of sand, which represents the proliferation of the seed of Abraham; another, the circumcision knife; and another, some trinkets for the infant. At the door of the synagogue, the grandfather would come to receive the newborn whom he welcomes with the traditional quotation, *Barukh haba*. These are ceremonies derived from such communities as Rabat-Salé.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Pidyon Haben (Redemption of the First-Born Son)*

The *Pidyon Haben* takes place at the beginning of the thirty-first night after birth.<sup>57</sup> At the conclusion of the ceremony of the *Pidyon Haben*, in Sefrou, the *Kohen* would recite the blessing over both the wine and the spices, or over the *hadas* (myrtle twigs), *Bore azei besamin*.<sup>58</sup>

It was the custom in Sefrou for the *Kohen* to return the money of the redemption to the father of the child at the time of the redemption or a little while thereafter, with everyone knowing that the money of the redemption would be returned to the father. The reason is that,

since there is a question about one's being an authentic *Kohen*, he should not take money from the father of the son. The money is therefore returned after the ceremony.<sup>59</sup>

In Tangiers, it was the custom for the *Kohen* to go to the mother of the child and to give her five silver coins as a gift. She would make a *kiryon* (by lifting up the five silver coins in order to acquire them, according to Halakhah). She would then give the five silver coins to her husband, and he would redeem their son with them by giving the coins to the *Kohen*. Sometimes the families gave their own silver coins to the *Kohen*, but it was unusual for him to keep the money for himself.<sup>60</sup>

During the course of the *Pidyon Haben* ceremony, they would have amulets hanging on the walls and on the door to protect the child, as at the circumcision.

In Rabat-Salé, there was a custom in connection with the redemption of the first-born wherein the whole procedure was dramatized. The *Kohen* would come to the mother of the newborn child together with the woman who delivered the child (midwife). He would ask questions of the mother to determine that this was her own child, her first child, the child of her husband, and that she had never had any other children. The other woman was present to hear the conversation and also in fulfillment of the normal *zeniut* (modesty), which required that he not be alone with the mother. On the thirty-first day after the birth, the father would hold the gathering for the *Pidyon Haben*. The *Kohen* would come to the home, which by now was thoroughly decorated for the occasion. The mother of the newborn was dressed in her finest, as would be all of the guests. The *Kohen* would again repeat the questions he had asked her at an earlier stage, and the mother would give the same answers, reaffirming that this was her first child. The *Kohen* would then take the child and recite various prayers from the Psalms. At the end of the saying of the prayers, the father would distribute perfume and flowers to all who would come by his door. However, all of a sudden, the *Kohen* rises and makes it appear that he is going to leave the house with the child. The entire scene immediately becomes pathetic and deeply moving, with the wailing of the mother, who fears that her child will be taken from her. The father, on his part, repurchases the son, offering a ransom of (five) jewels, coins, or precious stones, and only after there is an agreement that these are accepted

the grandparents is used. It is interesting to note that the women do not necessarily have Hebrew names, but may have Spanish names only, such as Rosa, Fortuna, etc. In all instances, the exact name, whether in Spanish or Hebrew, is used. Of course, as with everyone else, sometimes the English names given by the parents do not conform to the Hebrew names (either in meaning or in translation). What is of extreme importance is the fact that the Spanish name (which was often the only name given to the child) is the name that would be used in the marriage contract, a divorce document, or any other such official document.<sup>68</sup>

A first-born child is always named Bekhor (for a son) or Bukhureta (for a girl, meaning Bekhora) or by the respective diminutives Buki (boy) or Bukiza (girl). These are especially honored names.<sup>69</sup>

#### *Zeved Habat (Naming a Girl)*

The naming-of-a-girl ceremony, called *fadás*, is a special ceremony held in the home when the mother has recovered.<sup>70</sup> The child is brought in on a pillow by a young relative dressed up as a junior bride. A special song is sung to welcome the newborn daughter. Her parents and grandparents gather round her for the naming ceremony. This ceremony is called *Zeved habat*. The appropriate verses of the Song of Songs (*Shir hashirim*) are sung by everyone present. A special *Mi Sheberakh* prayer is recited by the rabbi for the mother. The naming of the girl then takes place. The formal ceremonies are followed by a celebration, with lavish offerings of food and drink served amidst the singing and joy in which all the guests participate.

#### *Berit Milah (Circumcision)*

The ceremony for the circumcision is called *Birkat Milah* by the Judeo-Spanish Jews and is not referred to as *Berit Milah*.<sup>71</sup>

The father and the *sandak* are called to the Sefer Torah on the Sabbath before the *Berit*. No special *piyutim* are sung for this occasion.<sup>72</sup>

There is a *shemira* on the night before the *Birkat Milah*, at which special portions of the *Zohar* are read.<sup>73</sup>

The same custom applies to the birth of a girl regarding placing a *yad* (hand) on the crib of the child and giving amulets to the mother and father as protective measures for the well-being of the child.

Often, in order to secure a large crowd, the *Birkat Milah* is held in the afternoon rather than the morning. Preferably, it should be held in the morning in fulfillment of the dictum *Zerizim makdimim lemitzvot*, meaning "Those who are zealous try to perform the commandments as early as possible."<sup>74</sup>

In the Judeo-Spanish tradition, the child is given a special paper (amulet) by the *mohel*, and it is left under his pillow. The amulet is in the shape of either a male doll or of a *magen* (circumcision shield). One of these amulets is placed under the pillow of the child, another is given to the mother, and a third one is given to the father. These are considered to be protection to ward off the *mazikim* (evil spirits).<sup>75</sup>

The concept of the *yad* (hand) to ward off the "evil eye" is derived from the Biblical episode which describes how Rebecca went out for the first time and (as tradition relates) Eliezer of Damascus gave her a "hand" to ward off the "evil spirits."<sup>76</sup>

At a *Birkat Milah*, when the child is given a name which is the same name as that of some of the persons present, those bearing the name which has been conferred upon the child are given a slap by all the others who are present at the ceremony. The reason for this is explained in the Kabbalah through the concept of *shiluv* (infusion of letters, wherein the word *reshama* and its letters are interwoven with the letters of the name of a person, which determines a certain kind of personality). Therefore, all present who carry the same name as the newborn child receive this slap to alert them to the fact that their attributes, which were developed as a result of the special combination of their name and soul, will now be shared by a new member of the House of Israel.<sup>77</sup>

There is a special *Kise shel Eliyahu* (Chair of Elijah) which is draped in purple and gold braided material to give it the appearance of a throne. The drapes for such special occasions are passed down from generation to generation in the family. (This is called *chevres*.) The chair is placed right next to where the *sandak* (godfather) sits.<sup>78</sup> The *sandak* is seated on a very elaborately decorated pillow which is given to him and which is placed on the table where he will sit to hold the baby in his lap through the circumcision ceremony. The fancy, embroidered pillowcases used for the *sandak* and for carrying the baby are all a part of the trousseau which the bride displayed at her *ashugar* (showing of her trousseau). Thus, the handiwork prepared by the mother of the bride comes into full display and is admired with great



pride by all present. A book of the Bible or a prayer book is placed upon the *Kise shel Eliyahu* to denote that this chair is not meant to sit upon, but rather represents the presence of Elijah the Prophet, who is the guardian angel over the young lad who is now being introduced into the Jewish fold through this circumcision ceremony. A special song describing Elijah the Prophet both as Elijah and as Pinhas is sung in the unique tune for this *pizmon*, which has come down through the ages.<sup>79</sup> The song explains that the *dam berit* (the blood of the circumcision) is in honor of Elijah, etc. The *kitada* (godmother), wife of the *sandak*, who has carried the infant to the synagogue on a beautifully embroidered cushion, enters the synagogue room where the circumcision is to take place.<sup>80</sup> The child is welcomed with the proclamation, *Berukhim hayoshuim veba'omedim ubarukh haba beshem Hashem ubarukh haba*. Everyone rises in honor of the child being welcomed for the circumcision. A special *pizmon*, *Ya amzeh*, is chanted by all present. After the *Bore peri hagefen* prayer, a lemon is used for the recitation of the blessing *Hanoten reah tov baperot*. Some use instead the *ruda* (a green mint) in order to recite the benediction, *Bore isvei besamim*.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to fragrant colognes, the Judeo-Spanish often distribute rose water, upon which the *Bore minei besamim* blessing would be recited.<sup>82</sup>

The traditional explanation for the inclusion of some appropriate fragrant vegetation, so that one of the additional blessings relating to the sense of smell can be recited, is explained in the following manner: At the time of creation, as described in Genesis 2:7, when God formed man out of the dust of the ground, it states, *Vayipah becpav nishmat hayyim vayehi haadam lenefesh haya*, meaning, "And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." It is considered that the *neshama* (soul) will be given to the child now as he is named. The Kabbalah attaches a great deal of importance to the name as giving rise to the soul. Since we have now named the child, its soul has been activated. We therefore thank God for the sense of smell, which reminds us of the original infusion of the soul into man through the nostrils of Adam Harishon (Adam, original man). Thus, the recitation of the blessing over a fruit or a fragrant-smelling herb enables us to properly thank God for the sense of smell.<sup>83</sup>

Some congregations have a special ornate Chair of Elijah to use at

circumcisions. However, as described above, those communities not having a special *Kise shel Eliyahu* decorate a chair by draping over the special purple cloth braided with gold, etc.

One of the interesting *segulot* enacted by the Judeo-Spanish community is in connection with the Chair of Elijah the Prophet. A glass of water is placed under the chair. According to tradition, Elijah the Prophet blesses the water so that those who are childless without a son, or who have only daughters, may drink from that water and hope that a son will be born to them. Another custom enacted as a *segula* is that the child is never brought in without a *yad* (hand) and *ruda* (green mint-like herb), which are believed to ward off the evil eye.<sup>84</sup>

The prayers are recited in Hebrew only, and, immediately after the circumcision has taken place, everyone recites, *Keshem shehikhnas labrit ken takhnisehu latora ulemizvot, lahuppah ulemaasim tovot vekhen yehi razon venomar amen*. They then continue to say, *Ye dam hanimol bikehal emunay kereah nihoadh isheh lashem wiyrush layim kise Hashem*.<sup>85</sup> This is followed by the blessings over the wine and over the spices and the *Barukh . . . asher kidesh yedid mibete*. The ceremony concludes with the *Elokeinu v'Elokei avoteinu* prayer wherein the child is named. When the child is named, only the Hebrew name which is given to the child is mentioned. The name of the father is not included in the naming ceremony.<sup>86</sup> There are numerous *pizmonim* chanted. Among the popular *pizmonim* chanted are *K. hazvakot, Eliyahu Hanavi* (before the *milah*), and, immediately after the *milah*, while the *mohel* is bandaging the child, they sing *Y amzeh*.

In the *Birkat hamazon* there are no special *Harahaman* prayers except for one that calls for a special blessing on the parents, the circumcised child, the *sandak*, and the *sandaka*.

The order of selecting a *sandak* and *sandaka* is as follows: For the first child, it is the parents of the husband; for the second child, the parents of the wife. These are the only two honored participants in the ceremony aside from the *mohel*, father, and child.<sup>87</sup>

#### *Pidyon Haben (Redemption of the First-Born Son)*

The mother wears her wedding gown for the *Pidyon Haben*, and the infant is carried in on a very special pillow covered with an em

broidered pillow case. The lemon is used to recite the blessing, *Barukh . . . hanoten reah tov baperot*.

The *pizmonim* usually chanted on happy occasions are sung at the *Pidyon Haben* as well. There are no special *pizmonim*.

#### Adoption

Adoption of a Jewish child is preferred in the Judeo-Spanish community. There is an old custom that, after a given period of time, when the couple knows that it is not possible for them to bear children, they then ask either a brother or sister (after the brother or sister and their respective spouses have themselves fulfilled the Biblical commandment of *Peru urevu*, meaning "be fruitful and multiply" [Genesis 1:22]; that is, after they have already given birth to a son and daughter on their own) to give them the next child that will be born to them. Their request is usually acceded to by their kinsmen, who want them to have the joy of bringing up a child in their home. Thus, we sometimes find a niece or nephew who has been adopted by the uncle and aunt.<sup>88</sup>

Also, when a sister or a brother had only daughters, their brother or sister would sometimes pledge to give their next boy to the sister or brother for adoption.

It is a quaint custom among the Judeo-Spanish Jews that when one finds the first tooth of a child, they undertake to serve *kulivas* (a cooked wheat sweetened with sugar) to all the members of the family at a special gathering to mark the happy occasion.<sup>89</sup>

#### As Practiced by Spanish and Portuguese Jews

##### Birth

The birth of a boy and girl in a family is the minimal, basic fulfillment of the Biblical command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22).

#### *Zebed Habat (Naming a Girl)*

The naming of a girl is enacted through the *Zebed habat* ceremony in the Spanish and Portuguese tradition. In a private ceremony, the mother comes (or brings the child) to the synagogue and recites the *Birkat hagomel* (thanksgiving prayer for recovery). The *hazan* blesses the child with: *Yonati bepagevei hasela beseter hamaderega. Hare'ini et marayikh. Hashemiini et kolekh. Ki kolekh areb umarekh naveh. If it is the first-born daughter, he continues with the words, Ahat hi yonati tamati. Ahat hi le'ima. Bara hi leyoladeta. Rauha banot vaye-asheruha. Melakhot upilageshim veyehaleluha. A Mi sheberakh prayer to name the child is then enunciated. This is followed by Shir hamaalot ashrei kol yerei Hashem (Psalm 128).<sup>90</sup>*

Another form of naming the daughter is for the *Abi habat* (father of the daughter) to appear in synagogue when the *Tbrah* is being read, at which time a special *Mi sheberakh* prayer for the good health of the mother will be offered, as well as *Mi sheberakh* to confer the name upon the newborn daughter. The father is called to the *Sefer* on the Sabbath following the birth of the child for this ceremony.<sup>91</sup>

Whereas the tradition of the child for this ceremony includes the naming of the child for the living father, this was not the procedure followed in Holland, where the child would be named only for a living grandparent, or for a deceased grandparent, but not for a parent.

When the child was given the name of the grandparent (or, in America, the name of the parent), the child would usually be designated with the exact same name as the one in whose honor he or she is to be called. Nowadays, there is no discernible connection between the Hebrew name and the English name that is given. However, until recent times, the same name, both in Hebrew and in English, would have been given to the newborn child (who would carry the name of the individual for whom he or she was being named in the exact same fashion). Sometimes, one was given only an English name without a Hebrew name, in which case a male would be called to the *Tbrah* by that English name.

Among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, there are no hard-and-fast rules on the procedure for naming a child in regard to which

grandparent would take priority in the sequence of being honored by the naming of children. The general tradition among all Sephardim, however, is to name the first son for the paternal grandfather.<sup>92</sup>

#### *Berit Milah (Circumcision)*

Where a father is qualified to circumcise his son, he always takes priority over a *mohel*.<sup>93</sup> A *mohel* would otherwise always be required to perform the *Berit Milah* ceremony among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.

The normal qualifications for a *mohel*, such as observance of religious tenets, piety, surgical knowledge, etc., apply in the Spanish and Portuguese community, as elsewhere.

The *Berit Milah* ceremony is preferably held in the early morning in conjunction with the *Shaharit* service.<sup>94</sup> It was the earlier custom of the community to hold the circumcision ceremony at the home of the child or in the hospital. However, the recently adopted tradition in New York's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue (which is actually an ancient tradition) has brought many *Berit Milah* ceremonies back to the synagogue.<sup>95</sup>

The father of the child is called to the reading of the Torah on the Sabbath prior to the *Berit Milah* and is called as *Baal haberit*. A special prayer for the good health of the mother and the child is made on this occasion.<sup>96</sup>

In America, there is no special *Kise shel Eliyahu* (Elijah's Chair). A specific chair is therefore designated to become the Chair of Elijah for the circumcision ceremony. It should be noted that in Amsterdam there used to be two chairs used in the circumcision ceremony; one was a special *Kise shel Eliyahu*, and the second, a seat for the *sandak* (godfather). The two chairs were placed one beside the other because it would be considered a lack of reverence if the Chair of Elijah were used. Therefore, they required an additional chair for the *sandak* alongside Elijah's Chair.<sup>97</sup> The derivation for Elijah's Chair is explained by Abudarham, who found in *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* the tradition going back to the days when there was a decree against circumcision in the Land of Israel. Elijah the Prophet, in his zeal for fulfillment of this *mizvah*, took a child and ran away and hid in a cave. When the Almighty discovered him there and asked Elijah what he

was doing in the cave, Elijah replied, "I was zealous for the Lord God of Israel in seeing that the children of Israel are transgressing Your covenant with them, so I have come here to see that this circumcision is performed." The Almighty said to him, "By your life! Inasmuch as you have been zealous for the commandment of *milah*, everytime that they will perform a circumcision anywhere you will give testimony to the children of Israel, that they shall preserve this *mizvah*." Therefore, we place the Chair of Elijah, who is known as the Angel of the *Berit*.<sup>98</sup>

Another version of how Elijah was instructed to be present to give testimony at each *Berit Milah* derives from the following historical facts. In our early history, the entire people of Israel observed this commandment. However, when the two kingdoms emerged, it was found that the Kingdom of Ephraim was not diligent in observing the commandment of circumcision. Elijah the Prophet took an adamant stand against their flouting the law and beseeched the Almighty not to allow rain to fall upon their territory because of their violation of the covenant. Tradition thus teaches that God declared to this champion of the covenant that no *Berit Milah* would take place until he sat and saw with his own eyes that it was being performed per His dictates. Once it was an established requirement that Elijah be present, they developed the concept of a chair for him to sit upon at each *Berit Milah*.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, we know that nowadays any chair can be designated to be the special Chair for Elijah, and there does not seem to be among the Spanish and Portuguese tradition any special decoration of the chair as is the custom among other Sephardim.<sup>100</sup>

Before the child is brought in for the actual *Berit Milah* ceremony, the assembled congregation chants the following *pizmon*: *Berukhim atem kehal emunay. Ubarukh haba beshem Hashem. Yeled hayulad yiheyve besiman tob*. The child is then brought in. On the Sabbath, a different *pizmon*, entitled *Shabbat umilah*, is recited. The ceremony then follows in the normal procedure, with the *mohel* reciting the blessing *Al hamilah* and the father reciting the blessing *Lehakheniso biberito shel Abraham Abinu* and the *Shehecheyanu* on the occasion of each *Berit Milah*, followed by the response of the congregation, *Keshem shehikhenasto laberit*, followed by the blessing over the wine, which is recited by the *hazzan* or the rabbi (rather than by the *mohel*), and the child is given his name. Then Psalm 128 is recited,

and the congregation joins together in singing the *Kaddish shalem*. In many such cases, the recitation of the *Kaddish* is simply an expression of hope and joy and is in no way connected with mourning. The ceremony is conducted entirely in Hebrew.<sup>101</sup>

The mother is permitted to be present for the *berit*. She is always dressed in her finest for such an important milestone.<sup>102</sup>

Usually both sets of grandparents participate in the ceremony by bringing the child to the *mohel* on the way to the circumcision and by taking the child out of the room.

The *sardak* (godfather) is called *padrino*, and the *sandeket* (godmother) is called *madrina*. The baby is passed around on a beautiful pillow. There are no others besides the *sardak* and *sandeket* who carry the baby around.<sup>103</sup>

The formula for the naming of the child is to give him his name, for example, Abraham bar Yosef.

In America, the *seudat mizvah* which follows the *Berit Milah* is one which is not marked by any specific tradition. However, in Holland, it was their custom during the *Birkat hamazon* to recite many *Mi sheberakh* prayers for the various participants in the *Berit Milah* ceremony. This is hardly ever done here.<sup>104</sup>

There are no special foods prepared for the *seudah* among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.

The surgical instruments used by the Spanish and Portuguese *mohel* are the same as used by others.

There is no *Shalom zachar* ceremony on the Friday night prior to the *Berit Milah*.

On the night before the *Berit Milah* (as on the night before other special occasions, such as a wedding or a *Yahrzeit*), a special *limud* known as *meldado* is held. Selections from Torah, *Nebiim*, *Tehillim*, and rabbinic writings are read. This *meldado* is rarely held in America by Spanish and Portuguese Jews, although it was regularly observed in Holland.<sup>105</sup>

#### *Pidyon Haben (Redemption of the First-Born Son)*

An observant *kohen* (priest) is sought for the *Pidyon Haben*. The event takes place on the thirty-first day after the birth of the boy, usually in the evening, and the ceremony is concluded with a *seudah*.

#### *Adoption*

There is a special ceremony for the adoption of a non-Jewish child (which is preferred). However, Jewish children are adopted as well. For the non-Jewish child, *Berit Milah* is followed by *tebila* (ritual immersion in a *mikveh*) about a half-year later. Until such time, the child has no name whatsoever. When the child is named, he is given the name designated for him under the name of his new father; for example, Abraham bar Shemuel (assuming that the father's Hebrew name is Shemuel). There seems to be an exception that, on the occasion of the *Berit Milah* of a *ger* (proselyte), *Tahannunim* are recited in the synagogue (which is not the case when a regular *Berit Milah* is held).<sup>106</sup>

## UNIT II: RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS AMONG SEPHARDIC COMMUNITIES

< 6 Sessions >

### Enduring Understanding and Essential Question

Where Jews have lived has resulted in cultural and religious diversity because of contact with larger cultures in which they have lived.

How does a subset of a religious tradition legitimate itself in light of a larger tradition?

### Goals:

1. Familiarize students with basic Medieval Sephardic history covering the four periods between 700-1500.
2. Familiarize students with significant Sephardic people of the Middle Ages who influenced Jewish religious practices and customs, namely Maimonides, Joseph Karo and Ibn Gabirol.
3. Initiate students into different contemporary Sephardic observances of Shabbat (Kabbalat Shabbat and Torah service) and Passover.
4. Introduce students to various Sephardic liturgical music.
5. Acquaint students with the Sephardic life cycle events, *zeved bat*, and *brit milah*.

### Objectives:

At the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. describe elements of Sephardic Medieval history between the periods 700-1000 and 1000-1500 including the Islamic Golden Age; what made it a “Golden” time for Jews and what caused it to end.
2. identify and name one work of Maimonides, Joseph Karo and Ibn Gabirol.
3. a) describe three practices/customs of a Sephardic Kabbalat Shabbat service  
b) describe five practices/customs of a Sephardic Torah service  
c) describe five practices/customs of a Sephardic Passover Seder.
4. identify the sound of one kind of Sephardic Torah trope, one Shabbat song and one holiday song.
5. identify main points of a Sephardic *zeved bat* and *brit milah*.

**During the unit, students will have the opportunity to:**

## 1. visit a Sephardic Shabbat or holiday service

**Key Concepts:**

\* Sephardim: The Sephardim are not just one group of Jews who have identical customs--far from it. They represent the Jewish tradition as it has unfolded within their locale. Based on the A-Z Lexicon Concepts of Jews Terms, the literal meaning of Sephardim means 'inhabitants of Sephard', a place mentioned in the Bible and later identified as Spain or Iberian peninsula. The term 'Sephardim' designates those Jews tracing their descent to ancestors living in Spain and Portugal before expulsions of 1492 and 1497. Iberian Jews exhibited traditions of the Babylonian community and, during the 'Golden Age', produced important poets, philosophers, scholars, mystics, statesmen, and soldiers. From 1391, Christian persecution and mass conversions gave rise to a new class of *anusim*, (Marranos or 'New Christians'), many of whose descendants also sought refuge abroad long after professing Jews were driven out of Spain and Portugal. From the late 15th century, these refugees (*megorashim*) founded new communities as far afield as North Africa, Italy, Low Countries, England, Eastern Europe, Ottoman Empire, Israel and the United States. The Hebrew spoken in the State of Israel approximates the pronunciation of Sephardim, whose original vernacular (medieval Spanish or Portuguese) became the Judeo-Spanish dialect known as Ladino, Giudezmo, or Spaniolish. Flourishing Sephardic culture, including poetry, folklore and music was maintained (e.g. in Salonika) until the *Shoah*. In Israel, Sephardim and Oriental Jews now form over 50% of Jewish population, mostly as a result of mass *aliya* from Arab and Muslim lands.

**Misconception Alert:** Not all dark skinned Jews are Sephardic. Jews who are often mistaken for Sephardim include Italian, Balkan and Oriental Jews (Jews who have been in Israel for many generations and some claim since the destruction of the Temple).

**SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES: (“\*” means can be used in the Ashkenazic unit as well)**

## I. History:

Introduce students to the two periods of Sephardic Medieval History: A historic overview of the Islamic period (based on Max. I. Dimont's Jews, God And History).

From 700-1000 Islam spread from the Caspian Sea across North Africa to Spain and stopped in France by Martel. This expansion is called the Muslim Golden Age. In 1000, the empire broke up into Sultanates and Caliphates. For Jews, this was a time of relative peace and prosperity: Jews rose to posts of great eminence and they made many Greek translations of traditional works.. As a side note, the Karaites, a competing Jewish group who did not follow Rabbinic interpretation of the Torah, began revolting at this time.

From 1000-1500 huge political changes took place: The Crusaders attacked from Europe and the Mongols invaded from the East. The Turks annexed Egypt; the Almohades seized North Africa; and the Christians reconquered Spain thus marking the end of the Islamic Empire. This five-hundred year period witnessed the popularization of Jewish religious poetry and the shifting of the Center of Jewish life from the East to the West. This period marks the end of the Karaite revolt and it is also the end of the Jewish Golden Age in Spain.

After going over the basic historic points with students, watch any of the suggested films mentioned in “Reference” section below. Follow movie with students making an illustrated time line depicting the different movement of Jews during 600-1200 and 1200-1500. In the Source Materials from Unit I, please find excerpts from the Atlas of Medieval Jewish History, by Haim Beinart, (Simon and Schuster, 1992) which has many maps showing migration during the various Medieval periods. Another option is to have students read about the Jewish Golden Age in the Encyclopedia Judaica and make a flow chart from the student’s reading in the order of the occurrence. Break students up into small groups and have each make a flow chart based on one period. This exercise will encourage students to do a close reading of the history and give artistic students a chance to express the history in a visually creative way. Display it on the walls. (Note to teacher: I highly recommend you read Judaism, by Isidore Epstein [Penguin Books 1984] chapter seventeen or at least pages 180-194 for an excellent overview of these periods [located in Source Materials]).

Films:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All film information in this and other units is from *Medium*, an evaluative review published by Jewish Media Service /JWB, Dr. Eric Goldman, editor.



\* *Song of the Sephardi*. 75 min., color. Available from the Jewish Media Service, 15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010. This film recounts the story of the Spanish Jews from the time of the Golden Age in Moorish Spain to the Expulsion in 1492 and the Inquisition and then the dispersion in Istanbul, Salonica, Amsterdam, Israel, and America. This documentary film, featuring Rivka Raz and the Sephardic communities of Seattle and Jerusalem, focuses on the folk songs that have been preserved for over five hundred years and portrays the use of Judeo-Spanish in the synagogue and home.

\* This can be shown now or in the America or Israel units, but it really looks great for this unit as well!

Moroccan: *Roots of Exile: A Moroccan Jewish Odyssey*, 90 min., color, Available from First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014. This documentary contains rare film footage and examines the history of the Moroccan Jewish community including their Berber roots, Spanish heritage, and relations with their Arab neighbors. It also discusses the Moroccan-Jewish situation today and follows their dispersal to Europe, Canada, and Israel. It includes a wedding scene and depiction of holiday celebrations, both old and new.

For further information about Sephardi films, contact the American Sephardi Federation, 8 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10010.

## **II. Three Sephardic thinkers who have influenced Jewish religious practices and customs:**

Here is a time outline based on the figures below you can use to help students get the “big picture.”

- \* 700-1100 is the period of the Gaonim, i.e., the names of the heads of Babylonian universities disseminating Talmudic learning.
- \* 1100 is the time of Rashi’s Commentaries and Tosaphot (we will study him in the Ashkenazi unit because he was born in France).
- \* 1200 is when Maimonides wrote the Mishna Torah.
- \* 1600 is when Rabbi Joseph Karo, born in Toledo, Spain wrote the Shulchan Aruch.

A. **Rabbi Moses ben Maimon** (also known as Maimonides and by the acronym Rambam: 1135-1204)<sup>2</sup> was a prolific author, a highly regarded authority on Jewish life and a much sought after physician. Born in Cordoba Spain, Maimonides eventually settled with his family in Cairo where he became doctor to the ruling house and where he wrote his two most important works, the *Mishneh Torah*<sup>3</sup> (a codification of Jewish law, 1180) and *The Guide to the Perplexed* (a work intended to resolve the contradictions between Jewish law and contemporary philosophy, 1190). An active community leader, Maimonides destroyed the influences of the surviving Karaite community (a Jewish sect) in Cairo, wrote numerous Responsa and even altered various prayer practices. When he died on December 13, 1204, Jews worldwide mourned his passing.<sup>4</sup>

One of the distinctions between the environment Maimonides lived in and that of European Jews had to do with the amount of exposure they each received to both philosophy and reason. Where Maimonides lived it was common for educated Jewish boys to learn about Aristotelian philosophy, music, and the arts. For European Jews, however, this was not the case, and as a result, they were much less receptive to alternative systems of thought outside of normative halakhic Judaism. The Sephardim's exposure resulted in their puzzlement by the apparent "logic" of philosophy and "irrationality" of certain aspects of religion. Therefore Maimonides wrote a book to help remedy that situation called, *The Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh HaNevuchim)*. In "The Guide," Maimonides attempted to demonstrate that biblical verses contain many levels of meaning: some of which are easily accessible, while other requiring disciplined and determined study to discover. For example, Maimonides' students had difficulty believing the

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Ronald H. Isaacs' Rites of Passage: A Guide to the Life Cycle, KTAV Publishing house, Inc. 1992. pp12-13.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides arranged in a methodical and logical manner the established laws as set forth in the Talmud. This work of Maimonides was very important because the Talmud is so vast that before Maimonides' work, it was often difficult for a person to locate all the specific references on any given subject. Maimonides was one of the rabbis who began to codify the laws and set them in order according to subject matter, so one could look them up more easily.

<sup>4</sup> This history of Maimonides and activity adapted from Jewish History: Moments and Methods by Sorel Goldberg Loeb and Barbara Binder Kadden, Alternatives in Religious Education, Inc. p145.

miracles in the Bible like the parting of the Sea of Reeds. Maimonides explained to his students that miracles of this kind need not always be taken literally, but can serve as a poetic means for emphasizing the dramatic way in which God saved Jews from the hands of the Egyptians.

Activity: In the Source Materials please find an excerpt of Maimonides' basic principles of the Torah written in summary form. As noted above, special sociological forces were at work during his time and thus Maimonides felt a need to respond to them. These "basic principles" represent one of those efforts to underscore the unity of the philosophical and the legal components of Judaism. In the copy I provide, written by Isadore Twersky, there are twelve "principles" of various lengths (not to be confused with Maimonides' Thirteen Principles which are different). Pass out copies of the "basic principles" to students working in pairs. Ask them to try to determine 1) the principle(s) being noted and 2) the competing contemporary beliefs and or philosophies that Maimonides is responding to. For example, in principle number four, Maimonides notes the prophetic saying, "But the Eternal is the True God." His principle is that there is only one true God and the belief or philosophy that he is responding to is people's claim that there are other Gods that are "true." Ask students to try this with each principle. Come together as a class to go over responses.

B.\* **Rabbi Joseph Karo** wrote the *Shulchan Aruch* ("The Prepared Table") which is the most respected and authoritative code of Jewish law. The *Shulchan Aruch* (completed in 1555) is really an abbreviated and simplified form of the Arba Turim, a compendium of Jewish law consisting of four parts dealing with all parts of daily life. Since Karo was a Sephardic scholar, he was charged with ignoring the views of Ashkenazic (French and German) legal authorities. As a result, Moses Isserles of Poland, a sixteenth-century scholar known by the acronym Rama, wrote supplementary notes (called Glosses) to the *Shulchan Aruch* called the *Mappah* ("tablecloth"). The Glosses of Isserles set forth the views of Ashkenazic scholars and presented the customs of their communities. When Karo and Isserles do not agree on a particular custom, the Sephardim generally follow Karo while the Ashkenazim will most often follow Isserles.

1. Activity: **Note, this activity is only recommended for the teacher with extensive rabbinic/Judaic background and access to Hebrew traditional texts.** Dobrinsky of A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs

suggests the teacher review with students excerpts from the following pages of the Shulhan Aruch, Orah Hayyim and then have a class discussion based on the questions below:

Shabbat Hagadol: 430; Making Utensils Kasher: 451, 452; The Laws of Matzah: 453,454, 456, 458, 460-462 (Sephardim can eat egg matzah while the Ashkenazim take a more severe stance of only allowing plain Matzah); The Seder: 472-481.

- a) Why do you think the Sephardim did not forbid *kitniyyot* on Passover?
- b) How should Ashkenazim respond to the invitation of Sephardim for the Passover meals? What differences can be expected on the menu? May an Ashkenazi be present, considering these differences? (See *Yabia Omer* 5:37).
- c) Of what significance is it for some Sephardim to be given salt on the second night of Passover when they begin to count the *Omer*? What is salt considered a *segula* (a good sign) for?

2. Compare Passover Styles among Syrian, Moroccan, Spanish-Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish Jews. In Source Materials please find and read pp 253-284 from A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs, four all four groups. You can skip the section on Counting the Omer which will cut the reading down to half. Have students make a chart comparing and contrasting the different customs of observance. Each person will take turns presenting to their small group and all will take notes. Each group or person can focus on one Jewry. Ask students if there are any customs they liked and if they are curious to try them in future Seders.

3. Since the Shulchan Aruch contains all the information necessary for living a traditional Jewish life, ask students to consider what information they would need to live a Jewish life today (e.g., ethics, holidays)? Loeb and Kadden of Jewish History: Moments and Methods suggest selecting one area and generate a complete code of behavior for that area. They suggest using the Code of Jewish Law, by Rabbi Solomon Granzfried, Hebrew Publications Company, NY 1961.

C. ***Shlomo Ibn Gabirol*** (1021-69) was a poet and philosopher born in Spain. Among the poetry he wrote were *piyyutim*, religious reflections about God. *Piyyutim* were based on Arab poetry of Medieval Spain which, to this

day, remains very popular. Notable examples of piyyutim are yotzerot among benedictions before and after the Shma; malkhuyyot, zikhronot, and shofarot in musaf for Rosh HaShanah and avodah section of musaf for Yom Kippur. Since the Middle Ages, when the first collections of piyyutim took shape, the Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities have created their own prayer rite.

Activity: Find copies of Gabirol's poems in Source Materials. Make copies, distribute and read through. These poems are used in traditional High Holy Day prayerbooks. Ask students to consider how they contribute to this special time dedicated to work on the inner spirit as well as for mending relationships and coming closer to God. What purpose do these serve in the High Holy Day context? For an added dimension to your lesson, listen to some of his and other religious poet's piyyutim put to music. See "music" section below.

### III. Sephardic observances of Shabbat and Passover

**Visit a Sephardic service for Shabbat or a holiday:** The Sephardim have incorporated Spanish/Arab sounding music into their services as a result of having lived for centuries in those cultures. For the uninitiated, this is a striking feature. If possible, arrange to speak with the rabbi or synagogue member about the customs and traditions of Sephardic Jews. Have students write/reflect about this experience.

A. If visiting a local Sephardic congregation for Friday night services, note the beginning of the service including chanting of the Song of Songs (Shir haShirim) which many Sephardic congregations do every Friday night and the kind of songs they sing, especially for L'cha Dodi.

B. If it is a Saturday morning service, note the Torah service including the auctioning of *aliyot* (right before the Torah service) *hagbah* (the raising of the Torah *before* its reading) and songs sung between *aliyot* (to keep with the festive mood as many Ashkenazic congregations sing something while the Torah is being dressed).

C. If visiting a congregation is not possible, there is the *Lekha Dodi Sephardic Shabbat Kit*, prepared by Rabbi Marc D. Angel and narrated by Rabbi Abraham Ben-Haim. Cassette and Study Guide on the liturgy and customs of the Sabbath are available from Sephardic House c/o Congregation

Shearith Israel in the City of New York, 8 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023.

Another idea is to write for pamphlets on holiday observance and the Sephardic songbook produced by the Youth Division of the American Sephardi Federation to: The American Sephardi Federation, 521 Fifth Ave, Suite 1404, New York, NY 10017 (212) 697-1845.

D. See above (Joseph Karo) for one Sephardic Passover learning activity.

E.\* Compare traditional Sephardic and Ashkenazic Hagadot: Very briefly go over key points of a Seder with students including *Hallel*, blessings over wine, customs within the first few pages of the Hagaddah, the Four Questions and the number of cups of wine at Seder. Questions to consider while comparing Haggadot:

1. What distinct differences are there in the recitation of the *Hallel*?
2. What differences are there in the blessings over the wine at the Seder?
3. What customs do Sephardim enact, at the early portion of the Seder, which are omitted by Ashkenazim?
4. What is the difference in the order of the Four Questions?
5. How many cups of wine do Sephardim pour at the Seder? Compare this with the Ashkenazim and explain the difference.

#### **IV. Sephardic religious music:**

Hopefully by now you have had a chance to visit a Sephardic congregation and hear some of its very Arab sounding liturgical tunes. If not, this can be good preparation for that visit (or listening to the Sephardic Shabbat Kit). There are many cassette tapes of Sephardic Torah chanting, songs of praise and other liturgical traditional songs. Jo Amar, Ray Mallel, and Jeb Levy produce many kinds of Sephardi liturgical music under the auspices of the World Sephardi Liturgical Association. Their list includes Hagim U'Modadim (Holidays and Festivals), Shabbat U'Motzaei Shabbat (Shabbat and post-Sabbath) and Piyyutim (Poems) to name a few. These recordings may be ordered from the Yeshiva University Sephardic Community Activities Program, 500 West 185th Street, New York, NY 10033; or from World Sephardic Liturgical Association, 2459 Coyle Street, Brooklyn, NY 11235.

I would suggest playing some of this music anytime you are teaching about a Sephardic holiday or about piyyutim. Providing students with the

opportunity of hearing Sephardic music would add another dimension about their culture.

#### **V. Sephardic life-cycle events in early childhood:**

*Zeved HaBat* (literally celebration for the gift of a daughter) is an old Sephardic ceremony accompanied by special songs, ululation's of joy, dancing and a lavish feast. As you will see it is very different from *Brit Milah* which has its roots in the Bible. There it is written, "He that is eight days old shall be circumcised..." in Genesis 17:12. The word *Brit* is a Hebrew word meaning "covenant" or "agreement." The word *Milah* is Hebrew for "circumcision." The circumcision became a symbol for Abraham and his male descendant that they would observe God's ways and obey God's commandments. Circumcision is Judaism's first rite of passage for boys, performed with prayers and prescribed rules and regulations as a religious spiritual act, not merely as a surgical procedure.<sup>5</sup> Among Sephardic Jews, the number twenty-six, the number equivalent of God's name, is the basis for giving money.

**Activity:** The following learning activity will demonstrate differences that exist within Sephardic practices and customs concerning *Zeved HaBat* and *Brit Milah*. In the Source Materials, please find child life-cycle events as observed by 1) Syrian Jews, 2) Moroccan Jews, 3) Judeo-Spanish Jews, and 4) Spanish-Portuguese Jews. Since there are four sections each of *Zeved HaBat* and *Brit Milah*, divide the material among students, say two people read about *Zeved Habat* as observed by Syrian Jews, two people read about *Zeved HaBat* as observed by Moroccan Jews, and so on for all the reading. Ask each set of students to report to the class what they found. They should share the main points of each event and compare and contrast differences among the Jewish groups. Everyone should take notes of the similarities and differences. At the end of the class, everyone should determine the five most common and least common elements between the four groups for the two life-cycle events. As a final review, ask students to choose any of the groups and either life-cycle event and write a brief description of what a friend should expect were they to attend one.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Ronald H. Isaacs' Rites of Passage. p.22.



# Source Materials

# JUDAISM

A HISTORICAL PRESENTATION

*Isidore Epstein*



PENGUIN BOOKS

THE CONSOLIDATION OF TALMUDIC  
JUDAISM

THE immense influence which the Talmud, particularly the Babylonian, came to exert as a book over the dispersed Jewrites dates from about the end of the seventh century. This was the time when the armies of Islam were advancing triumphantly to the conquest of the world. Like a tidal wave they had swept almost irresistibly over Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. They were now spreading farther eastward and reaching out as far as India and even China. Soon they were to turn west, and engulfing North Africa, overrun the whole of Spain. As they extended their conquests, more and more Jews came under Moslem (or Mohammedan) rule.

The first encounter of the Jews with Islam was not an unhappy one. Mohammed himself (571-632) its founder, had originally set out to win the support of the Jews of Arabia for his religion. For this reason he adopted many of their religious beliefs, practices, and customs. Hence his uncompromising monotheistic doctrine, his insistence on formal prayers, fasting, and almsgiving, his adoption of the Day of Atonement, his introduction of dietary laws (such as the prohibition of swine's flesh), and his requirement that his followers turn towards Jerusalem in prayer. But as soon as he found that the Jews refused to accept him he turned his unrestrained fury against them and proceeded to persecute and expel them from Arabia. This policy was followed for a time by his successors, known as 'Caliphs', but before long their inherited fanaticism gave way to almost boundless toleration. They saw in the Jews a people much akin to them in race and religion; and they also found that they could be of great use to them in the consolidation of their world conquests. The Jews had after all contacts all over the world. Commerce, more especially foreign trade, was in their hands. They had in addition a common tongue - Hebrew - with all their brethren in the Diaspora, and the

## THE CONSOLIDATION OF TALMUDIC JUDAISM

Arabs could accordingly use them as interpreters, alike in peace and war.

Thus did the lot of the Jews begin to improve wherever the Crescent bore rule. This improvement was very marked in Palestine and Egypt where the Christian Byzantine rulers had interfered not only with the economic and social life of the Jews but also with the internal affairs of the Synagogue and its services. But nowhere did this phenomenon display itself more brilliantly than in Spain, where Jews had been settled for centuries. The Christian Visigothic kings were pitiless, harsh, and cruel. But their Moslem successors not only brought the Spanish Jews relief from their oppressors, but also encouraged among them a culture which in richness and depth is comparable to the best produced by any people at any time.

Babylonia was still for the time the heart of the Diaspora. There, in the Islamic capital, at Baghdad, the Jews rose to positions of distinction and influence. The secular authority of the Prince of the Captivity, the Exilarch, was revived and clothed with renewed magnificence. Spiritual authority, however, resided in the *Geonim* (sing. *Gaon* 'Eminence'), the name by which the heads of the two major Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbeditha were now known. Although the Gaon of Sura was considered by virtue of his office superior to his colleague at Pumbeditha, they were both looked upon as the spiritual and religious guides of the Jews, and exercised an authority which the conquests of the Crescent only served to extend.

The Geonim derived their authority by virtue of their pre-eminence as teachers and expounders of the Talmud. This was by no means an easily acquired qualification. The Talmud is one of the most difficult books in the world's literature. Its dialectics, presented in a style of pregnant brevity and succinctness, tend to make the Talmud a sealed book, requiring a traditional guide or commentary to unfold its meaning. Besides, the Talmud in its desire to demonstrate the principle of development as basic to living Judaism, refrains as a rule from formulating decisions, but leaves it to the diligent student to find out the solution for himself, by working his way through the labyrinth of contending views and opinions it records.

Then again, in an ever-changing world there must always arise new problems, new questions, for which no ready answers are available in the Talmud, and which call for authoritative decision and action.

Such were the tasks for which the Geonim were eminently fitted, and to which they directed their main activities. They not only taught the Talmud, explaining its difficulties and expounding its contents and developing its principles, but also determined and fixed the law in all matters, religious, civil, domestic, and social on which communities – large and small – as well as individuals from all parts of the Diaspora turned to them for guidance – whether or not provided for in the Talmud. Their teachings, views, interpretations, and judgements have come down to us, mostly in the form of correspondence, *Sheeloth u-Teshuboth* (Queries and Replies), in English 'Responsa', that passed between them and Jewries from near and far; and, accepted as authoritative, these became generally speaking the norm of law for subsequent generations.

Supplementing the Responsa, the Geonim sought to spread the knowledge and practice of Talmud law by the compilation of legal codes. The first of these codes was composed by the blind Gaon Yehudai of Sura (fl. 756–77) in his *Halachoth Pesukoth* which formed the basis of several subsequent codes. The Geonim also sent messengers to distant communities with copies of the Talmud and Talmudic explanations. The first of such copies to reach Spain was provided by Paltai Gaon (eighth century).

Furthermore, the Geonim, thanks to their eminence and fame, attracted students to their academies from far and near – from the Christian no less than from the Moslem world. From Spain, Provence, Italy, and the Byzantine Empire students flocked to the Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbeditha, and brought home with them the Babylonian Talmud, the contents of which they in turn eagerly communicated to others.

The Geonim also occupied themselves with the task of fixing the order of divine service, about which, apart from the most important prayers, there existed much uncertainty and confusion. This was particularly the case in congregations lacking

historical continuity and tradition. Amram Gaon (d. c. 874) composed about 860 a complete Prayer Book accompanied with notes and explanations, at the request of the Spanish Jewish congregations. This work, known as the *Seder* or *Siddur* (Order) of Rav Amram was the first complete Jewish Prayer Book to have been produced, and has had a great influence on Synagogue usages. About sixty years later another Prayer Book, somewhat different in arrangement, was compiled by Saadya Gaon (892–942) for the use of the Egyptian congregations.

At the same time, the Babylonian schools applied themselves to the standardization of the Biblical text. Owing to the absence of vowels and punctuation marks in ancient Bibles, the art of reading the text was a matter of oral tradition. But the same reasons that led a former age to commit to writing the oral Torah made it now necessary to reduce to written form the oral traditions relating to the Biblical text. This work was carried on by a group of scholars in the academies of Sura, Pumbeditha, and Nehardea, known as the Masoretes (from a Hebrew root meaning 'to hand down'). Their task was to supply the Biblical text with vowel points, accents, and other signs by which the pronunciation and interconnexion of words, as well as sentence-markings and paragraph-divisions, were indicated. They also sought to produce a uniform and correct text free from copyists' errors that had crept into it in the past, and to safeguard it at the same time against the intrusion of errors in the future. With this end in view, they noted all the existing variants and peculiarities of the Hebrew text, they counted the verses and even the letters in the different books or parts of the books, and made most minute computations of words, expressions, and spellings. All these labours the Masoretes embodied in notes they wrote on the margins of copies of the Bible, and also in separate treatises and compilations.

In all their work the Babylon Masoretes based themselves on the traditions relating to the sacred books as handed down orally from the period of the Scribes. But it was in Palestine that the Masoretic studies were pursued with particular energy and drive. The Masoretes of Palestine and Babylon differed in

their systems of vocalization, as well as in the consonantal text they preserved.

In Palestine itself divergent textual readings were transmitted by the rival schools of Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali, which flourished in Tiberias from the second half of the eighth century until the middle of the tenth. Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali each wrote a Codex of the Bible, embodying the traditions of their respective schools. In the end, Ben Asher's Palestine Masorah prevailed, not only over the Babylonian, but also over that of his rival, and his Codex became recognized as the standard or Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup>

The seventh century saw also the emergence in Palestine of a new type of synagogue poetry known as the *piyyut* (from the Greek word for 'poet'), the writers of which were called *payyetaim*, whose activities extended well into the sixteenth century. Specially composed for recital at fasts and feasts and other commemorative occasions as poetic additions to the established forms of prayer, the *piyyut* was designed to deepen the religious emotions of the worshippers and stir within them feelings of the intensest piety and devotion. But the *piyyut* had also a didactic aim in view. It sought to bring before the mind of the worshipper the significance and lessons of the respective commemorations and their observances. For this reason, the *piyyut* drew heavily on the *Aggadot* (Talmudic and Midrashic) with its inexhaustible store of teachings and ideas, stories and legends. In this way the *piyyut* became a vehicle of religious and moral edification and instruction.

The earliest of the Palestinian *payyetaim* was Jose ben Jose (d. c. 670) who used blank verse but no rhyme. He was followed by Jannai, the first to employ rhyme and name acrostics. But greater and more prolific than either was Eleazar Kalir, who flourished about the end of the seventh century and whose poems, which he composed for practically every important occasion of the Jewish calendar, are still revered and chanted by millions of Jews to the present day.

In the ninth century a Gaonate was established in Palestine, which gained wide recognition not only in the adjacent countries, Syria and Egypt, but also in distant Italy — a country

which had never ceased to maintain its affiliations with the Holy Land. The Palestine Gaonate, like its Babylonian counterpart, had its own schools where preference was given to the Palestine Talmud, although the study of its rival Babylonian was not neglected.

Turning to other parts of the world, the study of the Talmud and its ancillary literature was being highly developed in schools that arose in the eighth century in North Africa and Egypt, as well as in several countries in Christian Europe. The earliest of these schools in Christian European countries were in Italy, from which many scholars went forth to spread the knowledge of the Talmud in other countries. There is a tradition that Charlemagne, anxious to attract scholars to his Empire, induced in 787 members of the prominent scholarly Kalonymus family of Italy, to settle in Germany where they established an academy in Mainz. Ten years later, according to another tradition, Charlemagne sent a diplomatic mission to the Caliph, Harun al Rashid (786–809) at Baghdad, with a request that he should send him a Jewish scholar from Babylon to propagate knowledge among his Jewish subjects. The Caliph sent him a scholar named Rabbi Machir who opened an academy in Narbonne in the south of France, which attracted pupils from many parts.

The principal subject of study in the schools of the West was the Babylonian Talmud, except in Italy where, influenced by their close contacts with Palestine, the schools also cultivated the art of the Midrash and *Piyyut*.

It is to Italy that we probably owe (at least in its present form) that ethical Midrash *Tanna debe Eliyyahu* which has been termed 'the jewel of Aggadic Literature', and the universal humanism of which is reflected in the utterance, 'I call upon heaven and earth to witness that whether a person be a Jew or non Jew, bondman or bondwoman — according to the deed which he performs, the Holy Spirit rests on him' (9).

From Italy there also emanated many of the earliest liturgical compositions of European origin which have been received in the Synagogue liturgy. The first of the Italian *payyetaim* was Amittai (end of the eighth century and the

beginning of the ninth) who was followed by his son Shephatiah (d. 887). But surpassing both the father and grandfather was Shephatiah's son Amittai (end of the ninth century and beginning of tenth), several of whose poems express a deep longing for the Holy Land. Other prominent early Italian *payyotanim* were Solomon ben Judah, called 'the Babylonian', who followed the method of Kalir, and Meshullam ben Kalonymus of Lucca (b. c. 976) whose composition for the *Abodah*'s service has been incorporated in the ritual of most congregations.

The connexions of the Jews of other Christian European countries with Palestine were rather limited. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other direct centre of influence, they were guided in many matters relating not only to ritual but also to marriage and divorce and civil law by usages that obtained in the Holy Land. On the other hand, the Jews who lived in Mohammedan countries had their centre of influence in the Babylonian academies with which they were in constant communication by correspondence and by which they were guided in all their religious usages and practices.

Thus began to take shape those two great Jewish traditions which, by the eleventh century, came to be represented, on the one hand, by the Jews who lived in the Moslem world and in Spain, and called Sephardim, reflecting Babylonian influence, and, on the other hand, by those designated Ashkenazim, reflecting Palestine influence, who lived in Italy, France, and Germany.

The effect of the combined efforts of all these various schools was a consolidation of Talmudic Judaism throughout Jewry. Increasingly the study of the Talmud came to absorb the intellectual interests of more and more Jews everywhere in the Diaspora, and its teachings to be accepted by Jews in all lands as standards of all life and action.

But this consolidation was not achieved without a struggle. About the middle of the eighth century there arose a movement which, for a time, rocked the entire Jewish world and threatened it with complete disintegration. The founder of this movement was Anan ben David, who was next in the line of

succession to the Exilarchate. He was, however, suspected of subversive views and tendencies, and consequently passed over in favour of his younger brother. Angry over the failure of his candidature, he renounced the Talmud and founded a new movement, which, like the Sadducees of old, denied the validity of the oral tradition and took its stand exclusively on the Bible in its literal simplicity. This movement was called Karaism (from the Hebrew root meaning 'to read', specifically, 'the Scriptures'), and its followers, Karaites ('Readers of Scripture') to distinguish them from the adherents of the Talmud, who now became known as Rabbanites.

In matters of dogmatic belief there was, generally speaking, no essential difference between Karaite and Rabbanite theology. Where Karaism and Rabbanism parted company was in matters of religious practice. Keeping to the strict letter of the law, Karaism burdened life with rigorous restraints and restrictions which are totally alien to Rabbinic Judaism. This was particularly the case with the application of the Sabbath Law. Karaite literalism forbade anyone on the Sabbath to leave the house, to carry anything from one room into another, to wash the face, to wear a coat, shoes, girdle, or anything except a shirt, to make a bed, to carry food from the kitchen into another apartment, and similar other necessary activities of daily life. Likewise, the Biblical injunction 'Ye shall kindle no fires throughout your habitation on the Sabbath day' (Ex. 35. 3) was pressed to its literalness, and accordingly understood to prohibit the use of light and fire on the Sabbath. The Karaites consequently were obliged to put out all the lights and fires on the incidence of the day of rest and had to spend Friday night in total darkness, and the Sabbath, even in the most wintry season, in the cold.

Forbidden degrees of relationships were so extended as to make it increasingly difficult for Karaites to intermarry with each other without incurring the guilt of incest. The laws of ritual cleanliness, of food and clothing, and fasts were rendered more severe than in the Talmud. In civil and criminal law the Karaites refused to accept the Talmudic interpretation of the Biblical 'an eye for an eye' as denoting a money fine, but



insisted on its literal application. So was the Biblical verse 'For I am the Lord that healeth thee' (Ex. 15. 26) understood in its extreme literalness, and medical aid accordingly considered a violation of the Will of God.

The strength of Karaism was derived from its appeal to the sense of individualism. Anan's principle, 'Search well in the Bible', confided to the individual conscience the task of interpreting the law, and as such could not fail to strike a responsive chord in many hearts.

The movement soon attracted to itself a number of intelligent minds of high calibre, and under their vigorous leadership, enforced by an intense literary-propagandist and polemical activity, Karaism began to spread beyond the borders of Babylonia.

Anan himself meeting with difficulties in Babylonia, withdrew to Jerusalem, where he set up a Karaite community governed by the most rigorous application of the text of the Bible, and from which all traces of Rabbinic Law were banished. In his hatred of Rabbinitism, Anan forbade intermarriage and intercourse with the Rabbinites, and abolished all prayers which had been used for centuries, substituting for them prayers which consisted solely of Biblical quotations.

By the ninth century Karaism had established itself in Persia, where Benjamin Nahavendi, a disciple of Anan, was active. Although not as uncompromising in his opposition to the Talmud as Anan, Nahavendi did much for the consolidation of Karaism. Nor was he a stickler to the letter of the text as was Anan. Of a philosophic bent of mind, Nahavendi indulged in metaphysical speculations which he did not hesitate to apply to the interpretation of the Bible. He held to the theory, already propounded by others before him, that God was too transcendental to mingle with the material world and that it was an angel who created the world and not God himself. This led him to allegorize all the passages concerning God in the Bible. He also denied the survival of the soul apart from the body.

Another contemporary of Nahavendi, also in Persia, was Daniel Alkumisi, who differed both from Anan and Nahavendi in important matters of law and belief. Daniel denied the

validity of speculation and strongly opposed the allegorizations of the Bible. He had likewise little regard for science, going so far as to condemn as astrology the astronomical calculations made by the Rabbinites for the purpose of fixing the New Moons; only direct observations of the moon being in his view valid.

Despite his anti-rationalism, Alkumisi denied the existence of angels, maintaining that when they are mentioned in the Bible they denoted various forces of nature by which God operates in the universe.

The movement, however, despite its promising start, was destined to failure. Its insistence on the freedom of each individual to interpret the Bible in the light of his own understanding and judgement made unity among Karaites impossible. Instead of presenting a uniform trend, Karaism was broken up into numerous dissident groups, leading to its disruption and final disappearance as a factor of any account from the stage of Jewish history.

But the time for the dissolution of Karaism had not yet come. It continued to progress and flourish, encroaching deeper and wider into Jewish life. By the tenth century, it had established itself also in Egypt and spread to Spain and Asia, and bade fair to become dominant throughout the Jewish world.

Added to this insurrection from within, there were the distressing perplexities that pressed upon Judaism from without. The discovery by the Arabs, through the medium of translations in Arabic, of the ancient monuments of Greek culture - its philosophy and science - produced an intellectual upheaval which had a disturbing effect upon the religious life of Islam. The same upheaval with similar effects took place among the Jews who were by no means behind in the cultural progress of their neighbours. As the new learning came flooding in, doubts arose in many Jewish minds as to the truth of the teachings and traditions of the Jewish religion, and reason entered into conflict with faith. It is true that the challenge to the Jewish faith by reason as represented in Greek philosophy was not new. It had already existed, as will be seen, in the days of Philo, but



then it had affected only the intelligentsia, particularly in Alexandria, and not the masses, and in any event never invaded the strongholds of Torah in Palestine where all the speculations of the Greek philosophers had aroused little curiosity. Things were quite different now, when the rationalism affected the mind of the crowd. Works attacking the very foundations of Judaism became the vogue of the day. Most vehement in his attacks was Hiwi al-Balkhi (middle of the ninth century) who wrote a book in which he propounded two hundred questions against the teachings of the Pentateuch. He even denied the unity of God, His omnipotence and omniscience. He denied free will and the possibility of miracles, and objected to circumcision. His book created quite a stir, and his ideas found many adherents and were even taught to schoolchildren.

Such was the twofold danger which threatened Judaism at that time and which the Rabbanites resolved to meet. Realizing before long that the most effective method of fighting the enemy from within and without was by employing his own weapons, the Rabbanites began to apply their minds to a wider range of studies than that covered by Talmudics. Whilst the onslaught of the Karaites led the Rabbanites to pay greater attention to Biblical exegesis, Hebrew grammar and philology, the challenge of rationalism gave a strong impetus among them to the cultivation of philosophy, logic, and the physical sciences. These studies reached their highest point in Saadya ben Joseph of Fayyum in Upper Egypt (892-942) who, at the early age of thirty-six was called from his native land to become Gaon of the famous Babylonian Academy of Sura. Of penetrating intellect and encyclopedic knowledge, Saadya exemplified the combination at its best of Hellenic-Arabic and Hebrew cultures. His independent Biblical researches and philosophical attainments, combined with his vast Talmudic scholarship, enabled him to fight and win many battles on behalf of his faith.

In his early twenties, realizing the danger inherent in Karaism, he began writing against the movement. His first work was a criticism of Anan, the founder of Karaism, a work of which only a few fragments have survived. This was followed by

many polemical writings in which Saadya championed brilliantly the cause of Talmudic Judaism against the attacks of Karaism. In his desire to strengthen Jewish tradition Saadya produced an array of books, all of them of abiding value and merit. Apart from his extensive writings, on Hebrew lexicography, grammar, and liturgy, he wrote many Halachic responsa, codified rules of Talmudic logic, clarified problems of the Jewish calendar, and composed, as already mentioned, an 'Order of Service', for public and private prayer. Included among the Saadya's works designed to counter Karaite influence was his Arabic translation of the Bible accompanied by an extensive commentary. This version - the first in Arabic ever to have been undertaken - won such popularity that it became incorporated before long in the public scriptural readings of the Synagogue in Arab countries, contributing thereby in a large measure towards the establishment of the supremacy of the Talmudic interpretation of the Scriptures.

The effect of all these literary activities of Saadya proved devastating for Karaism. From his time Karaism began steadily to lose ground until it found itself reduced to small isolated communities in what is now Turkey and the Crimea, as well as in Egypt, whence the mass departure of Karaites early in 1957 in consequence of the measures instituted by Nasser against the Jews, marked the end of the Egyptian-Karaite community.

Taking up the challenge of rationalism, Saadya, apart from his treatise in refutation of Hiwi al-Balkhi, composed his great philosophic work *Emunoth Wedeoth* (Faith and Knowledge). This work, finished in the year 933, was the first comprehensive and systematic attempt ever made to give a rational basis to Jewish religious doctrine and practice. As such, the work was not only the finest gift which Saadya could have made to the perplexed of this generation, but also proved a landmark in the history of Jewish religious thinking; and a consideration of the work is accordingly reserved for the chapter on Jewish Philosophy, which is the next to follow.

After the death of Saadya the cultural hegemony enjoyed by the Babylonian Jews for almost seven hundred years began to pass gradually to the Spanish Jews. The break-up of the unity

of the Moslem Empire into East and West, leading to the establishment at the beginning of the tenth century of independent caliphates in Spain and Egypt, was followed by political upheavals and social and economic disorders from which the Jews, as usual, were the most to suffer. Thereupon, Babylonian Jews, taking their scholars and their books with them, made their way in successive waves to Spain where the ruling caliphs – the Omayyads – seeking to make their state intellectually superior to all other Moslem territories, welcomed the Jews as a valuable element in human cultural and scientific progress, and extended to them equal rights and a full measure of freedom. Grasping with avidity the new opportunities offered to them, Jews contributed their part brilliantly to Spanish cultural life in all its branches – philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy; and many of them rose to positions of prominence in the State.

Foremost among the Jewish statesmen was Hasdai ibn Shaprut (c. 915–c. 990), who was the principal minister and court physician to the first Spanish Caliph, Abd al-Rahman III (913–61) and to his successor Hakim (961–76). A munificent patron of learning, Ibn Shaprut gathered about him and supported Jewish scholars, thereby making Cordova, his home, a centre of Jewish scholarship. He also helped Moses ben Chanoch a learned Talmudist, who is said to have hailed from Italy, to establish in Cordova an academy which not only gave a strong impetus to the study of the Talmud in Spain, but also attracted to itself scholars from all parts of the world.

Mention must also be made of Samuel ibn Nagdela (*Hasdai* – the Prince), the Grand Vizier of Granada (993–1055), who was not only a generous patron of learning but also himself a scholar and author of great versatility. He contributed richly to Jewish literature in many of its branches – Hebrew poetry (religious and secular), grammar, responsa – and also wrote an introduction to the Methodology of the Talmud which is still being studied as a standard work.

The result was an efflorescence of Jewish culture embracing all fields of Jewish intellectual and scientific endeavour, Talmudism, religious literature, philosophy, grammar, and biblical

exegesis. Hebrew poetry especially attained its high-water mark during this period which became known as the Golden Age of Spanish Jewish culture. To this period belong 'the three fathers of song, whose sun rose in the west', Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1021–69), Judah Halevi (c. 1086–1145), fuller reference to both of whom will be made in the next chapter; and Moses Ibn Ezra of Granada (*b.c.* 1070), a number of whose penitential prayers and hymns of deepest religious feeling and melancholy beauty have found a permanent place in the liturgy of the Synagogue.

The Spanish-Jewish Golden Age had its parallel in the golden age enjoyed by the Jews of Egypt and North Africa. In both these countries, particularly under the Fatimid Caliphs, the Jews rose to the highest positions in the State and in commerce, and were in the vanguard of a flourishing science and culture. Most famous among them was Isaac Israeli (c. 845–945), who was Court physician and also the author of a number of medical and philosophical works which were rated highly amongst scientists and scholastics in the Middle Ages.

Jewish learning was also at that time in ascendancy in these two countries. About the year 970 an important academy was established by Shemaria ben Elchanan of Italy at Fostat (Old Cairo) and another by Hushiel ben Elchanan, also of Italy, at Kairouan in North Africa. Owing to the geographical proximity of these two schools to Palestine, special attention was given in them to the study of the Palestine Talmud, which was almost unknown in other parts of the Diaspora. This was particularly the case in Kairouan where the study of the Palestinian Talmud was extensively developed by Hushiel's two disciples – his son, Chananel, and Nissim ibn Shachin, who were both famous as Talmudic commentators. From the Kairouan school the study of the Palestine Talmud spread to all other parts of the Diaspora.

But the glory of the Kairouan school was not of long duration. After the death of Chananel and Nissim (c. 1055) political events in North Africa led to the disorganization of the community and its intellectual life and to the closing of the schools. Nor were conditions much better in Egypt; whilst in

Babylon where, despite the general Jewish exodus, the torch of Jewish learning had still continued to shine brightly under Sherira Gaon (c. 900-1000) and his son Hai (c. 939-1038), the schools were by now beginning to shrink into insignificance.

It was in Spain that the centre of Jewish learning had by that time become more fixed than ever. Basking there in the sunshine of the Golden Age, the Jewish genius flowered and produced some of its choicest fruit, among which Jewish philosophy was also the newest; and it is to a sketch of Jewish philosophy that we must now turn.

## NOTES

1. A manuscript of the Hebrew Bible copied in 1008 in Cairo by Samuel ben Jacob directly from manuscripts 'prepared by Aaron ben Moshe ben Asher', the youngest member of the Ben Asher family, is now in the possession of the Leningrad Public Library (MS B 19A). The text of this manuscript has been printed in the famous R. Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* from the third edition onwards. There is also the Aleppo Codex which, though not actually written by Aaron ben Moshe ben Asher was provided by him with pointing and Masora. This Codex, written originally in Jerusalem, has for centuries been deposited in an old synagogue in Aleppo, and was reported to have been destroyed by fire during the Arab attacks on the Jews in Palestine, shortly after the decision of the United Nations on the partition of Palestine in November 1947. An article, however, contributed by Yizhak Ben Zvi, the Israel President, in the Hebrew periodical *Sinai*, Vol. 21 (No. 7-8), April-May 1958, pp. 5 ff. assures us that this Codex has been found and 'is now in a safe place'.
2. See p. 175.

## JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

THE beginnings of Jewish philosophy go back to the Bible. It is true that there is no Jewish philosophy in the accepted sense of the term. Philosophy refuses obviously to be bound by any conclusions arrived at other than by means of reason and experience, whereas Judaism as a religion is essentially based on revelation and tradition. Yet arguments derived from reason and experience are not uncommon in the Bible. The majestic order of the starry heavens is called upon to give witness to the one and only omnipotent creator (Psalm 19. 2 [1]; Isa. 40. 26; Amos 5. 8). Man's gifts of speech and hearing are used as proof for the existence of an all-seeing and all-hearing providence (Psalm 94. 9); and God's special dealings with Israel are made to testify His overruling power in history. Wrestling with the paradoxes of the moral government of God, the Book of Job makes reason and observation of human life and Nature as the final bar of appeal justifying the ways of God to man, whilst the questioning and doubting spirit which is so characteristic of philosophy is not absent in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

It was this tendency to rationalism, discernible already in the Bible, that enabled the teachers of Israel from the earliest times to arrive at a spiritual conception of God notwithstanding the anthropomorphisms in which Scripture abounds. They could not fail to notice in the Bible an inner contradiction between its insistence on the 'unlikeness' of God, on the one hand, and its descriptions of Him after the human pattern, on the other. They thus inevitably came to the conclusion, without the aid of any external influence, that the Biblical anthropomorphic expressions were mere figures of speech designed to impress upon man God's personal character.

This spiritualization of the conception of God is reflected already in certain changes known as *Tikkune Soferim* (Corrections of the Scribes), which, ascribed to Ezra, were introduced



religion does not demand extremism or self-mortification; indeed, the doctrine of the golden mean is a most poignant, barbed repudiation of all forms of monasticism and asceticism, including Islamic Sufism whose spiritual claims apparently fascinated many Jews (Moral Dispositions, chs. I-III; see Eight Chapters, ch. IV).

(3) Maimonides' conception of the history of religion, affirming—contrary to the modern evolutionary view—that monotheism was the original state of belief and idolatry a corruption of it (Idolatry, ch. I). Abraham is depicted as a vigorous iconoclast, crusading against the rampant polytheism of his day, engaging people in ideological debate and argumentation. His life is a paradigm of ethical activism. (Cf. Guide, II, ch. 39; III, chs. 29 and 51.) In rejecting astrology and other superstitious practices or beliefs, Maimonides insists that this rejection be motivated by rational conviction; routine conformity without absolute conviction is inadequate (Idolatry, ch. XI).

(4) The description of a disinterested love of God, with no desire for any kind of reward, as the highest and purest form of religious commitment (Repentance, ch. X). In this context, Maimonides introduces the stunning interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory of the soul's relation to or communion with God.



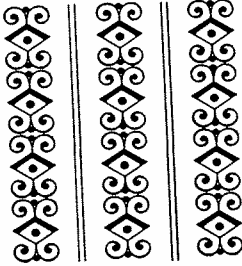
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE TORAH

Chapter 1 *Principles of Torah* = *10/10/17-1/31 - Aristotelia*

(1) The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a (First Being) who brought every existing thing into being. All existing things, whether celestial, terrestrial, or belonging to an intermediate class, exist only through His true existence.

(2) If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist.

(3) If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were nonexistent, He alone would still exist. Their non-existence would not



**M**AIMONIDES explains that he could not compose a comprehensive work on the details of practical precepts while ignoring the fundamentals of essential beliefs; he felt compelled to prefix a philosophical-theological prolegomenon to his code, thereby underscoring the unity of the philosophical and the legal components of Judaism. Book I contains Maimonides' summary of the essential beliefs and guiding concepts which provide the ideological and experiential substructure of Judaism.

The reader should be especially attentive to the following points:

(1) The identification of physics and metaphysics with classical rabbinic teachings (Basic Principles, II, 12; IV, 10-13) and the inclusion of these sciences in the Oral Law (Study, I, 11-12). Generally the chapters on Study—especially chapter III—throb with vitality. Maimonides' usual reticence and restrained formulation are slackened; the statements about the universality of the obligation of study and its absolute precedence are emphatic and vigorous.

(2) One sanctifies God's name not only by martyrdom but by leading a dedicated life of integrity and honesty (Basic Principles, V, 11; Moral Dispositions, ch. VI). Even in normal circumstances,

involve His non-existence. For all beings are in need of Him; but He, blessed be He, is not in need of them nor of any one of them. Hence, His real essence is unlike that of any of them.\*

¶ 4 This is what the prophet means when he says, "But the Eternal is the true God" (Jer. 10:10); that is, He alone is real, and nothing else has reality like His reality. The same thought the Torah expresses in the text: "There is none else besides Him" (Deut. 4:35); that is: there is no being besides Him, that is really like Him.

¶ 6 To acknowledge this truth is an affirmative precept, as it is said, "I am the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). And whoever permits the thought to enter his mind that there is another deity besides this God, violates a prohibition; as it is said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7), and denies the essence of religion—this doctrine being the great principle on which everything depends.

¶ 8 That the Holy One, blessed be He, is not a physical body, is explicitly set forth in the Pentateuch and in the Prophets, as it is said "(Know therefore) that the Lord, He is God in Heaven above, and upon the Earth beneath" (Deut. 4:39); and a physical body is not in two places at one time. Furthermore, it is said, "For you saw no manner of similitude" (*ibid.*, 4:15); and again it is said, "To whom then will you liken Me, or shall I equal?" (Is. 40:25). If He were a body, He would be like other bodies.

¶ 9 Since this is so, what is the meaning of the following expressions found in the Torah: "Beneath His Feet" (Ex. 24:10); "Written with the finger of God" (*ibid.*, 31:18); "The hand of God" (*ibid.*, 9:3); "The eyes of God" (Gen. 38:7); "The ears of God" (Num. 11:1); and similar phrases? All these expressions are adapted to the mental capacity of the majority of mankind who have a clear perception of physical bodies only. The Torah speaks in the language of men. All these phrases are metaphorical, like the sentence "If I whet my glittering sword" (Deut. 32:41). Has God then a sword and does He slay with a sword? The term is used allegorically and all these phrases are to be understood in a similar sense. That this view is correct is proved by the fact that one prophet says that he had a vision of the Holy One, blessed be He, "Whose garment was white as snow" (Dan. 7:9), while another says that he saw Him "with dyed

\*See Guide, I, ch. 69.

garments from Bozrah" (Is. 63:1). Moses our Teacher himself saw Him at the Red Sea as a mighty man waging war (Ex. 15:3) and on Sinai, as a congregational reader wrapped (in his tallit)—all indicating that in reality He has no form or figure. These only appeared in a prophetic vision. But God's essence as it really is, the human mind does not understand and is incapable of grasping or investigating. And this is expressed in the scriptural text "Can you, by searching, find out God? Can you find out the Almighty to perfection?" (Job 11:7).\*

¶ 12 This being so, the expressions in the Pentateuch and books of the Prophets already mentioned, and others similar to these, are all of them metaphorical and rhetorical, as for example, "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. 2:4), "They have provoked Me to anger with their vanities" (Deut. 32:21), "As the Lord rejoiced" (*ibid.*, 28:63), etc. To all these phrases, applies the saying "The Torah speaks in the language of men." So too, it is said "Do they provoke Me to anger?" (Jer. 7:19); and yet it is said "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). If God were sometimes angry and sometimes rejoiced, He would be changing. All these states exist in physical beings that are of obscure and mean condition, dwelling in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust. Infinitely blessed and exalted above all this, is God, blessed be He.

#### Chapter 2

¶ 1 This God, honored and revered, it is our duty to love and fear; as it is said "You shall love the Lord your God" (Deut. 6:5), and it is further said "You shall fear the Lord your God" (*ibid.*, 6:13).

¶ 2 And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name; even as David said, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:3). And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers—what

\*See Guide, I, chs. 26, 33, and 46.

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF

HEBREW VERSE

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EDITED BY T. CARMİ



PENGUIN BOOKS



הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר נִחְסַם הַסִּיף אֲלֵי מִכְאוֹב  
לְבִי וְאִין מְבִין לִי — וְאֲנִי כְּבֵר.

time of the end was sealed,<sup>1</sup> my agony  
redoubled. There is no one to guide  
me, and I am like a beast.

## שֶׁר אֲשֶׁר נִסְפָּר

יִשְׁרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר נִסְפָּר — קִימָה פְּתֻחָה,  
וְאֲנִי אֲשֶׁר בָּרַח — אֲלֵי שְׁלֹחָה!  
לְיוֹם בּוֹאֵר עֵדִי לְלִין בְּבִין שְׂדֵי,  
שֶׁם רִחַף הַטּוֹב אֲלֵי תַנְיָחוֹהוּ.

[Zion:] 'The gate that was shut — oh,  
arise and open it! The gazelle<sup>2</sup> that ran  
away — oh, send him to me! On the day  
You come to me and lie between my  
breasts, Your fragrance will rest upon  
me.'

יִרְעֵי הַדָּוִד יִהְיֶה — קִימָה קְשֻׁחוֹהוּ!  
כִּי חֹאמְרֵי אֵלֵי: "שְׁלֹחָה וְקַחְהוּ"  
הַהוּא יִהְיֶה עִין, אֲדָם וְטוֹב לֵאמֹר?

[God:] 'Lovely bride, what shape has  
your beloved, that you say to Me:  
"Send for him and bring him"? Is he  
the bright-eyed one, ruddy and hand-  
some?'

יִרְעֵי הַדָּוִד יִהְיֶה — קִימָה קְשֻׁחוֹהוּ!

[Zion:] 'That is my darling, that is my  
beloved. Oh, rise and anoint him!'

## שׁוֹכֵב אֲלֵי מִטּוֹת

שׁוֹכֵב אֲלֵי מִטּוֹת זָקֵב בְּאַרְמוֹנֵי,  
מִתִּי יִצְנֵי, יֵה, תְּכִין לְאַרְמוֹנֵי?  
לָמָּה, אֲבִי נִחְמָה, תִּישֵׁן — וְהַשְׁמֵר  
עֲלֵה כְּנֵם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׂנִירֵי וְחַרְמוֹנֵי?  
מִצַּל פְּרָאִים סוּר, וְנִטְּמָה לִיעֲלֵת-חַן.  
הֲוֹנֵי לְכַמוֹד, וְאֵת טוֹב לְכַמוֹנֵי.  
הֲבֵנָה בְּאַרְמוֹנֵי, מִצֵּא מִטְּמֹנֵי  
עֲסִים וְרִמּוֹנֵי, מוֹרֵי וְקַמּוֹנֵי.

ZION LONGING FOR THE  
MESSIAH

Lord, You who reclined upon couches  
of gold in my palace,<sup>3</sup> when will You  
prepare my bed for the rosy-cheeked  
youth? O lovely Gazelle, why are You  
still sleeping? The dawn has already  
risen like a banner over the mountains  
of Senir and Hermon. I turn away from  
the wild asses of Ishmael, come to  
Your graceful deer. I am Yours and  
You are fit for such as me. He who  
enters my palace will find in its treasures  
the juice of my pomegranates and my  
cinnamon and my myrrh.

1. The end of the period of exile; see Daniel 12:9.  
2. The Messiah.  
3. An allusion to the golden cherubim in the Temple.

## שְׁחֵי לְאֵל

שְׁחֵי לְאֵל, יִחַדְדָה כְּתֻבָּתָהּ,  
וְרוּחִי לְעַבַד אוֹתוֹ בְּאִימָה.  
לְעוֹלָמְךָ פִּנִי לִילֶךְ וְיוֹמֶי,  
וְלָמָּה תִרְדְּפֵי הַבֵּל וְלָמָּה?  
מִשְׁנֵהָ אֵת בְּחִינְתּוֹךָ לְאֵל חַי,  
אֲשֶׁר נִצְלָם כְּמוֹ אֵת נִצְלָמָה.  
הֲלֹא אִם יִצְרָךְ שׁוֹר וְנֶגְוִי —  
רְעִי כִי כֵן סְתוּרָה אֵת וְנִסְתָּה.  
חֲסִין יִשָּׂא שְׂתֻמִּים עַל וְרוּעוֹ —  
כְּמוֹ חֲשָׂאֵי גִוְיָה נִאֲלָמָה.  
וְמִירוֹת קִרְבָּי, נִכְפִּי, לְצִנּוֹרְךָ  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׂא דְמוּתְךָ בְּאַרְמָה.  
קִרְבִּי, כְּרָכּוֹ תְּמִיד לְצִנּוֹרְכֵם,  
אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁמּוֹ הִהְלֵל כָּל נְשָׁמָה!

Bow down before God, my precious  
thinking soul, and make haste to  
worship Him with reverence. Night  
and day think only of your everlasting  
world. Why should you chase after  
vanity and emptiness? As long as you  
live, you are akin to the living God: just  
as He is invisible, so are you. Since  
your Creator is pure and flawless, know  
that you too are pure and perfect. The  
Mighty One upholds the heavens on  
His arm, as you uphold the mute body.  
My soul, let your songs come before  
your Rock, who does not lay your form  
in the dust. My innermost heart, bless  
your Rock always, whose name is  
praised by everything that has breath.

## שְׁוֵי אֲשֶׁר יִקְשִׁיב

שְׁוֵי אֲשֶׁר יִקְשִׁיב לְבִלְ יִנְעֹתֵר —  
עַד אֵן תִּהְיֶה רְחוֹק מִנִּי, וְהַשְׁמֵר?  
לִל לָיוֹם אֲעִטֶנּוּ, אֲמַנְיָה בְּלֵב זָכוֹן,  
אוֹדֶה לְךָ תְּמִיד, כִּי חֲסָדְךָ יִתֵּר.  
מִלְכִי, לָךְ אוֹחִיל, לְבִי כִּי יִבְשֵׁת,  
חֹלֶם חֲלוֹם סְחוּם יִבְשֵׁת אֲלֵי פוֹתֵר.  
הֲנֵה שְׂאֵלְתִי: מִקְּשֵׁב חֲמוֹנֵי.  
אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ, לֹא פְחוֹת לְלֹא יוֹתֵר.

## THE REQUEST

God Almighty, You who listen to the  
wretched and grant their desire, how  
long will You remain far from me and  
hidden? Night and day I entreat You,  
I cry out with a confident heart. I shall  
always praise You, for Your love is  
never-ending. My King, I wait for You,  
I put my trust in You, like one who has  
dreamt an obscure dream and places  
his trust in the interpreter. All I ask is  
that You listen to my plea. This is my  
request, neither more nor less.

IN PRAISE OF GOD

שְׁתַּחֲוֹתֶיךָ

שְׁתַּחֲוִיתִיךָ בְּכָל שְׁחֵרֵי וְנִשְׁפִּי  
 וּפְרִשְׁתִּי לְךָ כַּפִּי וְאֶפֶי.  
 לְךָ אֲהַבְתָּה בְּלֵב אֲמֵא, וְאֲדַמְתָּ  
 לְדָל שְׂוֹאֵל עֲלֵי קִתְּוִי וְסִפִּי.  
 מְרוֹמֹת לֹא יִכְלִיף לְשִׁבְתְּךָ —  
 וְאוֹלָם יִשׁ מְקוֹמְךָ חוּץ מִצִּפִּי!  
 הֲלֹא אֲצַפֵּן בְּלֵבִי שָׁם בְּבוֹתֶיךָ,  
 וְגִבְרֵי חִשְׁקֶךָ עַד יִגְבְּרֵי פִי:  
 אֲנִי עַל כֵּן אֲהַרְתֶּה שָׁם אֶלְנִי  
 בְּעַד נִשְׁמֹת אֱלֹהִים מִי בְּאֶפֶי.

Morning and evening I seek You,  
 spreading out my hands, lifting up my  
 face in prayer. I sigh for You with a  
 thirsting heart; I am like the pauper  
 begging at my doorstep. The heights of  
 heaven cannot contain Your presence,  
 yet You have a dwelling in my mind.  
 I try to conceal Your glorious name in  
 my heart, but my desire for You grows  
 till it bursts out of my mouth. There-  
 fore I shall praise the name of the Lord  
 as long as the breath of the living God  
 is in my nostrils.

טָרַם הַיּוֹתוֹ

טָרַם הַיּוֹתוֹ מִסִּדְּךָ בְּאֶפֶי,  
 הַשָּׁם לִי־שׁ אֲנִי וְהַמְצִיאוֹתִי.  
 מִי הוּא אֲשֶׁר רָקַם מְבוֹנֹתַי? וּמִי  
 אֲצַמֵּי בְכוֹר יִצְקֵה הַקְּפִיאוֹתִי?  
 מִי הוּא אֲשֶׁר נָסַח וְהַצִּיאוֹתִי?  
 מִי הִנְהִיג מְבוֹנֹתַי עַד הַלֵּם?  
 מִי לְמַדְנִי בֵּין וְהַקְּפִיאוֹתִי?  
 אֲמַנְסֵם אֲנִי חֲמַר בְּקֶרֶב יָדַי.  
 אֲמַתָּה אֲשִׁימְנִי, אֲמַתָּה, לֹא אֲנִי.  
 אֲוִיהָ עֲלֵי פִשְׁעֵי וְלֹא אֲמַר לְךָ  
 כִּי הִנְהִימֵם נִמְשׁ וְהַשִּׁיאוֹתִי.  
 אֲיִכָּה אֲבַחֵד מִמֶּךָ הַשָּׂאִי? הַלֵּא  
 טָרַם הַיּוֹתוֹ מִסִּדְּךָ בְּאֶפֶי!

Before I was, Your enduring love came  
 to me, O You who make being out of  
 nothingness, and You created me. Who  
 was it that designed my form? Who  
 cast my body in a crucible and then  
 made it congeal? Who was it that  
 breathed into me the breath of life?  
 Who opened the belly of Sheol and  
 brought me forth? Who has been my  
 guide from boyhood to this day? Who  
 taught me wisdom and showed me  
 wonders? Yes, I am like clay in Your  
 hands. Truly, it was You, not I, that  
 made me. And so I shall confess my  
 guilt; nor shall I say, 'It was the  
 serpent' who conspired to deceive me.  
 How could I ever conceal my sin from  
 You? Even before I was, Your enduring  
 love came to me!

1. Here, the womb. 2. An epithet for the 'evil inclination'.

צִחָק אֲבָן-גִּיְאֹת  
 Isaac ibn Ghiyyat

THE PROMISE

שְׁדִי, שְׁוֹבְבָהּ

שְׁדִי, שְׁוֹבְבָהּ חֹלֶת אֲבֻבָהּ,  
 הוֹמָה לְרֹגְצִים עַל דַּת הַכּוֹבָהּ.  
 יוֹם רָמַת דְּרִדְוָה, וּנְפִשָׁה מֵאֲנָה  
 הִנְחָמָה, וְנָדָה עַל רֹאשׁ וְנִתְנָה,  
 וְכִבֵּי מֵעֲבֻדָּהּ הִדְוָה שְׂבָבָהּ.  
 עַל כִּי שְׁוֹבְבָהּ, עֵינָהּ הִרְאָהּ,  
 וּבְצוּרֵי רֹגְצִים בֵּיתָהּ חֲצָבָהּ.

O Lord, bring back the one who is faint  
 with love, who constantly bewails the  
 broken pledge.

The day her beloved forsook her, she  
 refused all comfort. She put her hands  
 on her head and silently submitted to  
 the hands of her enslaver. She has been  
 wayward; she has carved her home in  
 the treacherous cliffs of time. For this  
 her eyes grow dim with sorrow.

צוֹאֲמָת וְהוֹמָה מִיָּד לֹחֲצִים,  
 כִּי מִלְשֻׁמַּע דְּרוֹמָה אוֹמָה קוֹלְסִים,  
 אִם גִּבְרֵי וְחוֹמָה יִחַד פּוֹרְצִים.  
 אִיד לֹא-אֲזוּבָה פְּתָאם אֲזוּבָה,  
 בֵּין שְׁנֵי רִשְׁעִים לוֹהֲטִים שְׂבָבָהּ.

She cries and groans at the hands of  
 her oppressors; Mishma and Dumah  
 gloat over her and breach all her  
 barriers and walls. She who had never  
 been forlorn – how she was suddenly  
 abandoned, to lie among the teeth of  
 ravenous villains!

הוֹיֹוֹי בְּתֻבָּה הֵן מַה וְהִתְמַמּוּ!  
 רַעֲיוֹנֵי לְבָבָה לְקֹאֵד וּנְפִצְמוּ.  
 כֵּל יוֹשְׁבֵי סִבְיָהּ כִּיָּה יִלְחָמוּ.  
 עַל כִּי אוֹמָה פְּתָאם אֲזוּבָה,  
 בֵּין גְּרַע קֹרְעִים בְּדָד יִשְׁבָּהּ.

Her book of visions was sealed. Oh,  
 how this troubled her heart's thoughts!  
 Now those on every side of her attack  
 her. Because she had betrayed her  
 beloved, she now sits alone among a  
 race of evil men.

קוֹרְאוֹת מֵמַאֲרִים, לְמַה תִּרְאִי?  
 עַל בְּנֵפֵי וְשָׁרִים עוֹד תִּנְשָׂאִי.  
 הֵן אֲשֶׁת גְּבוּרִים לִי עוֹד תִּקְרָאִי,  
 רַעֲיָה וְנִצְנָדָה — אוֹמָה אוֹמָה,  
 כִּי עַל כֵּל פִּשְׁעִים חֲכַסָּה אֲהַבָּהּ!

[God:] 'O you who call out in distress,  
 why should you fear? You will again be  
 carried on eagles' wings. I shall again  
 call you "My youthful bride".' 2 My sad  
 beloved, it is you I love, for love over-  
 looks all offences!

1. The sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25-4), i.e. the Muslims. 2. Isaiah 54.6.

At the close of the Sabbath, the Spanish and Portuguese Jews wish each other "*Shabua tob*" ("A good week!").<sup>157</sup> Its Spanish and Portuguese equivalents are "*Buenas semanas*" and "*Boas semanas*."

It was a custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Holland (and of the Ashkenazim as well) not to sew on Saturday night. This is because *takhrikkim* (shrouds) were always sewn on Saturday nights. Therefore, it was considered to be a bad omen for one to sew on Saturday night; consequently, people were careful not to do so.

## 12 Pesah, Lag LaOmer

### As Practiced by Syrian Jews

The sanctuary was erected in the month of Nisan, and the princes brought their offerings for the dedication of the altar during that month, each prince bringing his gift on a different day. It is, therefore, the custom to read from the *Parashat hanesiyim* each day for the first twelve days of Nisan.<sup>1</sup>

Preparation for the Passover celebration begins on Shushan Purim by cleaning up all the *hamez* (unleavened foods) left over from the Purim *seudah*.

The children begin to study the laws of Pesah and to become familiar with the Haggadah before the *seudat Purim*.<sup>2</sup> The women begin to clean the house, room by room, to prepare it for Pesah. Weeks before Pesah, the women begin to prepare the rice for the Passover meals. Rice, which is neither *hamez* nor *kitniyyot* (beans), nevertheless has to be examined very carefully to see that there is no wheat between the rice. Special care is taken not to purchase rice which is sprayed with a wheat coating. The rice is scrupulously checked between the kernels three times on top of a clean white tablecloth to make sure that there is no wheat chaff.<sup>3</sup> After it has passed this rigid inspection, it is packed away in plastic bags to be kept for Pesah. Great importance is attached to rice because it is a staple food among the Syrians for the entire Pesah.

The rabbi begins to teach the congregation *Hilkhot Pesah* daily, beginning a month before Passover.

On the Sabbath before Pesah (Shabbat Hagadol), the rabbi delivers the special *derasha*, a dissertation about one and a half hours long, consisting of three parts, Gemara, Aggadah, and Halakhah.

The Syrian community observed the custom of *mekhirat hamez* in the communities of Aleppo and Damascus, and did not adopt this cus-

tom as something new in America. The *shetar harshaa* is signed by each individual who brings the rabbi the key to the room where the *hamez* is stored, or to the freezer in which it has been placed. The rabbi places these keys in envelopes which are appropriately labeled, and these keys are handed over to the non-Jew to whom the *hamez* is sold. The selling of the *hamez* to the non-Jew is conducted by the rabbi.

It is the custom of Syrian Jews to eat *mazzah* up until the day before Pesah. On that day, they are permitted to eat *mazzah ashira* (egg *mazzah*).<sup>4</sup>

*Mazzah shemura* is used for the two nights of the Seder. Some eat *mazzah shemura* during the entire holiday.

The *bedikat hamez* is fulfilled with the assistance of the wife, who prepares ten pieces of bread which she wraps in a protective covering, such as plastic, and places in different parts of the house.<sup>5</sup> The search is enacted by the men of the house, who find the ten pieces of *hamez* and put them aside to be burned the following morning. Usually, the *biur hamez* (burning of the *hamez*) is done outside of the house in a safe place in the street.

The day before Pesah (Ereb Pesah) is known as the Fast of the First-Born (*Taanit bekhoret*) and this is stringently observed by the Syrians.<sup>6</sup> Every male and female "first-born" attends the *Shaharit* service on Ereb Pesah in order to participate in the *siyum* (ceremony marking the conclusion of the learning of a tractate of the Talmud) so that they can participate in the *Seudah shel mizvah* which will free them from fasting. Otherwise, they must fast.<sup>7</sup> This Fast of the First-Born is considered so important that first-borns come from all over the city and even travel from out of town to participate in the service and ceremonies. Immediately after services, everyone waits and the *Birkat hagefen* (blessing over the wine) is made, since this is a *seudat mizvah*. Then cake is given to everyone. This cake is eaten and may also be taken home for the first-born infants, first-born daughters, and for any first-born who may not have been able to personally attend the service. For many Syrians, the fact that they have partaken of the *seudat mizvah* through the eating of this piece of cake (whether or not they attended the service) frees them to eat throughout the rest of the day. Everyone who attends the service is extremely silent

throughout the rabbinic dissertation on the Talmudic tractate which is being concluded, and they are intent on hearing every word in order to properly qualify for participation in the *seudat mizvah* which will follow.

The food eaten on Ereb Pesah is usually egg, carrots, celery, tomatoes or other vegetables, and walnuts. This is the diet for Hol Hamoed Pesah as well (with the addition of *mazzah*). It should be noted that while it is absolutely permissible for Sephardim to eat *mazzah ashira* (egg *mazzah*), there are some who have adopted the Ashkenazi *min-hag* and therefore, as a self-imposed stringency, do not eat *mazzah ashira*.

The men come home from work earlier in the afternoon in order to help prepare for Pesah. The Seder table is set since before sunset. The duty of the husband is to set up the wine cups, take out the Haggadot (Haggadah books), set up candlesticks, and generally to participate in getting the Seder table ready.

The *keara* (Passover plate) is set according to the tradition of the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria),<sup>8</sup> representing the Ten Sefirot (Kabbalistic emanations).<sup>9</sup> The *marror* is romaine lettuce, and a small piece of escarole is added together with the lettuce. The *hazeret* is also romaine lettuce, the *haroset* is crushed dates, almonds, and wine, the *karpas* is celery, and the *beiza* is a roasted or boiled egg. The *zeroa* (shankbone) is roasted.

The prohibition of eating *zei* (broiled meat) is observed by the Syrians.<sup>10</sup>

The *Kos shel Eliyahu* (Cup of Elijah) is included on the Seder table and was adopted from the Ashkenazi tradition. Four cups of wine are drunk during the Seder, but there are only two blessings made over the wine—one for the *Kiddush* and the other after *Birkat hamazon*.<sup>11</sup>

Before the *Kiddush* is made, water is added to the wine (*meziga*). The *kiddush* is then recited and one leans to the left in order to fulfill *heseiba* (leaning) as required by Halakhah.<sup>12</sup>

For *yahaaz*, the middle *mazzah* is broken and, according to Kabbalah, it is cracked into the shape of a *dalet* (Hebrew letter with numerical equivalent of four) and a *vav* (Hebrew letter with numerical equivalent of six) making for a total representation of "ten" to symbo-

lize that the *mazzah* is the counterpart of the Ten Sefirot of the Kabbalah.<sup>13</sup>

The *Afikoman* is then wrapped within the specially embroidered napkin cover, and it is thrown over the shoulder by each one as they recite, "*Mishearotam zerurot besimelotam al shikhmam ubenai Yisrael asu kidebar Moshe*" (Exodus 12:34).

They then ask in Arabic, "Where do you come from?" to which the individual responds, "Egypt!"; then "Where are you going?" to which the response is "To Jerusalem!"<sup>14</sup>

This is the only Arabic used in the Haggadah service. Some time ago, there was a translation of the Haggadah into Arabic (*Schereche*), but it is no longer used, since the young people today speak English. The *keara* is removed momentarily from the room before *Ma Nish-tanah* to stimulate questions from the children and is then returned to the table.<sup>15</sup>

The order of the Four Questions is as follows:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

For on all other nights we do not dip our vegetables even once; but tonight we dip twice.

For on all other nights we eat bread or *mazzah* (unleavened bread); but tonight—only *mazzah*.

For on all other nights we eat any vegetable; but tonight—maror (bitter herbs).

For on all other nights we eat either sitting up or reclining; but tonight—we all recline.<sup>16</sup>

The order of the Four Questions<sup>17</sup> is different from that in the *Maḥzor Moadim Lesimḥa Leshelosh Regalim*.<sup>18</sup>

Before the Ten Plagues, a drop of wine is poured for each of the words "blood," "fire," and "pillars of smoke."<sup>19</sup> The Ten Plagues (*Eser makot*) are enacted by pouring off a little wine for each of them, plus three more drops for *dezakḥ*, *adash*, and *beaḥab* (three-word acronym representing the Ten Plagues) in accordance with the teaching of the Kabbalah.

In the portion *Bekhol dor vador hayab adam lireot et azmo*, the Syrians change this to read: *LEHAROT et azmo ke'ihu hu yaḥa mimiz-rayim*. This was expressed by the acting out of the *Mishearotam* ceremony.

As the *berakha Gaal Yisrael* is completed, the second cup of wine is drunk (without a *berakha*).

Someone then brings in a pitcher with water and a washing cup and basin for everyone at the table to wash their hands with the blessing, *Al netilat yadayim*.

The three *mazzot* are then taken; one hand is placed on top of them and the other hand beneath them. The *Hamozi* is recited while holding all the *mazzot*. The *Al akhilat mazzah* is said while holding only the top *mazzah* and the middle half-*mazzah*. Then a *kezayit* (the amount of an olive size, which is the halakhically required amount to fulfill the *mizvah*) of the upper *mazzah* and the half of the middle *mazzah* are eaten while leaning to the left.<sup>20</sup>

For the *maror*, the bitter escarole lettuce is eaten after having been dipped in *haroset*, and the *berakha Al akhilat maror* is recited.<sup>21</sup>

The *korekh*, which is the sandwich of *mazzah* and romaine lettuce, and the *Zekher lemikdash kehillel hazaken*, continues with the words, "*Shehaya korekhan veokhelan bebat aḥat, Pesah, mazzah, umaror lekayem ma sheneemar al mazzot umerorim yokheluhu*."<sup>22</sup>

The *Shulḥan orekh* (the table is set and the meal served) begins with the eating of the roasted shankbone followed by the eating of the egg. The shankbone must not be broiled.

The meal of Syrian foods is served, featuring rice and *kibe*, a torpedolike shape made out of *mazzah* meal filled with meat.<sup>23</sup>

When the *Afikoman* is accompanied by the recitation of *Zekher lekurban Pesah afikoman heneekhal al hasova*.<sup>24</sup> The *kezayit* of the *Afikoman* is eaten leaning. It should be noted that, following the *Afikoman* in the Syrian tradition, one may partake of water, Turkish coffee, and even sweetened tea, although no other foods are allowed.<sup>25</sup>

Following the *Birkat hamazon*, the third cup of wine is drunk. A blessing is recited over this cup (which is the second blessing recited over wine).<sup>26</sup> The door is not opened as the *shefokh hamatḥa al hagoyim* is recited, the *Hallel* continues, the last cup is drunk, and it is followed by the *Berakha aḥarona* (Concluding Grace [over the wine]).<sup>27</sup>

The *Hallel* and the *Nirza* are recited and, for some, this concludes the Seder.<sup>28</sup>

The recitation of *Eḥad mi yodeya* is said by some and omitted by others. There are many in the Syrian community who recite the *Had*

*gadya* and sing it in Arabic or in old Ladino, either or both of which may be found in the Haggadah. This is the only inclusion of Spanish in the Haggadah, the last of the vestigial Spanish components which were a part of the Syrian community from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards.

The Syrian Jews normally visit their rabbi and his family at his home on the afternoon of either the first or second day of Pesah (as well as on the other Festivals). This demonstrates their respect for the rabbi, who in turn, together with his wife, extends hospitality to his guests in appropriate fashion. They also visit grandparents, parents, uncles, and aunts on Pesah, as on other holidays.

On Passover, the Syrians eat fresh green peas and other *kitniyyot*, but they do not eat any dried *kitniyyot*.

On the eve of *Shevii shel Pesah* (the seventh day of Passover), the special *Tikkun Leil Shevii shel Pesah* found in the *Sefer Keriei Moed* is read in the synagogue, beginning at about three o'clock in the morning. The *limud* includes readings from the Torah, Prophets, Hagiographa, Talmud, and Zohar, and concludes with a special prayer, *Yehi razon milefanekha Hashem Elokeinu v'Elokei aboteinu shetehei shaah zo shaat raḥamim shaat hakeshaha*,—followed by *Ana Hashem Elokeinu holel ayalot . . . yiheyu lerazon imrei pi vehegion libi lefanekha Hashem zuri vegoali*, which is followed by the *Kaddish derabbanan*.<sup>29</sup>

This is followed by the reading of the ten *Shirot* as follows:

*Bereshit bara . . . bara Elokim laasot* (Genesis 1-2:3)  
*Vayehi beshalah Paro et haam* (Exodus 13:17-15:26)

*Az yashir Yisrael* (Numbers 21:17)

*Haazinu hashamayim vaadabeira* (Deuteronomy 32)

*Az yedaber Yehoshua laShem beyom tet Hashem et haemori*  
(Joshua 10)

*Vatashar Deborah* (Judges 5)

*Vatitpalel Hannah* (1 Samuel 2)

*Vayedaber David laShem* (2 Samuel 22)

*Vehaya or halebana keor haḥama* (Isaiah 30)

*Ḥayom hahu yushar hashir hazeh* (Isaiah 26)

This is followed by Psalms 92, 66, 74, 75, 78, and 106. The *Shir hashirim* is then read. A selection of readings from the Talmud follows, and a special *pizmon* for the seventh day of Passover, entitled *Yom leyaba-*

*sha* (composed by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi), is chanted. The *Az yashir Moshe* is recited in the *Shaharit* service.<sup>30</sup> The theme of the entire *limud* of the seventh night of Passover is *geulah* (redemption) and *bitaḥon* (faith).

On the last night of Pesah, immediately following the *Arbit* for Mozaei Pesah, the men take several stalks of wheat and symbolically beat each other with them, greeting one another with the salutation, *Santa hadra* ("May you have a green and fruitful year!"). This ceremony, which is called *leil hamez*, highlights the fact that now the new wheat may be eaten and expresses the hope for a year of plentiful produce.

#### *Sefirat HaOmer*

The counting of the *Omer* is conducted by the rabbi, or by whoever leads in the counting, with the opening recitation of "*Htzeni mukhan umezuman lekayem miḥvat ase shel sefirat haOmer kedikhetiv usefar-tem lakhem . . . umaase yadeinu Koneneihu*." The leader then says, "*Birshut moray verabotay*," to which they respond "*Birshut shalom*." He then proceeds with the *berakha*, *Vezivanu al sefirat haomer* and continues immediately (example is for the ninth day), *Hayom tisha yamim laOmer shehem shabua ehad ushenei yamim*. (*LaOmer* is not repeated at the end, as among Ashkenazim. This is true of all Sephardim.<sup>31</sup>)

The counting is followed by *Ana bekhohah, Lamenezzeah bineginot mizmor shir*, and *Ribbono shel olam*.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the first thirty-three days of the *Omer*, it is forbidden for Syrians to celebrate weddings or *simaḥot* of any kind. They strictly observe the normal semimourning customs during this period of sadness, which commemorates the death of the disciples of Rabbi Akiba, many thousands of whom were lost during this season of the year more than nineteen hundred years ago. From the thirty-third day of the *Omer* (Lag LaOmer) onwards until Shabuot (Festival of Weeks), one may hold weddings, and the mourning is completely suspended. The Syrians use the thirty-third day of the *Omer* itself for the beginning of the lifting of the restrictions so that a wedding could take place on Lag LaOmer, which conforms to the law according to Rabbi Joseph Caro, but differs with the customs of some other Sephardim.<sup>33</sup>

On Lag LaOmer there is a special *hadlakah* in honor of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. This *hadlakah* (which is called *hilula* by others) is a very special, happy occasion when *pizmonim* for Lag LaOmer are sung, accompanied by a *nobeh* (a band of musicians). The main *pizmon* sung is *Bar Yohai*. The ceremonies of the evening include the auctioning off of the honor of lighting candles (up to thirty-three candles are lit) in order to raise funds for the local Sephardic Yeshivot. The lighting of these candles is *Leilui nishmat hazaddik Rabi Shimon bar Yohai*.<sup>34</sup>

#### As Practiced by Moroccan Jews

No sooner is Purim over than the intense cleaning for Pesah begins. The house is made immaculate, with special care to see that all *hamez* is removed from every corner. By the time Shabbat Hagadol arrives, the dining room is no longer used, lest the *hamez* undermine all the hard work and time spent to make the room ready for Pesah. All eating is done in a specified corner of the kitchen, where care is taken to contain all the *hamez*. In the schools, the children study the Haggadah in order to become proficient in its meaning and its melodies before the Sedarim. The Haggadah is read in synagogue after *Minha* on Shabbat Hagadol.<sup>35</sup>

The Moroccans sell the *hamez* with the same type of *shetar mekhira* as enacted by others.<sup>36</sup>

Although most Moroccans own special dishes, pots, and utensils which they keep specifically for Pesah use from year to year, there still is the need to kasher certain vessels for Pesah.<sup>37</sup> This ritual is performed through *libun* or *hagalah* in accordance with Halakhah. The mortar and pestle are almost always made kasher for Pesah.<sup>38</sup> Glassware is made kasher by *irui* (pouring of boiling water) without the need to soak the glass for three consecutive days (changing the water each twenty four hours). The Moroccan community is generally urged not to use dishwashers during the Pesah period because of the Halakic complications and in order to avoid problems.

The *bedikat hamez* is distinctive. Ten pieces of *hamez* (usually bread) together with slices of grilled liver were hidden for the male members of the household to discover in the search for the leaven. The *biur hamez* (burning of the leaven) is done the following morning. After the *biur hamez*, the baking of the *mazzot* would begin.<sup>39</sup>

The baking of the *mazzah* in Morocco was all done on the fourteenth of Nisan, Erev Pesah. The food eaten on this day was limited to hard-boiled eggs and cooked potatoes.<sup>40</sup>

During the baking of the *mazzot*, portions of *Hallel* or *Tehillim* were recited. Great care was taken to abide by the minutiae of the law. Neither *hamez* nor *mazzah* were eaten during the day. Special care is taken to clean all the vegetables very carefully. The *shamash* (sexton) made *haroset*, which he provided for all members of the community, who gave him gifts of money in return.

The Moroccan community, for the most part, forbade the use of rice and dried beans (*kitniyyot*) on Pesah. Fresh green beans were permitted. However, in Sefrou they ate *kitniyyot*.<sup>41</sup>

At the *Arvit* service on the night of Pesah, they recited the *Hallel* with the *berakha* in synagogue.<sup>42</sup>

It is the custom to come home from *Arvit* on the first night of Pesah and to take the special Passover plate (arranged according to the order of the Art), which is called *kearat hahaggada*, and to raise the plate and to pass it over the heads of everyone in the household while reciting, "*Bibehilu yazanu mimizrayim ha lahma anya benei horin*." In some communities, they make the rounds at the homes of their nearby neighbors and relatives during the course of the evening. In such cases, the same procedure of passing the plate over their heads ensues, and, after the pleasant interruption, each family returns to recite the Haggadah before the next visitors arrive.<sup>43</sup>

The Haggadah is translated into Arabic, Ladino, or French. The *Kiddush* is chanted by the father. The *rehoz* (washing without *Netilat yadayim*) precedes the *karpas* (celery), over which the *Borei peri haadama* is recited after dipping into the vinegar.<sup>44</sup>

The *yahaz* (breaking the middle *mazzah*) is done in a different fashion. The middle *mazzah* is broken into two pieces to look like the Hebrew letter *heh* (ה). While the *mazzah* is being broken, the family sings in unison a song in Arabic which is translated as follows:

So too did the Almighty split the Red Sea into twelve paths when our ancestors left Egypt under the leadership of Moses the son of Amram, may he rest in peace. Just as God redeemed them from their hard work to freedom, so too will the Almighty, blessed be He, redeem us from this dispersion for His own awesome name's sake.



This Arabic song was sung even in homes where the Haggadah was not translated into Arabic.<sup>45</sup>

The broken *mazzah*, which now has the shape of the Hebrew letter *heh* (ה), is taken by each member of the family, and it is held against the eyes as they recite, *Ha lahma anya . . . benei horin*. The *Afikoman* was then kept for after the meal. There was no tradition of stealing or hiding the *Afikoman* in Morocco, but the influence of the Ashkenazi community has introduced it to some Moroccan homes today. However, in most homes, it is still the custom to again sing, *Bibehilu yazanu mizrayim ha lahma anya benei horin*, as was done before the Seder began. Some would again lift the *kearat habaggadah* over their shoulder in remembrance of the Biblical verse, "And the children of Israel took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders" (Exodus 12:34).<sup>46</sup>

The Four Questions are asked by the children in Hebrew and in translation into Ladino, French or Arabic.

Following the Four Questions, before the *Avadim hayinu*, it was the custom for the father (*baal habayit*) to leave the room, only to return with a staff and the *Afikoman* in a napkin over his shoulder. Everyone at the table would ask him, "From whence do you come?" He would then recount the dramatic epic of the Exodus from Egypt, utilizing Biblical quotations and making reference to the *mazzah* (*Afikoman*), and to the fact that the Jews left Egypt with a great treasure, etc. Everyone seated around the table would repeat these key biblical phrases as a type of refrain. They would ultimately conclude with the statement: "*Vekhol hamarbeh lesaper beyeziat mizrayim harei ze meshubah*," ("The more one tells of the exodus from Egypt at great length, the more praiseworthy is he)."<sup>47</sup>

The reading of the Haggadah is shared by all the men, who read its text paragraph by paragraph, in rotation, one after the other. Everyone joins together in singing the last phrase of each section, and some complete paragraphs are even sung in unison, such as, the *Kiddush*, *Vehi sheamda*, *Bekhol dor vador hayav adam leharot et azmo*, and *Birkat Gaal Yisrael* (on the second cup of wine). The sections are read line by line from *Hallel* onwards.<sup>48</sup>

In order to keep the children from falling asleep before the end of the Seder, they would be chided: "If you don't fall asleep until the end

of the Haggadah, you will get to see *Shefokh . . .*" (*Shefokh hamatekha al hagoyim*). Intermittently, the children are jokingly asked, "Who is *Shefokh*, a man or a woman?" This is done in order to get them to stay up for the second half of the Haggadah after the meal.<sup>49</sup>

They read *Nishmat* until the late hours. They sing *Had gadya* and translate it into Ladino or Arabic, and they also sing *Ein adir ka-Hashem*, *Ki lo na'eh*, and other songs found at the end of the Haggadah. After the Seder, it is customary to sing the entire *Shir hashirim*, in many communities.<sup>50</sup>

Some wear a white cloak for the Seder to symbolize freedom, which is similar to the *kittel* which some Ashkenazim wear at the Seder.<sup>51</sup>

After the Sedarim of Pesah, the *haroset* is taken and it is placed on five spots (as five finger spots) on the doorstep of the entrance of the house, near the *mezuzah*, to serve as a protection (a type of *hamasa*) for the house from evil. These spots could be seen all through the year.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, the bone from *zeroa*, after it was taken from the Seder plate, would be stripped of its meat and would be left in the cupboard all year long, as an omen of good fortune.<sup>53</sup>

It was a custom to cut a child's hair for the first time at the age of five years on Hol Hamoed Sukkot or Hol Hamoed Pesah in the synagogue in a public celebration.<sup>54</sup> In Israel, there is a custom among some to cut the child's hair at the age of three (*hallakah*), in Meron on Lag LaOmer.

In certain families, they would not eat black olives during the month of Nisan, and this was the custom in Fez as well as Sefrou. The reason was that in the month of Nisan God brought the Jews out of Egypt. They were commanded to remember that time, and it is an accepted notion among the Moroccan Jews that the eating of black olives brings about forgetfulness, which would stop the Jew from remembering his redemption in the month of Nisan.

Many Moroccans eat *mazzah shemurah* throughout Pesah.

It is a widely observed custom to make a special *seudah* for the very young children during Hol Hamoed, which was called *mindara* (Arabic). These young children participated in preparing the food in small pans, they were served on tiny dishes, and they ate at special low (children's) tables. It was a miniature Seder meal for the kiddies.<sup>55</sup>

The ceremony of *Birkat ha'ilanot* ("blessing the trees") was performed during Hol Hamoed Pesah (and by some on the seventh day of

Pesah). They would go out on a picnic to the fields to recite blessings on those trees which had already begun to blossom. They would be sure to recite the *berakha* over at least *two* trees at the same time in order to fulfill the intent of the language of the blessing, which is: *Barukh ata Hashem Elokeinu melekh haolam shelo h'iser beolamo kelum ubara bo beriot tovot veihanot tovot leihanot bahem benei adam*. They would then read Psalms 126 and 148 and add a prayer for the souls of the departed holy ones. This was an especially pleasant and meaningful outing for these city dwellers, who rarely saw nature in such a beautiful setting.<sup>56</sup>

On the seventh night of Pesah (*Leil shevii shel Pesah*) the special *tikun* is read from *Sefer Keriei Moed*. This *tikun* lasts only until midnight. The *piyut Ashira keshirat Moshe* is recited before *Shirat hayam*. After that, *Vatikah Miriyam . . . ki ani . . . Hashem rofe'ekha* is sung in its proper Torah cantillation melody. Additional *piyutim* for the seventh day of Pesah are *Kel elyon shokhein meonim*, *Yom layabasha*, and *Malki mikedem Elokim*. Some said *Hallel* after the *Amida*.<sup>57</sup>

In Marrakech, they made a soup into which they would break small pieces of *mazzah* to indicate that the festival of Pesah was nearing an end and that *hamez* would soon be eaten again. This soup was called *solda*.

#### Maimuna

The night after Pesah has concluded is known as the Maimuna festival. This colorful and joyous celebration remains extremely popular among the Moroccan communities everywhere. In Morocco, the women dress in their fanciest velvets and gold and silver embroidered dresses. The girls dress up in bridal white. Both the boys and girls dress up in masquerade fashion, portraying either Berbers or Arab women as they roam the streets of the Jewish *mellahs* in which they dwell in Morocco. This is the traditional time of the year when the young men court the girls and initiate friendships which often end up in marriage.<sup>58</sup>

On Mozaei Yom Tov the regular weekday *Arvit* is prayed, and at the conclusion of the service, everyone greets his neighbor with the blessing *Tarbehu utisaadu* (Arabic for "May you be successful and

may you have many festive occasions!"), or simply with the word *Tarbah* ("May you have success!")—similar to *Hazlaḥa Rabba* and *Tizku leshanim rabot*.<sup>59</sup> They chant Chapters 1–6 of *Avot*, the first verses of the Book of Proverbs, the first *Azharot* (which will be recited on the festival of Shavuot, celebrated approximately six weeks later). This service is conducted with special joy, and in Fez some congregations say the Ladino translation of the *Kave el Hashem* before *Aleinu*.<sup>60</sup>

At the *Arvit*, the *bakashot* are sung with special fervor. In Marrakech, the *Ein K'Elokeinu* was sung in Hebrew and in Arabic.

The festive table is set at home with a white tablecloth bedecked with green stalks of wheat and flowers. In Morocco, these would be brought into town by Arab villagers. In the center of the table, a pitcher of buttermilk is placed. Alongside the milk they place a bowl of flour topped with five eggs, five bean stalks, and five dates. The table is covered with many plates of honey, other sweets, fruits, nuts, cookies, *mufleta* (a type of thin dough fritter made with flour, fried in oil, and then dipped into fresh butter and honey),<sup>61</sup> lettuce leaves (symbolizing spring), pancakes, and wines. Yeast<sup>62</sup> cakes are also often featured because, in its rising quality, yeast represents the insignnia or destiny of the Jew. In Morocco, some Jews bought these yeast cakes from Arabs, but many families insisted on making them by themselves. The Jews of Marrakech used to keep the wine from the *Kos shel Eliyahu hanavi* plus any leftover wine from the Seder's four cups to pour over the yeast cakes and at the same time recite this *pizman*.<sup>63</sup> *Besiman tov vehazlaḥa, tiheyeh le'edoteinu, vekol sason vekol simḥa yishama be'arḥeinu ve'az tiheyeh harevaḥa bebiyat meshiḥeinu*.<sup>64</sup>

In some communities, they poured olive oil on the yeast, beans, dates, and five silver coins (which would be used only to symbolize the blessing of prosperity). In other communities they covered the yeast with a *tallit* (prayershawl), and on top of the *tallit* they would place a golden or silver bracelet. This yeast was called *elarusā* (bride). Some say this name comes from the biblical verse, *Reshit arisotekhem hala tarimu teruma* (Numbers 15:20), meaning, "Of the first of your dough you shall set apart a cake for a gift." This could symbolize the first of the *hamez* to be eaten after Pesah, or the new crop which would soon be due.<sup>65</sup>

It was apparent that the Moslems looked forward to the Maimuna. On the last day of Pesah, in the early afternoon, they would already

begin to bring flowers, milk, butter, honey, green beans, stalks of wheat and grain, lettuce, etc., to the homes of the Jews. The amicable relationship between the Jews and the Arabs could be most distinctly exemplified on this holiday, when many of the Arabs acted in a friendly manner towards the Jews. They would allow the Jews to stroll in their gardens and would be very accommodating. The Jews, in turn, gave them gifts at this season. Perhaps this amity came about because the Jews had put their *ḥamez* in the homes of the Arabs before Pesah and then, on the night Pesah ended, had bought it back, generously rewarding the Arabs for selling them back the *ḥamez*. The Arabs would also be given a piece of *mazzah* by the Jews during Pesah. This *mazzah* was considered to be a good luck omen to the Arabs and was even called by a special Arabic name, *senat el hadra* (which means "from one year to the next").<sup>66</sup>

On Mozaei Pesah, as the congregants made their way home from synagogue, many would stop off at the homes of relatives and friends to partake of the traditional goodies and have a drink of wine. They would bless each other with the chanted Maimuna benediction in Arabic, *Alallah maimuna ambarkha massauda*, meaning, "Best wishes for a blessed successful Maimuna."<sup>67</sup>

In Fez and other communities, the rabbi and/or the ḥazzan would be accompanied home by the worshippers. Some even carried the rabbi home on their shoulders, singing *Yaalat hen*. At his home, the rabbi's wife would serve her guests refreshments, and the rabbi would bless them with the Priestly Benediction. As each one took leave of the rabbi's house, he would take a palm date to make his way home. In some of the southern Moroccan communities, they would bring home a stalk of wheat or any green vegetable to hang it on the threshold of their door as a way of wishing their guests a productive, successful and joyous year.<sup>68</sup>

The precise sequence of the visitations on the night of Maimuna is of great significance to the Moroccan family. After visiting the rabbi, one would visit his parents. The next visit would be to the home which he had first visited during the course of the New Year, because it was believed that it was in that house that the individual's good fortune was established. Thus, he always returns to visit the people in that house during the course of the year, lest his luck change for the worse as a result of the perceived loss of prestige to the family who had host-

ed his first visit in the New Year and whom he would be insulting by neglecting to visit them.<sup>69</sup>

On the eve of the Maimuna in Morocco, bridegrooms would send precious ornaments to their future brides and would go to dine with their future in-laws. Fried pancakes (*muflitas*) dipped in butter and milk and grilled fish constituted the menu. Neither meat nor strong coffee was served at the Maimuna meals. After dinner, everyone would go for long strolls within the limits of the "Quarter." The blessing of the older folks to the younger ones was, "A wedding within the year." These visits and social activities carried on late into the night.<sup>70</sup>

In one section of Morocco (Tafilaleṭ), the Jews would drink arak in the synagogue at the conclusion of the *Arvit* service on Mozaei Pesah and sing a well-known *pizmon* with the refrain after each verse: *Yom Gila, Yom Gila, Yom Gila Yavo, yavo, yavo, yavo*. The *pizmon* beseeches joy for Israel and punishment for its tormentors.<sup>71</sup>

On the morning of the Maimuna, after the morning services, which were held very early, the men would buy a fish before coming home for their early breakfast. The fish would be eaten at the lunch meal, wherever that would take place.

On Maimuna day, Jews make it a point to draw water from all kinds of wells and to pour water on their feet and also on the threshold of their homes. The connection to water is either the *Keriat Yam Suf* (Splitting of the Red Sea) or the washing away of the danger of lethargy, which was believed to take root at that season of the year. The notion that the Maimuna was a time to ward off laziness is further expressed by the fact that many took special pains to rise early in the morning, lest one remain a "lazybones" all year long. Thus, the family rises early and starts out early on its trip for a picnic at the sea-shore. The Jews of Marrakech would go to the well called *Sakis el mazodi*. The women beat the water seven times, and the men immerse their feet and wash their faces and chests with the water.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, the custom of going to the seashore to relax or to a spring or brook where there is water directly relates to the fact that the last day of Pesah (the seventh day, in Israel) was the actual day of the Splitting of the Red Sea.

There was also a tradition to take the bones (which were saved from the night of the Seder) and throw them into the water on the day of Maimuna.<sup>73</sup>

In Marrakech they set up booths for picnics in the parks and around the pools.

Some of the Marrakech Jewish community would rise early on the morning of the Maimuna and gather at the gateway of the *mellah* (ghetto). As the gatekeeper opened the gates of the *mellah*, the people would chant, *Pithu lanu shaarei zedek avo vam ode Kah* ("Open for us the gates of righteousness, I shall enter them and praise the Lord").<sup>74</sup>

In Marrakech they would also go to a special garden, where they would approach a very old olive tree and recite the *Birkat ha'ilanot* to pray for a fruitful year.

In Larache, even those who failed to pray all year long would go to the garden after services on the day of Maimuna to recite *Birkat ha'ilanot* over the trees, and each person would receive a flower or a vegetable from the proprietor of the garden.<sup>75</sup>

There were some pious individuals who refrained from eating bread until the daytime of Maimuna and did not eat bread on the evening before, even though it is permissible to do so. This was to show the love for *mazẓah* and how hard it is to break away from it. Some explain that this attachment to *mazẓah* is the reason for the national speciality for the Maimuna, namely, the *muflita* (wafer) which resembled a *mazẓah* in its flatness. The *muflita* made in *mazẓah*-likeness in a *hamez* form was to show that the *mazẓah* is not so easily forgotten. Some extremely pious families waited a whole week before eating regular bread. Instead, they would bake flat bread without yeast that looked like *mazẓah*.<sup>76</sup>

The origin of the Maimuna celebration and its importance to Moroccan Jewry even here in North America may have many roots. Some say it stems from the meaning of the word Maimuna in Arabic, which is translated as "wealth and good fortune." It is considered that one's prosperity will be determined on this day. This is in keeping with the thrust of the Mishnaic teaching which states that "at four seasons is the world judged . . . and on Pesah on the produce" (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:2). This celebration would suggest that everyone is seeking the blessing of God for a year of abundance of the crops, which represent prosperity in general. Thus, they bring for the Maimuna various wheats and produce to symbolically bless the land.<sup>77</sup>

Another connection with the word *Maimuna* is the word *emuna* (faith). Some, in fact, refer to the celebration as *Emuna* instead of

Maimuna. The derivation for this concept is from the teaching that *Benisan nigalu ubenisan atidim lehigael* ("In the month of Nisan the Jews were redeemed, and in the month of Nisan they will be redeemed again").<sup>78</sup>

Thus, since Nisan is almost over after Pesah has concluded and the promised redemption has not yet happened, this holiday is designed to assure the Almighty that the people have not lost faith, but that they do, indeed, have the abiding *emuna* that the redemption will be forthcoming in the month of Nisan in the future. This faith is expressed in the joyous outlook which the holiday portrays in its many forms of celebration.

Another explanation offered for the importance of Maimuna is that it is celebrated to complete the joy of Pesah which had been diminished by the fact that the Egyptians drowned (*Sanhedrin* 39b), thereby causing us to say only half-*Hallel* throughout *Hol Hamoed*. We, therefore, require an added day of festivity to bolster and fulfill the complete happiness of the festival. The fullness of the joy which comes from the Maimuna festivities fulfills that need among Moroccan Jews.

Perhaps the most direct relationship of the name Maimuna can be associated with the name Maimon. It was on the day after Pesah (Isru Hag) that the father of Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon) died in Fez, Morocco.<sup>79</sup> Since one does not conduct a *Hilula* during the month of Nisan, they may have instead initiated this celebration in his memory.

Another possible origin for Maimuna derives from a beautiful legend about Rabbi Moshe Amar, who lived in the city of Agadir, Morocco. He was a well-known scholar and Kabbalist and also a very famous singer amongst the populace in general. In fact, he was thought to be an Arab by all the Arabs (who also have the name Amar amongst them). Once he went to another city to visit the graves of some *zaddikim* and to pray there, when he was suddenly overcome by a dream wherein he learned that the Jews of his city were about to be destroyed by an evil decree of the local monarch. He hastily returned, and as he entered the city, the general charged with carrying out the impending destruction of the Jewish community saw him and accorded him great honor. Rabbi Moshe Amar begged the general to save the Jews. The general was astonished to discover that Moshe

Amar was a Jew. He immediately sent him to the monarch, who was similarly amazed to learn that his favorite singer was a Jew. In honor of Moshe Amar, the monarch rescinded the decree and the Jews were saved. This miraculous event took place on Erev Pesah in the year 1853. Since no celebration could be held until the end of Pesah, Rabbi Moshe Amar decreed that the Jews should celebrate to express their *emuna* (faith) in God, who delivered them through this miracle on Erev Pesah, with the festivity of the Maimuna immediately after the Pesah festival.<sup>80</sup>

There are still other legends which connect the Maimuna to the city of Fez, where the holiday was celebrated most enthusiastically, and where the concept of the Maimuna day, as one on which to picnic and to go to the seashore, probably originated. Many Moroccans also visited the cemeteries on that day to remember the *zaddikim* and their departed, and to seek their blessing.

It has also been suggested that Maimuna is a variation of the word *shemona*, meaning the "eighth day" of Pesah.

In Morocco, it was their tradition not to eat dairy throughout Pesah, so they ate only vegetables and meat. This might also explain why the Maimuna featured only dairy foods, which constituted a special treat after the Passover.

As we have stated, until the Maimuna, no one ate *hamez*. Many were scrupulous to secure *hamez* at the Maimuna only from an Arab who was very dark skinned (almost black). In this way they were certain that the *hamez* they purchased was the property of a non-Jew and could not possibly come under the prohibition of *hamez sheavar alav haPesah* (leaven that has been owned by a Jew during the Passover period, which is forbidden to be used forever).

Today in North America, the Maimuna is heartily observed by Moroccans in every city where they reside. The night is one of parties featuring the items mentioned earlier: buttermilk, *muffita* (wafers) dipped in butter and honey, "lucky dip" (a bowl of flour in which golden objects are placed), a plate of flour with five eggs, five beans, and five dates set into it—and some even put a live fish in a bowl (fertility). The day is also often observed as a picnic day for family and friends to get together. It is a celebration which brings to mind the vibrant, lingering memories of their recent past in Morocco and of the festive religious and social experience which Pesah and its Isru Hag provide in enriching their lives.

### Sefirat HaOmer

Some sing the *piyut*, *Shiru leKel beshira barekhu et hasefira* before counting the Omer.

It is the custom of Moroccan Jewry to observe the initiation of *Sefirat HaOmer* (on the second night of Pesah) with a special *segula*. The *shamash* of the synagogue distributes to each worshipper a piece of rock salt or some salt in a small plastic bag. This piece of rock salt (or bag of salt) is kept in the pocket as a reminder to count the *Sefira* each night throughout the Omer. It also is a *segula* against harm, so long as it is carried by the individual. This is in keeping with the ancient view that salt was a protection against evil forces. The Kabbalists believed that salt drives off evil spirits because it is the mathematical equivalent of three YKVK's (Tetragrammaton) (therefore, one should dip the bread, over which the *Hamozi* is recited, three times into the salt). Similarly, we learn that salt was a protective *segula*, since new babies were rubbed with it, as taught in the Biblical verse, "And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water for cleansing; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all" (Ezekiel 16:4).<sup>81</sup>

Moroccans adhere to the teaching that "it is a *segula* and of great secret meaning to hold a little salt in your hand on the first night of *Sefirat HaOmer*."<sup>82</sup>

The blessings for *Sefirat HaOmer* are led by the *sheliach zibbur*, who counts immediately after the blessing (example for the twentieth day), *Hayom esrim yom laOmer shehem shenei Shavuot veshisha yamim*. He continues with *Harahaman hu yivne hamikdash*. The congregation answers in unison *Amen* and proceeds to count for themselves. On the last day of counting the Omer, someone goes outside to see that the stars are out, and then they add the word *temimot* (*Hayom tisha vearbaim yom laOmer shehem shiva Shavuot temimot*).

All the prohibitions, such as celebrating *simahot*, having one's hair cut, etc., are forbidden until after Lag LaOmer, the thirty-fourth day of the Omer (it is not permitted on the thirty-third day of the Omer). However, in Sefrou they began on the thirty-third day of the Omer to celebrate (according to the *Shulhan Arukh*).

On Pesah Sheni (fourteenth of Iyar) a *hilula* in memory of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes is celebrated. It is known as *Hilula deRabi Meir*.<sup>83</sup>

On Lag LaOmer a major celebration and weddinglike occasion known as Hilula deRabi Shimon (Bar Yoḥai) is held after the *Arvit* service. They study some Zohar (*Idra Zuta*), sing *pizmonim*, and then memorial candles are sold in memory of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, abbi Meir Baal Hanes, the *Tannaim*, *Ammoraim*, and the various rabbis and *zaddikim* buried in Morocco. This candle-lighting ceremony is *Leilui nishmot haẓaddikim*. On Lag LaOmer day, everyone goes to visit the local cemeteries to pray at the graves of their sainted fathers and to make a *hilula* (celebration) at their graveside, just as it is the custom to go to Meron in Israel to the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai. Thus, in Morocco, many made the cemetery the main location for their picnic on Lag LaOmer.<sup>84</sup>

On the six Shabbatot between Pesah and Shavuot, before *Minḥa*, they read *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of the Fathers*) and *Pirkei Mishlei* (proverbs). Each Shabbat, after *Minḥa*, they read the verses for four letters of the alphabet from the *Alfa Beta* (Psalms 119).<sup>85</sup>

In some communities they counted the *Omer* each morning in a synagogue without the *berakha* immediately at the end of *Shaharit* as a reminder to anyone who may have forgotten to count on the night before.<sup>86</sup>

Women do not work while the *Sefira* is being counted. This is because the offering of the *sota* (wanton woman) was a tenth of an *sha* of flour from wheat, which is the same amount as the offering of the *Omer*. Thus, our righteous women were distinguished from the others by abstaining from work at this specific time.<sup>87</sup>

It is the custom to study the *Tikkun Karet* on the sixth day of the sixth week during the period of *Sefirat HaOmer*, just as during the month of Elul.

#### As Practiced by Judeo-Spanish Jews

Preparations for Pesah begin one month before the holiday, immediately after Purim. The Judeo-Spanish used to say, '*Purim lanu Pesah en la manu*,' meaning, 'Purim is come, and before you turn around, Passover is here.' The women begin to clean their houses, room by room, in preparation for the removal of all *hamez*. The children begin to study the Haggadah in the schools.<sup>88</sup>

In some communities the privilege of baking *mazzot* for the whole community was given to the one who would provide *mazzot* at the lowest price. Two types of *mazzot* were prepared: "thick" (*boyo*) and "thin" (*maniwo*) used for cooking and soaking in water.<sup>89</sup>

On Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Sabbath), which precedes Pesah, the children of the Talmud Torah, in such places as Salonika, would receive new clothes to mark the spring season. For them, this was known as *ḥag habalbasha* (The Festival of New Clothes). A large gathering which featured the singing of *piyutim* and special plays in honor of the contributors, was held each year.<sup>90</sup>

In Turkey there was no enactment of *mekhirat hamez*. However, nowadays since people do not use up all their *hamez* before the holiday season, the congregations do follow the tradition of having a special document to sell the leaven to a non-Jew. For many Judeo-Spanish communities, this is a relatively new procedure to which they were not at all accustomed in the old country.<sup>91</sup>

The usual preparation of special vessels and dishes for Passover prevails. There is preference for the individual family to have special Passover dishes (*la loza Paskual*). However, when this is not possible, the family is permitted to kasher their regular metal vessels in the usual fashion, which requires leaving them clean (in a state of disuse) for twenty-four hours and submitting them to either *hagala* (dipping in boiling water) or *libun* (being cleansed by a direct flame of fire).<sup>92</sup>

#### Mazzah Shemurah

*Mazzah shemurah* is used for at least the first two nights of Pesah, by everyone. This is in keeping with the declaration made in the Haggadah, "*Tomaran las tres mazzot shemurot . . .*"

The *bedikat hamez* is helped by the wife, who prepares a special plate with ten pieces of bread on it (as well as a scraping knife), the remains of the *hadassim*, and the *aravot*, which had been put away at the conclusion of Sukkot for the purpose of sweeping up the *hamez*. These are hidden, and the men of the family who come home in the evening recite the blessing over the *bedikat hamez*, take a candle, and search throughout the household until they find the plate with the *hamez*. They then set it aside for the following morning, when it will



be burned in the traditional *biur hamez*. The cleaning of the house of all *hamez* is called *kal hamira*.<sup>93</sup>

On the fourteenth of Nisan, when the eating of *hamez* is forbidden, the traditional food eaten is *buermelos de mazzah* (deep-fried *mazzah*). These are accompanied by eggs and vegetables.<sup>94</sup>

Plain *mazzah* is not eaten for a complete month prior to Pesah in order to preserve it as something special for the Passover holiday.

On Erev Pesah the housewife washes all of the vegetables very carefully to remove all insects, especially the romaine lettuce which is used for *maror* (bitter herb). The *haroset*, which is made from apples, nuts, figs, dates, and black raisins with seeds which are ground and mixed together with wine, is also prepared before the evening.<sup>95</sup> Each of the aforementioned fruits of the *haroset* has a Biblical connection with the people of Israel.<sup>96</sup>

The *zeroa* is symbolized by a roasted chicken wing.

There is no prohibition among the Judeo-Spanish from eating *zeli* (broiled meat), although many refrain from doing so. Similarly, there is no restriction on eating *mazzah* which is soaked in water (*manura*). The delicacies of Passover include *mazzah mojada* and *buermuelos*, which are soaked in eggs and water and salt, etc. *Prasa fuchi* or *sun-gato* (leek patties) and *meyina* or *meyina* (*mazzah* meat pie) are also special main dishes of the Passover holiday. Among the special beverages for Passover is *raki* (liqueur distilled from dried raisins). Today, many other beverages are used as well.<sup>97</sup> There is no prohibition against *kitniyyot* among the Judeo-Spanish. However, they do not eat rice on Passover because of the necessity of checking through the rice to make sure there is no grain mixed into it. All vegetables which grow are used for Passover.<sup>98</sup>

The *Arvit* service begins with the singing of *Hodu*, which is the *Mizmor shel Pesah*. At the conclusion of the regular *Arvit* service, the entire congregation chants the complete *Hallel* with the blessings being recited both before and at the conclusion of the *Hallel*.<sup>99</sup> This is in fulfillment of *Leil hitkadesh hag* also, because at home in the Seder service, the *Hallel* is split into two sections; therefore, the recitation of the entire *Hallel* at once at the evening service gives fulfillment to the concept of *Leil hitkadesh hag*.

The *Yigdal*, chanted at the conclusion of the *Arvit* service, is sung in the same melody as the *Kadesh urehatz* of the Seder.

When everyone comes home from services, the woman of the house has all of the required foods for the *keara* (Passover special plate) prepared. It is the obligation of the husband to place them on the plate in the proper order. The tradition of the Judeo-Spanish Jews is to place the items on the Passover plate according to the tradition of the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria), and not the way it is stated in the *Shulhan Arukh*.<sup>100</sup> The Judeo-Spanish tradition regarding the plate is the same as the Syrians.

The order of the *keara* (Passover plate) is as follows with the items being laid out as if it were a *ziyyon* (a six-pointed Star of David) with the *maror* (bitter herb) in the middle, according to the Ari.

The three *mazzot* are placed at the top. These symbolize *Keter*, *hokhma*, and *bina*, according to the ten *Sefirot* of the Kabbalah. To the right is *zeroa* (the roasted chicken wing), which represents *hesed*, according to the Kabbalah. Opposite it to the left is the *beizah* (roasted egg), which represents *gevurah*, according to the Kabbalah. Below the *zeroa* on the right is *haroset* (the admixture of black raisins with wine), which represents *nezah*, according to the Kabbalah. Directly opposite it, to the left, is *karpas* (parsley), which represents the spring, which, according to the Kabbalah, is symbolic of *hod*. Directly at the bottom, below the *mazzot*, is the *hazeret*, a form of Romaine lettuce, which symbolizes *yesod*, according to the Kabbalah. In the middle is the *maror* (bitter herb), which represents *tiferet*, according to the Kabbalah. Romaine lettuce is always used for the bitter herbs.<sup>101</sup>

The plate itself is the tenth item, which represents *malhut*, and it completes the ten *Sefirot* of the Kabbalah, according to the teaching of the Ari.

The door of the house is opened at *Kol Dikhfin*.<sup>102</sup> to symbolically invite all the poor who may wish to join in the Seder.<sup>103</sup>

The three *mazzot* are "bedecked" with a special embroidered cover.<sup>104</sup> The middle *mazzah* is broken in half, and one half is placed into a special napkin, as the *Afikoman*. This is to be used in a special way to arouse the curiosity and questions of the children as a part of the Seder ceremony.

The Seder plate is held for a moment over the head of each one at the table.

Parts of the Seder are said in both Hebrew and Ladino nowadays, although in earlier times the whole Seder was rendered in both lan-



## FIVE TYPES OF KUSHEYOT

### CONTRADICTIONS

*If God wrote the Torah, then there can be nothing written there which contradicts another part.*

**DIFFERING DETAILS BETWEEN TWO VERSIONS OF THE SAME STORY/LAW:**

*...male and female he created them. Gen. 1:27*

*and the Lord God formed the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman.*

*Gen. 2:22*

**ONE STORY CONTRADICTS THE FACT OR PREMISE OF A PREVIOUS STORY:**

*And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived.... Gen. 4:17*

*(Where does she come from—Adam and Eve had only two sons?)*

**A BROKEN PATTERN OF SERIES:**

*(Once the Torah sets up a pattern, it must have a reason for breaking or changing it.)*

*In Gen. 1, we have: one day... a second day... a third day... the sixth day.... (Why no "first day"? Why does day six rate a "the"?)*

### EXTRA LANGUAGE

If God wrote the Torah, everything in it must be there for a good reason. Nothing would be done just for emphasis or literary effect. Everything which seems to be extra, everything which is repeated, must be there to teach us something.

**A PHRASE OR INCIDENT IS REPEATED:**

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... Gen. 1:1*

*When the Lord God made earth and heaven.... Gen. 2:4*

*(Once should have been enough. Notice also: heaven-earth/earth-heaven)*

**A SERIES OF PHRASES OR WORDS SAYING THE SAME THING:**

*Go from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house to a land that I will show you.... Gen. 12:1*

*(God could have just said "Go to where I show you.")*

**EXTRA WORDS IN A SENTENCE:**

*And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, a hundred threescore and fifteen years. Gen. 25:7*

*(Is "which he lived" needed?)*

**WORD REVERSALS:**

*Honor your father and your mother.... Exod. 20:12*

*You shall each revere his mother and father.... Lev. 19:3*

*(If we are going to repeat something, why change the order?)*

## NEXT TO EACH OTHER

If God wrote the Torah, then there must be a logic in the way it is put together. God must have had a reason to connect passages which don't immediately seem to follow one from the other.

**TWO STORIES OR EVENTS ARE LINKED:**

**And it came to pass after these things....**

Gen. 22:1

(Look it up and try to figure out after what things?)

**TWO DISTINCT SUBJECTS JOINED INTO ONE SENTENCE:**

**You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths....** Lev. 19:3

(What does revering mother and father have to do with Shabbat? If the two are next to each other, there must be a connection.)

## BEHAVIOR

If God wrote the Torah, we would expect to find no limitations or evidence of human weakness in God. Similarly, biblical heroes should be the most righteous and law-abiding people imaginable.

**SOMETIMES GOD SEEMS TO DO THINGS WE FEEL ARE "UNGODLIKE":**

**"And the Lord God called unto the man and said to him: "Where are you?"** Gen. 3:9

(Shouldn't God know where he is? Does God need to ask?)

**SOMETIMES BIBLICAL HEROES SEEM TO VIOLATE SOME OF THE COMMANDMENTS:**

**and he [Abraham] took cream and milk and the calf which he dressed, and he set it before them.** Gen. 18:8

(Doesn't Abraham keep kosher? Biblical heroes are expected to follow all the commandments.)

## GRAMMAR/MEANING

God should write Hebrew perfectly and clearly, but we find in some places obscure words or even bad grammar. There are some places where the meaning is confused or impossible to comprehend. (Many of these *kusheyot* are impossible to translate.)

**SOMETIMES WE EXPECT ONE THING AND GET ANOTHER:**

**Let them make me a dwelling-place [sanctuary] that I may dwell in them.**

Exod. 25:8

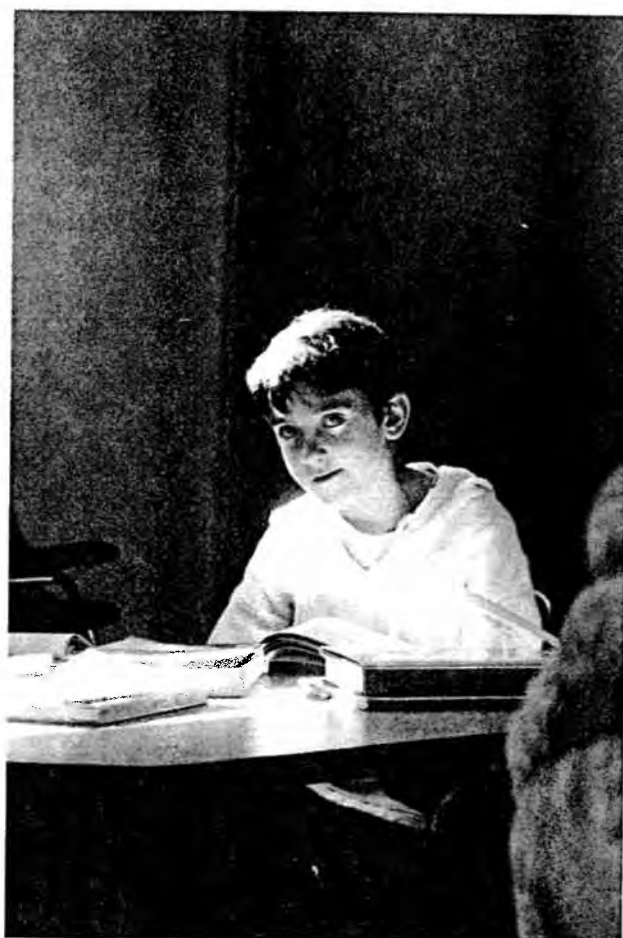
(When God is talking about a sanctuary, we would expect that God, and not we, would dwell in it.)

**SOMETIMES THE WAY A WORD IS USED IS INTERESTING:**

**Noah walked *with* God.** Gen. 6:9

**The Lord *before* whom I [Abraham] walk.** Gen. 24:40

(Why does Noah walk with and Abraham walk before?)



## Exercise 8.3

In the following quotations you'll find at least one *koshi*. They've all been put in *italics* for you. Your job is to:

- a. Define these *kusheyot*. (What is the problem? What question does the text make us ask?)
- b. Categorize the kind of *koshi*. (Contradiction, extra language, next to each other, behavior, or grammar/meaning.)
- c. Identify where (what story or section) they come from.
- d. Remember: Look for questions—we'll find answers later.

**1** And you shall love the Lord your God with *all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might*. Deut. 6:5

*Why is it that way to love?  
extra language to love?  
Deut 6:5 (d)*

**2** "Come and let us sell him to the *Ishmaelites*"...and there passed by *Midianites*, and they drew and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the *Ishmaelites*...and the *Midianites* sold him in Egypt. Gen. 37:27-36

**3** And God said: "Let *Us* make man in **Our image**, after our likeness..." and God created man in *His own image*. Gen. 1:26-27

**4** "How can *I, myself, alone*, bear your *cumbrance*, and your *burden*, and your *strife*." Deut. 1:12

**5** And the Children of Israel were *fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty*....Exod. 1:7

**6** And the Lord *called* unto Moses and *spoke* to him outside the Tent of Meeting, saying... Lev. 1:1

**7** And you will say to Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord: '*Israel is My first-born*....'" Exod. 4:22

**8** And the Lord said to Cain: "*Where is Abel your brother?*" Gen. 4:9

**9** And *Jacob* was left alone, and **there wrestled with a man** until daybreak....And he said: "*Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and man and prevailed.*" Gen. 32:25-29

And God said to him: "*Your name is Jacob: your name shall not be called any more Jacob but Israel shall be your name.*" And they called his name **Israel**. Gen. 35:10

**10** Now these are the names of the sons of *Israel* who came into Egypt with *Jacob*; every man came with his household. Exod. 1:1

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**11** And the servant took *ten camels*, of the camels of his master, and departed. Gen. 24:10

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**12** And *Jacob* said to his father: "*I am Esau*, your first-born." Gen. 27:19

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**13** And Isaac called *Jacob* and blessed him...and Isaac sent *Jacob* away and he went to *Paddan-aram*...Now *Esau* saw...so *Esau* went to *Ishmael* and took wives....And *Jacob* went out of *Beer-sheba* and went towards **Haran**. Gen. 28:1-10

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## Exercise 8.4

In these selections you'll find hidden *kusheyot*:

- Circle or underline these *kusheyot*.
- Define/describe the *koshi*. Sometimes this involves comparing two quotes.
- Remember—find questions, not answers.

**1** Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you. Gen. 27:29

Blessed be everyone who blesses you and cursed be everyone who curses you.

Num. 24:9

**2** And Sarah laughed to herself, saying: "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment with my husband so old?" Then the Lord\* said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying: 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'" Gen. 18:12-13

\*Up to now, Abraham was talking to three visitors.

**3** I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. ...And I will take you to Me for a people. Exod. 6:6-7

**4** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which your God gave you.

Exod. 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well of you upon the land that the Lord your God gave you. Deut. 5:16

**5** And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall into it, the owner of the pit must make good, he shall give money to their owner and the dead beast shall be his. Exod. 21:33-34

**6** And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush...and when the LORD saw that he turned aside, God called to him out of the midst of the bush.... Exod. 3:4

**7** And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said: "Jacob, Jacob...." Gen. 46:2

**8** The LORD, the LORD God, is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Exod. 34:6-7

**9** And Abraham said of Sarah his wife: "She is my sister." Gen. 20:2

**10** Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of the Machpelah before Mamre—the same is Hebron—in the land of Canaan. Gen. 23:19

**11** And the LORD said: "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation...?" Gen. 18:17-18

**12** מִי־כַמֹּכָה בְּאֱלֹמִים יְהוָה  
מִי־כַמֹּכָה נֹאדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ  
*Mi chamochah ba'elim Adonai*  
*Mi kamochah ne'edar ba-*  
*kodesh.* Exod. 15:11



## Exercise 8.5

- a. Find the *kusheyot* in each of the pairs of quotes.
- b. Then find the *koshi* discovered by comparing the quotations.

**1** Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth...and on the seventh He rested....The Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. Exod. 20:8-11

Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy. For you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. Deut. 5:12-15

**2** The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, "Send men to scout the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Children of Israel. Send one man from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain among them." Num. 13:1-2

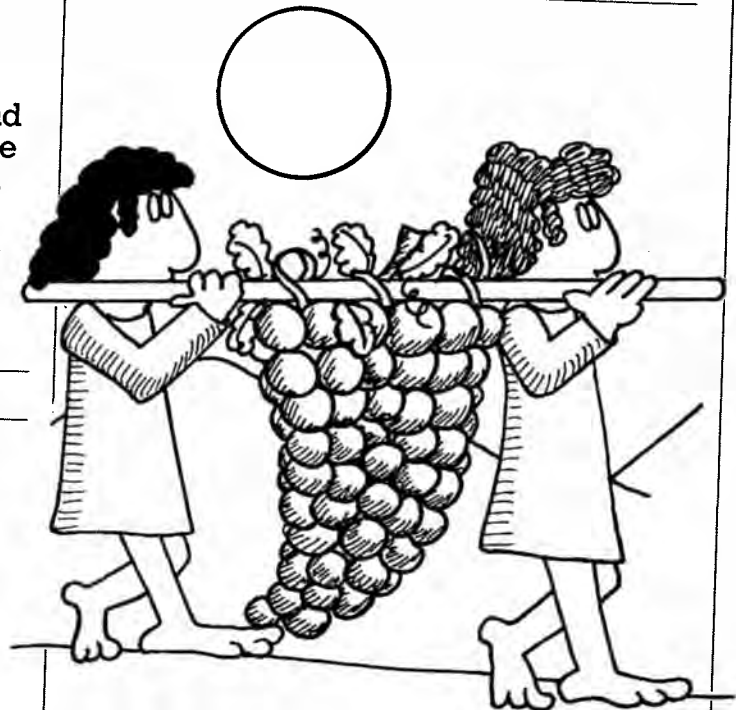
Then all of you came to me [Moses] and said: "Let us send men ahead to explore the land for us and bring back word on the route we shall follow and the cities we shall come to." I approved the plan, so I selected twelve of your men, one from each tribe. Deut. 1:22-23

**3** And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: "Speak unto the Children of Israel, saying...." (Over a hundred times in the Torah)

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: "Speak unto all the congregation of the Children of Israel, and say unto them ..."  
Lev. 19:1-2

**4** And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and water and gave it to Hagar and put it on her shoulder and the child, and sent her away. Gen. 21:14

And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place that God had told him. Gen. 22:3





## Exercise 8.6

### GENESIS 22

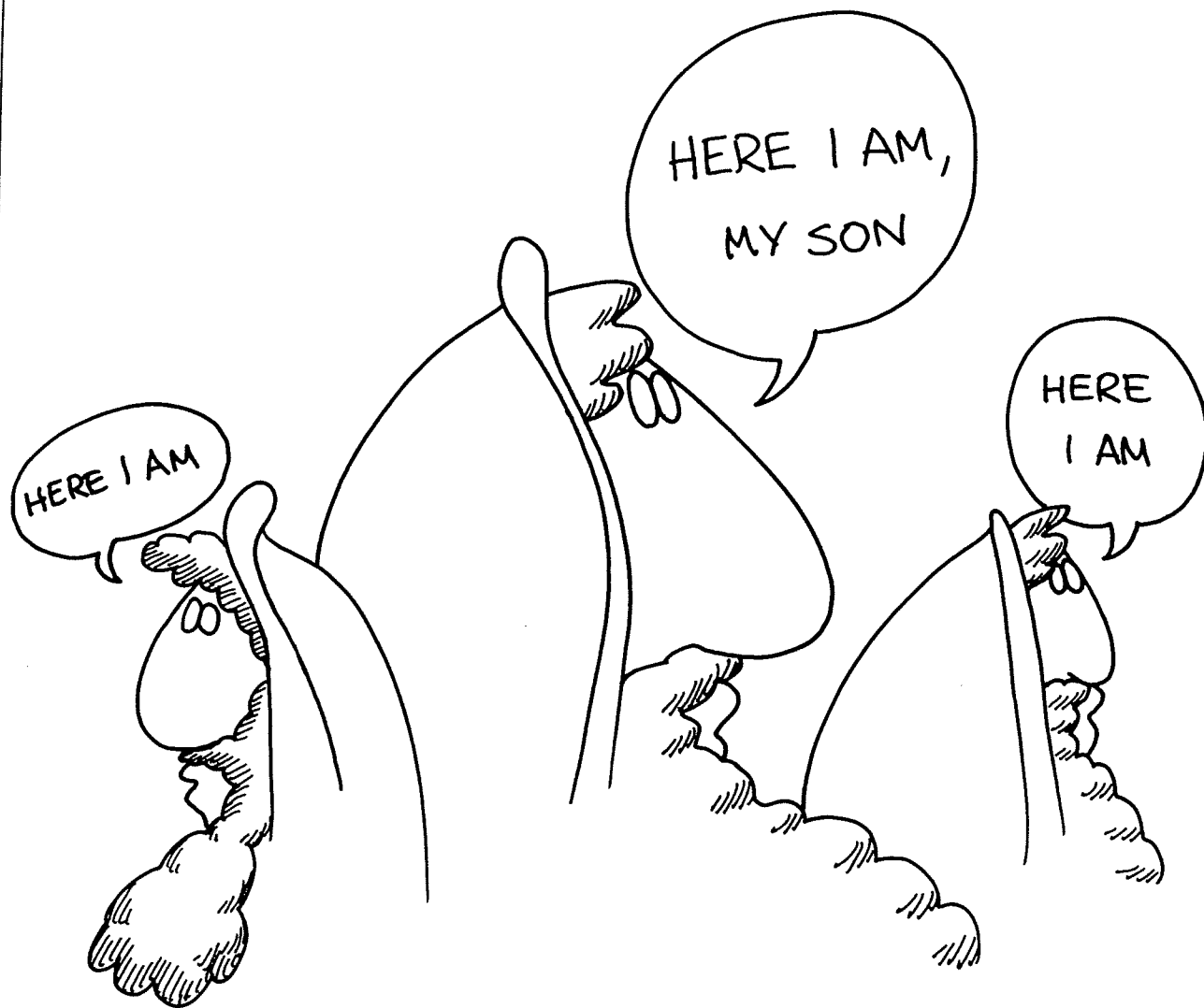
**N**ow try to find the *kusheyot* in a real chapter of Torah. Define the *koshi* in the appropriate place in the right-hand column.

And it came to pass *after these things*, that God tested Abraham, and said to him: "Abraham"; and he said: "Here I am." And He said: "Take—please, *your son, your only son, whom you love— Isaac*, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will show you." **Abraham** rose early in the morning, and **saddled his ass, and took two of his young men, and he chopped wood for the burnt-offering**, and rose up, and went to the place that God had told him of. *On the third day*, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place in the distance, and Abraham said to his young men: "Wait here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder, and we will worship and come back to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife, and they went both of them together, and Isaac spoke to his father and said: "My father" and he said "Here I am, my son." And he said: "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?" and Abraham said: "*God will provide for Himself the lamb* for the burnt-offering, my son." So they went, both of them together. **And they came to the place which God had told him of, and**

1. After these things.
2. God tested.
3. Your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac.
4. Offer him...
5. Abraham...saddled his ass...
6. And took two of his young men...
7. On the third day.
8. And we will worship and come back to you.
9. God will provide...the lamb (or God will see for Himself the lamb).
10. Place which God had told him of.

11. And the angel of the Lord.
12. Abraham, Abraham.
13. Lay not your hand...nor do anything...
14. Now I know.
15. Your son, your only son.

Abraham built the altar there, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, on the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. *And the angel of the Lord* called to him out of heaven, and said: "*Abraham, Abraham.*" And he said: "Here I am." And he said: "*Lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him, for now I know that you are a God-fearing man, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.*"





## Exercise 8.7

### A LOOK AT THE WAY RASHI WORKS

אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדֵת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלְקֵת־נֹחַ

This is the line of Noah—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age [generation]; Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:9)

We examined this verse as part of the post-test in Module Seven. Do you remember the *koshi* or can you work out what Rashi finds difficult? Write what you think is Rashi's question.

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(Or read Rashi's commentary. He doesn't state the problem because he assumes you can find it on your own. If you are clever, you can work out the problem from the answer.)

### RASHI'S COMMENTARY ON GEN. 6:9

*In his generation*: Some of our rabbis explain *in his generation* to Noah's credit—it follows that had he lived in a generation of righteous people he would have been even more righteous.

Others, however, explain *in his generation* to discredit Noah. In the context of his own generation, he was considered righteous but, had he lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered as important.

Explain Rashi's two answers to this *koshi* in your own words.

*In his generation* means \_\_\_\_\_

*In his generation* means \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you think that Rashi got these two answers? (Remember our midrash?)

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Rashi didn't invent these comments on this verse. He merely "brings" them to the learner. They can be found in the Talmud (San. 108a) and the Midrash (Gen. R. 30:9).

Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah disagreed.

Rabbi Judah said:

Only in his age was he a righteous man. If he had lived in the time of Moses or Samuel, he would not have been called righteous.

In the street of the totally blind, a one-eyed man is called a visionary and the infant is called a scholar.

This can be compared to a man who had a wine vault and who opened one barrel and found it vinegar, then opened another and found it vinegar, but the third barrel had only begun to turn sour. People told him, "It is turning," but he said, "Is there any better?" This is the meaning of *in his age*.

Rabbi Nehemiah said: If he was righteous in his age, he would have been even more righteous in the age of Moses.

Compare him to a tightly closed pail of perfume lying in a graveyard (full of the stench of rotting bodies) that still gave off a pleasant odor. It would smell even better outside the graveyard. (Gen. R. 30:9)

Underline in this text those portions Rashi utilized in his commentary. See if you can figure out the guidelines Rashi uses in drawing from the sources.

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Based on what you've learned so far, how does Rashi work, both as a teacher and as a commentator?

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## Exercise 8.8a

# 1

**And [Joseph's brothers] took him, and cast him in the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.** (Gen. 37:24)

**RASHI: The pit was empty; there was no water in it:** Since it states "the pit was empty," do I not know that "there was no water in it"? Why then does the Torah say "there was no water in it"? Not only did it not contain water, but also there were no snakes or scorpions in it. (Shab. 22a)

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

*Eicha language*  
*Why does it tell us both*  
*it's empty & there's no water*  
*in it?*

B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

*He brings in Shab. 22a related to*  
*another. No water = no water*  
*+ empty means no snakes or*  
*scorpions*

C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

*Yes. There were snakes / scorpions?*  
*No proof text - by logic figures*  
*it out*

D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

*San 22a - Talmud.*

E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

*The bros. didn't really*  
*want to kill him?*

# 2

**These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.— Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab.**

(Deut. 1:1)

**RASHI: Between Paran and Tophel:** Rabbi Yochanan said: We have gone through the whole Bible and we have found no place where the name of Tophel or Laban is mentioned. But the meaning here is that he rebuked them because of the לָפֶת tophel/calumnious statements they made about the manna, which was לבן /lavan—white in color. And they said: Our souls hate this light bread.... (Num. 21:5; cf. Sifre, Ber. 32a)

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

**3** These are the offspring of Aaron and Moses at the time that the Lord spoke with Moses on Mt. Sinai. And these are the names of Aaron's sons: Nadab, the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.... (Num. 3:1-2)

**RASHI: And these are the offspring of Aaron and Moses:** But it mentions only the sons of Aaron! But they are also called the sons of Moses because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches Torah to the son of his neighbor is considered as though she/he is the child's parent. (San. 19b)

**At the time that the Lord spoke with Moses:** The children of Aaron became Moses' because then was the first time that he taught them what he had learned from God.

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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**4** So the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them." And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

**God spoke all these words, saying: I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.** (Exod. 19:24-20:2)

**RASHI: God spoke all these words:** The name **אלהים** / *Elohim* (God) is the term for a judge. These chapters of the Torah are material where if a person obeys these *mitzvot*, she/he will receive a reward, and if she/he does not observe them, there is no punishment. However, to show that the Ten Commandments are different from the surrounding material, the Torah says: "**God spoke**," meaning *God who is judge*, and who will exact punishment. (Mechilta)

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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## Exercise 8.8b

For each of these comments by Rashi, find the following:

1. The *koshi*.
2. The solution.
3. The proof-text (if one is used).
4. The message being taught.
5. Rashi's source.

**1** If any man insults his father or mother, he shall be put to death; he has insulted his father and his mother—his bloodguilt is upon him.

(Lev. 20:9)

**RASHI: If any man insults his father or mother:** These words seem to repeat themselves, but their intent is that anyone who insults his parents after they are dead or while they are alive is subject to the death penalty. (Sifra; San. 85b)

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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**2** The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9)

**RASHI: Where are you?:** God knew where he was but asked the question in order to start a conversation—so that he should not be confused in his reply—as if God were beginning by punishing him. Similarly, in the case of Cain, God said to him, "Where is your brother Abel?"

(Gen. 4:9)

Similarly with Balaam: "What do these people want of you?" (Num. 22:9)—to begin a conversation with them....

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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**3** Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. (Exod. 17:11)

**RASHI:** When Moses held up his hand—But could Moses' hands win the battle? To understand this, see the whole passage in Rosh Hashanah 29a.

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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**4** But Moses changed the name of Hosea son of Nun to Joshua. (Num. 13:16)

**RASHI:** Changing his name was part of praying for him—"May God save you from the evil counsel of the spies." (Sotah 34b)

His name, *יושע* /Hosea, which means "saving," became *יהושע* /Yehoshua, which means "May God save ..."

A. What is the *koshi*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve this *koshi*?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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**5** Keep and hear all the words that I command you; thus it will go well with you and with your descendants after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God. (Deut. 12:28)

**RASHI: Keep and hear** [understand] **all these words which I command you:** The word שמר /shemor (keep) refers to the study of the Oral Law—that you must keep it within you. This is what is taught in Proverbs 22:17-18, “*And apply your heart to my knowledge...for it is a pleasant thing if you keep...[it] within you.*” Because, only if you learn, is it possible to understand and act correctly. (Sifre, cf. Rashi on 4:6)

**All the words:** This teaches that a “light” commandment should be considered as carefully as a “heavy” commandment.

**What is good:** This refers to that which is proper in God’s eyes.

**And right:** This refers to what is proper in people’s eyes. (Sifre)

A. What are the three *kusheyot*? (State both the type and the question.)

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B. How does Rashi solve them?

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C. Is there a proof-text? (If so—what does it prove?)

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D. From where does Rashi learn this explanation?

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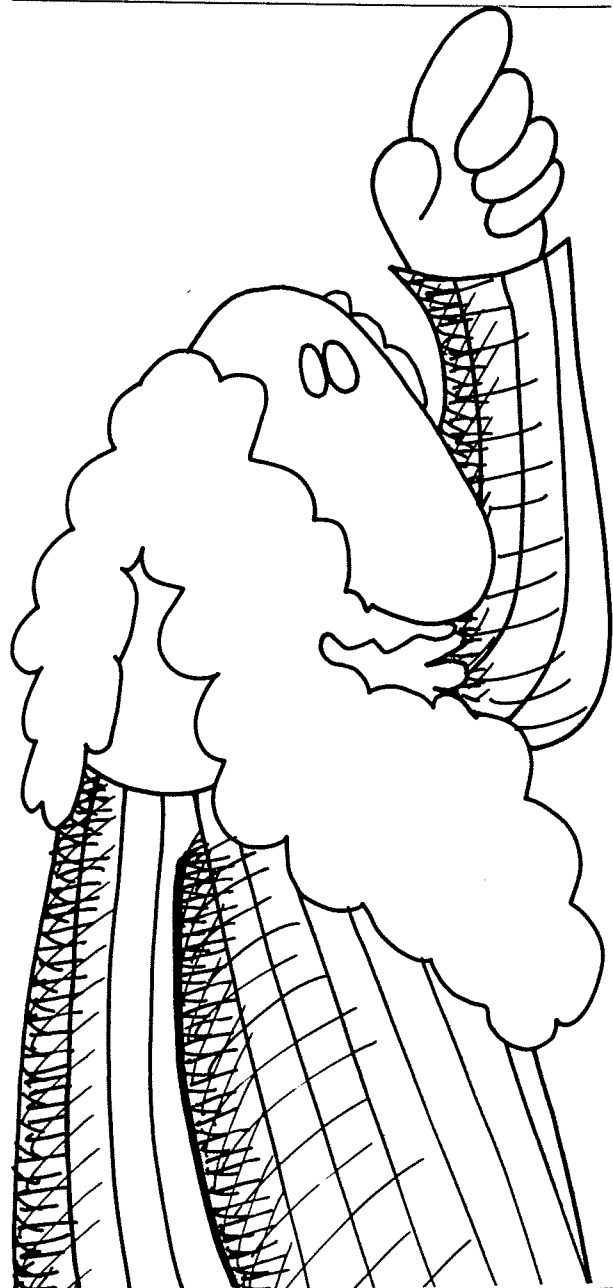
E. Is there a message being taught? (If so, what is the moral?)

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# RASHI AS A TEACHER

**L**earning with Rashi's commentary is like having a private tutor sitting by your side. His work isn't "user-friendly"; in fact, it's often quite demanding, but, as you learn his tricks, Rashi is there holding your hand, helping you over the hard points, and making you a better Torah learner.

Obviously, I've never met Rashi, and little biographic material is available, but his personality comes through in his work. First, he is quiet and patient. He doesn't shout out—"You are going to learn three things from this passage." Rather, he sits waiting in the margins. As I'm reading the text and something isn't clear, I turn to him. Usually, he is waiting with an answer which begins, "I thought you might have a problem with this verse." Then, rather than giving a full answer, he begins with a few cryptic words—a hint and gentle sigh.... "Now go work it out for yourself." Sometimes I scream in anger, "Why can't you just tell me what you're trying to teach me." But Rashi doesn't say anything. His commentary just echoes—"Look at the text again; think; you'll find it." And in the end, with satisfaction like that of the mountain-climber who has reached the top, my understanding of the text has brought me the satisfaction of owning this small piece of Torah. Rashi just smiles and says: "I knew you could figure it out." He's that kind of teacher.

Other times, when I'm reviewing or skimming, I look directly at Rashi. He's always one up on me. He'll review all the problems he's found in a passage, and I'll think—I should have seen that one, or how could I have missed that connection. Even so, Rashi is never loud or dramatic. His words work like a road sign, pointing the direction towards the next understanding.

Clearly, Rashi has a vision of Torah learning as a way of life. For him, Torah isn't just knowledge or value statements, it isn't just rules and connections; it is a

way of thinking and communicating. Rashi lived in the twelfth century, yet we talk regularly. He is that kind of teacher.

Rashi has a second objective too. For him, the Torah has to be read in context. It doesn't stand alone. As we read a passage, he will tell me to remember that this rule in the Talmud comes from this idea, or in the Midrash there is another idea which is like this. Jewish learning requires the making of connections, and Rashi is a master at reminding us how the rest of rabbinic literature grew from the Torah. For me, it is impossible to talk about Rashi in the past tense.

## POST-TEST

This module has four objectives:

- 8.1 Trace the history of Jewish biblical commentary from the Masoretes through the commentators.
- 8.2 Identify *kusheyot* (difficulties/problems) by category in a biblical verse.
- 8.3 Follow a commentary by Rashi, identifying (a) the question, (b) the solution, (c) the moral/message, and (d) the use of proof-texts.
- 8.4 Express in your own words what can be gained from studying Torah "with rabbinic eyes."

The first of these (8.1) we are not going to test; you'll have to decide on your own competency.

If you completed Exercise 8.6, the identification of problems in chapter 22 of Genesis, you've fulfilled the second part.

Now for objective 8.3, here are Rashi's comments on the "Binding of Isaac." Your job is to identify the problem, solution, and moral.

## **Unit III: Religious Practices and Customs among Ashkenazic communities**

< 4 Sessions >

### Enduring Understanding and Essential Question

Where Jews have lived has resulted in cultural and religious diversity because of contact with larger cultures in which they have lived.

Given that there are equally valid but sometimes opposite traditions, how does that help your understanding of Jewish practice and custom?

How does a subset of a religious tradition legitimate itself in light of a larger tradition?

### **Goals:**

1. Familiarize students with the two stages of Medieval Ashkenazic history between 600-1200 and 1200-1500.
2. Introduce students to significant Medieval Ashkenazic Jewish thinkers who influenced Jewish practice and custom, namely, Rashi and Rabbeinu Gershon.
3. Initiate students into different Ashkenazic observances of Kabbalat Shabbat, Torah service, and Passover.
4. Acquaint students with Ashkenazic observances of *zeved bat* and *brit milah*.

### **Objectives:**

At the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. identify Medieval Christian influences on Jewish life in England, Northern France, Germany and Eastern Europe in light of historic and political forces including the First Crusade; negative images of the Jew in Medieval Christendom; economic activities of Ashkenazi Jews; Pope Innocent III's restrictions on Jewish status; and a series of expulsions and massacres of Jews.
2. identify significant Ashkenazic people who have influenced Jewish practice and custom including Rashi and Rabbeinu Gershon.
  - a) describe three practices/customs of an Ashkenazic Kabbalat Shabbat service
  - b) describe five practices/customs of an Ashkenazic Torah service

- c) describe five aspects of an Ashkenazic Passover Seder  
4. list main points of an Ashkenazic *zeved bat and brit milah*.

During the unit, students will have the opportunity to:

1. visit a traditional Ashkenazic Shabbat or holiday service.

Key Concepts:

Ashkenazim:

Ashkenazic: According to A-Z Lexicon Concepts of Jewish Terms, Ashkenazim literally means ‘inhabitants of Ashkenaz (biblical location).’ By the early Middle Ages, Ashkenaz was identified with Germany: earliest such reference occurs in *siddur* (prayerbook) of R. Amram Gaon (d. 875), while Rashi (1040-1105) calls German language *leshon Ashkenaz*. The term denoted the first compact settlement of Jews in N.W. and Central Europe, identifying Rhenish (‘German’) Jews and their descendants elsewhere as *Ashkenazim*. In a broader sense, the term is applied to an entire complex of Ashkenazi culture, legal concepts, mores, religious traditions and social institutions.

Major differences have developed over the centuries between Ashkenazim and Sephardim in their pronunciation of Hebrew language, customs, liturgy and language. Separate synagogues and institutions are maintained by the two groups wherever they live side by side although both accept the *Shulhan Arukh* as their standard code of Jewish law but each has their own commentator. Widespread use of Yiddish (Judeo-German) as vernacular was characteristic of Ashkenazim until the Shoah. From 15th century, external pressures drove German-Jews east (to Poland, Lithuania, and Russia); but 19th-century Tsarist persecution resulted in mass emigration to W. Europe, N. and S. America, Israel and other parts of the world. Ashkenazim remain numerically predominant in World Jewry, although non-Ashkenazim now comprise over 50% of Jews in Israel.

Misconception Alert: It is easy to lose sight of the fact that at times good relations did exist between Christians and Jews, even where there were troubles. This is easy to miss under the broad strokes of history.

### **Suggested Learning Activities:**

I. History:

A. First Crusade: Even during the most peaceful times, Jews were always in danger of getting in the way of fanatic churchmen and brutal lords. However,

in November 1095, Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade at Clermont in southeastern France and triggered a widespread hysteria, especially among the knights of northern France, who were promised rewards of salvation for those who reclaimed the Holy Land from the Turks. This set in motion mob violence against anyone who was perceived as a non-believer. Jewish towns were pillaged and its inhabitants slaughtered unless they converted through baptism. Locals exterminated most of the Jewish community of Worms and Mainz. This supercharged religious atmosphere was paralleled by the Ashkenazic Jews who were willing to die as martyrs for the sake of God (an act called *kiddush ha-Shem*, sanctification of the divine name), rather than save their lives and property by conversion.

Activity: From Moments and Methods (p38), here is an activity: There are three Jewish laws which must never be broken even if it means sacrificing one's own life to preserve them. Listed below are eight laws. Choose the three which you believe are the laws that cannot be violated:

- A: You Shall honor your father and mother.
- B: You shall not commit murder.
- C: You shall observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- D: You shall observe the laws of *kashrut*.
- E: You shall not worship false gods.
- F: You shall not bear false witness.
- G: You shall not have sexual relations with close family members (incest).
- H: You shall not steal.

The correct answers are: B, E, G. This exercise should be followed by a structured discussion of why Jewish law ordained those three positions. First, it must be made clear to students that Judaism is anti-martyrdom, even in cases where Jews are forced to worship another God. Second, similarly to the first point, Judaism values life so much, that traditionally it was considered better to take ones own life rather than murder an innocent person. Sexual relations with family members has always been wrong in Jewish tradition. Ask students to rank the three in order of their importance to them. Are there any laws or values which they would add or subtract from this list of three? Do these laws which if followed lead to ones death, speak to us in modern times? If not death as the consequence, then what?



B. Restrictions of kind of work Jews allowed to do: In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there occurred an important shift in the economic activities of the Ashkenazic Jews into money lending. This shift was a direct result of the growing monopoly of Christian merchant guilds, which forced Jews out of the trade. Jews were never the only money lenders in Europe, but certain conditions made them very desirable as loaners. However, moneylending did not increase the popularity of the Jews in Europe, especially by those who could not pay back the loans with accumulated interest.

The period of the Crusades was from 1096 to 1500. During this time Jews were subjugated to a variety of persecution including heavy taxation, blood libel trials and forced conversions. Jews were also alternately permitted in, and expelled from, France. Some of these expulsion dates include January 21, 1306, June 24, 1322, and November 3, 1394. Official attitudes toward the Jews fluctuated based upon the financial needs of the authorities.

Activity: Also adopted from Moments and Methods, Chart the journeys and reasons for Jewish expulsion and their readmission by reproducing the map of Western Europe on a game board. Include England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy. Add pathways in and out of these countries which are divided into spaces on the board. Decide on the rules for play, how tokens may be moved and whether to have bonus or consequence cards, etc. Try to include historical information with in the structure of the game. For your reference, consult the Junior Encyclopedia Judaica for each of the countries you plan to include. Also, *The Jewish History Atlas*, Revised Edition, by Martin Gilbert, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1976.

C. Have the class visit a Jewish museum so they can see the different kinds of clothes worn by Jews of different parts of the world. They can also see the different designs of ritual objects. \*

II. Learn about significant Ashkenazic people who have influenced Jewish practices and customs: As Robert Seltzer describes in history book, Jewish People, Jewish Thought,

The Ashkenazic ideal, with its emphasis on talmudic learning for every man, is quite in contrast with the Sephardic admiration for

universal culture, the study of science and philosophy, and the writing of secular as well as religious Hebrew poetry patterned on Arabic literary forms [piyyutim]. The difference between the two Jewries reflect their different environments: Muslim Spain at the height of its cultural splendor and feudal Europe just on the verge of intellectual renaissance. Indeed the two Jewries had little contact at this time.<sup>1</sup>

The early Ashkenazic Jewish communities were small and homogeneous. Jewish craftsmen and artisans, a widespread segment of Mediterranean Jewry, did not emigrate to northern Europe; moreover, once the system of Christian artisan guilds was established, Jews were effectively barred from these occupations. Besides trade, another occupation held by Jews was the growing of grapes and making of wine; ownership of vineyards was common in France. The Jews of each town governed themselves and each town had its distinct set of rules. Unlike the Jewries of Muslim lands, the Ashkenazic communities (kehillot) had no professional bureaucracy and no equivalent of an exilarch. Each Ashkenazic kahal established its own special regulations (takkanot) The kahal system of Jewish self government was the Ashkenazic adaptation to the decentralized power structure of feudal society.

According to Seltzer, early Ashkenazim pursued biblical and talmudic studies with exceptional intensity. The two greatest centers of rabbinic scholarship appear in the tenth century in the Rhineland cities of Mainz and Worms, and soon afterwards in northern France at Troyes and Sens. The most famous of the early teachers was Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz "the Light of the Exile"; among his takkanot and legal opinions that have survived in the Responsa literature is the responsum definitively prohibiting polygamy among Ashkenazic Jews.

A. Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (1040-1105), known by his acronym as Rashi, was the first major literary figure of Ashkenazic Jewry, and one of the greatest. His commentaries on almost the entire Bible and Talmud became fundamental texts of Jewish education. His explanations focus on the literal (peshat) and sermonistic (derash) meaning of the texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Seltzer's Jewish People, Jewish Thought, chapter "Middle Ages and early Modern Times," Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1980. p355.

Activity: Learn how to read a biblical text through Rashi's eyes. Consult Joel Lurie Grishaver's Learning Torah: A Self-Guided Journey through the Layers of Jewish Learning, pp 151-170, provided in Source Materials. You do not have to use all of the material here, but it gives step-by-step guidance on how to read a text and look for Rashi-like questions and to read some of Rashi's commentary -- in English.

### **III. Visit a traditional Ashkenazi Shabbat or holiday service:**

A. One of the distinctions between a Sephardic and Ashkenazic service has to do with pronunciation of Hebrew. Notice that in the traditional Ashkenazic service, the Hebrew letter "tav," is often pronounced as "s" as in "Bas Mitzvah" rather than "Bat Mitzvah." Modern Ashkenazic congregations uniformly adopted the Sephardic pronunciation for their services.

If visiting on Friday night, note the different, European style music and the tune they sing for L'cha Dodi.

If visiting Saturday morning, note in the Torah service how people are called up to the Torah for an aliya, when Hagbah is done, and if they sing any tune while the Torah is being dressed.

B. Authentic Assessment: Write a letter to an imaginary Sephardic friend who is visiting your congregation Saturday morning. Explain to them what to expect in the Torah service that is different from what they are used to.

C. For Passover, see Unit II for comparison of Haggadot activity.

### **V. Life cycles**

**Baby Naming:** According to Ronald H. Isaacs' Rites of Passage, the custom of naming children after other persons began in the sixth century B.C.E. Since there were no laws concerning the naming of children, much of what the Jews did then and much of what Jews observe today in this area is custom and is sometimes based on folklore or superstition. Ashkenazic Jews customarily chose to memorialize a deceased relative by bestowing that person's name upon a newborn child. However, they did not use the names of a living relative, like the Sephardim do, because of the belief that a person's name carries with it both the power and characteristics of that person. Naming a child after that person, they believed, would shorten the length of the relative's life. Similarly, they would often not name a child after a person who died early in life.

You may recall that for Sephardim, naming a baby after a living grandmother or grandfather is considered a real honor for the living relative. In Eastern Europe children would sometimes be given additional names that symbolized length of years, such as the Yiddish name “Alter,” meaning old person. Giving a child such a name was believed to increase one’s longevity.

***Brit Milah:*** Among Ashkenazic Jews it is common to give some multiple of eighteen dollars as a gift because the number value for eighteen is spelled out with the Hebrew letters for the world life--*chai*.

**Kvater:** This is a German-derived word which means godfather. His ritual role is to bring the child into the room for the circumcision. **Kvaterin:** This is a German-derived word which means godmother. Along with the kvater, the kvaterin also brings the child into the room where the circumcision will be performed. The kvater and kvaterin are often grandparents of the newborn, although aunts, uncles, cousins and friends may also be used. **Sandek:** This is a Greek term meaning “with child.” The sandek’s role is to hold the baby while the mohel performs the surgical procedure of circumcision.<sup>2</sup>

In Western Europe a custom arose of using the linen wrapping worn by the baby into an embroidered Torah binder called a wimple which had the embroidered name of the baby, his date of birth and astrological sign sewn on. The wimple was presented to the congregation on the occasion of the baby’s first birthday.

Another Eastern European custom was to throw sugar, raisins, cake, and coins into the baby’s cradle before the child was placed in it, as an omen for a sweet and abundant life.

**Authentic Assessment:** Imagine you are Sephardic and you just attended your first Ashkenazic zaved bat/ brit milah. You want to write a thank you note to the family for inviting you. In your thank you, share with them what a cultural experience it was by explaining the main differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazic observances of one of these rites, i.e., differences in terminology, naming after relatives (deceased/living), songs sung, location of ceremony.

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<sup>2</sup> See Ronald H. Isaacs’ Rites of Passage: A guide to the Jewish Life Cycle KTAV, 1992, pp28-36.

*Sarah Schechter*

# Learning Torah

*A Self-Guided Journey through the Layers of Jewish Learning*

Joel Lurie Grishaver

UAHC Press

New York, New York

ירושלמי

אם נפשו רחוק יספין (ט) אפר לכן לקרקע הקראו את קושי תפלתו...
אין מי לי פניהו אנדר: (טז) ולכן הוין מרחין בן ימים רבתי אלה...
אם נפיקת רחל: (יז) געזי לאה הוין אידויתן רבתי ובעזי בן קרוב ו...

ינתן בן עזראל

אם נפשו רחוק יספין (ט) אפר לכן לקרקע הקראו את קושי תפלתו...
אין מי לי פניהו אנדר: (טז) ולכן הוין מרחין בן ימים רבתי אלה...
אם נפיקת רחל: (יז) געזי לאה הוין אידויתן רבתי ובעזי בן קרוב ו...

(כז) אפר לכן לקרקע הקראו את קושי תפלתו

קב

בעל המזרים

שלא נפיקת רחל יספין: (א) וינתן לו וינתן לו, תחלה ספקי נפיקת חס היה ספק...
בשם נהגו ובעל חס: (ב) וינתן לו וינתן לו, וינתן לו וינתן לו...
אם נפיקת רחל: (ג) וינתן לו וינתן לו, וינתן לו וינתן לו...

ינתן

לננו יום נדחיו כי חסיד חסד: (א) וינתן לו וינתן לו, תחלה ספקי נפיקת חס היה ספק...
בשם נהגו ובעל חס: (ב) וינתן לו וינתן לו, וינתן לו וינתן לו...
אם נפיקת רחל: (ג) וינתן לו וינתן לו, וינתן לו וינתן לו...

אבן עזרא

(טז) משכרתך. על חסדן חסדו חסדו: (יז) רבותי. \*כמשמעו...
ויש שואלים למה היו כן נצטוו ששנו שמתנות השם כמשנתותיהם...
וכל הנכחים רלויות לזכות להיות שוות. וכן אש"י אמר שהוא ספק...
אלף ושמנו חרבות וכו' היה ספק קאלף: יפת תאר. כמו וחסד לכס...
'בגבול. כל אשר כעין והאף והסם יפה. ומכאן הכל 'יפה. או מכאן...
על עין הפנים הנכחה: (כ) ויעבר יעקב ברחל. נצטור 'כחל: (כז) שלא...
(טז)

רמב"ן

נצטור נצטור ונצטור הימים שאמרה לו אמו גם מפני וקנחו לא ין לו לכן...
נש קודם זמנו אשר חסדו שיהיה ודי שיקיים חסדו ונדנדי לוונקלוקס הוא...
שולק לרשע מלא שנוע זמנו על המשחה כי ימי העבודה שלמים היו כאשר...
אשר לו יעקב גם כן פירש ר"ל ואלו לא ידעתי כי נצטור ימי המשחה תקנה...
עשה נצטור לזרחל וזלוי נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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ואן נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
קדם הורסו אכל נצטור שלנו לא למדו מנחן ודעוה מועט נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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שע אליו וימלא חוסם נצטור לכן כי עש יוכל לעשות והוא נצטור נצטור נצטור...
ינתן לומר כי כאשר היו נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
לשמו קשו וכן עד יום עלאת ימי עלחיקם עד יום הנצטור שנו יתלא ימי הנצטור או שאמר...
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פירוש על אבן עזרא

'(כמשמעו) (א) כי נצטור נצטור. ונצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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ספורנו

עצמי ובשרי אתה. אף על פי שחולל להפטרם נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור נצטור...
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פירוש רש"י

עצמי ובשרי אתה וכו'. ויפת כונת לבא אלי: (טז) ולכן שתי בנות. והפסיק תשובת דבריו של יעקב כי לפי שהיה לו שתי בנות והקטנה...
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## Exercise 8.2

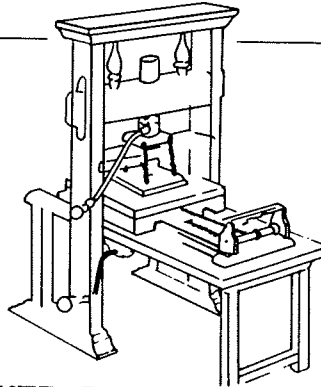
**QUESTION:** Why do you think that Torah study was so important in this period? Why was it probably the leading Jewish art form?

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**AN ANSWER:** The great period of Jewish biblical commentary started with Rashi in the middle of the eleventh century and ended with Sforno in the mid-sixteenth century. The eleventh century was really the beginning of the growth of the great market centers and the beginning of guilds. The sixteenth century saw the growth of the printing press as a viable means of communication.

**T**he printing press seemed to bring the “classical age” of Jewish commentary to an end. After Sforno, the world began changing rapidly through the application of new technologies. Changes in the economy brought the enlightenment through which Jews became full members of the communities in which they lived. As we will see in the next module, this new age brought new tools to the process of learning Torah.

קושי / *koshi* (difficulty/problem)  
קשה / *kasheh* (hard)  
קשיה / *kusheyah* (question)  
ארבע קשיות / *arba kusheyot* (the four questions)

In a few pages we are going to begin to study Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. Before we get there, we’ll need to develop a new skill. In Module Three: “Close-Reading,” we saw that the Torah was written. In Module Six: “Who Done It?” we learned that the assumption “God Wrote It” leads to a unique way of learning Torah. In Module Seven: “Reading the Torah with Rabbinic Eyes—Midrash” we learned how to learn midrash. We learned that a midrash starts with a question about the biblical text, and that in answering that question it often teaches an additional moral or message.

Before we get to Rashi, we’re going to have to develop the skill of finding the problem in the verse (without looking at the answer). These questions or problems in the text are called קשיות / *kusheyot*.

In most Jewish commentaries on the Torah, five basic kinds of *kusheyot* are studied. These include some of the difficulties we defined in Modules Three, Four, and Five, as well as some new kinds of *kusheyot*.

The traditional commentators all assumed that God wrote the entire Torah. If God wrote it, then it must be *PERFECT*. That means that God would not have put anything extra into the Torah, that God would have arranged the Torah in a totally logical way.

**REMEMBER**, traditional Judaism believes that God intentionally put each of these *kusheyot* in the biblical text. Each difficulty is there to make us pause and learn something through struggling with it.

CHART 3B. MEDIEVAL PERIOD, 1200-1500

General History	Jews in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Southern France	Jews in England, Northern France, Germany, East Europe	General History	Jews in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Southern France	Jews in England, Northern France, Germany, East Europe
<p>1200</p> <p>1198-1216. Pontificate of Innocent III.</p> <p>1200-1225. Establishment of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders.</p> <p>1208. Beginning of crusade against the Albigensian heresy in southern France.</p> <p>1212. Battle of Los Navas de Toloso leaves most of Spain in Christian hands.</p> <p>1215. Fourth Lateran Council.</p> <p>1225-1270. Thomas Aquinas, Christian scholastic philosopher.</p> <p>1226-1270. Reign of Louis IX (St. Louis) in France.</p> <p>1249. Mamluk regime in Egypt (until 1517).</p> <p>1258. Mongols capture Baghdad and put an end to the caliphate there.</p> <p>1272-1307. Reign of Edward I of England.</p> <p>1265-1321. Dante Alighieri, Italian poet and author of the <i>Divine Comedy</i>.</p>	<p>1194-1270. Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), Spanish talmudist, biblical commentator, mystic.</p> <p>1235-1310. Solomon ibn Adret, rabbi of Barcelona and talmudic scholar.</p> <p>1263. Disputation of Barcelona.</p> <p>c. 1286. Completion of the <i>Zohar</i> by Moses de Leon.</p> <p>c. 1261-1328. Immanuel of Rome, Hebrew poet.</p>	<p>1215-1293. Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg, talmudic authority and last of the great tosafists.</p> <p>1240. Disputation of Paris, leading to the burning of the Talmud in 1242.</p> <p>1244. Charter of Frederick II, Duke of Austria.</p> <p>1255. Ritual murder charge at Lincoln.</p> <p>1264. Charter of Prince Boleslav the Pious of Poland.</p> <p>1288. Blood libel of Troyes.</p> <p>1290. Expulsion of Jews from England.</p> <p>1298-1299. Rindfleisch persecutions in Germany.</p>	<p>1356. The Golden Bull defines the electoral system of the Holy Roman empire.</p> <p>1378-1417. Rival popes at Avignon and Rome (the Great Schism).</p> <p>1325-1345. Rise of the Ottoman Turks in Asia Minor.</p>	<p>c. 1270-1340. Jacob ben Asher, rabbinic codifier, author of <i>Arba'ah Turim</i>.</p> <p>1288-1344. Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), scientist and philosopher.</p> <p>c. 1340-1414. Hasdai Crescas, philosopher and communal leader.</p>	<p>1348-1349. Black Death massacres, mainly in central Europe and France.</p> <p>1334, 1364, 1367. Casimir the Great, king of Poland, confirms and extends the charter of 1264.</p> <p>1394. Final expulsion from France.</p>
<p>1400</p> <p>1414-1417. Council of Constance ends the Church schism.</p> <p>1453. Ottomans capture Constantinople; end of the Byzantine empire.</p> <p>1456. The Gutenberg Bible, first European book printed with movable type.</p> <p>1461-1483. Reign of Louis XI of France.</p> <p>1463-1494. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Italian philosopher and humanist.</p> <p>1479. Marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castille; unification of kingdom of Spain.</p> <p>1480. Establishment of the Spanish Inquisition.</p> <p>1491. Fall of Muslim Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella.</p> <p>1492. Columbus discovers America.</p>	<p>1391. Massacres and conversions in Castile and Aragon.</p> <p>c. 1360-1444. Joseph Albo, theologian and preacher.</p> <p>1413-1414. Disputation of Tortosa.</p> <p>1449. Anti-Conversion riots in Toledo.</p> <p>1473. Blood libel of Trent.</p> <p>1473-1474. Massacre of Conversos in Cordova.</p>	<p>1421. Persecution of Jews in Austria.</p> <p>1424. Expulsion from Cologne.</p> <p>1439. Expulsion from Augsburg.</p> <p>1452-1453. The Franciscan preacher John of Capistrano campaigns against Jews and instigates expulsions.</p> <p>1453. Casimir IV of Poland ratifies the charter of Casimir the Great.</p> <p>1450-1500. Expulsion of Jews from many cities and districts of Germany.</p> <p>1462. Establishment of the Frankfort ghetto.</p>	<p>1492. Jews expelled from Spain.</p> <p>1497. Jews coerced into baptism or expelled from Portugal.</p>	<p>1306. Philip IV the Fair orders the expulsion of Jews from France.</p> <p>1315. Jews recalled to France.</p> <p>1320-1321. Pastoureaux (Shepherds) massacres in France.</p> <p>1336-1339. Armleder massacres in Germany.</p>	<p>1304-1373. Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), Italian poet and humanist, one of the first great writers of the Italian Renaissance.</p> <p>1347-1349. The Black Death.</p> <p>1304-1378. The popes at Avignon in France (the Babylonian Captivity of the Church).</p>

PART FOUR

# The Modern Period

CHART 5. MODERN PERIOD (1775-1880)

General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe and the Middle East	General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe and the Middle East
<p>1775</p> <p>1778. Deaths of Rousseau and Voltaire.</p> <p>1789. Implementation of the United States Constitution; beginning of the French Revolution.</p> <p>1793-1797. First coalition against France.</p> <p>1793. Second partition of Poland, 1795. Third and final partition of Poland.</p> <p>1799. Napoleon Bonaparte comes to power in France as First Consul.</p> <p>1800</p> <p>1804. Napoleon crowned emperor of the French.</p> <p>1812. Napoleon's invasion of Russia.</p> <p>1813. Battle of Leipzig, major defeat of Napoleon.</p>	<p>1779. Lessing's <i>Nathan the Wise</i>.</p> <p>1781. W. Ch. Dohm's "Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews."</p> <p>1782. Joseph II of Austria issues an Edict of Toleration.</p> <p>1783. Publication of Moses Mendelssohn's <i>Jerusalem</i>. Founding of <i>Measef</i> and beginnings of the Berlin Haskalah.</p> <p>1791. Emancipation of all Jews of France.</p> <p>1796. Emancipation of the Jews in the Batavian (Dutch) Republic.</p> <p>1797-1799. Temporary emancipation in areas of Italy by the French Revolutionary army.</p> <p>1807. Napoleonic Sanhedrin at Paris.</p> <p>1808. Napoleon's "Infamous Decree" (lapsed in 1818). Emancipation in Westphalia.</p> <p>1812. Partial emancipation in Prussia.</p>	<p>1780. Publication of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye's <i>Toldot Yaakov Yosef</i>, the first work of Hasidic literature.</p> <p>1781. Second wave of excommunications by the Mitnagdim against the Hasidim.</p> <p>1791. Jewish merchant barred from central Russia, but allowed to settle in Odessa.</p> <p>1791. Publication of Shneur Zalman of Lyady's <i>Tanya</i>, a major work of the Lubavitcher stream of Hasidism.</p> <p>1794. Berek Joselewicz, Jewish colonel in the Polish armed forces during the Kosciuszko rising of 1794.</p> <p>1804. Tsar Alexander I's Jewish Statute regularizing the Pale of Settlement.</p> <p>1814. First publication of the <i>Shivhei ha-Besht</i>, the collection of tales in praise of the Baal Shem Tov.</p>	<p>1814-1815. Congress of Vienna.</p> <p>1814-1830. Bourbon Restoration in France.</p> <p>1825</p> <p>1829. Emancipation of Catholics in England.</p> <p>1830. July Revolution in France.</p>	<p>1815. The Congress of Vienna permits the withdrawal of emancipation in the German states.</p> <p>1818. Hamburg Reform temple.</p> <p>1819. Anti-Jewish riots in Germany. Formation of the <i>Verrein für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>.</p> <p>1820s. Spread of Haskalah to Austrian Galicia.</p>	<p>1824. Russian attempts to implement the plan to deport Jews from the villages.</p> <p>1827. Tsar Nicholas I orders Jewish youth inducted into the army and enrolled as cantonists.</p> <p>1830s. Beginnings of sizable German-Jewish immigration to the United States.</p> <p>1831. Judaism put on legal par with other religions in France.</p> <p>1832. Full rights for Jews of Canada. Publication of Zunz's <i>Sermons of the Jews</i>.</p> <p>1836. Publication of S. R. Hirsch's <i>Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel</i>.</p> <p>1844-1846. Reform synods in Germany.</p>
				<p>1840s. First pamphlets and books of Judah Alkai, rabbi of Semlin (now in Yugoslavia), advocating return to Zion.</p> <p>1840s. The Haskalah spreads to Russia, especially in the southwest and in Vilna.</p> <p>1844. Government schools established for the Jews and autonomy of the kahals abolished in Russia.</p>	

Chart 5. (cont')

General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe and the Middle East
<p>1848. Revolutions in France and in Central Europe.</p> <p>1848-1849. Abortive Frankfurt Constitution for Germany.</p>	<p>1847. Start of parliamentary dispute in England over seating of Lionel de Rothschild.</p> <p>1848. Frankfurt Constitution endorses full rights for German Jews.</p>	
<p>1850</p>		
<p>1852. Napoleon III becomes French emperor.</p> <p>1853-1856. The Crimean War.</p>	<p>1853-1878. Publication of Graetz's <i>History of the Jews</i>.</p> <p>1854. Breslau Seminary opened.</p> <p>1858. Rothschild permitted to take seat in Parliament.</p> <p>1860. <i>Alliance Israélite Universelle</i> founded.</p> <p>1862. Publication of Moses Hess's <i>Rome and Jerusalem</i> and Zvi Kalischer's <i>Derishat Zion</i>, two early Zionist treatises.</p>	<p>1853. Publication of Mapu's <i>Ahavat Zion</i>, the first Hebrew novel.</p> <p>1856. Cantonist legislation in Russia abrogated.</p> <p>1859. Beginning of limited easing of restrictions on the Jews living outside the Pale of Settlement in Russia: merchants of the first guild (1859), Jews with university degrees (1861), Jewish craftsmen (1865), discharged soldiers (1867), medical personnel and holders of other diplomas (1879).</p> <p>1864. Jews admitted to the Russian legal profession.</p>
<p>1861. Unification of Italy except for Rome (which was absorbed in 1870).</p> <p>1861-1865. Civil War in the United States.</p>	<p>1866. Emancipation of Swiss Jews.</p> <p>1867. Final emancipation of the Jews of Austria-Hungary.</p> <p>1870. Abolition of the ghetto of Rome and final emancipation in Italy.</p> <p>1870. Algerian Jews granted French citizenship.</p>	<p>1870. Mikveh Israel agricultural school established in Palestine by the Alliance Israélite Universelle.</p> <p>1871-1872. Attacks on the Jews in Rumania.</p>
<p>1867. Austrian empire becomes dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary.</p> <p>1870-1871. Franco-Prussian War.</p>		
<p>1871. Final unification of Germany.</p>		
<p>1873. German financial crisis and economic depression.</p>		
<p>1873. Union of American Hebrew Congregations founded in the United States for Reform synagogues.</p> <p>1875. Hebrew Union College (Reform rabbinic seminary) opened in Cincinnati, Ohio.</p>	<p>1871. New German constitution gives Jews full rights.</p> <p>1872. Reform rabbinic seminary and center for scholarly study of Judaism founded in Berlin (the <i>Hochschule</i>).</p> <p>1873. Orthodox seminary founded in Berlin.</p> <p>1873. German law passed allowing the Neo-Orthodox to succeed from the general Jewish community.</p> <p>1870s. First use of term <i>anti-Semitism</i>.</p>	<p>1874. New military service law with educational exemptions spurs the flow of Jews into Russian schools.</p>
<p>1875</p>		
<p>1877-1878. Russo-Turkish War.</p> <p>1878. Congress of Berlin.</p>		<p>1876. First Yiddish theater, in Rumania.</p> <p>1878. Jewish farming community of Petah Tikvah in Palestine.</p>

## PART 6. MODERN PERIOD (1880-PRESENT)

General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East
<p>181. Assassination of Tsar Alexander II.</p> <p>182. The British occupy Egypt.</p> <p>1890-1914. Height of Western imperialism in Africa, the Pacific, China.</p>	<p>1879-1881. Spread of new anti-Semitic movement in Germany.</p> <p>1881. Beginning of mass East European Jewish migration to the United States.</p> <p>1886. Publication of Drumont's anti-Semitic <i>La France Juive</i>.</p> <p>1893. Anti-Semitic parties gain 250,000 votes in German election.</p> <p>1894-1899. The Dreyfus Affair in France.</p> <p>1895. Karl Lueger, using anti-Semitic slogans, elected mayor of Vienna.</p> <p>1899. H. S. Chamberlain's anti-Semitic treatise <i>Foundations of the Nineteenth Century</i>.</p>	<p>1881-1882. Wave of pogroms in Russia.</p> <p>1882. May Laws restricting Jewish residence rights.</p> <p>1884. Kattowicz Conference of the Lovers of Zion.</p> <p>1887. Restrictive quotas on Jewish enrollment in general Russian schools and universities.</p> <p>1891. Expulsion of Jews from Moscow. Baron de Hirsch's plan to settle thousands of Russian Jews in Argentina.</p> <p>1897. October. Founding of the Jewish Labor Bund at Vienna.</p>	<p>1881. Beginnings of the first aliyah; Biluist students from Russia arrive in Palestine.</p> <p>1882. Publication of Pinsker's <i>Autoemanzipation</i>.</p> <p>1880s-1890s. Establishment of new Jewish farming villages in Palestine; Rishon le-Zion (1882), Gederah (1884), Rehovot and Haderah (1890), and others.</p> <p>1889. First essays of Ahad Ha-Am.</p> <p>1896. Publication of Herzl's <i>Judenstaat</i>.</p> <p>1897. August. First Zionist Congress at Basle.</p>
<p>1904. Russo-Japanese War.</p> <p>1905. Revolution in Russia; Tsar Nicholas II forced to grant parliament.</p>	<p>1902. Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York reorganized with Solomon Schechter as president.</p>	<p>1903. April. The Kishinev pogrom.</p> <p>1905. <i>The Protocols of the Elders of Zion</i> appears in print.</p>	<p>1903. Sixth Zionist Congress; the Uganda controversy.</p>

optimistic about the future—the future of Judaism and the future of humanity. To be sure, there were dangers: Jew-hatred still existed, and many Jews did not understand the significance of their own faith. But conditions in Europe were improving; emancipation was an irreversible process; the Jews and their religion were gradually being accepted by enlightened Europeans. As we shall see in the next chapter, events in the 1870s and 1880s were to shake that optimistic faith in inevitable progress and in the forthcoming satisfactory integration of Jews and Judaism in modern civilization.

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1919

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General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East	General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East
<p>1908. Young Turk revolution in the Ottoman empire.</p> <p>1911. Libya under Italian rule; Tunisia under French control.</p> <p>1912. Morocco divided between French and Spanish.</p> <p>1914. August. Outbreak of World War I.</p> <p>1917. March. Russian revolution overthrows Nicholas II.</p> <p>1917. April. United States enters World War I.</p> <p>1917. November. Communist revolution in Russia.</p> <p>1918. March. Communist regime signs Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany.</p> <p>1918. Nov. 11. End of World War I.</p> <p>1919. Peace treaties of Versailles.</p> <p>1918-1920. Civil War in Russia.</p>	<p>1906. Founding of the American Jewish Committee.</p> <p>1906-1907. Peak years of Jewish immigration to the United States.</p> <p>1913. Establishment of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith.</p>	<p>1905-1907. Wave of pogroms in Russia involving the Black Hundreds.</p> <p>1911-1913. Beiliss blood libel case.</p> <p>1917. March 16. Emancipation of the Jews of Russia.</p>	<p>1904-1914. Second aliyah to the land of Israel.</p> <p>1909. City of Tel Aviv founded.</p> <p>1910. Establishment of Degania, the first kibbutz.</p> <p>1917. British army occupies Palestine.</p> <p>1917. Nov. 2. Balfour Declaration.</p>	<p>1921-1923. Enormous inflation in Germany.</p> <p>1924. Death of Lenin.</p>	<p>1906. Founding of the American Jewish Committee.</p> <p>1906-1907. Peak years of Jewish immigration to the United States.</p> <p>1913. Establishment of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith.</p>	<p>1905-1907. Wave of pogroms in Russia involving the Black Hundreds.</p> <p>1911-1913. Beiliss blood libel case.</p> <p>1917. March 16. Emancipation of the Jews of Russia.</p>	<p>1904-1914. Second aliyah to the land of Israel.</p> <p>1909. City of Tel Aviv founded.</p> <p>1910. Establishment of Degania, the first kibbutz.</p> <p>1917. British army occupies Palestine.</p> <p>1917. Nov. 2. Balfour Declaration.</p>
<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>	<p>1921. Publication of Rosenzweig's <i>Star of Redemption</i>.</p> <p>1923. Publication of Buber's <i>I and Thou</i>.</p> <p>1921, 1924. Restrictive immigration legislation in the United States.</p>	<p>1928. Birobidjan project to settle Soviet Jews in an area of eastern Siberia.</p> <p>1932. Height of the Yiddish school system in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>Late 1930s. Many Jewish intellectuals and Jewish members of the Communist old guard liquidated during the Stalinist repressions.</p> <p>1937. Anti-Jewish measures introduced in Polish universities.</p> <p>1937-1939. Anti-Jewish legislation and other anti-Semitic measures by pro-Nazi governments in Rumania and Hungary.</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>	<p>1921-1923. Enormous inflation in Germany.</p> <p>1924. Death of Lenin.</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>	<p>1928. Birobidjan project to settle Soviet Jews in an area of eastern Siberia.</p> <p>1932. Height of the Yiddish school system in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>Late 1930s. Many Jewish intellectuals and Jewish members of the Communist old guard liquidated during the Stalinist repressions.</p> <p>1937. Anti-Jewish measures introduced in Polish universities.</p> <p>1937-1939. Anti-Jewish legislation and other anti-Semitic measures by pro-Nazi governments in Rumania and Hungary.</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>
<p>1928. First Five Year Plan in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1929. Oct. New York stock market crash; beginning of world economic crisis.</p> <p>1933. Jan. 30. Nazi party comes to power in Germany.</p> <p>1934-1938. Stalin uses show trials, accusations, slave labor camps in a massive campaign of purges in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1936-1939. Spanish Civil War, leading, with German and Italian aid, to Franco dictatorship.</p> <p>1938. Sept. Munich crisis; western capitulation to Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>1939. Sept. 1. German invasion of Poland begins World War II.</p>	<p>1933. April. New civil service law begins the elimination of Jews in Germany from most professions.</p> <p>1935. Sept. Nuremberg Laws establish a racial definition of German citizenship, reduce Jews to status of German subjects.</p> <p>1938. Nov. 9-10. <i>Kristallnacht</i>, Nazi destruction of synagogues and attacks on Jews in Germany.</p> <p>1939. Organization of the United Jewish Appeal in the United States.</p>	<p>1928. First Five Year Plan in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1929. Oct. New York stock market crash; beginning of world economic crisis.</p> <p>1933. Jan. 30. Nazi party comes to power in Germany.</p> <p>1934-1938. Stalin uses show trials, accusations, slave labor camps in a massive campaign of purges in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1936-1939. Spanish Civil War, leading, with German and Italian aid, to Franco dictatorship.</p> <p>1938. Sept. Munich crisis; western capitulation to Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>1939. Sept. 1. German invasion of Poland begins World War II.</p>	<p>1928. First Five Year Plan in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1929. Oct. New York stock market crash; beginning of world economic crisis.</p> <p>1933. Jan. 30. Nazi party comes to power in Germany.</p> <p>1934-1938. Stalin uses show trials, accusations, slave labor camps in a massive campaign of purges in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1936-1939. Spanish Civil War, leading, with German and Italian aid, to Franco dictatorship.</p> <p>1938. Sept. Munich crisis; western capitulation to Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>1939. Sept. 1. German invasion of Poland begins World War II.</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>	<p>1928. First Five Year Plan in U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1929. Oct. New York stock market crash; beginning of world economic crisis.</p> <p>1933. Jan. 30. Nazi party comes to power in Germany.</p> <p>1934-1938. Stalin uses show trials, accusations, slave labor camps in a massive campaign of purges in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1936-1939. Spanish Civil War, leading, with German and Italian aid, to Franco dictatorship.</p> <p>1938. Sept. Munich crisis; western capitulation to Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>1939. Sept. 1. German invasion of Poland begins World War II.</p>	<p>1921. Arab riots.</p> <p>1922. League of Nations gives final approval to the British mandate in Palestine and to the Jewish National Home.</p> <p>"Fourth Aliyah"</p>
<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>	<p>1935. Separate congress of Zionist Revisionists ( Jabotinsky's party) held in Vienna.</p> <p>1936. Arab strike in Palestine, followed by terrorist attacks on the yishuv.</p> <p>1937. Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs.</p>

Chart 6. (con't)

General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East	General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East
<p>1941. June 22. German invasion of the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1941. Dec. 7. Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brings U.S. into World War II.</p> <p>1942. Oct.-Nov. Battle of El Alamein; beginning of German retreat in North Africa.</p> <p>1943. Jan. Battle of Stalingrad; beginning of German retreat in U.S.S.R.</p>	<p>1940. Nazis set up Jewish "ghettos" in Eastern European cities.</p> <p>1941-1942. German <i>Einsatzgruppen</i> murder 1-2 million Jews in occupied U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1942. Jan. 20. Wannsee Conference in Berlin to arrange for transport of Jews from Nazi satellite countries to death camps.</p> <p>1942-1944. The six extermination camps--Chelmo, Auschwitz, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek, Treblinka--in full operation for the gassing of Jews and other "undesirables" in the Nazi Reich.</p> <p>1943. April-May. Warsaw ghetto uprising.</p> <p>1943. Oct. Danish resistance smuggles Jews of Denmark to Sweden.</p>	<p>1944. Jewish Brigade Group organized in the British army, fought in Italy.</p> <p>1945-1947. Jewish-British tensions in Palestine; British efforts to stop illegal immigration and repress the Haganah and the Jewish terrorist groups.</p> <p>1947. Nov. 29. General Assembly of the United Nations votes in favor of the partition of Palestine.</p>	<p>1939. McDonald White Paper strictly curtails Jewish immigration to Palestine.</p> <p>1941. Riots and attacks on Jews in Iraq.</p> <p>1941. Formation of the Palmah, permanently mobilized striking force of the Haganah, the underground military organization of the yishuv.</p>	<p>1950-1953. Korean War.</p> <p>1953. Mar. 5. Death of Stalin.</p> <p>1954-1962. French-Algerian War.</p> <p>1956. Complete independence of Morocco and Tunisia; Suez Canal crisis; Soviet military occupation of Hungary to put down uprising.</p> <p>1957. First unmanned space satellite, by U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1958. Charles DeGaulle takes power in France.</p>	<p>1953. West German signs reparations agreement with Israel.</p> <p>1954-1968. French communities augmented by immigration of Jews from North Africa, especially Algeria.</p> <p>1954. Tercenary of the Jews in the United States.</p>	<p>1952. Slansky show trial in Prague, marked by anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda. Secret execution of eminent Yiddish writers in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1953. Arrest of prominent Soviet Jewish physicians, accused of planning murder of government officials (the "Doctors' Plot").</p>	<p>1948. May 14. British evacuate Palestine and Arab armies invade; Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel.</p> <p>1949. Jan. Cease-fire brings an end to Arab-Jewish fighting (the Israel War of Independence).</p> <p>1949. Beginning of mass migration of Jews from Displaced Persons camps in Europe and from Arab and other countries to Israel.</p>
<p>1944. June 6. Normandy invasion.</p> <p>1945. May 9. End of World War II in Europe.</p> <p>1945. Aug. 6, 9. Atomic bombs dropped on Japan.</p> <p>1945. Sept. 2. End of World War II in the Pacific.</p> <p>1945-1948. Communist regimes established in East European countries.</p>	<p>1944. Nov. Gassing of Jews stopped at the last functioning extermination camp, Auschwitz.</p> <p>1946. Kielce pogrom in Poland.</p> <p>1948-1952. "Black Years" of Soviet Jewry; suppression of Jewish culture and leadership.</p> <p>1947. Population of Jews in Displaced Persons camps in Germany, Austria, Italy swells to c. 2,200,000. (By 1950 most had been resettled.)</p>	<p>1946. Kielce pogrom in Poland.</p> <p>1948-1952. "Black Years" of Soviet Jewry; suppression of Jewish culture and leadership.</p>	<p>1947. Nov. 29. General Assembly of the United Nations votes in favor of the partition of Palestine.</p>	<p>1950-1953. Korean War.</p> <p>1953. Mar. 5. Death of Stalin.</p> <p>1954-1962. French-Algerian War.</p> <p>1956. Complete independence of Morocco and Tunisia; Suez Canal crisis; Soviet military occupation of Hungary to put down uprising.</p> <p>1957. First unmanned space satellite, by U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1958. Charles DeGaulle takes power in France.</p>	<p>1953. West German signs reparations agreement with Israel.</p> <p>1954-1968. French communities augmented by immigration of Jews from North Africa, especially Algeria.</p> <p>1954. Tercenary of the Jews in the United States.</p>	<p>1952. Slansky show trial in Prague, marked by anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda. Secret execution of eminent Yiddish writers in the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1953. Arrest of prominent Soviet Jewish physicians, accused of planning murder of government officials (the "Doctors' Plot").</p>	<p>1948. May 14. British evacuate Palestine and Arab armies invade; Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel.</p> <p>1949. Jan. Cease-fire brings an end to Arab-Jewish fighting (the Israel War of Independence).</p> <p>1949. Beginning of mass migration of Jews from Displaced Persons camps in Europe and from Arab and other countries to Israel.</p>



Chart 6. (cont)

General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East	General History	The Jews in Western and Central Europe and America	The Jews in Eastern Europe	Zionism, Middle East
<p>1963. Nov. 22. Assassination of President John F. Kennedy.</p> <p>1964-1968. Height of the Vietnam War.</p> <p>1965. New U.S. immigration law abolishes quotas of national origin.</p>	<p>1965. Formal diplomatic relations established between West Germany and Israel.</p>		<p>1966. S. Y. Agnon and Nelly Sachs awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.</p>	<p>1979. Jan.-Feb. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping visits United States, indicative of a major reversal of Communist Chinese policies. Revolution in Iran and overthrow of the Shah.</p>			<p>1978. Dec. Death of Golda Meir.</p> <p>1979. March. Signing of Israel-Egypt peace agreement.</p>
<p>1968. Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>1969. American astronauts walk on the moon.</p> <p>1970. Death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt.</p>	<p>1972. Merger of United Jewish Appeal and Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in the United States; first woman rabbi (Reform) ordained in the United States.</p>	<p>1968. After Six-Day War, intense anti-Zionist campaigns in U.S.S.R. and Poland. Anti-Semitism in Poland results in emigration of most remaining Polish Jews.</p> <p>1970s. Upsurge of clandestine Jewish activity in the U.S.S.R. and of Russian Jewish emigration to Israel and the West.</p>	<p>1969-1970. Egypt launches a war of attrition along the Suez Canal.</p> <p>1973. Oct. Yom Kippur War.</p> <p>1973. Dec. Death of David Ben Gurion.</p>				
<p>1973. Oct. Beginning of Arab oil embargo and quadrupling of oil prices.</p> <p>1974. Aug. Resignation of President Richard Nixon.</p>	<p>1978. Isaac Bashevis Singer awarded Nobel Prize for literature.</p>		<p>1977. Israel Labor Party ousted from office; Menahem Begin becomes Prime Minister of Israel.</p> <p>1977. Nov. President Anwar Sadat of Egypt visits Israel.</p> <p>1978. Sept. Meetings between Begin, Sadat, and President Carter of the United States at Camp David to plan for Israel-Egypt peace settlement.</p>				

## **Unit IV: Religious Practices and Customs among Jews in the United States**

< 4 Sessions >

### Essential Question and Enduring Understanding:

How does living in a larger secular culture into which Jews are integrated impact upon cultural distinctions within Jewish life?

How do forces in American culture effect religious distinctions among Jews of different ethnic backgrounds?

The religious experience for American Jews has been ideology over race/ethnic background.

### Goals:

1. Introduce students to basic Jewish American history
2. Familiarize students with Jewish American feminists and their contribution to Jewish practices and customs including life cycle events, Passover and liturgy.
3. Acquaint students with the changes in Jewish practice and custom made by the different movements in America.

### Objectives:

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. identify the three waves of Jewish immigration to the United States.
2. list the contributions made by Jewish American feminists in the department of life cycle, liturgy and holidays.
3. describe American religious practices and customs of the Jewish movements regarding ordination of women as rabbis, bat mitzvah, patrilineal descent, inclusion of the Imahot in the "Avot," and gay marriages.

### Key Concepts:

**Minhag America:** Customs, practices and traditions that may not have force of law, but have nevertheless become established Jewish practice in the United States.

## **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

I. History:

***Jewish Immigrants and distinct practices they brought to the United States:***

A. The waves of Jewish immigration to the United States are divided into three periods: 1654-1800, 1820-1880, and 1882-1920. In all cases the Jews brought with them traditional practices and customs of their country of origin. The longer they settled, however, the less distinct their customs became and eventually ideology took over from ethnic difference.

1. 1654-63 is the earliest history of the American Jewish Community.<sup>1</sup> The first Jewish settlement took place September 1654 with the arrival of 23 Portuguese Jews in New Amsterdam (today's New York). They earned the right to settled and to bear arms and join the militia. Their right to worship at home was respected.

2. 1800-1880 are the years Jews immigrated from central Europe and settled within the thirteen colonies. By 1800 there were only about 2,500 Jews scattered through the United States and only six congregations had built synagogues. Between 1820 and 1880 a larger wave of Jewish immigrants, most of them from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire immigrated to America.

Activity: Find out the role this wave of Jews played in the expansion westward of the United States. Ask students to look on a map of the United States and try to find the towns where Jews settled in and were named after, for example, Gilman, Connecticut and Aaronsburg, Pennsylvania; Roseville, California and Heppner, Oregon. How did they travel the country? What did Jewish peddlers do once they accumulated some money? Find out by having students read excerpts from the Encyclopedia Judaica on American Jews from this era. Later these Jews fought bravely in the American Civil War. Again using the Encyclopedia Judaica, ask students to read and answer questions such as where did Jews settle following the war? What kind of industry and commerce did they participate in and in what way did they contribute to the industrial growth of the United States?

3. 1882-1920 was the third and largest wave of Jewish immigration, this time from Eastern Europe. In the early 1920's immigration laws became very

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<sup>1</sup> This historic section based on Ruth Seldin, Image of the Jews: Teachers' Guide to Jews and their Religion, "Who is the American Jew?" by Dore Schary, ADL, 1970. p 5-7.

strict so that very few Jews or other people were allowed in the country. Almost two million Jews flocked to America at this time because of pogroms in Russia, restrictions in Romania and poverty in Austria-Hungary. They were almost all Yiddish speaking and very poor reaching the country with an average of nine dollars in their pockets.

A. Activity: Read excerpts from “Who is the American Jew” [in Source Materials] by Dave Schary and find out where new immigrants lived, the kind of housing conditions they dwelled in, the newspapers they founded, the kinds of work they did. Give this entire time period to a group of students to do a class presentation in any creative way they can think of. Or, divide all the different questions up and let small groups represent a particular aspect of that time period. For example one group might research and present where Jews worked and their livelihood while another group can present the kind of neighborhoods they lived in and their housing conditions.

B. Have students write and tell stories about the experience of their own family’s immigration to the US. See if students can obtain ‘first person’ accounts. This might work well as an introduction to the subject.

C. Film: *I Miss the Sun*. 20 minutes., color. Available from the filmmaker, Mary Halawani, Sphinx Productions, 151 Joralemon Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. This film details the story of a woman’s grandmother Rosette Hankim, a seventy-three-year-old Egyptian Jew who, forced to leave her country, came to the United States in the 1970s, this film shows her attempt to preserve her culture’s values and heritage while living in Brooklyn, New York, somewhat isolated and in a society still mysteriously foreign. An important scene in this documentary is the family’s preparations for the Seder.

## **II. Feminist contributions to Jewish American religious practices and customs:**

### **A. *Life Cycles***

According to Debra Orenstein’s introduction to Lifecycles, “Feminist Jews have been instrumental in expanding the definition of lifecycle in four ways: (1) By including women in the observance of passages that formerly spoke only to and of men -e.g., establishing Bat Mitzvah along with Bar Mitzvah, and convenient ceremonies for baby girls, along with those for boys; (2) by supplementing or altering traditional rituals related to lifecycle e.g.,

supplemental divorce rituals or alternative marriage contracts; (3) by valuing as sacred and sometimes ritualizing the events of women's biological cycle--e.g., menarche, menses, childbirth, miscarriage, menopause; and (4) by sacralizing non biological passages and milestones not contemplated by the tradition--e.g., through ceremonies celebrating elder wisdom..."

"Fifty years ago, Bat Mitzvah ceremonies were literally unheard of. Today, some form of celebration of a girl's coming of age is common, even in many ultra-Orthodox communities. Twenty-five years ago, covenant/naming rituals for girls were virtually non-existent. Today, they are widespread."<sup>2</sup>

A. **Zeved Ha Bat and Brit Milah:** There are many new and innovative naming ceremonies that have been created for girls in recent years. These ceremonies go by many names: *Simchat Bat* (joy of the daughter), *Brit Hachayim* (covenant of life), *Brit Kedusha* (covenant of sanctification) and *Brit Sarah*, (covenant of Sarah).

**Activity:** Read pp 57-67 from Lifecycles in Source Materials and follow with discussion: What are the fears and objections of creating a covenant ceremony for girls? What is the draw of the tradition for Jewish women, particularly feminist? What is so powerful about the Brit Milah that some women want something similar for their daughters? Should a covenant ritual for daughters be modeled after a boy's covenant ceremony? Read pp 65-67 to see a model of a ceremony for a girl entering the Jewish Covenant.

**Extra:** Ask students to consider common life events they would want ritualized (birth, events surrounding puberty, learning to drive, finding love, losing love, to name a few). How do they think women felt not having prayers or rituals reflecting the common life events? Pass out the list of rituals found in Source Materials and ask students to put their name and mark the rituals they would like to read or try. Offer to give them a copy of that ritual the following class. If they try the ritual, have students reflect with the class or privately in writing their reaction.

## B. *Liturgy*

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Debra Orenstein, Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones, Jewish Lights, 1994. ppxx-xxii.

It is very common today to go to a Reform congregation and see a “mini” healing service take place. There have always been a few moments set aside, but until recently, virtually no time was given to healing in a Reform context. Today, not only are there songs of healing sung by the Reform, but all kinds of monthly Jewish healing services and Jewish healing centers are popping up all over the country. Where did this trend come from and why?

According to the article, *Sources of Healing in Judaism: Jewish Folkways in a New Age*, Peter S. Knobel reports that the most important teachers in the healing movement, the most creative teachers, have been women.<sup>3</sup> One of those women has been Debbie Friedman. Ms. Friedman is one of the most popular musical performers in the United States and in Reform Judaism. She has written countless songs that are sung in American Reform camps and congregations and one of her greatest contributions to liturgy is her *Misheberach* (May the One who blessed). As mentioned above, until Ms. Friedman’s song, the *Misheberach* was traditionally briefly said by the Gabbai during the Torah service and in the Reform service it was virtually nonexistent. However, for various reasons, including an aging female baby-boomer population’s desire for the liturgy to reflect their needs and the growing problem of people being infected with the AIDS/ HIV viruses, and Debbie’s beautiful song, the healing movement has caught on. In fact, Knobel calls Friedman’s *Misheberach* one of the great examples of American folk religion in action. He says, “It is a very powerful piece which is being adopted spontaneously, in response to a need, without official sanction. When people encounter it, they are so moved that they want to include it in their regular practice.” Knobel believes it has to do with Debbie’s “magnificent” melody, but also thinks it has to do with the text she has created. He says “It is a text that picks up on the tradition, using traditional Hebrew phrases that link us and connect us, but offering us a theology we can deal with.”<sup>4</sup>

Activity: Part One: In the Teacher’s Resource please find copies of a traditional and modern *Misheberach* prayer. Distribute copies of both to

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<sup>3</sup> Peter S. Knobel, *Sources of Healing in Judaism: Jewish Folkways in a New Age*, The National Center for Jewish Healing, 1997, p10.

<sup>4</sup> Peter S. Knobel, *Sources of Healing in Judaism: Jewish Folkways in a New Age*, The National Center for Jewish Healing, 1997, p10.

students in small groups. Have them compare and contrast the prayers in terms of language (gender, modern vs. antiquated) and style.

Part Two: This can be observed in action when you take students to visit a traditional service. Ask students to go to one of the temple's healing services if they have them. Have students reflect on the two experiences and contrast them. Do they feel any connection with the service? Are they geared toward a population other than their own? Have they ever participated in sharing the name of a friend/loved one at a healing service? If they have, did they let that person know? Would they be willing to try this in the future? Is there anything in the service that they would change, i.e., expand, shorten, change (the music, the chanting, etc.)? Have they seen another variations of the Misheberach service?

### C. *Passover*

Set induction; Share the following story with the class and following with a discussion in about the story's meaning and student's responses. Is there any difference between the female and male response? If not, that is noteworthy of the different times we live in.

Story: Sussana Heschel, daughter of the renown thinker and peacemaker, Abraham Joshua Heschel, once heard a man say, "A woman belongs on the pulpit like an orange on the Seder plate." Today it is customary for many feminists and female rabbinical students to put oranges on their Passover Seder plates. Food for thought.

Background: In an article published in the CCAR Journal, Spring 1993, titled "*To Reclaim Our voice*": *An Analysis of Representative Contemporary Feminist Passover Haggadot*," Lee Bycel reminds us that

In Jewish tradition, the Exodus story constitutes what the prominent contemporary Jewish theologian Emil Fackenheim has called a "root experience," a lens through which the contemporary adherent of the tradition views reality. The Jew, through participation in the seder, "reenact[s] the natural-historical event, and in so doing, "reenacts [its] abiding astonishment as well, and makes it his own," The ritual of the

seder makes the Exodus “eternally present” and connects the seder participant with the seminal events of the tradition.<sup>5</sup>

In his introduction, Bycel shares that Jews of the United States have continued the age old tradition of producing different Haggadic texts and illustrations. American Jews from the late 19th century until the present “have employed the Haggadah as a vehicle to translate, transmit, and -- through emendations and supplements -- transform the meaning and relevance of the Exodus story to Jews living in this country.” What makes the Jewish American tradition different from all other traditions is the particular manner they view the story. Bycel says, “The themes of human suffering, oppression, enslavement of others, and devaluation of human life as well as redemption -- all expressions of the core “root experience,” of going from slavery to freedom -- have all been shaped to relate the experience of particular groups. Bycel reports that there has been an emergence in the past three decades of feminist, secular, vegetarian, anti-war and environmental Haggadot, to name but a few. However, Bycel declares that contemporary feminist Haggadot have been representative of these larger historical and modern tendencies. In the words of feminist scholar Judith Plaskow, “The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence...”<sup>6</sup>

A. Looking closely at excerpts of feminist Haggadot: By this time, students have already experienced comparing Sephardic and Ashkenazic Haggadot. Now is their chance to see where Jewish-American customs come into play.

Activity: In Source Materials please find feminist versions of the “Four Questions;” “The Ten Plagues of Jewish women;” and a “Magid” of the ‘enslavement’ of women in general. Distribute excerpts of each of the above to students in small groups. Have them read and discuss among themselves. If you have a large class, have one representative of each group share impressions and conclusions. Is there anything they would add or subtract? Do they relate? Do they feel the traditional Hagaddah meets their needs or would they want to model what women have done and do their own kind of specialized Hagaddah that dealt with other issues? It is my hope that

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<sup>5</sup> Lee T. Bycel, “*To reclaim our Voice*”: *An analysis of Representative Contemporary Feminist Passover Haggadot*, CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly, Spring 1993. P. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 56.



students, however much they take equality for granted, can appreciate that they (all of us) are really standing on the shoulders of others who fought hard for the life style we enjoy today.

References for Feminist Haggadot:

- i. Twin Cities Women's Minyan (compiled/written), *Women's Passover Seder*, Minneapolis, 1981.
- ii. Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education (cooperative effort), *San Diego Women's Haggadah*, 1986.

There are others more recently published as well.

**III. American religious practices and customs of the Jewish movements:**

It appears that in the United States, it is more important to Jews to belong to an ideology than to an ethnic group when it comes to belonging to a congregation. This can be said for most liberal Jews who, regardless of their country of origin, tend to belong to an Ashkenazic congregation. For example, Temple Sinai in Los Angeles is known for its huge congregation of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. There is an Ashkenazic rabbi and cantor. This is not as true for Orthodox congregations where Sephardic Jews will go to a traditional Sephardic congregation. In this country are four distinct movements: Reform, Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist.

To prepare for teaching this section, please read Dr. Michael Wyschogrod's description and examination of the four movement's theological and historical roots and the significance of these divisions for contemporary Jewish life (in Source Materials).

A. Activity: After giving students an overview based on the above article, move on to this activity which has to do with reading and discussing Responsa of the Reform Movement. Responsa are the Movement's official position regarding all kinds of issues. Responsa are written in a question and answer form and are interesting to read. They give us a window into the issues of that particular time. In our case students will read about liberal Jewish customs that were born in the United States.

Activity: For this activity you will need to copy the following Responsa and distribute to small groups. Explain to students that these Responsa include the Toraitic (from the Torah) position/quote on the subject (if there is one), the traditional stance that has always been taken, and then

the Reform position. Each group will read one topic and make a presentation before the class. You might want to give a brief overview about the issues first before giving out parts reminding them that although these topics are commonplace today, there was a time in the not so distant past when Jews did not have a choice. [Another idea: As a set induction, ask students to think of questions they would like to know the Reform position on. Some might ask about euthanasia, abortion, premarital sex... As a transition, you might say that in 99% of the time, the tradition has been opposed to the above mentioned. However, there are some areas which are so common place today, students might not even think to ask about them, for example, women becoming rabbis or girls becoming Bat Mitzvah. The list below represents important Reform and other liberal changes made in the religion that occurred in the United States].

- \* Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Vol. I, #7, #8
- \* Inclusion of the Mothers in the Shmona Esre: []
- \* Girls obligated to become Bat Mizvah: Vol. I, #30, #31, #32.
- \* Patrilineal Descent: Vol. II, #38.
- \* Officiating at Gay Marriages: []

# **Source Materials**

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# Image of the Jews

## *Teachers' Guide to* **JEW**S and their **RELIGION**

EUGENE BOROWITZ  
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MAX J. ROUNTENBERG  
DORE SCHARY  
MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD

Foreword by Brother Joseph Irwin, F.S.C.  
Teachers' Guide by Ruth Seldin

# WHO IS THE AMERICAN JEW?

DORE SCHARY

## *Introduction: Definition of the American Jew*

The simplest questions often give us the greatest difficulty.

The Jew has been on the stage of history for a long time. He has lived everywhere and has shared in many of the great moments which have directed the course of human destiny. Some say that more has been written about the Jewish people than any other people; and surely the word Jew is one of the most used and abused in the dictionary of mankind. Yet until now nobody has really succeeded in giving us a clear-cut answer to the question, "Who is a Jew?"

The Jew is as perplexed about a proper definition of himself as is the non-Jew. No less a source than the government of the State of Israel set up a special committee in 1958 to inquire of leading Jewish scholars throughout the world: Who is a Jew? The results, while interesting enough, were inconclusive.

Though, on the face of it, my task is more limited—after all, I shall only be discussing the question "Who are the *American Jews*"?—what I shall have to say will not, I suspect, provide the definitive answer either. It may, as a matter of fact, raise still other questions and challenge some of our most firmly-held concepts. It will, I hope, stimulate us into hard and serious thinking. And who knows?—perhaps one of you will be so inspired that he or she will at long last provide us with an answer which will satisfy everyone.

## *Jewish Identity*

Before plunging into this absorbing topic, I think it might be interesting to cite at least one man's view on the subject. I have in mind the late Rabbi Morris Adler, one of the leaders in American Conservative Judaism. This is what he had to offer:

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Based on the original script delivered on closed-circuit television.

The modern Jew is not only a riddle unto himself. He senses that he is likewise a mystery to his Gentile neighbors, even though many myths touching the Jew have been dissolved in our time. The Jew no longer dwells behind ghetto walls. He shares the culture, the mores, the preoccupations and diversions of his non-Jewish neighbors, who are often his friends. Yet there remains something enigmatic in his relationship with Gentiles.

I recall, for example, my own experience when I was an Army Chaplain during World War II. I was on most cordial terms with the other Chaplains, both Catholic and Protestant. We shared the same tents, jumped into the same foxholes. Our dislike of certain of our superiors was also shared. We thus had much in common. Perhaps because it was contrary to Army regulations I decided one day to grow a beard. The consequences were surprising. My beard seemed to add a new dimension to my relationship with my fellow Chaplains. I think this was because my identity had suddenly become clearer and more intelligible. After all, the last Jew they really knew about was Jesus, who is always pictured with a beard. Clean-shaven like the rest, wearing a uniform, I provided no continuity with this Jewish image of theirs. I bore the designation Jew, yet they were perplexed as to what kind of a being I really was. My beard changed matters; I was now no great mystery.

The American Jew thinks of himself as a doctor, a businessman, a worker, a citizen, a father—just like other Americans. Then he discovers a puzzlement in the eyes of his neighbors—and the question mark quickly moves into his own mind. So he comes home and asks: "Who after all am I?"

Perhaps the best way to reach at least the beginnings of an answer to the question of Jewish identity is to take a look at the present-day American Jewish community and see how it evolved. Composed of almost six million people, which makes it the largest concentration of Jews within one land in world history, the Jewish community in the United States is largely a middle-class one—well educated, mobile, active in numerous organizations and movements. Though it has no central authority, no one framework of reference, and no one delineated sphere of action, it is held together by a feeling of group interdependence and a common spiritual and cultural heritage. At the same time, it is a community built up as much by social change and external needs as by unconceived or internal planning.

American Jews today are not only the largest but the most influential Jewish community anywhere. However, they did not really assume this role until the rise of Hitler and the subsequent slaughter of some six million European Jews. During this dark moment in human history, the Jews in this country were instrumental in organizing a mighty effort to rescue those Jews who still survived, as well as to shore up their refuge, Israel.

Yet, though it is true that Israel is now a state, fulfilling thus the ancient dream and belief that the Jewish people would one day reestablish their nation in Palestine, only a handful of American Jews have felt the wish to live there. Jews in America were stirred, of course, by the rebirth of Israel; have been deeply concerned for its safety and survival, particularly during the recent Six-Day War. And, perhaps most important of all, to many it has given a deeper appreciation of their Jewish identity. But Jews here have not simply lived through too much, they have given and received too much to be anything but Americans, or to view this country as anything but their home.

Nothing could be more natural, after all; for, after generations of restrictions in Europe's ghettos, the opportunity to become a significant part of the prevailing secular culture was heady wine, indeed. And with the passionate struggle for self-improvement that was born of this opportunity came a source of new pride. As a consequence, the conflict that once existed for many American Jews—*i.e.*, between practicing Judaism, and participating in the mainstream of American life—has become more and more muted, and a unique pattern of Jewish life is increasingly developing in the United States. It is a pattern that unites 5,000 years of tradition with 300 years of growth and experience in a free land.

#### *Earliest History of the American Jewish Community (1654-63)*

Let us take, then, a glance at the history of these 300 years. The first Jewish settlement in what is now the United States took place as far back as September 1654, with the arrival of 23 Portuguese Jews in New Amsterdam. In less than ten years, they won from Governor Peter Stuyvesant not just the right to buy real estate and engage in retail trade but to bear arms and join the militia in defense of their new homeland. Likewise their right to worship at home was respected.

#### *Jewish Immigration From Europe (1800-80)*

Within a short time other Jews, most of whom came from central Europe, settled elsewhere in the 13 colonies. This early wave of Jewish

immigration was quite small, however. By 1800 there were all told not more than 2,500 Jews scattered through the United States, and only six congregations had built synagogues.

In the sixty years from 1820 to 1880, a second and far larger wave of Jewish immigrants, most of them from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, hit the American shores. These Jews were to play an important role in the expansion westward of the United States. Many of them put peddlers' packs on their backs and headed for new frontiers. They helped open the lands that were to become West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri; carried supplies to Indians, trappers and farmers; built paper and hemp mills.

When a Jewish peddler accumulated enough capital to open a store at a crossroads, he settled down. As a result, you can drive across America today, and eat and sleep in towns named after their pioneering Jewish founders—from Gilman, Connecticut and Aaronsburg, Pennsylvania to Roseville, California and Heppner, Oregon.

Thousands of Jews, in the North and South, fought and served in the American Civil War. After the war was over, Jews continued to move westward, sinking their roots deep into such frontier cities as St. Louis, Cincinnati and San Francisco. They entered into all aspects of industry and commerce, and their efforts contributed in no small measure to the industrial growth of our nation.

#### *A New Life in America (1882-1920's)*

The third and largest wave of Jewish immigration, this time from Eastern Europe, began in 1882 and continued until the restrictive immigration laws of the early 1920's cut it to a trickle. Under the lash of pogroms in Russia, restrictions in Roumania and poverty in Austria-Hungary, almost two million Jews sought a new life in the United States. They were almost entirely Yiddish-speaking. They were desperately poor, reaching America with an average of nine dollars. The majority of them found employment in the garment industry in New York City, and lived on the Lower East Side which at its peak housed over one-and-a-half million Jews.

To give you some flavor of what life was like for these immigrants on their arrival in this country, let us turn for an instant to a typical letter—of which there were many—addressed by one such immigrant to the Yiddish paper, *The Forward*:

March 6, 1906

Dear Mr. Editor:

I am a greenhorn. I have only been five weeks in the country. I am a jewelry maker. I left a blind father and a stepmother in Russia. Before my departure my father begged me not to forget him. I promised that I would send him the first money I should earn. I walked around two weeks and looked for work. But at the end of the third week I succeeded in getting a job. I worked a week and received eight dollars for the week. I paid for my board and bought certain necessities, such as a hat, shoes, and some small items, and I have a few dollars, too. Now, Mr. Editor, I want to ask you to give me some advice as to what to do. Should I send my father a few dollars for Passover, or should I keep them for myself? Because the work at our place is at end, and I may have to be without work. So that I do not know what to do. I hope you will give me some advice in my difficulties, and I shall obey you just as you tell me.

Y. Mednikoff

There is enough evidence to warrant the observation that these immigrant Jews had by the turn of the century become the most industrialized ethnic group in the City of New York. This began to change, however, as they increasingly responded to the occupational needs and economic demands of the twentieth century by directing their vocational aspirations, and in particular those of their children, towards the professions and white-collar occupations. To achieve this step up the ladder, education was obviously necessary.

#### *Secular Education and Its Results*

Education had always had deep roots in Jewish consciousness, representing not only an ideal to strive for but a religious duty and a way of life. In fact, there is an old Jewish saying that a father "will bend the sky" to give his sons the best education possible. In Biblical times the instruction of children in *Torah*, or the Jewish law, was regarded as the solemn duty of all parents. During the Middle Ages, schools that gave education to boys were as important to each and every Jewish community as the synagogue itself. For how could one hope to communicate with God if one had not studied and could not read and understand the words of the prayers and the Bible?

Our modern world, too, has witnessed this continued emphasis by Jews on education. With one major change. From an emphasis on re-

ligious training, the majority of Eastern European Jewish immigrants shifted to a more secular approach in their struggle for self-improvement and integration within the American community at large. Thus, while many of them lived in cold-water tenements, they nonetheless saw to it that their sons were sent to college and to professional schools.

The results of this educational effort have been impressive, to say the least. By 1916, the Jewish population on New York's lower East Side had shrunk to only 350,000 and by 1930, to 100,000, reflecting the mobility of an educated people. The same was true of Chicago, where the ghetto area lost half its Jews between 1914 and 1920. Everywhere, in fact, Jews improved their occupational and residential status.

The figures in the field of education are equally arresting. A contemporary study has revealed that there are more than 300,000 Jewish students enrolled in American school of higher education, and that there is a similarly large proportion of Jews in the academic community. At the same time, surveys of Jewish education in New York City taken within the last ten years show that, of all students over 18 who had completed college, there were almost four times as many Jews as non-Jews. In smaller communities, the proportion is believed to be even higher.

For the past several decades, Jews have been extremely active in all the professions, arts and sciences, and have had a profound effect on American life. In law, one can cite Benjamin Cardozo, Louis Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter; in medicine, Selman Waksman and Jonas Salk; in physics, Albert Einstein and Isidore Rabi; in the arts, Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Miller, George Gershwin, and Herman Wouk; in government, Herbert H. Lehman, Anna Rosenberg and Jacob Javits. And these are only a few names picked at random from a very lengthy list.

#### *Discrimination and the Fight Against It*

As Jews entered increasingly into the main currents of American life, this trend was accompanied by the outbreak of considerable antagonism and discrimination. For the first time in American history, socially-based anti-Semitism appeared, and anti-Jewish exclusion started to spread through white Protestant society: its clubs, hotels and residential districts. More important still, by the early 1920's, in colleges, professional schools and at the managerial and executive level of many large corporations, quota systems were imposed against Jews which have begun to disappear only in recent years.

To combat the various forms of anti-Jewish discrimination, a number of organizations within the Jewish community. In 1906,

the American Jewish Committee was formed, with the prime purpose of dealing with discrimination in business and industry. In 1913, the Anti-Defamation League, the civil rights and educational arm of B'nai B'rith, was set up to achieve better understanding between individuals and groups that compose the ethnic, religious and racial fabric of this nation. Lastly, in 1917, the American Jewish Congress was organized, representing the aspirations and ideals of many of the newest East European immigrants. Today, all three of these human relations agencies are energetic champions of civil rights; and, though they sometimes employ different means to achieve their commonly-held objectives, their concern for human betterment has never lost its ancient Jewish roots.

#### *Jewish Philanthropy and Welfare*

Jews have also had a long tradition in the American labor movement. Samuel Gompers founded the American Federation of Labor and was its president for 37 years. Sidney Hillman, late head of the CIO Political Action Committee, and David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, were likewise products of Jewish unions which arose in protest against the low pay and long hours in the old "sweatshops."

The traditional Jewish concern for human betterment found even greater expression in the less tumultuous area of philanthropy. If any one impulse can be said to be commonly characteristic of Jews, it is devotion to charity. This impulse is deeply grounded in ancient religious tradition, which placed the highest premium on charity and lovingkindness in the hierarchy of values that make up the Jewish way of life. It is well illustrated by the following quotation from the Midrash, a collection of commentaries on the biblical text:

In the future world, a man will be asked, 'What was your occupation?' If he reply, 'I fed the hungry,' then the reply is, 'This is the gate of the Lord; he who feeds the hungry, let him enter.'

So too with giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, with those who look after orphans, and with those generally who do deeds of lovingkindness. All these are gates of the Lord, and those who do such deeds shall enter within them.

The catalogue of American Jewish welfare is endless. The American Red Cross was organized in Washington, D.C., home of Adolphus S. Solomons. Julius Rosenwald of Chicago established a \$30-million fund



tion that is currently widespread in American family life. It likewise maintains a definite Jewishness through the home-centered observance of festivals and holy days, although the formal ritual content of many of these ceremonies has changed considerably in recent years. Education is a prime value, and the family retains an undiminished sense of loyalty and cohesiveness.

### *The Synagogue and Religious Education*

Just as Jewish life on the individual level centers in the home, so within the community it revolves around the synagogue. This is particularly true of suburbia. In almost every suburb where there are a hundred or more Jewish families, a new synagogue is rising. Though many of the members have had little or no contact with synagogues since childhood, they want their children to be introduced and made aware of their Jewish heritage and the Hebrew language. As a consequence, synagogue membership has increased in the past 20 years from about a third of the Jewish population to well over one-half. This upsurge has been felt by all three major Jewish groups, the Orthodox, the Conservative and the Reform. In addition to the traditional role as a place of worship, the synagogue of today—like the Jewish community center—has developed into a central meeting place for a number of activities which express the way of life of the Jew in America.

### *The American Jew of Today*

The moment has come, I think, when we can look back at the foregoing discussion and attempt, if not a definition, at least a tentative description of who and what is the American Jew. Certainly one thing that emerges is that, to the American Jew, Judaism is not only a religion, but something very much more—a whole way of life, in fact. A way of life which has evolved through history and tradition and which includes literature and language, music and art, ethics and law. Thus, the secular as well as the religious Jew can feel at home within the many aspects of American Jewish culture.

The American Jew, though he identifies fully with the land of his birth, is at the same time part and parcel of the Jewish people. For this reason, he can—for all his Americanness—identify with the suffering of the Russian Jew, be proud of the achievements of the Israeli Jew. This bond that unites Jewry throughout the world is ever-present and, while at times it appears to be obscured, it invariably rises to the surface during some crisis situation.

for Negro welfare and education as part of his lifetime contribution of \$70 million to charity. The three Strauss brothers of New York, Isadore, Nathan and Oscar were almost as generous. They built hospitals and tuberculosis sanitariums, set up relief stations that dispensed more than a million meals during the depression winter of 1914-15, led the fight for the pasteurization of New York City's milk supply and helped build a Roman Catholic Church. And then there is the Guggenheim family, of course, who set up a foundation, which since 1925 has given educational fellowships to thousands of artists, writers, scholars and scientists. Hundreds of institutions for human welfare scattered over the nation are Jewish in creation and Jewish in support, although the bulk of the beneficiaries are non-Jewish. In its early days the Henry Street Settlement in New York, which was founded by Lillian D. Wald and financed by Jacob H. Schiff, became a world model for creative social work and was the cradle of the visiting nurse service.

Another Jewish innovation is the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, an association of community organizations which coordinates the many national and international appeals (such as the energetic United Jewish Appeal for overseas aid) and analyzes the needs and finances of each.

Jewish women have been especially vigorous in welfare and civic work. Hadassah, one of the most influential women's organizations, is particularly active in Israel. Another leading group, the B'nai B'rith women, with chapters throughout the United States, is busily engaged in civic, charitable and humanitarian affairs, and works closely in coordination with the ADL in the area of civil rights.

### *The Jewish Home*

I would like to say a few words at this point about another aspect of American Jewish life which has long served as perhaps the major reinforcement of Jewish social consciousness and tradition, in other words, the home, the family.

Any attempt to sketch a rough sociological picture of the contemporary American Jewish family as distinct from other American family groups must begin by acknowledging the fact that the sweeping social and economic changes of our times have affected all American families. Such developments as the increasing number of working wives and mothers and the vast movement to the suburbs, to name just two, have cut across group lines. However, certain customs, associations and values have helped the Jewish family withstand many of the disruptive influences of modern life by preserving itself against some of the disorganiza-

*Israel*

Perhaps the clearest example of what I have just said can be seen with regard to Israel. Israel occupies a position in the minds and hearts of Jews in America that is unique. Unlike the Irish Catholics, for example, who with the passage of time and the process of acculturation, are tied today to their original homelands by gossamer strings, the American Jews have a different relationship with the nation of Israel. The bond which has always existed between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel is one that is unbreakable to the modern Jew, regardless of where he lives. American Jews hold their heads higher because of the existence and the achievements of Israel. Similarly, American Jewish concern for Israel remains as steadfast and as strong as ever and, as was seen during the Six Day War of June 1967, it can rise to a tremendous pitch of emotional fervor.

It is true, of course, that the position and attitude of American Jews to Israel can differ—even significantly, sometimes. Many still envision it as the fountainhead of Jewish culture and religion which ensures the continuance of many highly prized Jewish values and from which they can draw a powerful sense of identity. Others are less ardent, less emotionally involved. They wish Israel well, but expect it to develop a national existence largely independent of American-Jewish relations. But no American Jew is indifferent to, detached from, or unaware of the modern State of Israel.

*Summary and Conclusions*

In any case, and no matter what his ultimate attitude, the American Jew is a full-time resident and a full-time achiever in his native land, even while he aids and contributes to his Jewish brothers throughout the world. In fact, in ennobling and enhancing his own Jewish culture, he at the same time enriches the American scene in which he moves and draws breath. The freedom he has found under American democracy has thus been a blessing of opportunity and of achievement for himself as well as for all Americans.

Thus, American Judaism today is robust and looks to the future with confidence. It is generating spiritual and creative energy from which all people will benefit. Its good health is one sure proof that America's concept of equality under the law works. From New Amsterdam to the new suburbia, the Jews have struggled to make one of the most ancient religious cultures part of the growth of an ever-evolving and nobler America. They have contributed to America; they have grown with America. And, while their faith is still being tested here, it is being

# LIFECYCLES



*Jewish Women on  
Life Passages and Personal Milestones*

VOLUME 1

EDITED AND  
WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

*Rabbi Debra Orenstein*

WILSTEIN INSTITUTE FELLOW

JEWISH LIGHTS PUBLISHING  
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nies them for life," and women do not. Boys and men enter into the covenant of Abraham; girls and women do not.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Shulamit Magnus and Treasure Cohen do not resolve those lingering disparities with respect to *Brit*, but they mitigate them by providing additional rituals that can be used equally for boys and girls. Dr. Magnus creates the *Simkhat Lev* (rejoicing of the heart), a ritual for entering children into the House of Israel. She bases the text, symbols, and timing of the ritual on traditional sources. Cohen draws on an ancient custom of planting trees in honor of the birth of one's children, and invests it with new vitality. She also connects her "tree-dition" to the spectrum of Jewish lifecycle, especially to death, growing up, and the *Tu B'shvat* (New Year for Trees) holiday.

Not surprisingly, the authors for this chapter have negative associations with circumcision. All three point out that parents, and mothers particularly, are hardly prepared for a major celebration just eight days after a birth. Rabbi Geller and Dr. Magnus both mention that circumcision is considered child abuse by some parents and activists. The authors agree with those who consider circumcision abusive on one essential point: Circumcision is an imprinting experience. However, they regard it as imprinting boys with peoplehood and covenant, rather than pain or parental uncaring. Thus, none of the authors doubts the power of *Brit Milah*, nor would any abandon this four-thousand-year-old ritual. Instead, they seek to plumb its mystery and to create parallel or supplementary rituals for welcoming girls, as well as boys, into name and covenant.

## *Brit Milah* and *Brit Banot*

LAURA GELLER

*"You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember, make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."*

—MONIQUE WITTIG, *LES GUERILLERES*

Our lives are shaped by both biology and culture. Nowhere in the cycle of life is this clearer than at birth. Every human being comes into the world in the same way, but cultures mark this entrance idiosyncratically, imposing values on the individual and the community through particular rites of initiation. For traditional Judaism, that rite is *Brit Milah* (covenant of circumcision ritual). What is the meaning of this rite in its own terms, and how might its form and content be applied to baby girls?

The covenant of circumcision is first mentioned in Genesis 17:9:

And God said to Abraham... "This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your seed after you; every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male in your generations...."

The tradition makes it clear that circumcision is not merely a surgical procedure. It is a sign of the eternal promise and relationship between God and the Jewish people, sealed in the flesh of Jewish males. Maimonides explains the reasons for *Brit Milah* as follows:

Circumcision... gives all Jewish people a common bodily sign. There is much mutual love and assistance among people who are united by the same sign... Circumcision is also the symbol of the covenant which Abraham made in connection with the belief in God's unity. So every person who is circumcised enters the Covenant of Abraham to believe in the unity of God.

(*GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED*, III, 49)

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Rabbi Laura Geller is the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, Pacific Southwest Region, which includes the AJ Congress Feminist Center.

## Fears and Objections

For non-traditional Jews, the decision to enter sons into the covenant of circumcision is often a difficult one. For some, traditional explanations like that of Maimonides seem less compelling than the fear of hurting a healthy infant.

Some go so far as to consider circumcision a form of child abuse.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite this concern, most Jews continue to have their sons circumcised either through *Brit Milah* or through a hospital circumcision—surgery without ritual.

Those who are satisfied by medical arguments about the benefits of circumcision or the baby's relative insensitivity to pain, or those willing to carry on the tradition at the cost of momentary pain, may well have other objections to the ritual. From a feminist perspective, it appears totally phallogentric; obviously it does not give "all Jewish people a common bodily sign"—it gives that sign only to Jewish males. *Brit Milah* excludes female Jews in the most powerful of ways. Women cannot in and of themselves fully participate in the covenantal relationship and bodily sign that connects God and the Jewish people.

## The Draw of Tradition

Why is this ritual so compelling in spite of the critique it evokes? Why do Jews who respond to few other *mitzvot* (commandments) want their sons to bear this bodily sign? Why do some Jews continue to celebrate *Brit Milah* even as they allow feminist critique to shape other dimensions of their Jewish commitments?

Perhaps the power of *Brit Milah* comes from its danger and antiquity. To witness a *Brit Milah* is to experience a primitive enactment of a very ancient understanding that this child belongs not only to his parents, but also to God—and God wants what parents cannot fully understand. Through the *Brit Milah*, the child is wrested from his parents in order to fulfill the ancient demand. Parents are often uncomfortable with the message that their children do not belong completely to them, but it is a lesson that they must eventually learn in order to allow their children to become themselves.

All this attention to a baby's penis forces his parents to ac-

knowledge that this little one will be connected primarily to his family of origin only for a limited time, that he will grow up and likely use his penis to create a family with another human being, and that his parents need to help him become ready for this. That the sign of the covenant is located on the male organ of generation has powerful implications for the centrality of sexuality and reproduction.

Another way to understand the power of *Brit Milah* is as a bonding between the father and son. Perhaps the father relives his own *Brit* through the *Brit* of his son. Or perhaps the *Brit Milah* is the father's experience of giving birth. Just as the mother's experience of birth was painful and bloody, so too the father's experience of giving birth is painful and bloody—painful and bloody for the child who may grow up to be a father reexperiencing this moment with his own child. Perhaps this is why the primary commandment is for a man to circumcise his sons, not to be circumcised. Only failing a father's ability to circumcise his own sons(s) does a *mohel* (ritual circumciser) act on his behalf. Just as fathers can be present to comfort mothers as they birth their children, perhaps the most women can do is to comfort fathers as they symbolically give birth to their sons through the *Brit Milah*. The power of this ritual for our patriarchal tradition is also its major problem from a feminist perspective. It ritualizes for us a disturbing inequality of our tradition: Mothers give birth and fathers give tribe. Mothers birth babies and fathers birth Jews.<sup>5</sup>

## *Brit Milah* as Effective Ritual

Lifecycle rituals, including circumcision, are transformative. Not only does the boy emerge physically different after the *Brit Milah*, but he is also transformed from baby to covenanted Jew; from an infant with no history, to a person with a past and a future. In the process of ritual, the individual passes through a moment when he or she is separated from a prior status and not quite incorporated into the new one, no longer what s/he was but not yet what s/he will become. That period of "betwixt and between"—what anthropologists call "liminality"—is a time when the individual merges with all other individuals, sharing characteristics of innocence, vulnerability, paradox, and renewal.

Rituals are performed. They are like theater in that they are effective not because they make rational sense but because we somehow believe them. The *Brit Milah* has such players as the *mohel*, the *sandak/sandakit* (person holding the baby during ritual circumcision), the parents; such props as Elijah's chair, the knife, the cotton dipped in wine. The procedure itself is full of drama.

Finally, lifecycle ritual asserts the idea of a life. *Brit Milah* communicates that this baby boy is in some profound way the same person who will go to school, stand under a *huppah* (wedding canopy), and one day, die. Even though the eight-day-old infant bears little resemblance to the eighty-year-old man he may become, he remains, at core, the same.

### **Seder Brit Milah: Order of the Service**

As the baby is brought into the room, he is greeted with words that simultaneously welcome him and Elijah, the forerunner of the messiah.<sup>6</sup> The child is placed upon an empty chair, designated as the chair of Elijah in tribute, according to many, to the prophet who criticized the people for forsaking the covenant (I Kings 19:10) and was rewarded with the privilege of attending every *Brit Milah*. The clear message of the ritual is that this child could be messiah, or, perhaps at least for the moment, is messiah.

After the *mohel* says the blessing and performs the circumcision, the father responds: "You are blessed, *Adonai* our God, ruling over time and space, who has sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us to enter him into the covenant of Abraham our father." Those present respond with a text, that appears in the Talmud (BT *Shabbat* 137b): "Just as he has entered to the covenant, so may he enter to Torah, to *huppah* (marriage canopy), and to good deeds." Thus, the ritual asserts the idea of a life and a set of values for baby, parents, and all assembled. A custom which symbolizes this linking is the adornment of a *wimpel* (swaddling cloth that envelops the baby at his *Brit*) which is donated to the synagogue to be used as a Torah binder at his Bar Mitzvah ceremony.

Then covenant is invoked. After a blessing over wine, the following passage is recited:

You are blessed, *Adonai* our God, ruling over time and space, who did sanctify the beloved person from the womb, impressing Your statute in his flesh and marking his descendants with the sign of the holy covenant. Eternal God our Stronghold, because of this, for the sake of the covenant You did impress in our flesh, deliver our dearly beloved from destruction. Blessed are You, *Adonai*, author of the covenant.

(BASED PARTLY ON BT *SHABBAT* 137B)

Who is the "dearly beloved," sanctified from his mother's womb? Obviously it is the child. And yet, who are his descendants? Rabbeinu Tam says that *yedid* (beloved one) means Abraham; Rashi explains that it must be a reference to Isaac. The Tosafot conclude that it is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (See BT *Menahot* 53b and *Shabbat* 137b).

Why the confusion? Who is this child just entered into the covenant but not yet named? This is the moment of liminality when the child is "betwixt and between." All Jewish history flows through this child, who is simultaneously Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the hoped-for messiah; his father, his grandfather, and every Jewish man who ever was or ever will be. Wholeness is possible; rebirth is possible; redemption is possible. And this moment is ended with the giving of his name:

"Our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, preserve this child to his father and mother and let his name be called in Israel \_\_\_\_\_ the son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .... May this little one become great."

Even more than the circumcision, it is the granting of the name that transforms and brands a Jew. This becomes most clear through the folk tradition of not speaking the child's name until after the *Brit Milah*. Until the moment of the *Brit* he is simply "the baby." During that moment he is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his father, grandfather, and the messiah. After the naming, he becomes himself—a Jew linked through ritual to covenant and messiah, and transformed through ritual into so-and-so the son of his particular parents within the context of the Jewish people. Thus, the power of *Brit Milah* is spiritual, as well as physical. The infant is transformed, named, given tribe and history, roots and

purpose, baggage and wings. As the infant is transformed so are we, the community gathered for the ritual, who have relived again the biblical stories of our ancestors and the messianic promise of our redemption, in the process of welcoming another Jew into our covenantal community.

### Where Are the Girls, and Where Should They Be?

What do we learn from this about rituals for entering our daughters into the covenant? Should a covenant ritual for daughters be modeled after *Brit Milah*? If so, how closely ought they be parallel? If not, how do we create covenant ceremonies for girls that are authentically Jewish?

If the primary source of the power of *Brit Milah* were the physical marking of the infant boy, it would be almost impossible to create a parallel ritual. But we have seen that the power of *Brit Milah* is not only physical. While a *Brit* for a daughter cannot physically parallel the circumcision, it ought to be transformative in a similar way: The child must change from baby to Jew; the child must become Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, as well as messiah; she must be named and given tribe and history; and the community gathered for the ritual must be different because of the ritual.

While boys are named at the *Brit Milah*, girls are traditionally named in synagogue on the Sabbath after their birth. Typically, the father is called to the Torah and receives a blessing in which the child is named. Another blessing prays for the healing of the mother. Most often, neither the child nor the mother is present.<sup>7</sup> Naming, then, has none of the power that we observed in connection to *Brit Milah*; there is no connection to covenant or a messianic future, only the ceremonial conferring of a name on the (usually absent) child.

"On the Birth of a Daughter," one of the first published covenant rituals for girls, included variations of the seven blessings said at Jewish weddings, as well as a version for girls of *Pituyon Haben* (ceremony symbolically redeeming first-born males, born vaginally, from Temple service), celebrated one month after the birth.<sup>8</sup> Among the innovations of this early ceremony is a *berakhah* (blessing) for entrance into the covenant: "Praised are You

*Adonai*, Our God, Lord of the Cosmos, who has made us holy through Your commandments and commanded us to bring our daughter into the covenant of the People of Israel."

Since this ceremony, there have been many others. Early ceremonies tended to be closely modeled after *Brit Milah* in that they were set on the eighth day after birth and used much of the traditional imagery and blessings.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1970s, Mary Gendler proposed that the parallel to *Brit Milah* ought to involve the ritual breaking of the infant girl's hymen<sup>10</sup>. This would incorporate the blood ritual and genital elements of *Brit Milah* and, at the same time, free the baby girl from the strictures of virginity. Here, as in *Brit Milah*, the sign of the covenant would be located in connection to the organ of generation. Gendler's suggestion, while provocative, has not been followed.

Other alternatives involve blood, for example tapping a girl's cheek<sup>11</sup> to evoke the folk tradition of a "menstrual slap" which a mother gives her daughter when she reaches menarche. Proponents of blood rituals argue that in a boy, blood is made to flow unnaturally through circumcision, but in a girl blood will flow naturally when she gets her period. A problem with this type of ceremony is the possible implication that the girl's entrance into the covenant is somehow incomplete until she begins to menstruate and, arguably, ends when she reaches menopause.

More recent ceremonies forsake *Brit Milah* as the model. They operate from the assumption that, because *Brit Milah* focuses on the physical maleness of the boy, there can be no parallel ritual for girls. Instead they propose that a *Brit Barot* (covenant ceremony for daughters) ought to celebrate female spirituality. This, of course, raises the provocative question: What are the sources of female spirituality in Judaism?

Two symbols have become popular in *Brit Barot* ceremonies: Water/ritual bath immersion and moon/lunar celebrations and blessings. The Me'iri, a medieval commentator, suggests that when Abraham was circumcised, Sarah underwent ritual immersion in order to enter the covenant (BT *Yevamot* 46a). So ritual immersion seems to be the feminine equivalent of circumcision as a sign of *brit*. Both immersion and, in the case of males, circumcision are required of converts to Judaism who take on the covenant. This connection between immersion and covenant led

to the creation of a ceremony by Rabbi Michael and Sharon Strassfeld which replaces circumcision with immersion in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) for a baby girl.<sup>12</sup> Immersion is most commonly done after a woman's menstrual period, so that this ceremony, like *Brit Milah*, evokes associations with blood, as well as covenant. The problem is that this ceremony resembles baptism too much to "feel Jewish," although in fact the Christian tradition of baptism is an adaptation of the Jewish tradition of ritual immersion.

A less problematic ceremony, also associated with water, is called *brit rehitzah* (covenant of washing) and was created by Rabbi Ruth Sohn and others.<sup>13</sup> It evokes the biblical story of Abraham's welcoming the three angels who visited him after his circumcision by washing their feet. The ceremony welcomes the girl child into the world and covenant by washing her feet and employs a new *berakiah*: "Blessed are you *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe, who is mindful of the covenant through the washing of the feet."

The second, and in my view, more powerful, alternative to immersion rituals relates female spirituality to the cycles of the moon. *Rosh Hodesh* (New Moon Festival) is designated in the tradition as a woman's holiday. The mystical tradition links women and the moon and suggests that in the world to come women will be restored to their rightful position as equal to men, just as the moon will be restored to her equal position with the sun.<sup>14</sup> There is also an obvious connection between the menstrual cycles of women and the cycles of the moon.

Using the connection between women and the moon as the organizing principle of the ritual determines its timing. It no longer occurs on the eighth day but on the *Rosh Hodesh* after the birth. It moves the ceremony from the day to the night.

A most interesting ritual flows out of the tradition of *Kiddush Levannah* (blessing of the moon).<sup>15</sup> Traditionally observed on a Saturday night after *Havdalah* (distinction-making ritual that separates the Sabbath or holiday from weekday), between the third and the fifteenth of the month, the ceremony offers fitting opportunities for a covenant ceremony for daughters. It involves singing, chanting, and movement; a liturgy filled with images of renewal, regeneration, and creation; and most importantly, a powerful messianic thrust. For example, the liturgy includes "Long

live David, king of Israel," an obvious messianic reference, and Song of Songs 2:8-9, a more subtle one.

A *Brit* ritual which begins with *Kiddush Levannah* celebrates female spirituality in an authentically Jewish way. It evokes the liminal—the possibility that this child is messiah, and that she is connected to the women of our tradition who celebrated the cycles of the moon.

## S E D E R B R I T K I D D U S H L E V A N A H

Order of the Service

### Entry into the Covenant

The girl is entered into the covenant with a new *berakhah* based on the blessing offered at a circumcision:

ברוך אתה « אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו ואינו להכניסה בבריתם של אברהם וישרה.

*Barukh attah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam, asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav vetzivvanu lehakhnisah b'britam shel avraham vesarah.*

Blessed are you God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments and commanded us to enter our daughter into the Covenant of Abraham and Sarah.

The community responds: "As this child has been entered into the covenant, so may she enter into a life enriched by Torah, a warm and loving relationship, and a commitment to create a better world."

The baby is linked not only to the cosmic future and redemption, but also to her own individual future, as the ritual asserts the idea of a connected life.

### Welcoming and Naming

Before \_\_\_\_\_ was formed in (her mother's) womb, the Holy One gestured to the angel in charge of the winds



and said, "Bring me the wind which is in the Garden of Eden and whose name is \_\_\_\_\_ *bat* (daughter of) \_\_\_\_\_ *ve* (and) \_\_\_\_\_." Immediately the angel went and brought the wind \_\_\_\_\_ before the Holy One shaking and trembling, and the Holy One said to the wind: "\_\_\_\_\_, enter into that sperm and that egg." And the wind \_\_\_\_\_ opened her mouth to speak: "I am quite satisfied living in the garden of Eden. Why must I leave? I am holy and pure and formed out of Your own holiness." And the Holy One replied, "The place where I am sending you will be even more pleasant than the Garden of Eden. And when I created you it was just for this purpose." The Holy One dispatched the wind \_\_\_\_\_ and the angels placed her in her mother's womb. There she was fed by two angels, and they guarded her and kept her safe. And in there a candle burned over her head and by its light she saw from one end of the universe to the other. There are no days in a person's life more enjoyable than those days in the womb, and by the light of the candle the angels taught \_\_\_\_\_ the entire Torah. After nine months the angel announced that the time had come to enter the air of the world. \_\_\_\_\_ protested: "Why do I have to leave? I am just fine in here!" But the angel replied, "Whether you like it or not, you are going. And mark my words, when your time comes to leave that world outside, you will not want to go." And the child \_\_\_\_\_ entered the air of the world. And the angel tapped her on the upper lip, leaving a mark, and the candle went out and \_\_\_\_\_ has forgotten all that she had seen and known.<sup>16</sup>

*The rabbi or a parent then says:* Tonight is the beginning of \_\_\_\_\_'s remembering. We give her, her first word of Torah—her own name.

Like the "dearly beloved" of the *Brit* liturgy, the soul about to enter the world is no longer what she was but not yet who she will become. It is especially powerful to use portions of the *Zevad Habat* (gift of a daughter), the traditional Sephardic welcoming blessing for a baby girl, in the naming:

May God who blessed our mothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Miriam the prophet, Avigail and Esther, the queens, bless this lovely little girl and let her name be called in Israel \_\_\_\_\_ the daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ at this favorable moment of blessing.

May she be raised in health, peace, and tranquility to study Torah, to stand under the *huppah*, to do good deeds. May her parents merit to see her happy, blessed with children, wealth and honor, peaceful and content in their old age. May this be God's will. Amen.<sup>17</sup>



So this little girl, at once the wind from the Garden of Eden, the hoped-for messiah, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Avigail, and Esther, becomes a particular person with a particular history, the daughter of her mother and her father. The baby is entered into the covenantal community, endowed with both cosmic and personal history.

### Creating a Future of Continuity

The time has come for our tradition to mark the entrance of girls as well as boys into the world and our people. *Brit Batot* can be powerful, transformative and authentic. Someday a mother will look into the eyes of her baby girl at her child's *Brit* and see her own mother looking into her own eyes. And when that chain goes back for generations, we will know we have succeeded.

*Sarah Schechter*

# GIVE ME YOUR HAND

*Traditional and  
Practical Guidance on  
Visiting the Sick*  
Second Edition

BIKKUR CHOLIM

בְּקוּר חוֹלִים

*Send you  
Tuba you*

Jane Handler  
Kim Hetherington  
with Rabbi Stuart L. Kelman

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## CONCLUSION

**A**s you visit the sick—listening to their concerns, talking with them, laughing and praying together, holding one another—keep in mind that you are experiencing rare moments, closer to the core of human experience than most moments you encounter in the hurly-burly of daily life. Learn from your experience in the sickroom. Reflect on what is important in life. Consider your own priorities. Think about the meaning of friendship in general, and the particular friendship that you are confirming or forging in the performance of the *mitzvah*.

Feel enriched and empowered by the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim*. For indeed, the benefit flows not only to the person who is ill, but to you, the visitor. It is as if you were the one who asked the patient, 'Give me your hand,' and rose up stronger and straighter because of the touch.

## APPENDIX 1—PRAYERS

1. *Mi Sheberach*—

## Traditional Prayer for Healing

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Leah, Rachel, and Jacob, bless \_\_\_\_\_ son/daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ along with all the ill among us. Grant insight to those who bring healing; courage and faith to those who are sick; love and strength to us and all who love them. God, let Your spirit rest upon all who are ill and comfort them. May they and we soon know a time of complete healing, a healing of the body and a healing of the spirit, and let us say: Amen.

—FROM THE SIDDIR

For a male:

מי שברך אבותינו, אברהם, יצחק ויעקב, ערה רבקה רחל ולאה,  
 הוא יברך וירפא את החולה \_\_\_\_\_ בן \_\_\_\_\_. הקדוש ברוך הוא,  
 ימלא רחמים עליו, להחזיקו ולרפאותו, וישלח לו מהרה רפואה  
 שלמה לכל אבריו ויגדיו בתוך שאר חולי ישראל, רפואת הנפש  
 ורפואת הגוף (שבת היא מלועזק / יום טוב הוא מלועזק /  
 ורפואה קרובה לבוא) השתא בעגלא ובזמן קרוב, ונאמר אמן.

For a female:

מי שברך אבותינו, אברהם, יצחק ויעקב, ערה רבקה רחל ולאה,  
 הוא יברך וירפא את החולה \_\_\_\_\_ בת \_\_\_\_\_. הקדוש ברוך הוא,  
 ימלא רחמים עליה, להחזיקה ולרפאותה, וישלח לה מהרה  
 רפואה שלמה לכל אבריה ויגדיה בתוך שאר חולי ישראל,  
 רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף (שבת היא מלועזק / יום טוב הוא  
 מלועזק / ורפואה קרובה לבוא) השתא בעגלא ובזמן קרוב,  
 ונאמר אמן.

## 2. *Mi Sheberach*—Alternate Version

Source of mercy, spread Your shelter of peace over all the ill among us and watch with special care over \_\_\_\_\_. Help us, as we seek ways of healing; share Your kindness with us; that the bonds of love and caring be increased; and grant courage and hope to the sick and the well together. Reveal Your compassion and Your blessing upon all who are ill and comfort them. Speedily and soon, let us see together a day of complete healing, a healing of body and a healing of spirit, and let us say: Amen.

—FROM "SERVICE OF HEALING," RUACH AMI, SAN FRANCISCO

## 3. *Mi Sheberach*—

Music by Debbie Friedman

Lyrics by Debbie Friedman and Drorah Setel

מי שְׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ

*Mi sheberach avoteinu, m'kor habracha limoteinu.*

May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us

Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing

And let us say: Amen.

מי שְׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ

*Mi sheberach imoteinu, m'kor habracha lavoteinu.*

Bless those in need of healing with *refuah shelaymah*

The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit

And let us say: Amen.

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## 4. A Prayer for Visitors to Recite

Source of Healing of the Universe,

in whose hands are the issues  
of life and health,

Grant complete healing

to \_\_\_\_\_

along with all those who suffer.

Impart your wisdom

to those who care for the sick.

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To the family

of \_\_\_\_\_

give strength enough for each day.

To us,

the members of his/her community,

grant understanding

and a caring heart.

So that we may be there when he/she needs us.

Return him/her to us, we pray.

sound in body and whole in spirit,

in perfect health,

To do your will.

— RABBI AVIS D. MILLER, ADAS ISRAEL CONGREGATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

## 5. From the Siddur

Blessed are You, Adonai, Creator of the universe, who has made our bodies in wisdom, creating openings, glands and organs, marvelous in structure, intricate in design. Should but one of them, by being blocked or opened, fail to function, it would be difficult to stand before You. Praised are You, source of our health and strength, we give You thanks and praise.

בְּרַךְ אֱתָהּ יְיָ הוֹרֵה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הַעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּהַקְמָה  
וּבְרָא בּוֹ נִקְבִים וְנִקְבִים חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים. גְּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כֹסֵא  
כְּבוֹדֶיךָ שְׂאֵם יִפְתַּח אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִשְׁתֵּם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשֶׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם  
וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵיךָ. בְּרַךְ אֱתָהּ יְיָ הוֹרֵה רּוּפֵא כֹל בְּשֶׁר וּמְפַלֵּיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

## 6. A Litany for Healing

We pray that we might know before whom we stand: the Power whose gift is life, who quickens those who have forgotten how to live.

We pray for winds to disperse the choking air of sadness; for cleansing rains to make parched hopes flower and to give all of us the strength to rise up towards the sun.

We pray for love to encompass us for no other reason save that we are human—that we may all blossom into persons who have gained power over our own lives.

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We pray to stand upright, we fallen; to be healed, we sufferers; we pray to break the bonds that keep us from the world of beauty; we pray for opened eyes, we who are blind to our authentic selves.

We pray that we may walk in the garden of a purposeful life, our own powers in touch with the power of the world.

Praise to the God whose gift is life, whose cleansing rains let parched men and women flower toward the sun.

— FROM 'SERVICE OF HEALING,' RUACH AMI, SAN FRANCISCO

## 7. The Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26)

May God bless you and guard you

May God show you favor and be gracious to you

May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְיָ הוֹדוּ וְיִשְׁמְרֶכֶם.

יְאִרְ יְיָ הוֹדוּ פְנֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיַחֲמֶךָ.

יְשׂא יְיָ הוֹדוּ פְנֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִשְׂעָם לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים.

## 8. From the *Amida*

Heal us, Adonai, and we shall be healed. Help us and save us, for You are our glory. Grant perfect healing for all our afflictions. May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to send complete healing of body and soul, to \_\_\_\_\_ along with others who are stricken. For You are the faithful and merciful God of healing. Praised are You, Adonai, Healer of the people of Israel.

רְפָאוּנוּ יְיָ הוֹדוּ וְנִרְפָּא, הוֹשִׁיעֵנו וְנוֹשְׁעָה כִּי תִהְלַתְנוּ אִתָּה.  
וְהַעֲלֵה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְכָל מַכּוֹתֵינוּ.

*On behalf of someone ill, you may add:*

יְיָ רַצוֹן מִלְּקַנְיָד, יְיָ הוֹדוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂתַשְׁלַח  
מִקְדָּרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, רְפוּאָת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְרְפוּאָת הַגּוּף,  
לְ \_\_\_\_\_ בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ, בְּתוֹךְ שָׂרָי חוּלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

כִּי אֵל מְלֶכֶד רּוּפָא נְאֻמָּן וְרַחֲמָן אִתָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹדוּ  
רוּפָא חוּלֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

## 9. From the *Siddur*

בְּשֵׁם יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל In the name of Adonai:

מִיְמֵינוּ מִיְכַאֵל. May the angel Michael be at your right

וּמִשְׁמָאלֵינוּ גַבְרִיאֵל. and the angel Gabriel be at your left:

וּמִלְפָּנֵינוּ אוּרִיאֵל. and in front of you the angel Uriel

וּמֵאַחֲרֵינוּ רַפָּאֵל. and behind you the angel Rafael

וְעַל רֵאשִׁי and above your head

שְׂכִינַת אֵל. the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence).

## 10. Psalms

Another way to pray for the sick is to recite specific Psalms that engender hope, such as Psalms 6, 9, 13, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 49, 51, 55, 56, 59, 69, 77, 86, 88, 90, 91, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 116, 118, 121, 130, 137, 142, 143, 148, or 150. These may be said in any language and either by the visitor or together with the sick person. A wonderful resource is *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body*, edited by Simkha Y. Weintraub (see Bibliography) in which spiritual leaders unfold the strength and solace in selected Psalms.

A different custom is to choose verses from Psalm 119 that spell out the individual's name, the mother's name, and the words: *kera satan* (may the evil decree be abolished). Since Psalm 119 is an acrostic containing verses beginning with each letter of the alphabet, this is a unique way to tailor a prayer to an individual. This is typically followed by a *Mi Sheberach* (above).

## 11. Names

In many communities it is customary to use the name of the mother of the sick person instead of the father. The reason often given for this custom is that the Hebrew word for compassion is *rachamim* and the Hebrew word for womb is *rechem*. We ask that God give protection and be compassionate just as the mother's womb gave love and compassion. In the event of serious illness, there was a custom to give an additional name (usually of someone who had lived a long life) to the sick person. This folk custom was intended to confuse the Angel of Death who

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*Sexual Exploitation in Pastoral Counseling*

# CCAR

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are generally overlooked, and rarely acknowledged and treated. And the profession suffers. Interim rabbis, who are trained to heal such congregations, might be one solution. Trained investigative teams are part of another solution. Our response must be fair, and it must be without delay.

The headlines about which Rachel Adler spoke as she began her article usually occur only when victims seek redress through the legal system. I would argue that when justice is served in a fair and timely internal process, we would rarely see such headlines. In order for justice to be served, we must end the secrecy that surrounds such abuse, acknowledge the violation, and hear the victim. We must act with compassion, protecting the vulnerable by preventing further abuse. The abuser must be held accountable and consequences must be imposed. Restitution should be made to the victim, and help provided to free all involved from the suffering so that healing can begin.

At one retreat held by the Center for victims of clergy sexual abuse, a question was informally posed to the group: What was the cost of the abuse to you, in measurable terms? The eleven victims wrote their answers down, and they were added up. The total? Fifty-five years, and \$278,000.<sup>4</sup> Denominations around the country are becoming increasingly embroiled in lawsuits relating to such misconduct. There are many moral arguments that are certainly compelling us to take a long hard look at this issue and how it is handled. But if those aren't enough, the dollars are a most compelling argument, too. "If not now, when?"

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship Trainer's Manual* (Seattle: CPSDV, 1992), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> For her insightful analysis of this dilemma, I thank Marie Fortune, and the staff of the Center. The relationship graphic on which this discussion is based can be found on p. 31 of the training manual.

<sup>3</sup> By the way, much of what is said here in relationship to rabbis holds true for cantors and perhaps, to a certain extent, any synagogue professional.

<sup>4</sup> *CPSDV Trainer's Manual*, p. II-17.

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# "To Reclaim Our Voice": An Analysis of Reproary Feminist Contemporary Feminist Passover Haggadot

Lee T. Bycel

In Jewish tradition, the Exodus story constitutes what the prominent contemporary Jewish theologian Emil Fackenheim has called a "root experience,"<sup>1</sup> a lens through which the contemporary adherent of the tradition views reality. The Jew, through participation in the *seder*, "reenact[s] the natural-historical event, and, in so doing, 'reenacts [its] abiding astonishment as well, and makes it his own.'<sup>2</sup> The ritual of the *seder* makes the Exodus "eternally present" and connects the *seder* participant with the seminal events of the tradition. "In every generation," the *Haggadah* states, "each Jew is obligated to see himself (sic) as if he had gone forth from Egypt."<sup>3</sup> The significance of this commandment and the degree to which Jews have internalized it can be witnessed in the proliferation of *Haggadah* texts and illustrations Jews have produced for over a millennium.

The United States has certainly been no exception to this trend towards the "ritual expansion," as Baruch Bokser has so aptly put it, of the Passover liturgy. From the late 19th century until the present, American Jews have employed the *Haggadah* as a vehicle to translate, transmit, and — through emendations and supplements — transform the meaning and relevance of the Exodus story to Jews living in this country.<sup>3</sup> Recent creative American *Haggadot*, while not abandoning the particular Jewish context of the Exodus story, have increasingly come to view the

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story in more than a particularistic Jewish manner. The themes of human suffering, oppression, enslavement of others, and devaluation of human life as well as redemption — all expressions of the core “root experience” of going from slavery to freedom — have all been shaped to relate the experience of particular groups. There has been an emergence in the past three decades of feminist, secular, vegetarian, anti-war and environmental *Haggadot*, to name but a few. Thus, in the Jewish community, the *Haggadah*, with its core story of enslavement and freedom, has been the source of an enormous amount of creativity by Jews — some of them only marginally connected to Jewish life — who have written *Haggadot* to reflect their viewpoints on freedom.

Contemporary feminist *Haggadot* are, in one sense, representative of these larger historical and modern tendencies. The compelling rationale for these feminist texts is expressed powerfully in the words of Judith Plaskow:

The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence. It begins with noting the absence of women's history and experiences as shaping forces in the Jewish tradition. Half of Jews have been women, but men have been defined as normative Jews, while women's voices and experiences are largely invisible in the record of Jewish belief and experience that has come down to us. Women have lived Jewish history and carried its burdens, but women's perceptions and questions have not given form to scripture, shaped the direction of Jewish law, or found expression in liturgy. Confronting this silence raises disturbing questions and stirs the impulse toward far-reaching change. What in the tradition is ours? What can we claim that has not also wounded us? What would have been different had the great silence been filled?<sup>4</sup>

Feminist *Haggadot* are an attempt to confront the silence, the absence of a woman's voice in the traditional text. In all fairness, it must be said that despite this “silence” of women's voices in the traditional text of the *Haggadah*, there are no restrictions regarding women's participation in the traditional rituals of the *sefer*. In fact, according to the medieval *Musar* text, *Sefer Halimukh*, the commandments of Passover, including the rituals of the *sefer*, are as incumbent upon women as they are upon men.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is equally true that the primary role of women has not been to conduct the *sefer* ritual. A late nineteenth century eastern European account describes the nature of the *sefer* itself, the atmosphere that has traditionally marked it, and the gender specific role that males have played in the actual performance of the ritual.

He looks different and he sits differently, for he reclines among pillows, as “a free man.” He looks and he sits like a king, and on *Pesach* even more than on Sabbath, he is a king ... The questions will not be asked by a girl unless there are no boys in the family ... He conducts the service as the director of an orchestra conducts a score, signaling when it is time to take a sip of wine, when it is time to spill out the ten wine drops, symbolizing the ten plagues of Egypt ... When the child is a father, he will do it all in exactly the same way, with exactly the same gestures. He will know every move, his muscles will even remember how one expands and reclines on pillows to show he is a free man.<sup>6</sup>

As this description vividly indicates, the reading of the *Haggadah* and the conduct of the *sefer* have been, in practice, the province of men. The role that women have played, in contrast, has essentially been a domestic one. Women have traditionally been assigned the responsibility of preparing the elaborate meal. They have lit the candles, listened and perhaps participated in the reading of the *Haggadah* and its discussion. However, at the appropriate moment it has been women who have served the meal, and cleaned up after it. The nature of this role, and the resentment some women have felt concerning it, have been captured in the following memoir:

It was not only the upheaval, but the extra work incurred by the observance of the Passover laws that upset me. Not even a can opener that had been used during the rest of the year could be used during the Passover preparations ... As it was inconceivable to have a *sefer* meal without guests, we found ourselves cooking on a larger scale with fewer utensils. It was hard work, although my mother never complained. But when I was small I noticed that she invariably fell asleep during the *sefer* ceremony. As a child, I just felt pleased that I was able to stay awake longer than an adult; but later on I appreciated just how exhausted my mother was. As I grew up I found myself increasingly resentful that it was my father who dictated what needed to be done — that surface must be scrubbed; this cupboard must be thoroughly cleaned out before anything could be put into it — but that it was my mother and I who did most of the hard work. Perhaps it gave us a better appreciation of the meaning of slavery, even if there was no sign of freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Several factors have thus promoted the development of Haggadot devoted to feminist issues during the past two decades. The first deals with content — or more precisely, as Plaskow has pointed out, the lack of women's voices in the traditional text. The stories in the traditional *Haggadah* center



around men and a male image of God. Stories about women, or discussion of their role in the Exodus, are virtually absent. Furthermore, the little that is contained there about women is told from the perspective of men. In addition, the roles assigned in the performance of the *seder* ritual and the serving of the *seder* meal have been divided along traditional gender lines. Feminist *Haggadot* seek to rectify both of these perceived faults. The expansion of Jewish tradition they embody is fully in keeping with the imperative of the tradition itself: to reflect on the experiences of bondage and liberation in a personally and generationally relevant manner.

The Exodus story deals with a central concern of human existence: the right of the individual to be free. Feminist *Haggadot* seek to fill the void left by the absence of women's voices concerning women's experiences in this crucial matter. They attempt to expand the tradition — to let women be heard as well as to allow them to play publicly active roles as leaders — so that the values of freedom and dignity inherent in the Exodus story may more fully include the perspectives and sensibilities of all men and women. By examining excerpts from three different *Haggadot* — the *Women's Passover Seder* (compiled and written by the Twin Cities Women's Minyan, 1981); *The San Diego Women's Haggadah* (2nd edition, cooperative effort of the Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1986); and *The 1991/5751 Passover Haggadah of the L.A. Jewish Feminist Center* — these aims will be illuminated. The excerpts focus on three specific sections of the *Haggadah*: The Four Questions, The Ten Plagues, and the core narrative itself. The concept of freedom as developed in these *Haggadot* will be compared and contrasted to the notion of freedom expressed in the traditional *Haggadah* and the distinct messages of the feminist *Haggadot* will be made clear.

The *Women's Passover Seder* is based primarily on the work of two women, Lynn Rosen and Rachel Adler, who had a few years earlier written their own. In the introduction to this *Haggadah*, its context is explained:

We gather together here as Jewish women. We, too, are a family, a growing family. We, too, have ties we hope to strengthen. While we are not related by blood, we are related by something perhaps even stronger: Sisterhood. Some of us have close ties with the women's community, others with the Jewish community. Tonight, let us learn from each other and strengthen our bonds as women, and as Jews. Let us renew our personal and collective commitments to the struggle for liberation of all people.<sup>8</sup>

This *Haggadah* follows the structure of the traditional *Haggadah*, though its content reflects a feminist perspective. While the traditional *Haggadah* uses only the masculine form to name God, in the Hebrew of this feminist rite, God — or, more precisely, God's presence — is referred to exclusively in the feminine as the '*Shechinah*,' and the English translation identifies God only as 'She.' In addition, the lives of Jewish women are highlighted throughout. The second *Haggadah* under consideration in this paper, *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*, more moderate in tone, brought women together, in the words of its editors,

... [at] a time when [they] could sit down, share a meal and recite stories about their liberation in terms of the exodus from Egypt. The seventh night was designated for this occasion because it was removed from the celebration of family *Seders* during the first and second nights of Passover. This would indeed be a time when we could rest and recline as free women...<sup>9</sup>

Although structured in a manner akin to the *Women's Passover Seder*, it is not as insistent upon employing feminine imagery for the Hebrew naming of God; the term *Shechinah* is not utilized. The traditional Hebrew terms for God remain and the translation is gender inclusive. Finally, *The 1991/5751 Passover Haggadah of the L.A. Jewish Feminist Center* addresses the same issues as its Twin Cities and San Diego counterparts, but in a much abbreviated form. It simply abridges the complete structure of the traditional *Haggadah*. As a crucial aside, it is significant that none of the authors of these Passover *seder* liturgies intended them for use on the first two nights of the holiday, when traditional family *seders* are held. Instead, they all provide for their recitation and celebration on later nights of the eight-day Passover festival. Their intent is to provide a forum for women to gather and retell their story.

The 'Four Questions' of the traditional *Haggadah* are central to the entire *seder* experience. The form and content of the questions, as well as the *Haggadah* text's response to them, have been crucial in the development of feminist *Haggadot*. In *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*, the traditional four questions are asked with the next section "We were Pharaoh's slaves..." included, though translated in a gender inclusive manner. Yet, prior to the recitation of the traditional four questions, four new questions that acknowledge the role of the biblical matriarchs are also asked. Historical material is provided about each and then a creative answer is attributed to each of the women. A lengthy citation will indicate precisely how this is done.

Tonight we have gathered our foremothers to the table, to surround our story with their commentary...

We speak of Deborah, our mother, of Beruriah and Hannah [Senesh] and [the sixteenth century German businesswoman and memoirist] Gluckel;

Of all our mothers whose strength

above and around and within  
Enabled us to reach this day.

We question our foremothers;  
and they reply.

Mother, we ask, why is this night different from all other nights?  
Why do we celebrate a women's Seder?

Deborah, judge and prophetess, "who arose a mother of Israel" [Judges 5:7], considers this question carefully...

This is the reply Deborah gives to our first question:

"They called me a judge in Israel. They called me a woman of great and rare distinction, a mother of my nation. And yet when they came to me for advice, to draw on that wisdom and compassion of which they were in such awe, they made me leave my home and sit outside. For in their eyes all women were the same, weak and wanton, not to be trusted alone in the company of men.

"We celebrate a women's Seder tonight so that we are free to be ourselves, not afraid that our actions will be misjudged or misinterpreted, considered bold or unwomanly."

We turn now to Beruriah. Mother, we ask, why do we taste this bitterness and keep it fresh in our mouths?...

"My life," explains Beruriah in answer to our question, "has been both sweet and bitter. The sweetness needs little explanation. It flows from Torah, the study of which is a blessing. The bitterness is equally evident. The scholars considered my degree of learning to be astonishing for a woman. Brilliant as they were, these learned men never realized that any woman, given the same opportunity, might have become my equal ... or theirs.

"Be reminded at this celebration of freedom, that freedom must be won again by every generation. You, too, must make your exodus from Egypt."

And now we ask, Mother, why then do we taste both salt tears and sweet?

Hannah Senesh knows the answer to our question. She knows it well...

"I shed many tears in my short life; tears of frustration over the opportunities denied to me because of my religion, tears of fear during my secret mission, tears of pain at the hands of my tormentors and, at the end, tears of grief, for I loved my life and did not want it to end.

"Yet through all the salty tears, the sweet beauty of the land and the people of Palestine sustained me. As long as it exists I will be there, basking in its sweetness."

We address the fourth question to Gluckel of Hameln. Mother, why do we find it so difficult to lean back and relax during this meal?...

"Now," Gluckel tells us, "is the season to relish our freedom, to reign as queens in our own homes. I bore twelve children, nurtured them to adulthood, and provided for their material needs after the death of my husband. Rest was a rare and precious commodity for me.

"Yet I found even my few moments of leisure difficult to enjoy. Women are the ones who create and sustain, and so we can never truly be at rest. There will always be needs, always be cares; and you and I will always have to be there, daughter, to help, to heal, and to nurture."<sup>10</sup>

The compilers of this *Haggadah* have thus provided paradigms of exemplary female conduct drawn from different spheres of human action and disparate eras of Jewish history. The questions, although structured in the traditional manner, transform the nature and content of the ritual. The liberation of the Jewish people from Pharaoh by divine intervention now focuses on the liberation of Jewish women and the role the women themselves play in achieving this liberation. Each of the women represents a different aspect of enslavement and freedom.

In this *Haggadah*, the focus seems to be on the reclaiming of tradition for women, the empowering of women based on the lives of their foremothers, and the analysis of freedom as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The traditional "We were slaves..." is there but, in citing the four women, a broader perspective is given on the issue of freedom.

In *The 1991/5751 Passover Haggadah of the L.A. Jewish Feminist Center*, the four questions are rephrased:

Why is this seder night different from all other seder nights?

Why is this year different from all other years?

On this night, why do we still taste bitterness, even as we enjoy the sweetness of a vision coming true?

As Jewish Feminists, what are our dreams?<sup>11</sup>

In the response to the first question, the purpose of the *seder* is made explicit:

On all other seder nights, women were not free to recline and to truly celebrate. On all other seder nights, while women cooked, served, and cleaned up afterwards, men chanted the prayers, men retold the story, passing on our people's story from father to son. Tonight, as women, we celebrate that we are free to pray, free to retell our story, and free to reclaim our unique heritage. In this way, we pass our story and our traditions to our daughters and our sons, so they, in turn, can pass it on to their children.<sup>12</sup>

It is women's freedom which is being celebrated. The section "We were slaves..." is omitted altogether. Women, as persons endowed with dignity, are deemed capable of self-realization and autonomous empowerment, apart from men. Theirs is an inclusive freedom, one extended both to sons and daughters. Men have become the substitute Pharaoh as evidenced in the answer to question three:

Tonight we recall the bitterness of our lives under past Pharaohs, acknowledge present Pharaohs and, with sadness, anticipate future Pharaohs. We remember, too, that women have been and still are enslaved: by their roles as prescribed by men, by their reproductive functions as controlled by men, by their obliteration from history as written by men.

In spite of this bitterness, we give thanks for the sweetness we have already gained: we are free to remember, we are free to question, we are free to act. We give thanks for these freedoms, even as we remember women everywhere whose daily lives are embittered by the absence of the most basic freedoms.<sup>13</sup>

Freedom, as presented in this section, does not result from God's intervention. It is human beings who achieve liberation; and the role of the biblical Miriam, the sister of Moses, is underscored in understanding the historic liberation from Egyptian slavery.<sup>14</sup>

In *The Women's Passover Seder*, a fifth question is added to the traditional four questions: "How is this *seder* different from all other *seders*?" The answer emphasizes the importance of women participating in the communal ritual, freed from their traditional domestic role. "In many other places where people are celebrating *Pesach*, the women are enslaved in the kitchen preparing the meal. But at this *Seder* we are gathered together as women, leading and participating fully in the *Seder* ritual."<sup>15</sup> The section "We were slaves..." remains intact, although God is referred to in the English translation as 'She'.

All three feminist *Haggadot* have transformed the explicit content of the traditional liturgy. The focus has shifted away from the centrality of God's role in the struggle for freedom. Instead, these *Haggadot* emphasize the role humanity plays in the struggle for liberation, and express confidence in the ability of people to achieve this goal of liberation. The questions are also redesigned to provide images of female domestic subjugation. Finally, the questions affirm that women need not be trapped in such roles, and they optimistically present alternative visions of freedom that serve as paradigms of hope for women.

Central to the narrative of the traditional *Haggadah* is a litany and discussion of various verses which acclaim God's power

and crucial role in the liberation from Egypt. Prominent among these verses is the passage from Deuteronomy 26:8, "And the Eternal brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with terribleness, and with signs and wonders." The 'wonders' are traditionally interpreted as the ten plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians and hence enumerated in the *Haggadah*. The theme is reformulated in the feminist *Haggadot* under consideration here to reflect the injustices women suffer. In *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*, the ten plagues which have afflicted women are listed.

*Each woman pours a drop of wine onto her plate as the plagues of Jewish women are described.*

These are the ten plagues brought upon women in Jewish life:

- 1) The consistently male image of God.
- 2) The lack of recognition of women rabbis, cantors, scholars, and decision makers who could serve as models for all of us.
- 3) The biblical stories traditionally selected for commentary which neglect the role of women.
- 4) The sexist language of most prayers and blessings.
- 5) The repressive divorce laws, and the exclusion of women as witnesses in a Jewish court.
- 6) The education of our young women not being taken as seriously as that of our young men.
- 7) The lack of equality in salary and promotional opportunities for women in Jewish education and community service.
- 8) The devaluation of Jewish womanhood after the childbearing years are over.
- 9) The denial by omission of single women, childless women, battered women, lesbians, the elderly, the poor and the disabled from among the central concerns of organized Judaism.
- 10) The prison created by the rigid traditional views of men and women.

From these plagues, Judaism and women must be freed.<sup>16</sup>

Here the content and direction of the traditional ten plagues are completely reconceptualized. In the biblical narrative, these plagues were visited by God upon the Egyptians as just punishment for their enslavement of the Israelites. In this revisionist list of ten plagues, it is the unjust sufferings of Jewish women at the hands of a patriarchal society and tradition which are highlighted.

This *Haggadah*, like the traditional version, dictates the pouring of a drop of wine for each plague, though, as indicated above, here the motivation is reversed. The traditional rite

expressed empathy for the oppressor, and the suffering which the oppressor must experience in order for the enslaved to go free. "My children perish, cease your songs. How can you sing while my creatures are drowning in the sea?"<sup>17</sup> The different ambience of the women's *Haggadah* is illustrated in the introduction to the enumeration of the traditional plagues found in *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*: there it states, "These plagues played a necessary part in the liberation of Jews from slavery. Today, we Jewish women have still not completely gained our freedom."<sup>18</sup> This motif is also expressed in *The Women's Passover Seder* where, in the introduction to the 'Ten Plagues of Jewish Women,' the following explanation is given: "God struck the Egyptians with ten plagues to accomplish our liberation. Men have struck Jewish women with ten plagues to enslave us. At the mention of each plague, we drop a bit of wine out of our cups, diminishing our joy. Only when these plagues have ceased to afflict us will our cup be full."<sup>19</sup>

The ten plagues which follow employ the traditional plagues, but new ones are added with creative explanations provided for each one:

- Blood** our slandered menstrual blood, about whose dangers men have terrified themselves and oppressed us.
- Laughter** the contemptuous laughter elicited by our misrepresentation on television and in print. It is our own brothers who have vilified us as castrating mother, Jewish princess, neurotic pseudo-intellectual, and who have portrayed us as vulgar, insensitive and self-engrossed.
- Shame** the shame bred into us about our sexuality, about our bodies, about our genitals — our genitals, those parts of us which go nameless in classical Hebrew and are known only as 'that place,' 'the dirty place,' 'the abominable place.'
- Guilt** the guilt which binds us to our enabler roles, which tells us that we must marry and have many children to replace those lost in the Holocaust, that we must sacrifice our own dreams and plans for the good of our husbands, our children, our communities, the Jewish people — that wishing to do our own work in the world is selfishness.
- Mutilation** the mutilation we have been taught to practice on our bodies to make them look non-Jewish and

hence beautiful. Thus, we have painted our faces, dyed and straightened our hair, shortened our noses, and had our breasts cut to the fashionable size by the surgeon's knife.

**Weakness** Only in dire need are we permitted to be strong. Once the kibbutz is established, we are no longer tractor drivers but child care workers. In the Israeli army we, who in the early days fought side by side with men, are file clerks, secretaries, nurses and teachers. In the synagogue we, who have carried children for weary hours, are judged too weak to hold the Torah scrolls.

**Emptiness** Our emptiness overcomes us as our roles are taken away. Told to devote ourselves to husbands and children, we are displaced homemakers in their forties and fifties, sufferers from empty nest syndrome who populate mental hospitals.

**Exploitation** Through volunteer activities, we raise the money which sustains Jewish organizational life, yet frequently we have no voice in the policy-making which determines where the money will go. And when we enter the job market, the skills we have exercised are rejected on the grounds that nothing of value is done for free.

**Darkness** Our darkness is our ignorance of our people, our culture, our traditions, our language. This knowledge is more available to men than to women. By excluding women from the rabbinic, two of the branches of Judaism conspire to keep us ignorant and to withhold from us the knowledge and authority to interpret Jewish law toward our own inclusion.

**Silence** About our history as Jewish women, there is silence. There is no model of a mother-daughter relationship in the Bible. Of the daughters of Jacob we learn only the name of Dinah, and only because she was raped, which is an insult to her father and brothers. The names of women who were scholars, poets, martyrs, warriors, are lost, and their unrecorded deeds can now never speak to us.<sup>20</sup>

These plagues are much more detailed than the ones listed in *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*. They focus virtually exclu-

sively on the injustices men have perpetrated against women. These plagues are not the biblical ones performed by God which facilitated the Israelite freedom. Rather, they are plagues inflicted by men upon women which have prevented their actualization as free people.

The section of the *Haggadah* which tells the story of liberation, the core of the narrative, has been reworked by the feminist *Haggadot* so as to include women characters and stories which reflect women's struggle for freedom. Although traditionalists may argue that it is a freedom story for all, the claim expressed in these feminist *Haggadot* is that the freedom story has been androcentric and cannot be told adequately without the inclusion of women. In an essay entitled "*Have We Got a Theory For You!*", Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman discuss the theory of feminism; their introductory comments can be applied to the feminist *Haggadot*:

Feminism is, among other things, a response to the fact that women either have been left out of, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world. And so while part of what feminists want and demand for women is the right to move and to act in accordance with our own wills and not against them, another part is the desire and insistence that we give our own accounts of these movements and actions. For it matters to us what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said: having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it; hence our distrust of the male monopoly over accounts of women's lives... As humans our experiences are deeply influenced by what is said about them, by ourselves or powerful (as opposed to significant) others. [As a woman], one experiences her life in terms of the impoverished and degrading concepts others have found it convenient to use to describe her. We can't separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience.<sup>21</sup>

For many Jewish women, the profundity of the experience of the Exodus — the depths of slavish degradation and the exaltation of freedom — cannot be fully 'experienced' as the *Haggadah* instructs without an effort to articulate their own female experiences. Ellen Umansky amplifies this theme in her essay "*Beyond Androcentrism: Feminist Challenges to Judaism*," where she writes: "If we are to create, or attempt to create, a non-patriarchal, non-androcentric Judaism — a Judaism in which the experiences of both men and women are seen as central — we Jewish women need to reclaim our voices."<sup>22</sup>

Feminist *Haggadot* are attempts at filling in the silence left by the absence of women's experiences and words. This desire to give expression to women's sensibilities and words is reflected in the transformations this section — the core narrative — embodies. The traditional narrative utilizes several biblical verses that center upon freedom and God's redemptive powers, and it provides a lengthy exposition on the verse, "And the Eternal brought us forth out of Egypt and with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great tribleness, and with signs, and with wonders" [Deuteronomy 26:8]. In *The Women's Passover Seder*, these key verses are mentioned, but without the detailed exposition. In this narrative, the biblical women Shifrah, Puah, and Miriam are the protagonists; it is their role in the struggle for liberation, not God's role, that the narrative highlights:

"And whoever relates in great detail the story of the exodus is to be praised."

The traditional story of the Exodus, of the First Passover, that comes down to us through the generations is a man's story...

There is another story waiting to be told, a telling made up of fragments, of many stories, that when pieced together make a great patchwork quilt. It tells of our own herstory [sic:] in the coming out of Egypt, our own power and the vital roles we played in the Exodus, the liberation of our people. The Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzraim*, literally means 'the Narrow Place,' and the passage through it and across the waters of the Red Sea is often seen as an allegory to birth. It is no wonder the women's stories we find are related to bringing out life, respecting life, saving lives, enabling birth and enabling freedom. These are but a few of the stories that come down to us —

The story of Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who, though they were slaves to the hard-hearted Pharaoh, refused his command to kill all the male children born to our people. Instead, they cleverly replied, "The Hebrew women are lively, and give birth before we arrive!" They knew, through the power of midwifery, how to stand up for life in the face of death.

There is the story of Miriam, Moses' sister, and Bithuah, Pharaoh's daughter, who worked together to save the life of Moses. These two women, Egyptian and Jew, drew Moses out of the water where he had been left in a basket to survive the elements, and returned him to his original mother. In doing so, they returned him to life, and

later, to becoming a leader in bringing us out of Egypt. Let us remember these women without whom this might not have happened. Miriam becomes a strong leader. She rejoices and dances with her sisters after the crossing of the Sea.<sup>23</sup>

The stories of these biblical heroines become paradigmatic ones for other women struggling for freedom. Shifrah and Puah are highlighted for their courage in resisting Pharaoh. Without Miriam, Moses' life would not have been saved. Without their acts, there would have been no Exodus, no freedom. The ability to draw upon the tradition and to expand the traditional rite so as to include women as key participants in the struggle for liberation is here apparent.

The *San Diego Women's Haggadah* includes much of the traditional narrative. Yet here, unlike in *The Women's Passover Seder*, the focus is not in developing the traditional narrative with a focus on particular female characters. Rather, it is on the creation of a new narrative that emphasizes the 'enslavement' of women in general.

It is customary at a *Seder* to recount the reasons we, as Jews, became slaves in Egypt. Tonight, we also ask how we, as women, became enslaved among our own people.

Some claim that from the beginning of human society there was a division of labor between women and men, arising out of biological differences between the sexes.

But this is not correct. In ancient times of simple, cooperative societies, we were the equals of men. Our reproductive abilities became the excuse, but are not the true reason for our being oppressed.

In the time after the settlement of Israel by the descendants of the Hebrews in Egypt, warfare, disease and famine threatened their extinction. For the survival of the Jews as a people, it became imperative for women to have many children while still participating as equals in the raising of crops. The rules of society which were formulated then, and which we recognize from the Bible, reflected the urgent reality of the need to be fruitful and multiply.

Women were in short supply because giving birth to many children increased [the] risk of illness and death. We lived only about three-fourths as long as men. This increased our social value, but at the same time we did not live to the age of venerability to take on positions of community leadership and influence.

Eventually, changing social conditions no longer required the emphasis on domestic labor and high fertility for survival, but by then social customs and laws created by the male elders had become so ingrained that our limited role could not expand to suit the times. The development of cities broadened the business role of men, while women's economic contribution in peasant agriculture became less and less important. Thus our important role in perpetuating society through our reproductive capacity became the excuse, rather than the cause, for our lack of power.

Like the slaves in Egypt, we had assured the foundation of a strong society, but we had no hand in its direction.

We were slaves. In countless ways, we still dwell in Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

This psycho-historical analysis traces the roots of women's enslavement, and indicates how difficult it is to break the shackles of historical patterns that have consigned women to certain roles. The last line, "We were slaves. In countless ways, we still dwell in Egypt" asserts that many women are still enslaved by societal norms that limit their freedom. The oppression of Egypt is a contemporary reality.

*The 1991/5751 Passover Haggadah of the L.A. Jewish Feminist Center* also provides texts about Shifrah and Puah. The story of Ruth and Naomi is also added. The following conclusion is drawn:

Had it not been for Shifrah and Puah who, even though ordered by Pharaoh, refused to be bringers of death, rather than bringers of life; Had it not been for the extra help they gave women in labor and those who had just delivered; Had it not been for Ruth and Naomi, whose love and devotion for one another transcended patriarchal boundaries; Had it not been for the courage and caring of these four women, We would not be here to celebrate tonight.<sup>25</sup>

The interpretation presented here of the acts of Shifrah and Puah, as well as the emphasis placed upon the virtues of love and devotion as presented in the story of Ruth and Naomi, further elaborates the central motif of freedom contained in the *Haggadah*. Freedom provides an opportunity to enter into caring and nurturing relationships, as modeled by Shifrah and Puah, Ruth and Naomi. Feminist virtues, not patriarchal acts of dominance, are thus highlighted.

The tale of degradation and the striving for — and ultimate achievement of — liberation which are yearned for in these

feminist *Haggadot* are, in many senses, essentially parallel to the story and themes that have been expressed in the traditional *Haggadah*. The feminist *sefer*, like the traditional one, allows the individual to experience and encounter, reflect upon and reenact, the 'root' Jewish and human experiences of slavery and freedom. What the feminist *Haggadot* so eloquently affirm is that neither slavery nor freedom can be fully understood, fully felt, until one truly 'hears the silence' — the stories of women, their degradation and enslavement, as well as their yearnings to experience the redemption of freedom. Their focus is not on God's redemptive hand, but on the responsibility and ability of the human being to achieve freedom and realize redemption.

In modern *Haggadot* of all types, the Israelite struggle for freedom becomes transformed into a paradigmatic struggle that all human beings experience in their quest for freedom. These feminist *Haggadot*, like their present-day counterparts, reorient the universalistic message of freedom in the Passover story to a particularistic focus on the struggle of women to be free. They express the ongoing communal need to reinterpret an ancient ritual so as to make it enduringly relevant. While each *Haggadah* discussed in this paper has its own particular emphases and shades of meaning, their overall aim and hope are eloquently expressed in the final line of *The San Diego Women's Haggadah*: "May we celebrate Passover next year in a world of universal freedom for men and women."

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Fackenheim, E. *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 8-14
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14
- <sup>3</sup> See Bokser, "Ritualizing the Seder", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56:3, pp. 443-471. American *Haggadot* of the past few decades alone number in the hundreds. Such *Haggadot*, the focus of my current research, are beyond the purview of this article. Hopefully, my analysis of these texts will be completed and published in the near future. However, these texts indicate that the liturgical creativity evidenced by the feminist writings under consideration in this paper are not unique in their attempts to make the Exodus story enduringly relevant.
- <sup>4</sup> Plaskow, J. *Standing Again at Sinai* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 1
- <sup>5</sup> See the citation of this work by Meiselman, M. *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav and Yeshiva, 1978), p. 53
- <sup>6</sup> Zborowski, M. and Herzog, E. *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1952), pp. 387-389

<sup>7</sup> Kendall, T. "Memories of an Orthodox Youth" *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* ed. Heschel, S. (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), pp. 97-98

<sup>8</sup> Twin Cities Women's Minyan (compiled/written), *Women's Passover Seder* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 1

<sup>9</sup> Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education (cooperative effort), *San Diego Women's Haggadah* 2nd ed. (San Diego, 1986), p. vii

<sup>10</sup> Woman's Institute, pp. 13-18

<sup>11</sup> *The 1991/5751 Passover Haggadah of the L.A. Jewish Feminist Center* (Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 6-7

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>14</sup> One should note that this emphasis upon the role that human beings play in the process of redemption, though one does not find expression of it in the traditional *Haggadah*, is not unprecedented in the tradition. For example, there is a statement attributed to Judah Ha-Nasi (2nd century Palestine) that the people Israel played a crucial part in the redemption from Egyptian bondage. "With an alertness of their own, Israel went out of Egypt." [*Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* trans. by Lauterbach, J.Z. (Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 1:141]. Moreover, in other modern non-traditional *Haggadot*, this emphasis upon the role of the human is also found.

<sup>15</sup> Twin Cities, p. 7

<sup>16</sup> Woman's Institute, pp. 41-42

<sup>17</sup> *TB Megillah* 10b

<sup>18</sup> Woman's Institute, p. 41

<sup>19</sup> Twin Cities, p. 13

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14

<sup>21</sup> Lugones, M. and Spelman, E. "Have We Got a Theory For You!" *Hypatia Reform* ed. Al-Hibri, A. and Simons, M. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 19

<sup>22</sup> Umansky, E.M. "Beyond Androcentrism: Feminist Challenges to Judaism," *Journal of Reform Judaism* (Winter, 1990), p. 33

<sup>23</sup> Twin Cities, p. 11

<sup>24</sup> Woman's Institute, pp. 30-31

<sup>25</sup> Feminist Center, p. 16

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# Image of the Jews

*Teachers' Guide to*

# JEW<sup>S</sup> and their RELIGION

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Foreword by Brother Joseph Irwin, F.S.C.  
Teachers' Guide by Ruth Seldin

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH



and unto thy glorious Name let them give honor; let them all accept the yoke of Thy Kingdom, and do Thou reign over them speedily, and for ever and ever. For the Kingdom is Thine, and to all eternity Thou wilt reign in glory. As it is written in Thy Torah, 'The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.' And it is said, 'And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall the Lord be one, and his Name one.'

#### Summary

Because God is one, there can only be one end to history. Because God cares for man and covenants with him, He will not let him go. Because God loves mankind, he has bound himself to the people of Israel and bound the people of Israel to Him, so that they may testify to Him and His reality and all of history. Thus the people of Israel—small, dispersed, beaten—remain God's faithful witness in history. So they understand themselves; so they understand their task and their duty. They are a strange people, the people of Israel. A people who have in their background and tradition the most diverse experiences; who have lived in tropical and temperate climates; under nomadic, rural and now metropolitan circumstances; on their own soil, as well as, unhappily and happily, among other peoples. And they are a people who, throughout all these experiences, have found a way to serve the Lord, their God.

The people of Israel are a people of hope. If they have anything to say to mankind in these difficult days, it is that we must not despair; that the Messiah will come; the Kingdom of God will be with us. To this faith and hope the people of Israel stand in steadfast testimony, today just as they have in the past.

## JUDAISM: ORTHODOX, CONSERVATIVE AND REFORM

DR. MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD

*Jewish Life: A Study in Diversity*

To the Biblical interpreter, the 49th chapter of Genesis is something of an enigma. Jacob, the last of the three patriarchs, is about to die, and he gathers about him his 12 sons "so that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days." To each of them he then addresses a sentence or two, poetic in form and somewhat mysterious in meaning, but which unmistakably indicates that he not only understands their individuality and uniqueness, but also the special role each of them is to play in the destiny of the Jewish people.

Ever since those ancient days, Jewish life has been a fascinating study in diversity: a collage of faces, activities, tempers, ideologies and cultures. Even the face of the Jew is diverse—sometimes swarthy and oriental, because Jews have participated in the cultures of Yemen and India; sometimes Nordic and blonde, because Jews have also been part of the cultures of Germany and the United States. For the same reason, Jewish prayer may be addressed to God in the high-pitched wail that reflects the tonality of the Middle East, or in the sometimes sad, sometimes joyful, melodies of the Hassidim that reflect the Slavic environment in which they developed.

If, at times, this diversity is bewildering even to the Jew himself, how much more it must be then to the interested non-Jew! One has only to visit synagogues to be struck at once with this diversity. In some, men pray with their heads covered and are separated from the women; in others, men pray with their heads uncovered and are permitted to sit together with women. Some other examples. For the Orthodox Jew, the Sabbath runs from sundown Friday to nightfall Saturday, and involves

(among other things) abstinence from travel, one's daily work, the use of electricity and cooking. In short, the Sabbath is a sacred day of rest to be spent in worship, study and family-togetherness. Reform Jews, on the other hand, are not obliged to abstain from the kind of work forbidden to the Orthodox, and the whole meaning of the Sabbath day is interpreted in a more liberal spirit. Furthermore, whereas Reform Jews will eat in the same restaurants that non-Jews frequent, the Orthodox Jew will only eat at home or in so-called *kosher* restaurants, *i.e.*, those which serve the kind of food that the Jewish dietary laws prescribe as permissible to be eaten.

To the American who is not a member of the Jewish faith, and who observes these and other differences, certain questions very naturally present themselves. For instance, how many different kinds of Judaism exist in this country? What is their significance? How did they come into being? To give a satisfactory answer, one must go back to past history.

#### *Different Kinds of Judaism: Past History in the United States*

Throughout medieval times the majority of Jews lived in Europe,<sup>1</sup> in most instances under conditions that tended to isolate them from their non-Jewish neighbors. In other words, they lived in ghettos, as a result of which a way of life established itself which was dominant for a long time. With the Enlightenment, however, certain things changed. Jews were now admitted into the universities, as well as into other areas of national life. As more and more Jews entered the professions and began to make their lives in industry, politics, etc., the restrictions that the Law imposed on them, particularly in terms of the Sabbath and of the dietary laws, became increasingly difficult to observe. The result was that many erstwhile Orthodox Jews gradually began to abandon the practice of these particular aspects of Judaism without, however, feeling that in so doing they had thereby separated themselves from the rest of the Jewish people. In time, they developed synagogues whose ritual was somewhat different, and adopted a position in which the observance of the Sabbath and of the dietary laws was no longer considered to be as crucial as it had been earlier. In short, they became Reform Jews.

#### *American Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform (1885)*

In our country, of course, this process developed at an even more rapid rate. The Jews who came here adapted very quickly to the open-

1. There were also a considerable number of Jews living in North Africa, but these remained relatively unaffected by change, and so are not discussed here.

ended society that was the United States. As a result, many congregations grew up that followed Reform rituals. Thus, in 1885, 19 American Rabbis who shared this Reform orientation met in Pittsburgh, under the chairmanship of the man most prominently identified with Reform Judaism in the United States—Isaac M. Wise. There they adopted a manifesto that came to be known as "The Pittsburgh Platform" which, with some significant modifications, is still relevant to American Reform Judaism. Among other things, it had the following to say:

We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the infinite . . . the consciousness of the in-dwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the 'God idea' as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by Jewish teachers in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We recognize, in the Mosaic Legislation, the system of training the Jewish People for its mission during its national life in Palestine. (However,) today we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives; but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization. We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical Laws that regulate diet, priestly purity in dress, (etc.) originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness. Their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation. We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope and the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship out of the Sons of Aaron, or the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State.

In full accordance with this spirit of Mosaic Legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times; to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

In the very last sentence, we find expressed the social consciousness of American Reform Judaism that has remained a part of it from the

time of the "Pittsburgh Platform" to this very day. Thus we see the emphasis placed on social justice, on concern for the poor, on concern for those whose opportunities were not the same as those who succeeded. This emphasis still exists. At the same time, however, there are elements in the "Pittsburgh Platform" that most American rabbis would no longer accept today. Among these, for example, is the statement that we no longer expect a return to Palestine. The reason for this change is that, while in the 19th and the early part of the 20th century, much of Reform Judaism was anti-Zionist, this is no longer the case. And I think it is also fair to add that American Reform Judaism has returned, to some extent at least, to a position which gives increased significance to ritual (in the "Pittsburgh Platform," ritual did not always fully receive its due).

*The Conservative School: Alexander Kohut (1885)*

At the same time that the "Pittsburgh Platform" was being formulated, it should not be thought that the other branches of Judaism were standing silently by. There were those who felt Reform Judaism had gone too far, giving up too much of what was germane and essential to Judaism. This group, which may be called the "Historical School" (since it was given to thinking largely in terms of Jewish historical experience) has, in the 20th century, come to be known as the "Conservative School."

The "Conservative School" developed largely as a result of a reaction by certain Jews to the Reform platform outlined above. In his first address (1885) from the pulpit of Congregation Ahavath Chesed in New York City, Alexander Kohut, a scholar and leader of Hungarian Jewry, laid down the following principles that were to guide the Conservative Movement for many years to come:

The chain of Tradition continued unbroken from Moses down to the latest times. On this Tradition rests our Faith which Moses first received from God on Sinai. On this foundation rests Mosaic Rabbinical Judaism today. And on this foundation we take our stand. The teaching of the Ancients we must make our starting point, but we must not lose sight of what is needed in every generation. Let's now revert to the question raised at the outset. Is Judaism definitely closed for all time, or is it capable of, and in need of, continuous development? I answer both 'yes' and 'no'. I answer 'yes' because religion has been given to man, as it is the duty of man to grow in perfection as long as he lives. He must modify

the forms which yield him religious satisfaction in accordance with the spirit of the times. I answer 'no' insofar as it concerns the word of God which cannot be imperfect. You Israelites, imperfect as you are, strive to perfect yourself in the image of your perfect God. Hold in honor His unchangeable law, and let it be your earnest task to put new life into the outward form of our religion. Our religious guide is the Torah, the Law of Moses, interpreted and applied in the light of Tradition. But inasmuch as individual opinion cannot be valid for the whole community, it behooves individuals and communities to appoint only recognized authorities as teachers. Such men, that is to say, as acknowledge belief in authority and who, at the same time, with comprehension and tact are willing to consider what may be permitted in view of the exigencies of the times, and what may be discarded without changing the nature and character of the foundations of the Faith.

Here we have in outline form the themes of Conservative Judaism that have remained essentially unchanged to our day. To Alexander Kohut and to most Conservative thinkers, there are those elements in the Torah, in the word of God and in the rabbinic tradition, which cannot, and must not, be changed. On the other hand, there are also certain elements which, they feel, can and must be changed. At the same time, the leaders of this movement were very insistent that the changes deemed proper and necessary be made not by the man in the street who finds himself under the exigencies of day-to-day life as he tries to adapt himself to the demands of the culture around him; but, rather, that these changes be made by those who were properly steeped in biblical and rabbinic literature, so that Judaism might continue the tradition of following the lead of the scholar and the rabbi. The delicate balance between change, on the one hand, and permanence, on the other, is one of the guiding motifs of Conservative Judaism, which can be seen to fail, then, somewhere between the positions of Reform and Orthodox.

*American Orthodoxy (1898)*

Orthodoxy in the United States is that branch of Judaism which has retained the largest degree of identification with the rabbinic Judaism of the Talmudic and Medieval Periods. To the Orthodox Jew, Judaism and its interpretation and application in the rabbinic text is divine. It is the word of God and *cannot* be changed. It may be interpreted, but only within the framework of the Law. This is the crucial concept that had guided and continues to guide Jewish Orthodoxy.

It took American Orthodoxy some years to adapt itself and make itself heard, because the first Orthodox immigrants to this country (who were from Eastern Europe) arrived later than other immigrants, and it therefore took some time for these people not only to learn English, but to learn to think in American terms. For these reasons, the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union did not come into being until 1898, at which time it set down the following basic principles:

We believe in the divine revelation of the Bible. And we declare that the Prophets in no way discountenanced ceremonial duties but only condemned the personal life of those who observed ceremonial Law but disregarded the morals. Ceremonial Law is not optative, it is obligative. We affirm our adherence to the acknowledged codes of our Rabbis and the 13 principles of Maimonides. We believe . . . that we are to be united with our brethren of alien faiths in all that devolves upon men as citizens; but that religiously, i.e., in rights, ceremonies, ideals and doctrines, we are separate and must remain separate in accordance with the divine declaration, 'I have separated you from the nations, to be mine.' And further, to prevent misunderstanding concerning Judaism, we reaffirm our belief in the coming of the Messiah, and we protest against the admission of proselytes into the fold of Judaism without circumcision and immersion. We protest against the idea that we are merely a religious sect and maintain that we are a nation, though temporarily without a national home. Furthermore, that the restoration to Zion is the legitimate aspiration of scattered Israel, in no way conflicting with our loyalty to the land in which we dwell, or may dwell, at any time.

There are many Orthodox Jews today who are active in all the trades and professions of this country and who, at the same time, obey very carefully the laws that have bound Judaism for many years. To the outside observer, this sometimes may seem difficult to reconcile. However, to the Jew who feels that he is fulfilling the word of God with love, the experience is one that draws him even closer to his God.

#### *The Secular Jew*

Finally, we have a type of Jew who is perhaps the most perplexing of all to the non-Jew—the secular Jew. On the face of it, this can seem like a contradiction in terms. Isn't Judaism a religion? And, if it is, what sense does it make to speak of a "secular Jew"? To understand this, one

must approach the problem theologically. Judaism is the covenant of the Jewish people with God; the Jewish people is the seed of Abraham. It follows, therefore, that no matter what the ideology or belief of any given Jew may be, so long as he is a descendant of Abraham, he remains in this covenantal relationship with God. The secular Jew is not a contradiction in terms. He may have an ideology, which from the point of view of the believing Jew is erroneous, but that in no way detracts from his being a Jew. Thus there exist, in this country as well as in Europe, great numbers of Jews whose allegiance to the Jewish people is profound, who helped develop Jewish culture, yet who, ideologically, are secularists.

#### *Significance of the Diversity and Division*

What then is the significance of the divisions in contemporary Judaism that we have been discussing? Are these merely surface phenomena which leave the unity of the Jewish people basically unimpaired? Or would it be more accurate to say that Judaism is no longer a unified religion, and that what we have here, in effect, are different religions whose points of divergence will continue to increase with the passage of time? From my own point of view, both of these alternatives miss the mark. Just as one must be careful never to underestimate the importance of these differences, so one must be equally careful not to overestimate them. Certainly the differences in theology and practice that have been discussed are not minor. Whether a Jew is duty-bound to obey a law that's understood as coming from God and which covers what he eats as well as how he treats the poor, which is the Orthodox point of view; or whether the ethical portions of the Torah retain primacy, thus permitting the modern Jew to disregard those ritual commandments he considers outdated, which is the point of view of Reform Judaism and many segments of Conservative Judaism—this question is one that no thinking person can overlook. The fact that today there is profound disagreement among Jews as to the correct answer to this question (and others like it) is clear testimony to its importance. But to conclude that, because of this disagreement, the unity of the Jewish people has therefore been severed once and for all would perhaps be even more of an error.

#### *The Israeli Jew: A New Breed?*

In a recent book by Georges Friedmann, a French Jewish sociologist, the point is argued that the new generation born and raised in Israel is no longer Jewish; that, instead, they are Israelis who, being a new

breed, have no real connection with the Jews of the Diaspora. "If," says Friedmann, "there is a Holy Place to which they are indifferent, it is surely the Wailing Wall—the symbol of a past, all traces of which in their view should be obliterated."

These words were written before the events of June, 1967, which made the Wailing Wall once again accessible to the Jews. What happened then? Well, as if to belie the validity of Friedmann's thesis, on the very first day that the general public was permitted to visit the Wall, hundreds of thousands of Jews streamed by it—Orthodox and non-Orthodox, European and African, the young and the old, men as well as women. Ever since then, this Wall, the only remaining fragment of the Temple that was destroyed in 70 A.D., has become once again a symbol of the indestructible unity of the Jewish people.

#### *Summary and Conclusions*

However serious the theological differences may be, however passionately they have been argued in the past and will continue to be argued for some time to come, the Jewish people are rediscovering (if they ever forgot) that so long as there are those for whom compassion and tolerance for one's fellow-man represent an intolerable intrusion into the so-called natural order of things, so long too will the Jewish people have to be prepared for what happened to them during the Holocaust to happen again. In Auschwitz and Dachau, no one asked the Jew whether he was Orthodox or Reform, whether he was secular or believing. Irrespective of such distinctions, real though they are, they were all put to death in the greatest mass murder in human history.

To the extent that the Messianic faith is at the heart of Jewish faith, to that same extent must the present divisions in the House of Israel be viewed as only temporary: as divisions to be overcome in the fullness of redeemed time.

## THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE JEWS (Torah, Marriage, Good Deeds)

RABBI JULES HARLOW

### *Introduction*

In the creation of a new life there are three partners: God, and a man and a woman. Thus begins an ancient rabbinic statement dealing with the formation of the embryo. New life gives birth to much more than an infant. In view of the hopes and possibilities, what do you say to new parents? Congratulations, of course. But this expression is appropriate on many other occasions as well. There is a Hebrew phrase, however, which is especially appropriate to new life, and many Jews still use it in writing or speaking to new parents: "May you raise your child to a life blessed with Torah, marriage and good deeds." This wish for a specific kind of fulfillment is taken from the ritual that formally marks a Jewish infant's entry into the world.

Before presenting this phrase in its ritual context, let me amplify the individual terms. Torah technically refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. It can also refer to the handwritten parchment scroll containing these books kept in the synagogue and read from during services. It is likewise used in a larger context to refer to the study of Jewish texts and sources, in which one finds an ever changing emphasis and modification. Used in this last sense, Torah (in the words of Dr. Louis Ginzberg) is "the aggregate of all Jewish teaching." The study and perpetuation of this teaching is a cardinal principle of Jewish life and tradition.

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Based on the original script delivered on closed-circuit television.

## **Unit V: Religious Practices and Customs among Jews in Israel**

< 3 Sessions >

### Essential Question and Enduring Understanding:

How does living in a larger Jewish culture into which Jews are integrated impact upon cultural distinction within Jewish life?

How do forces in Israeli culture effect religious distinctions among Jews of different ethnic backgrounds?

The religious experience for Israeli Jews is a combination of ideology over race/ethnic background and ethnic distinctiveness.

### **Goals:**

1. History: Introduce students to the five waves of aliyot to Israel.
2. Introduce students to Rav Kook, religious Zionism, secular Zionists and anti-Zionist orthodox.
3. Familiarize students with the lack of Movement affiliation in Israel.
4. Introduce students to different Israeli observances of Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'atzmaut, Yom Yerushalaim and Shavuot.

### **Objectives:**

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. identify the five waves of aliyot to Israel including the dates, where people came from and why.
2. write a paragraph about Rav Kook and his outlook on religious and secular Zionism, plus describe the tensions that exist between secular and ultra-religious Israelis.
3. list theories for lack of Movement affiliation in Israel.
4. describe how Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'atzmaut, Yom Yerushalaim and Shavuot are observed in Israel.

### Key Concepts:

**Aliya:** Literally, 'going up' or 'ascent', especially in the sense of immigration to Israel from lands of dispersion or exile. In Rabbinic tradition, the Land of Israel is considered to be the highest spiritual point in the world. For this reason, the movement of Jews -- whether individually or in organized groups -- from Diaspora lands to Israel, is termed *aliya*.

**Kibbutz:** A kibbutz is a collective settlement in Israel based on the principle of communal ownership of property, common responsibility for work,

productivity, etc. The first such collective, was Deganyah, founded in 1909. In addition to agriculture, industry is also an important contribution of many kibbutzim to the economy of Israel. Approximately 20 of the 240 kibbutzim are religious.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### **I. History**

Jews have been immigrating to Israel even before it was legally a state. Between 1881 and 1939 there were five waves of aliyot to Israel. Each wave brought Jews from different parts of the world for ideological, but mostly political reasons. During those years anti-Semitism was rampant in Russian and European countries forcing Jews to flee their homes. Jews continued to immigrate to Israel and other countries until the implementation of Hitler's Final Solution (his term for a plan to rid the world of Jews) when it became illegal for Jews to leave and nearly impossible for them to escape.

1. Activity: In Source Materials, please find timelines with the five aliyot listed and distribute them to the students. Divide the class into five groups, and have each one focus on one of the aliyot. Their job is to become "specialist" of their aliya knowing it's dates, the countries from which these Jew came, and their main reasons for leaving that country. Provide students with articles from the Junior Judaica - Encyclopedia Judaica for Youth under "Aliya" for further background.

Extra: For students interested in more information about the immigration experience to Israel, you can suggest the following books:

a. Laszlo Hamori's Flight To The Promised Land, Harcourt, Brace, and World, NY, 1963. This is a true story about a boy from Yemen who became Commander in Chief of the Israeli army. This biography makes the young reader aware of one person's journey from being a persecuted minority in Yemen to being a proud Jew in Israel.

b. Another recommended book is Seymour Rossel's Israel: Covenant People, Covenant Land, UAHC, NY, 1985. This might be a little young (recommended for grades 7-9), but Chapter 21 "The People of Israel" discusses the Jews who came to Israel from Muslim countries. It deals with the problems these Jews faced upon entering a country suited for an Ashkenazi population. Students are asked to think about the problems these Jews encountered.

c. Herbert Lewis' After the Eagles Landed (Westview Press, Boulder, 1989) book is based on a Yemenite community in Israel. It provides information on the history of Yemenite Jews, immigration to Israel, their religious and social life, as well as their values and feelings about identity.

**Film:**

While sixty-five percent of Israel's citizens are Ashkenazim and Oriental, they are often ignored by a power structure of mostly Western Jews that determines the political politics of the nation. If time permits, consider showing the film, *The Arab Jews* (28 minutes, color, and available from the Jewish Media Service at the National Jewish Welfare Board, 15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010). This film documents the sufferings of Jews in Arab lands, historically and at present (especially in Iraq and Syria), the hardships they have endured as refugees fleeing those lands, and the difficulties in their reception in Israel. It includes rare historical footage and interviews of refugees in Israel.<sup>1</sup> The film is not a learning activity in itself, but it adds another dimension to the student's learning experience.

## **II. Religion<sup>2</sup>**

Jews who lived in Israel before its statehood practiced their Judaism of whatever ethnic background they came from. There were designated places in the Old City of Jerusalem where varying customs and traditions of Jews from Persia, Bokhran, Iran, Yemenite, as well as strains of Sephardic and Ashkenazim could perpetuate their cultural and religious differences. The Turkish and British governments allowed its citizens to be subject to the religious law of the group to which they belonged. However, eventually this religio-legal situation caused strain between religious and secular Jews who began to filter into the country in larger numbers.

One person who peaceably sought to reduce these tensions was Israel's first Chief Rabbi, Abraham Isaac Kook -- also known as "Rav Kook" (1921-1935). Even though he led a traditionally religious lifestyle, he sought to interpret aspects of the Kabbalah in ways that made it relevant to modern life.

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<sup>1</sup> All film information in this and other units is from *Medium*, an evaluative review published by Jewish Media Service /JWB, Dr. Eric Goldman, editor.

<sup>2</sup> Researched from Bernard J. Bamberger's The Story of Judaism, Third, Augmented Edition, Schocken Books, New York, 1964. pp378-384.



He had a certain sympathy for the “irreligious” pioneers feeling that their service of rebuilding the state of Israel mitigated their offenses against the traditional law. And although there was no ultimate meeting ground between them, they respected and loved him. However, few of the great Rabbi’s associates and successors shared his generosity of spirit. Religious Zionists (religious Jews who live in Israel and recognize its statehood) look to Rav Kook as one of their most important leaders.

1 Activity: Hold a debate: Divide the class into three groups with one representing religious Zionists, one representing secular Zionists, and one representing anti-Zionist orthodox. Give the students background information on each group from the packets provided in Source Materials, and then hold a debate. Follow the debate with their reflections on how they feel about the different positions.

2. Traditionally Jews lived according to Jewish law in their Jewish communities. Men were well educated in Torah and women were responsible for knowing the dietary laws and other laws for maintaining a Jewish home. When Jews came to Israel, many held on to their traditions while others assimilated into the “westernized” Israeli society.

As we learned in Unit IV, most American Jews tend not to hold on to their ethnic/religious roots as long as Israelis do, however, they do tend to affiliate more with religious Movements (Reform, Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist). In fact, according to Stanley A. Ringler’s article *Reform Judaism in Israel*, 44 percent of Israelis do not see themselves as belonging to any religious *movement*. It is suggested that this lack of affiliation reflects the character of Israeli culture. “In Israel,” writes Ringler, “Jewish religious “Movements” per se are generally unknown or, perhaps out of ignorance, not recognized as legitimate or meaningful.”<sup>3</sup> He reports that after forty years of struggle, Conservative and Reform Judaism are still marginal groups in the country. On another level, Uri Regev, head of the Israel Reform Action Center, states that the more economically prosperous Israelis become, the less religious/ traditional they tend to be.

Activity: First, bring in a temple member to talk about the importance of affiliating with one of the four Movements and have students note main

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley A. Ringler, *Reform Judaism in Israel*, *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 1996, p.88.

reasons. This information will be considered in the second part of the activity. Second, bring in an Israeli (they should be there during “Movement affiliation” presentation) to answer students’ questions about the following: Why is it the case that in Israel a large percentage of its Jewish population does not affiliate itself with a Movement? What is it about Israeli culture or ideology that results in this condition? Is there something about living on the land of Israel that would make a Jew think that was sufficient? What would belonging to a Movement offer Israelis that they could not get otherwise?

### **III: Holidays:**

There are special holidays that were developed in Israel in the last hundred years. Some of them are Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israel Independence Day), and Yom Yerushalaim (Jerusalem Day).

A: Yom HaShoah: This day falls on the 27th of Nissan, according to the Jewish calendar. Rituals of this day are still in formation since they were instituted by the secular authority. The most traditional authorities do not believe a special day should be set aside for the Holocaust and some oppose its observance.

In Israel the day is observed by the closing of all theaters and places of amusement, banks, schools and most businesses. At the end of the day sirens are sounded followed by a few minutes of silence. The whole country comes to a halt.

Activity: One way the class can honor this day is through a service. First prepare students by having them share what they remember about the day. Second, have students prepare reflective writings about the Shoah that would be shared in the service. Third, have students combine reflective readings with a “Remembrance of Jews who have suffered,” service from the New Union Prayerbook on p. 407. Conclude with reading Psalm 144, El Male Rahamim and the Mourner’s Kaddish. To keep the solemnity of the day, ask students not to greet each other when they walk in and out of the sanctuary. Another way to remember this day is by inviting a survivor to speak to the class.

B. Yom Ha’atzmaut: The 5th of Iyar commemorates Israel’s Independence Day. There is much joy and celebration with dancing in the streets and parades through out the country. The festivities are in sharp relief to the

somber mood of Yom HaZikaron, the day of remembering the capture of Jerusalem during the Six Day war in 1977. Over the years a number of synagogue rituals have developed, the most widely observed being those published by the Chief Rabbinate and the religious kibbutz movement/ World Zionist Organization. Israelis celebrate this day with parties, performances and military parades. Another popular custom is to walk at least a short distance (four “amot”) somewhere in the land of Israel where you have never walked before.

Activity: Celebrate the day with Israeli culture: bring in an Israeli folk dance teacher and spend forty-five minutes learning and dancing Israeli folk dances; teach students “Hatikvah,” the Israeli national anthem; eat Israeli food: arrange to have different people make or order falafel, humus, tehinah, Israeli salad (chopped cucumbers and tomatoes) and Turkish coffee (which can be bought in an ethnic store). Depending on how much time you have use one or all of the above to make this a memorable day.

C. Yom Yerushalaim: The 28th of Iyar commemorates the capture of Jerusalem during the Six Day war in 1977. This holiday is the most recent addition to the Jewish calendar and, for the most part, is observed only in Israel. As of yet, there are no specific rituals for this holiday, but I would suggest emphasizing the importance of the city by reading poems about Jerusalem (from Source Materials) and decorating the walls with posters depicting scenes of Jerusalem’s mountains and ancient architecture.

D. Naturally all the traditional Jewish holidays are also celebrated in Israel. This section is only meant to briefly convey how special traditional holidays can be when celebrated in the Holy Land.

Shavuot is on the 6th day of Sivan and celebrates God’s giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah is God’s gift which is a guide for how we are to live in this world. The stories below provide the backdrop for the following discussion on the uniqueness of celebrating Jewish holidays in Israel.

Activity: Distribute eyewitness accounts of Shavuot observances in Israel as found in Source Materials from The Shavuot Anthology by Philip and Hannah Goodman, JPS, Phil., 1973. They include, *The Festival in Haifa*, *Bikkurim in Kibbutz Matzuba*, *Tikkun Lel Shavuot at Yifat*, and *At the Western Wall*. Read these in class followed by a discussion on these

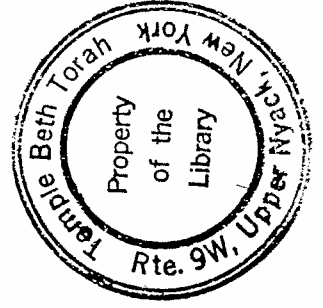
questions: 1. What is it about these particular places in Israel that makes the holiday celebrated there so special? 2. How do they celebrate the holiday? 3. In what way(s) are the observances in Israel different from how you grew up with them? How many examples can you think of?

# **Source Materials**

*The*  
**Shanout**  
**Anthology**  
*Philip*  
**Goodman**

*The Jewish Publication Society of America*

PHILADELPHIA



seems to have held confirmations every year after the custom was started.<sup>18</sup>

\* *Shavuot on a Farm in Connecticut*

ISRAEL KASOVICH

Our first holiday on the farm was Shavuot. All around us was a sea of verdure and everything was in bloom. I told my children that this holiday commemorates the giving of the Torah to the children of Israel at Sinai—a Torah which teaches us to live on fair and brotherly terms with our fellowmen; and who could do this so well as the farmer with his unique mode of life? I described to them how our ancestors, the Jewish farmers of Palestine, used to go to Jerusalem for Shavuot, bearing the fairest fruits as offerings to the Temple; how the hills of Judea would resound with the sweet Hebrew songs of the brave, proud Jewish farmers; and how the priests and leading men of Jerusalem would come out to meet their brothers, whose labor fed the whole nation, and escort them with great pomp to the Temple. And I related to them how, when I was a little boy and went on the eve of Shavuot to other men's fields to pluck some blades of grass and twigs with which to decorate our house for the holiday, gentle peasant boys threw stones and set their dogs at me. And now we were living in a free country among our own green fields and woods, and I was proud to hold our Torah in one hand and a plow in the other.

Translated by Maximilian Hurwitz<sup>19</sup>

\* *The Festival in Haifa*

GERSHON AHITUV

The preparations for the great day were noticeable in Haifa on the eve of Shavuot. The streets and the houses were decorated

with greenery and national flags. Crowds of people in festive mood, including groups of youth and children who had come from other parts of the country in order to take part in the festivities, filled the streets and the festival atmosphere permeated the city. On both sides of the streets leading to the square on which the ceremony was to take place, two large gates were erected, adorned with the inscription *Barukhim ha-baim* (Blessed are they who come). One gate took the shape of two winged lions, and the second was in the form of a gigantic bunch of grapes with two doves stretching their wings on both sides.

The platform for the bearers of the firstfruits was set up in the courtyard of the Technion. It was ornamented with symbols connected with the festival and a representation of the Temple. The celebration began with the procession of the bearers of the firstfruits. All the villagers of the Valley of Jezreel, the Valley of the Jordan and the Galil were represented, each village trying to bring forth the best that it had produced in the past year. There were carts laden with hay, barley, wheat, vegetable crops, chickens, sheep, and calves. The offerings, which in ancient days were brought to the priest and the Temple, were now made to the Keren Kayemet le-Yisrael (Jewish National Fund).

After passing through the streets of the city the celebrants reached the platform and were received with loud applause by the thousands of people who crowded both sides of the streets, and the roofs and balconies of the houses.

On the platform there took place a pageant of the bringing of the firstfruits in ancient days, showing the men of the Galil leaving their villages to go up to Jerusalem, being met by men of the Negev and Gilead on the way, and forming with them one great procession, composed of large numbers of people on their cattle, their donkeys and their camels, laden with sheaves of corn and baskets of fruit. Next the spectators could see the men of Jerusalem, headed by the priests, coming out to meet them, welcoming them with singing and dancing and escorting them with rejoicing to the Temple.

The children also played their part in the festivities. Thousands of children garlanded with leaves and flowers walked in procession between the rows of spectators, bringing their offerings. Fourteen boys, clad in white clothes, and fourteen girls, dressed in blue robes, representing Levites, received the firstfruits from

The Messiah has still not come. There are only the agonies of the Messiah. Therefore the form of renewal of our lives and the bringing of the firstfruits is still not complete. It accords with this period; it is only the beginning of the ancient form, which will be complete when the redemption is complete. . . .

"Let us not forget that the national chain of the people begins with the festival which we are celebrating today, the festival of Shavuot. This was not only a festival of nature, the Festival of the Firstfruits of soil and toil. This is the day of the 'Giving of the Torah,' and on that day we became a nation. We cannot separate these two festivals. In one day we were created a nation and became a people tilling its land with the sweat of its brow."<sup>20</sup>

\* **Bikkurim in Kibbutz Matzuba**

G E R S H O N A H I T U V

The sea is wide and still during the hot month of Sivan. From behind the copse that faces the road there approaches a red tractor, pulling a wide platform laden with freshly cut fodder. Aboard are a host of little children wearing their holiday clothes, decorated with greenery. Immediately following you see a procession of people attired in holiday costume, some walking, others traveling in vehicles.

The entire cavalcade is decked out in fresh foliage. They move slowly, the tractors and machines, the horse- and donkey-drawn wagons. The wagons are filled with workers in high spirits, dressed in their working clothes, carrying their tools and the fruits of their labors. There are broad-shouldered plowmen; workers from the orchards and vineyards wearing their wide-brimmed hats; sun-tanned vegetable gardeners and poultrymen carrying baskets of chickens and eggs; drivers and beekeepers.

Among them on foot are the dairy workers and the foddermen pulling a little bull calf. There are those who work in the banana orchards, two of them carrying a weighty bunch of ripe bananas, fastened to poles; the landscape gardeners adorned in flowers; the mushroom growers with their produce. Following



15. A *bikkurim* festival in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, Israel.

the children. The "Levites" sang and declaimed the formula beginning "My father was a wandering Aramean," continued with singing of biblical verses connected with the occasion, and concluded with the "Dance of Sheaves."

In 1932 when Menachem Ussishkin, at that time at the head of the Keren Kayemet, accepted the firstfruits brought forth by the children of Israel, he emphasized the importance and significance of the festival in the following words:

"You, children of Israel, have brought the firstfruits of your soil, the fruits of your toil, to the supreme body for the redemption of the land of our fathers. Our forefathers two thousand years ago also brought forth firstfruits on Shavuot, but then they brought their firstfruits not to Haifa, the City of the Future, but to Jerusalem, the Eternal City; not to Mount Carmel, but to Mount Moriah. And they gave the fruits not to the Jewish National Fund, but to the holy Temple.

"Nevertheless, I have consented to accept from you your firstfruits in the form in which you have brought them today for this reason: the same form was customary in that period when our people lived as a free nation in its own homeland. Our times today are not the same as that period, to which we aspire, which we hope to attain, for which we long. Our redemption is still not the complete redemption, but the beginning of the redemption.



on their heels, gaily singing, are the workers from the laundry, the carpentry shop, and the looms, the builders, and those who do the sewing and work in the kitchen. A band accompanies the procession and song after song spontaneously breaks forth. "Open the way for us, we bring the *bikkurim*!" . . .

The cavalcade reaches the reaped fields. On their faces you can see their pride as workers on the soil. In festive spirit they enter a square through seven gates which are crowned with the seven kinds of produce with which the Land of Israel was blessed.

One after another, the workers of the various branches approach the stage and offer, with the appropriate blessing, the firstfruits contained in their straw baskets. Seven *baverim* and *baverot* stand on the decorated stage and accept the baskets, containing the produce of the fields and the garden. . . .

Those who accept the *bikkurim* answer with festive greetings, and the leader of the ceremony totals up the income, which is dedicated to the Jewish National Fund. The children, who have also brought their firstfruits, proudly present recitations and songs. A group performs a play about the story of Ruth. The choir accompanies them with songs and special harvest dances. The time spent in the fields is enjoyed by all; the *baverim* and the children sing and dance together, there in the fields as in the days of yore. Before everyone starts back home, the sun begins to sink into the sea, the young *baverim* pass around biscuits coated with honey and glasses of milk. Thus the biblical saying is fulfilled in Matzuba: "He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 26:9).<sup>21</sup>

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### \*Tikkun Lel Shavuot at Yifat

MEIR EYALI

One of the contributions of the kibbutz movement toward a new Judaism—and this in spite of its generally secular ideology—has been the revival of the festivals. How charming to see the children gathering the *omer*, or bringing their firstfruits, to the accompaniment of music and dance! But in thus celebrating nature

and the seasons, without the religious content, there is a danger of what might almost seem a return to paganism, which is an enemy of true culture. At Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of Our Law, the specifically religious and Jewish aspect is usually omitted altogether.

To correct this, we decided two years ago to revive the old custom of all-night study on Shavuot. Some seventy took part: former students of the high school at Yifat, teachers and members of Yifat and neighboring kibbutzim. Roughly two hours were devoted to Talmud (Sanhedrin): examination of witnesses, "there is no deputy for an illegal act," "who saves a single soul, saves a whole world," leading up to discussion of current issues involved, e.g., the trial of war criminals. After a short break, a philosophical lecture on "The Moral Autonomy of Man" was followed by discussion. Lastly, there was a lesson on "Honor thy father and thy mother," with the reading of texts from the Bible and *Aggadab*. By that time, it was already dawn, and the "students" dispersed to their homes, carrying with them the memory of a true spiritual experience.

The *Tikkun* could not be conducted last year on account of the Six-Day War; but this year we are holding it again.<sup>22</sup>

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### \*At the Western Wall

Y A A C O V L U R I A

For this holiday [Shavuot] we return from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which is after all where the great holidays were meant to be celebrated. Waiting at dusk for evening services to begin at the Western Wall, one can with no great effort of imagination picture the scene two thousand years ago. Then as now there were the dark shadows of birds flying across the face of this outer wall, and a great horde of people assembled with the coming of evening. Cut into the rock to the left of the exposed part of the Wall is a series of cave-like rooms, one of which contains a deep well. Here surely some of the multitudes which came to Jerusalem on foot crowded for shelter.

Our sages tell us that there was always room, no matter how many came. A remarkable thing about the Wall today is that it seems to have room enough for everybody. Though there may be dozens of *minyanim* at prayer simultaneously, none seems to interfere with the others. Each *minyan* has its own style: black-garbed Hasidim pray with zeal, raising their voices toward God with force and resonance. The oriental Jews pray more quietly, as if to impress their Father through understatement. The boys from the beautiful newly built Yeshivah Hakotel sing and dance in a circle, then bow away facing the Wall. Finally they dance their way up the hills toward the *yeshivah*, their white skullcaps and shirts receding in a billowing stream into the night. The tourists gather in knots to watch at the low stone fence at the approach to the Wall and store up impressions; on holidays and *Shabbat* they may not use cameras here. And somehow it all fits together in a single harmonious setting to which the massive Wall is the eternal backdrop.

Jerusalem in May is hot, dry, and exhausting, and we are in bed by ten o'clock that night. We fall asleep quickly, for our room is in a quiet street off Zion Square. At midnight we are awakened by the sound of singing and dancing, lusty enough for a regiment. This, apparently, is not a night for sleeping, not in Jerusalem at any rate. I dress quickly and look outside for the revelers, but they have disappeared. I walk back to the Wall through dark, silent streets. Anywhere else I would be uneasy; in Israel one loses his fear of walking alone at night.

Close to the Jaffa Gate light gleams from the windows of a tiny Kurdish synagogue. A man makes room for me on his bench when I enter, and for a long while I join the congregants in chanting *Tikkun Lel Sharuot*. As I leave, they motion for me to take some *kibbud* from a table laden with cake, fruit, and chick-peas.

By now there is a steady flow of people through the steep narrow walls of the Old City toward the Wall. The Hasidim have left no one at home; entire families are here in their holiday clothes, earlocked children not even sleepy-eyed, infants cradled in the arms of parents. The stalls of the Arab market are padlocked, but the daytime smells linger. The cool night air is redolent of coffee and pepper, cabbage and scallions, and uncured sheepskins. Aroused by the shuffling of hundreds of shoes, hens in a live poultry market cackle behind a wire enclosure.

At the Wall there is no night. Light highlights the rough-hewn Herodian bottom stones, but it floods the entire square. Everywhere, in the open and in the cavernous rooms at the side, men are bent and swaying over the *Tikkun*. Some, having apparently completed the *Tikkun*, are reading Psalms or studying Talmud. By three o'clock the crescent moon has vanished and the first glimmerings of dawn appear in the sky.

The square is as full as I have ever seen it. Prayer shawls are draped over thousands of heads, thousands of voices rise in prayer. Across the millennia I hear the echo of voices at Sinai. "We will do and we will listen." All my intellectual reservations fall away. From under a heap of prayer books I dig up an old prayer shawl and enfold myself in it. A *minyan* is just beginning the service, and my voice is one among many. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwelling places, O Israel!"

It is broad day when I return to our room. I try to sleep, but there are still voices vibrating within me. I sleep very little, but I am exhilarated, not exhausted, that entire day. Miriam marvels over that and remarks, "There must be something in the air here."

"There always has been," I say.<sup>23</sup>

Sarah Schechter

Jewish People,  
Jewish Thought:  
*The Jewish Experience  
In History*

ROBERT M. SELTZER

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.  
*New York*

Collier Macmillan Publishers  
*London*



Jewish street in Opatow, Poland, known in Yiddish as Apto. In the impoverished shtetlekh of Eastern Europe, the Jews frequently formed a substantial minority, sometimes more than half of the population until World War II. (Courtesy of the Jewish Daily Forward Association.)

elders supposedly review their increasing hold over the European economy, their control of the press, and their manipulation of all political parties opposed to the tsarist regime and other autocratic governments. A wide range of social and political developments, from alcoholism to freedom of speech, are explained as cynically utilized techniques to ensure confusion of the gentiles, so that they will eventually fall under total Jewish domination. Circulated in print by a Russian Orthodox priest in 1905, the *Protocols* were not accepted as authentic on a large scale until after World War I, when they began to play an important role in anti-Semitic propaganda, cementing together the contradictory collage of anti-Jewish accusations into a potent ideological weapon. The impact of extremist, fanatic anti-Semitism, even when not swallowed whole, was effective in isolating the Jews: Reinforcing the feeling that Jewry was an alien force, anti-Semitism increased Jewish vulnerability in the turbulent and harsh arena of twentieth-century mass politics and dulled the edge of sympathy when Jews were to be openly persecuted.

### *The Rise of Zionism and Jewish Socialism*

After 1880 a new Jewish leadership emerged to deal with the special problems of the Jewish people, including the poverty of most East European Jews, the physical violence and psychological stress produced by anti-Semitism, and the need to construct social forms to cope with

mass politics. A combination of factors fostered the rise of Zionism and Jewish socialism in East Europe rather than elsewhere. First, the ethnic distinctiveness of the Jews was most pronounced in this part of the world. As a result of the slow pace of social change in Eastern Europe, Ashkenazic folk culture, traditional religiosity, and the Yiddish language were still entrenched among the Jewish masses in the last quarter of the century. Second, the demography and economics of the Jews in Eastern Europe reinforced their cohesion and at the same time intensified the urgency of their plight. Despite a large migration abroad, by 1897 there were over 5 million Russian Jews, increasingly concentrated in the larger cities of the Pale. The Jewish role as middlemen between peasants and towns had disintegrated after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861; the "May Laws" had speeded up their urbanization; a high Jewish birth rate further exacerbated the difficulties of finding new sources of livelihood. Although some East European Jews were able to maintain a middle-class position and a few became important capitalists, the vast majority were poorly paid day laborers in small workshops owned by Jews. Many were destitute, relying on communal charity. Third, the policies of the Russian government inadvertently stimulated an effective resistance. Although the tsarist regime was capable of brutal acts, and although it tried to repress the spread of "dangerous" ideas through censorship and other means, it was an autocracy, not a totalitarianism. Within the government there were proponents of moderation and tolerance as well as reactionaries and anti-Semites. Sufficient freedom of Jewish action remained, despite governmental restrictions, for new modes of self-organization to take shape. The spread of Haskalah and modern education had created a core of secular, free-thinking Russian Jewish intellectuals eager to break away from the now inadequate model of Jewish modernization laid down earlier in the century in Germany. The modern Russian Jewish intelligentsia in a few decades produced a wide range of semilegal and illegal movements, parties, and organizations, all emphasizing just that element of Jewish life which had seemed to threaten the emancipation of the Western Jews—that the Jews could be considered a "nation."

The formation of the Zionist movement was triggered by the emotional shock of the pogroms of 1881–1882.<sup>3</sup> The hostility of the tsarist government to the victims, coupled with the indifference of the liberal and radical intelligentsia to Jewish suffering, made it clear that Jewish emancipation and social acceptance were not a likely prospect. When East European Jewish migration increased manifold, the Jewish press debated whether it should be directed to America or to Palestine. Most of the emigrants opted for the United States, but the idea of re-establishing the land of Israel as the center of Jewish life took hold.

maskilim and Russified Jews. During the pogrom years a new network of *Hibbat Zion* societies appeared in the Pale ("Love of Zion" societies, the members being known as *Hovevei Zion*, "Lovers of Zion"). One group, the *Bitu* association of Kharkov, composed of Jewish university students who had experienced a "return to their people" during the riots, set off for Palestine to become farmers.<sup>4</sup> Of the Russian Jewish intellectuals pondering the Jewish future in light of the pogroms, one of the most articulate was Leon Pinsker, an eminent Jewish physician who had been an advocate of enlightenment and Russification. In the summer of 1882 Pinsker published a widely read pamphlet, *Autoemancipation*, in which he argued that the only solution for eternal and incurable Jewish hatred was a program of self-emancipation leading to the creation of a separate Jewish homeland somewhere. (More will be said about Pinsker's ideology in the next chapter.) The Love of Zion movement in the 1880s and 1890s had a profound impact on Hebrew literature and Jewish consciousness. When nationalist movements were appearing among all East European and Balkan peoples and when the Russian government turned to Russian nationalism for support, Hibbat Zion represented the reaffirmation of a national identity by Jews caught in the crossfire of competing loyalties and searching for an honorable and effective independent stance.

By the mid-nineties the idea of Jewish nationalism had spread to Central Europe, especially among East European Jewish students attending the University of Berlin and other universities of Germany, Austria, France, and Switzerland. The crucial figure for the next phase of Jewish nationalism was Theodor Herzl. Born in Budapest and educated at the University of Vienna, Herzl was a successful journalist and playwright, the epitome of the acculturated and almost assimilated Central European Jew. Although quite aware of Viennese anti-Semitism, Herzl was converted to Zionism as a result of the anti-Jewish agitation accompanying the Dreyfus affair. (At the time Herzl was the Paris correspondent of an important liberal Viennese daily, the *Neue Freie Presse*.) In 1896 Herzl published *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question*. (Herzl's position will be described in Chapter 15.) Although he had arrived at his proposal for a Jewish homeland independently of the Hovevei Zion, he quickly made contacts with them and with a few like-minded Western Jews. A decisive and commanding figure, Herzl called into being the first Zionist Congress (Basle, August 29, 1897). The result of the deliberations was a platform calling for a Jewish national home in Palestine recognized by international law. Although it did not have the support of the majority of the Jewish people, the world Zionist organization created in 1897 became a permanent body with a core of dedicated leaders, an enthusiastic membership, branches in Europe and America, a Jewish national fund to purchase land in Palestine, a variety



Theodor Herzl en route to Palestine in 1898 to meet Kaiser Wilhelm II in an effort to win his support for Zionism. (Courtesy of the Zionist Archives, New York.)

of newspapers, journals, cultural and other activities—all embodying the will that the Jews reconstitute themselves a political nation for the first time in 2,000 years.

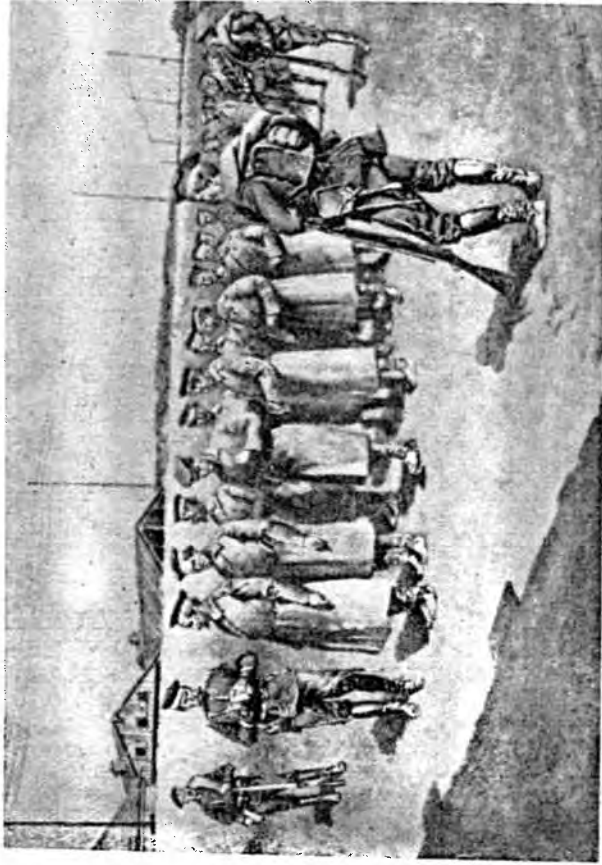
In its early decades, tensions within the Zionist movement reflected the difficulties to be faced in transforming the Jews into a "normal" nation. What were to be the priorities of Jewish nationalism? Herzl saw as the first order of business the acquisition of a legal charter permitting mass Jewish settlement in Palestine. Critics who pointed to Herzl's lack of success in winning diplomatic support for a charter, said that the primary task was to promote modern Hebraic culture and raise the Jewish awareness of the people. (Herzl's knowledge of Hebrew and of Jewish literature was minimal.) In turn the secular tone of "cultural Zionism" raised fears among the Orthodox that it would undermine Jewish religious faith. In 1902 the Orthodox Zionists formed the *Mizrabi* movement to combine Herzl's "political Zionism" with a traditional religious identity. A second troublesome issue arose in 1903 at the Sixth Zionist Congress, when Herzl submitted for discussion a possible offer of land in East Africa by the British colonial administration. The Uganda project was decisively rejected by the East European Zionists, who were convinced that Palestine was the only possible Jewish homeland. Herzl backed down, but a number of leading Zionists seceded in 1905 to found a Jewish Territorial Organization, which attempted to find another location for Jewish colonization—without success. Zionism was irrevocably wedded to Palestine,

which, though underpopulated, posed the ominous question of long range relations with the Arabs.

A third dilemma arose over Zionist participation in the struggle for Jewish rights in the diaspora. Herzl had opposed involvement in European politics on the grounds that the Jewish question was incapable of solution there and that Zionism should prepare for a total Jewish evacuation. In the brief political thaw after the Russian revolution of 1905, however, the Russian Zionists joined the "Union for the Attainment of Full Rights for the Jews in Russia," which called for a Jewish parliamentary bloc to work for the legal recognition of the Jews as a nonterritorial nationality in the tsarist empire. A similar development occurred in the Hapsburg empire as a result of the nationality struggles there. Commitment to the struggle for Jewish minority rights threatened to deflect Zionism from the goal of a Jewish homeland. A fourth issue arose as a result of a new wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine after 1904. Herzl had opposed "infiltration," but the rapid growth of the Jewish community in the land of Israel seemed to require that the movement become directly involved in practical measures to aid the new settlements, despite the evident hostility of the Turkish government. These last two issues, minority rights and the new settlements in Palestine, were connected to the rise of Jewish socialism.

Individual Jews were prominent in the socialist parties of Central Europe in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but in Russia the attractions to young acculturated Jews of a universal socialist brotherhood were especially intense. By the turn of the century, Russified Jews were playing a conspicuous role in all the main radical movements: the revived Populist party (the Social Revolutionaries), anarchism (a force during the 1905 upheavals), and Marxism (the Social Democrats). Marxist socialism was especially compelling, because it purported to prove scientifically that a world-wide proletarian revolution would replace capitalism with an egalitarian and just society in which the coercive state would inevitably disappear. In the new age religious and ethnic differentiation would also vanish. Imbued with these ideas, some Russian Jewish socialists in the early nineties began to form small study circles of Jewish workers, teaching them Russian so that they could read revolutionary literature.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Jewish laborers in larger cities of the Pale, such as Vilna and Bialystok, began to form embryo labor unions and mutual aid associations and to organize strikes for better wages and working conditions. Between 1893 and 1895 several Jewish socialist intellectuals advocated abandoning small-scale propaganda for mass agitation in Yiddish, the language of the Jewish proletariat. The new frame of mind, that the Jewish proletariat should associate itself with the Russian labor



Drawing of Jewish recruits in the Russian army by the American Western artist Frederick Remington, 1894.

movement on the basis of partnership but not assimilation, led a group of Jewish socialists and workers, meeting in Vilna, to found the General Union (Bund) of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. Organized in October 1897, the same year as the first Zionist Congress, the Bund quickly became Zionism's major competitor among the Jewish masses and one of the most effective branches of the Russian left. Bundist strikes, demonstrations, and mass protests played an important part in the political turbulence of 1903-1905. Bundist defense groups protected Jews during pogroms. Bundist agitators and writers educated a new generation of Jewish laborers to active political consciousness.

Like Zionism, the Bund in its formative years faced a series of tensions pulling in several directions. The question of its exact relationship to the Russian Social Democratic party (which the leaders of the Bund had helped to form in 1898) came to a head in 1903, when the Bund sought recognition as the sole representative of the Jewish workers in Russia. This proposal, which would have turned the party into a federation, was rejected by Social Democrats of varying views—especially by Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik faction.<sup>6</sup> (In 1906, its autonomous status recognized, the Bund rejoined the Social Democratic organization.) Despite disagreement with the other Marxist socialists, the Bund remained committed to



tariat was the proletariat of other peoples, its principal enemy (apart from the tsarist regime), the capitalist class, including the Jewish bourgeoisie. As a consequence, the Bund found it difficult to define an "ideologically correct" relation to the Jewish people as a whole. Early Bundists followed the usual Marxist position that the Jews had survived in history as a distinct group only because of their unusual economic roles and legal status. (A thorough-going economic determinism, Marxism does not assign an independent causality to ideas or religious faith.) After the socialist revolution the Jews would inevitably assimilate because the economic substructure that maintained their identity would disappear.

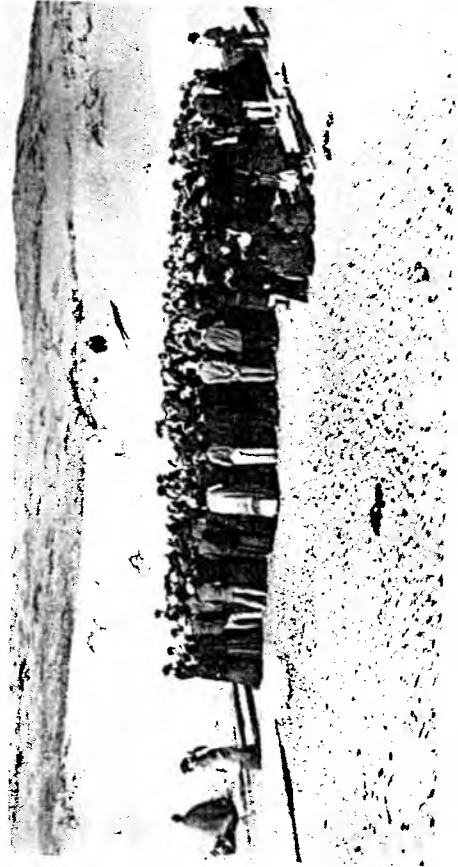
At first the Bund proclaimed itself a Yiddish-speaking workers' movement. Only in 1901 did the Bund Congress agree that the term *nation* should be applied to the Jews, and even then it rejected the call for Jewish communal rights apart from political emancipation as individuals. In the next few years the goal of cultural and social autonomy became widely accepted in Russian Jewry as the only solution to the Jewish problem in a multinational state, and the Bund's leadership came to include Jews more deeply rooted in *Yiddishkeit* (the Ashkenazic folk ethos). As a result, in 1905 the chief Bundist theoretician, Vladimir Medem, proposed that, inasmuch as the Bund opposed oppression of any nationality, it should demand legal guarantees for the free development of Jewish culture. Medem qualified his position by a stance of "neutrality" as to whether Jewish identity would endure in the long run, which was to be left to the "laws of history." After 1907, when government repression and Jewish emigration led to a decline in Bundist political and economic activities, the Bund became involved in furthering Yiddish as the language of general education and Jewish literature. For the Bund, Yiddish was the language of the Jewish working class, and the working class was the sole legitimate representative of the people. The Bund remained hostile to Hebrew as the language of the modern Jewish renaissance, and it continued to oppose the Zionist movement as a dangerous form of "romantic," bourgeois nationalism drawing Jews away from the revolutionary struggle in East Europe.

During the political turmoil of the first few years of the twentieth century, several other Jewish socialist parties were formed in Eastern Europe. One was associated with the search for a Jewish homeland somewhere other than in Palestine. A second emphasized the attainment of extensive Jewish autonomous legal rights in Russia. A third combined Marxism with an affirmation of the centrality of the land of Israel on the grounds that only in the historic Jewish homeland could the Jews, freed from minority status and the pressures of an anti-Semitic environment, have a "normal" proletarian revolution. A fourth tendency based its ideology on personal fulfillment through pioneering agricultural labor.

The last two groups made Labor Zionism the most vital factor in the new wave of Jewish emigration to Palestine during the decade prior to World War I.

In 1881 the *yishuv* (the Jewish community in the land of Israel) numbered about 24,000 Sephardim and Ashkenazim, half of whom lived in Jerusalem. Almost all were pious traditionalists supported by charitable contributions raised in the diaspora. The first Zionist *aliyah* (wave of immigration) in the 1880s and 1890s resulted in about twenty agricultural settlements. As the Hovevei Zion were able to provide little material help, the settlers were forced to rely on generous financial aid and vexing supervision from Baron Edmond de Rothschild and his agents. Many became discouraged as a result of obstacles placed in their way by the Turkish government, the prevalence of malaria, and the backward economic conditions in the country. But early Zionist settlers, such as the Biluists, were an influential ideological precedent for the next generation.

The second *aliyah* (1904–1914) brought 40,000 Jews to Palestine, mostly idealistic youth despairing of the bleak situation in Russia after the failure of the revolution of 1905. The Marxist *Poalei Zion* (Workers of Zion) and the non-Marxist *Zéirei Zion* (Young People of Zion) were dedicated to social and personal redemption through Zionism, and to the conviction that they must till the soil and do all the menial work them-



Founding ceremony in 1909 for the city of Tel Aviv, to be built on the site of these sand dunes. (Courtesy of the Zionist Archives, New York.)

selves rather than rely on hired Arab labor. Gradually the ideal of a cooperative farming community, the *kibbutz*, emerged. (The model, Deganyah, was established in 1910.) Although the Young Turk revolution in the Ottoman empire (1908) worsened political conditions for the *yishuv*, by 1914 there were 85,000 Jews in Palestine, 43 Jewish agricultural settlements, an association of Jewish armed watchmen to protect them, a new Jewish city (Tel Aviv, founded in 1909), a network of Jewish schools in which the language of instruction was Hebrew, a variety of modern Jewish political parties, mutual aid societies, and a periodical press. The ground had been laid for a modern Jewish homeland.

### *Jewish Migration and the Expansion of the American Diaspora*

Since the mid-seventeenth century there had been a steady drift of Jews westward on the European continent, but the number who crossed the Atlantic to the New World was small until the nineteenth century. By 1776 there were about 2,500 Jews in the future United States; by 1820 about 4,000. Between 1840 and 1880 a quarter of a million Jews came to America, mainly from Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary, but also from Russia and Rumania. After the traumatic pogroms of 1881-1882,



Jewish immigrants arriving at the Battery, New York, in the 1890s. (Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.)

Russian anti-Semitism and difficult economic conditions in East Europe led to an enormous increase. About 2,750,000 Jews left Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1914. Of these, 350,000 resettled in other parts of Europe: tens of thousands in Germany and France where they bolstered the numerical strength of these Jewries; and 200,000 in England where they increased the Jewish population more than threefold. East European Jews scattered over the globe. Among the more sizable migrations were the 40,000 that went to South Africa, 115,000 to Argentina,<sup>7</sup> 100,000 to Canada. But the most attractive land of all was the United States, to which 2 million East European Jews—85 per cent of the intercontinental migration—emigrated between 1881 and the outbreak of World War I.

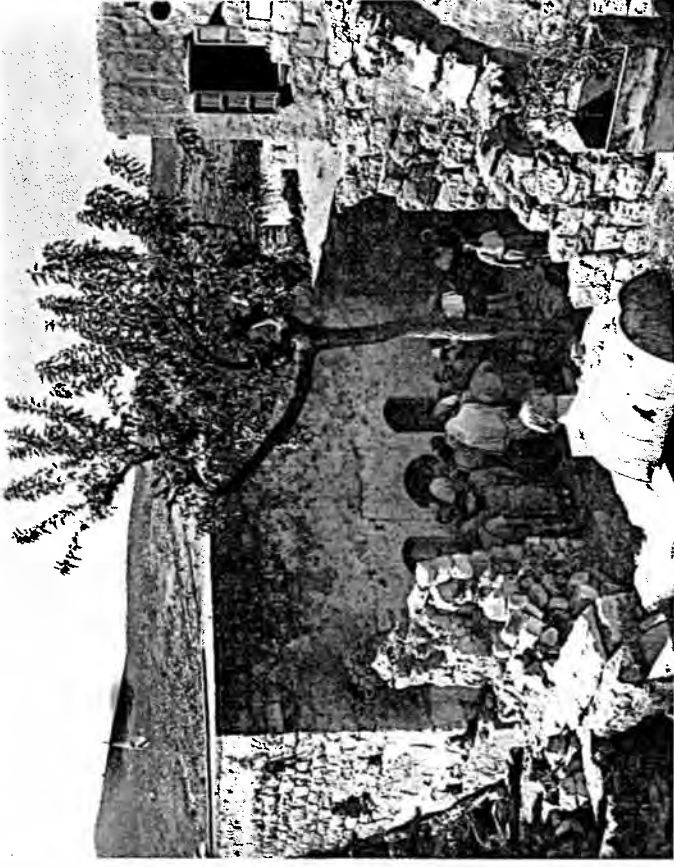
This mass exodus produced striking changes in the social profile of American Jewry. The Sephardic Jews, who were the major force in the early eighteenth century, had lived in the coastal towns (the only towns of size at the time) where they had been merchant shippers, shopkeepers, and artisans. The German-speaking Jews who came in the mid-nineteenth century had spread throughout the continent. Starting out often as itinerant peddlers, they quickly became business proprietors in the growing cities of the midwest, south, and California. By 1880 the largest Jewish center, New York, contained 85,000 Jews, mostly of German derivation, including a few prominent Jewish bankers who had established their firms in the post-Civil War economic boom. The German Jews quickly Americanized themselves—and they Americanized their religion. In the sixties and seventies the majority of synagogues in the United States turned to Reform Judaism, a process aided by the arrival of several energetic and articulate European Reform rabbis. When efforts to create a broad federation of synagogues failed, the Reform temples joined together in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873. A Reform theological seminary, the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, was founded in 1875; a Reform rabbinic association, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in 1889. Like European Reform, American Reform had its moderates and radicals, but the more extreme type of antitraditionalism (such as that of Samuel Holdheim) fell on fertile soil in the United States. Classical Reform reached its apex in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885: Insisting that the Jews were only a religious association and not a national community, the Pittsburgh Platform portrayed Reform Judaism as a rational religion whose moral law pointed to the coming age of universal human brotherhood. Reform was closely attuned to the optimism of the American environment and to the efforts of American religious liberalism to stress that theology was fully compatible with the natural sciences and with the principle of historical evolution.

The social background of the East European Jews who arrived after 1881, combined with their arrival at a time when America was experiencing rapid industrialization, resulted in a much more diverse and ethnically



## CHAPTER 16

# Twentieth-Century Jewish Religious Thought



The ancient synagogue of Peki'in in the Galilee, a village which has had a Jewish population from before the first century CE to the present. (Courtesy of the Consulate General of Israel.)

Since 1900 Jewish philosophy has become more variegated than ever before. Traditional Judaism not only produced articulate modern defenders but attracted young secular Jews searching for their spiritual roots. Reform, Neo-Orthodox, and Conservative approaches continued to develop, sometimes with major modifications of their nineteenth-century positions. Before discussing key figures in twentieth-century Jewish philosophy—Cohen, Rosenzweig, Buber, Kaplan, and Heschel—we will survey religious tendencies before World War II in Eastern and Central Europe, the land of Israel, and America, pausing briefly to describe several important men for whom limited space prevents more extended treatment.

In late tsarist Russia the rabbinat continued to write in the time-honored talmudic and moralistic literary forms and East European orthodoxy showed some signs of an inner religious revival. One of the most saintly rabbis of the mitnagedic (non-Hasidic) Orthodox was Israel Meir Ha-Kohen (1838–1933), author of many halakhic and ethical treatises. (He is usually known as the Hafetz Hayyim, from the title of his book on the laws of slander, gossip, and talebearing.) The Hafetz Hayyim was associated with one wing of the *musar* (ethics) movement, founded

by Rabbi Israel Lipkin Salanter in the 1840s, which had spread to many Lithuanian yeshivot by 1900. In the yeshivot, *musar* teachers sought to counteract the corrosive effects on traditional piety of Enlightenment and modernity through regular study of moral treatises, daily meditation, and self-examination, in order to inculcate constant self-criticism, subdvanity, overcome preoccupation with worldly matters, and advance toward spiritual perfection. Hasidic rabbis also continued to maintain a following among the East European Jewish masses in pre-World War I Russia as well as in Poland, Romania, and Hungary up to the Holocaust. In 1912 mitnagedic and Hasidic rabbis joined with German and Hungarian Orthodox leaders to form the *Agudat Israel* (League of Israel) party to combat secularist ideologies, especially Zionism. By the 1920s and 1930s the Agudat Israel constituted a political and social force in the Polish Jewish communities and maintained an extensive network of Jewish schools for girls as well as boys. (The Agudat Israel was, of course, not opposed to settlement by Jews in the holy land, but rejected the Zionist ideal of a secular Jewish society that would not conform to the halakhah.)

In the decade before World War I, Hasidic spirituality began to interest

certain philosophically sophisticated Central European Jewish writers who rejected positivism and Marxist materialism. Martin Buber (to be discussed later in this chapter) was only one of several who discovered in Hasidism an orientation to life and to God that they could appropriate into their own personal religious quest. Another revered figure of this type in interwar Poland was Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942), poet, journalist, and essayist. Zeitlin's early monographs and essays had been marked by a philosophical pessimism mixed with humanitarian sympathies; as he gravitated to Orthodoxy, he found in the teachings of the Hasidic masters a path leading to the lonely and despairing individual to fervent repentance and renewed messianic hope. Judaism, he insisted, was essentially mystical and not rationalistic. (Clad in prayer shawl and *tefillin*, Zeitlin was killed by the Nazis on the way from the Warsaw ghetto to the extermination camp of Treblinka—a modern incarnation of the traditional Jewish martyr dying for the sanctification of God's name.)

If East European Orthodoxy was showing signs of vitality in the last decades before the Holocaust (in the Soviet Union, of course, the lack of religious freedom made this impossible), German Jewry of the same period witnessed renewal of Jewish philosophy of religion. The three most important figures—Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber—were thoroughly trained in classical philosophy. Apart from Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Buber, who were not rabbis (they will be treated separately later in the chapter), German Jewry in the twentieth century also produced several eminent rabbinic theologians. Leader of the small, closely knit Frankfurt Neo-Orthodoxy was Isaac Breuer (1883–1946). In his many articles and books, Breuer continued to espouse Samson Raphael Hirsch's position that the Jewish people was a suprahistorical entity under the direct sovereignty of God and that the Torah was an inexhaustible, eternally valid communication of content from God to man. (Breuer was active in the Agudat Israel and settled in Palestine in the mid-1930s.) Among the liberal rabbis of Germany, outstanding was Leo Baeck (1873–1956), who studied at the Breslau Jewish Theological Seminary and then at the Berlin *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* where he was ordained. From 1912 Baeck held a rabbinical position in Berlin and taught at the *Hochschule*, with the exception of a stint as German army chaplain during World War I. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, he was elected president of the overall body representing German Jews in the Third Reich. Refusing to leave Germany, Baeck was interned in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in 1943; he survived the Holocaust to become one of the most eminent Jewish spiritual figures of the immediate post-World War II era, continuing to write and teach in England and America.

Baeck's first and most influential book, *The Essence of Judaism* (first edition 1905, second and expanded edition 1922) originated as a polemic

against the position that Judaism was only a preparation for the ethical perfectionism represented by Jesus. On the contrary, according to Baeck, Judaism is the clearest instance of the "classical" type of religion characterized by a realistic but hopeful ethical optimism and a firm commitment to man's moral freedom. In his essay "Romantic Religion," Baeck contrasts classical religion with a tendency in Christianity, beginning with Paul, to emphasize complete dependence on divine grace, mystical union with God, and faith alone at the expense of works, which resulted, Baeck argued, in passive indifference to the struggle against evil in the world. Baeck did not identify Judaism only with the ethical: "The commandment," the never-ending duty to realize the good, emerges out of "the mystery" that is God. Jewish religious consciousness preserves a necessary tension between the finite and the infinite, existence and the ideal, the human and the transcendent. In glimpsing the divine mystery, man recognizes that he is created; in apprehending the divine commandment, he becomes conscious that he is expected to create. Baeck's last book, completed after World War II (*This People Israel: The Meaning of Jewish Existence*), shifts from a definition of the essence of Judaism to the inner meaning of Jewish history—a path of repeated rebirth in which Israel must reformulate and reapply God's demand to an ever-changing present.

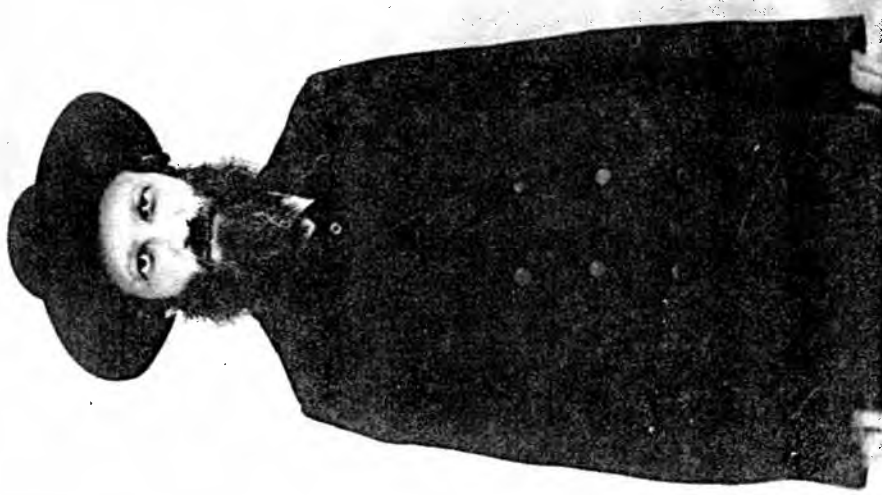
All these strands of European Jewish thought have been absorbed by the newer Jewries of the land of Israel and America, albeit in quite different ways. Several eminent European scholars who settled in Jerusalem in the 1920s and 1930s (Samuel Hugo Bergman, Julius Guttmann, Ernst Simon, Leon Roth, and others) continued the academic philosophical tradition that reached its height in German Jewry. But the most influential spiritual figures in the *yishuv* came from Eastern Europe, such as the venerated mentor of the *halutzim*, or "pioneers," Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922). A Russian Jew who arrived in Palestine in 1904 when he was almost fifty, Gordon was inspired not only by Jewish sources but by Tolstoi, Dostoievski, and the Russian populists, especially their idealization of the peasant life. Rejecting the impersonal and dehumanizing effects of industrialization and mass, urban society, Gordon saw in small Zionist agricultural communities a primary means for inner Jewish redemption as individuals and as a people. (His non-Marxist, agrarian socialism is sometimes called the "religion of labor.") Gordon's religiosity is expressed through a mystical bond between man and nature. Rational knowledge may be a necessary tool for physical survival, but man grasps the immediacy of life in its fullness only through intuition. Gordon acknowledged that for the secular pioneers traditional religious forms and rituals may have lost their meaning, but the deepest content of religion—the organic unity and purposiveness of the cosmos—remains eternally available for rediscovery. For Gordon, nations, as well as human

Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922), essayist and Zionist pioneer. His pantheistic Zionism has been called the "religion of labor." (Courtesy of the Zionist Archives, New York.)



beings, are natural phenomena, products of the interaction of a society with its physical environment. To his readers and followers, therefore, Gordon held out the hope that Jewry could experience moral rebirth in the homeland—a rebirth that would make the Jewish people, in Gordon's phrase, an "incarnation" of the ideal humanity.

Within Orthodoxy in Palestine, a similar mystical Zionism was the hallmark of Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935). Emigrating from Russia to Palestine in 1904, Kook became the rabbi of Jaffa, and in 1921, the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of the yishuv. In contrast to the Agudat Israel in Europe and the extreme traditionalists in the holy land, Kook was distinctly impressed by the ethical idealism of the young Jewish socialists, who, in building the Jewish national home, were aiding the divine plan. Redemption is the central theme of Kook's writings. Drawing on the Kabbalah, Kook insisted that there was no real separation between the religious and the secular. Holiness, an intensified form of life itself and the ceaseless impetus to perfection, is the ever-present task to transmute coarse and earthly aspects of existence to higher planes of being. Social and scientific progress have intrinsic value as long as they are not divorced



Abraham Isaac Kook in 1914. A mystic and a religious Zionist, Kook (1865–1935) was later Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine. (Courtesy of the Zionist Archives, New York.)

from the spiritual. Kook endorsed the Darwinian view of evolution as compatible with a cosmic process in which all souls, fragments of the one world soul and refractions of God's unitive being, yearn to discover and return to God. Like Judah Halevy, whose philosophy he admired, Kook was convinced that Israel had a special genius for holiness and that the renewal of the Jewish bond to the land was an important stage in mankind's advance to universal harmony.

Neither Gordon's nor Kook's mysticism generated large-scale religious movements in the yishuv, where the contrast (sometimes the sharp disagreement) between secularism and traditionalism is still a feature of Israeli life. In America, the distinction between secularist and religionist was less important in the long run than that between Reform, Conservatism, and Orthodoxy, each of which had a sizable membership and extensive network of congregational federations, rabbinical bodies, and

institutions of higher Jewish learning. Nevertheless, although the dividing lines between the three movements remained evident, all gradually developed more traditionalist and more liberal wings on such issues as adjustment of Jewish practice to the contemporary situation and the theology most suited to religion in a secular age. During the first half of the twentieth century, the various strands of European Jewish religious thought were absorbed and reshaped in the American environment, to produce new emphases and points of view.

One of the most important figures of Reform Judaism at the turn of the century was Kaufmann Kohler (1843–1926). Kohler came to the United States from Germany in 1867 and served as rabbi of several Reform temples until he became president of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1903. A prodigious scholar, Kohler was the author of *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered* (1917). Acknowledging that Judaism had a communal aspect and distinctive rituals and ceremonies, Kohler nevertheless saw as its core a universal set of ethical and religious truths, proclaimed by the biblical prophets and evolving in the course of history toward greater clarity. Kohler was both a believer in a personal God and a rationalist: Revelation and religious intuition were indispensable, but the validity of Judaism lay not in its source but in its content. The Bible does not inspire because it is holy, it is holy because it inspires. Man's ethical conscience is the main proof for God's existence, and the moral law is the principal message of Judaism. Kohler was opposed to Zionism because, to him and other classical Reformers, it was a retreat to an obsolete and particularistic Jewish nationalism. Just before World War I, however, and especially in the twenties and thirties, younger Reform rabbis took an increasingly positive attitude toward the idea of Jewish peoplehood and the rebirth of the Jewish homeland (Stephen S. Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, Judah Magnes, and others). At the same time, they became involved in concrete issues of social justice in the United States, arguing that Reform's commitment to the prophetic tradition mandated active concern for the rights of organized labor, the blacks, and the poor. (The next generation of Reform rabbis, who took on the task of formulating a new Jewish theology after World War II, will be discussed at the end of the chapter.)

In American Conservative Judaism the major contemporary of Kaufmann Kohler was Solomon Schechter (1847–1915). Born in Romania, for two decades a prominent scholar of Judaica at Oxford University, Schechter was invited in 1901 to become president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Unlike Kohler, Schechter believed that the Jewish religion was not reducible to a logically formulated system of principles but was the ongoing manifestation of the religious consciousness of "catholic Israel" (catholic in the sense of all-inclusive). For Schechter, Judaism was a consensus emerging from the study of



Leo Baeck (1873–1956), leading German liberal rabbi and theologian, Holocaust survivor. In this photograph he is being awarded a honorary degree by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, President of the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 12, 1948. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute and Whitestone Photo, New York.)

Torah over many centuries. In *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909), he defined talmudic Judaism as a complicated arrangement of checks and balances, rather than a fixed scheme of salvation: Indeed, the health of a religion was to have a theology without being conscious of it. Schechter eloquently defended the joy of Jewish observance of the law and the "applied holiness" exemplified by the great spiritual figures of the Jewish past, lovingly described in his *Studies in Judaism* (3 volumes, 1896–1924). Because of the centrality of Jewish peoplehood in the Conservative movement, it was not painfully caught up in the dispute between anti-Zionism and Zionism that troubled early twentieth-century Reform and European Orthodoxy. The Conservatives did develop their own divergent tendencies in the 1930s and 1940s, however, between those who called for greater flexibility and innovation in response to the challenges of modern science and democracy, and others who emphasized

the need for a firm commitment to the Jewish legal and theological mainstream (as we shall see later in our more lengthy discussion of Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Heschel).

American Orthodoxy, although united in its devotion to a supernaturally revealed Torah and to the normative status of the *Shulhan Arukh* and its regulations, also came to embrace a wide gamut of religious styles. Transplanted East European traditionalism was preserved by yeshivot of the Old World, Lithuanian type founded in various American cities, and German Neo-Orthodoxy established roots in New York in the 1930s. (Hasidic groups have also settled in the Northeast since World War II.) The major focus of modern American Orthodoxy has been the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University in New York. A persistent disagreement within Orthodoxy has revolved around whether it should cooperate with non-Orthodox movements in the Jewish community in order to preserve the unity of the people or whether it should adamantly refuse to recognize the legitimacy of secular, Reform, and Conservative forms of Jewishness and avoid joint activities with them. Although a few traditional rabbis continued to warn against the dangers of secular learning, modern Orthodoxy in America has become increasingly able, since the 1930s, to present its position in contemporary theological terms. (Two of the most important Orthodox theologians, Joseph Soloveitchik and Eliezer Berkovits, will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.)

The next sections will concentrate on five men who stand out by having published a body of writing recognized as modern classics. Highly original thinkers, they also represent the impact on Judaism of four of the most influential philosophical or theological tendencies in twentieth-century Europe and America—Neo-Kantianism, existentialism, religious naturalism, and Protestant Neo-Orthodoxy. An examination of these men indicates some of the methodological and substantive dilemmas facing Jewish religious thought in recent decades.

### Hermann Cohen's Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Judaism

The man who stood at the borderline between the nineteenth and twentieth-century liberal philosophies of Judaism—perfecting the former in such a way as to point to the new departures of the latter—was Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), a towering figure in modern Jewish rationalism. Born in the small German town of Coswig (his father was a Hebrew teacher and cantor), Cohen received a Jewish education at home and a general education in a *gymnasium*. Intending to become a rabbi, he attended the Breslau Jewish Theological Seminary, but soon left to study

science, mathematics, and philosophy at the University of Berlin. Little more than ten years after receiving his doctorate, Cohen was appointed full professor at the University of Marburg (1876), a signal honor for a Jew at that time. Cohen made Marburg one of the great centers of German academic philosophy. He wrote three distinguished books on Kant's thought, followed by a series of volumes on the philosophical foundations of the natural sciences, ethics, and art. Unlike most modern Jewish thinkers, Cohen achieved eminence in professional philosophy before he made his most important contribution to Judaism. When anti-Semitism made its conspicuous appearance, around 1880, in German politics, Cohen began to publish articles defending the ethical teachings of Judaism and the value of Jewish religious survival. Against German intellectuals who looked on Judaism as a particularistic anachronism that a Jew would have to drop as he entered the mainstream of German culture, Cohen insisted on the affinity between Judaism and "Germanism," that is, between a purified, rational Judaism and his conception of the human civilization as a central force in the progressive movement of the human mind toward moral freedom and intellectual autonomy. Retiring from Marburg in 1912, Cohen moved to Berlin to lecture at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* and to devote himself to an examination of religion's relation to philosophy. In 1915 he published *The Concept of Religion in the System of Philosophy*. His major Jewish work, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (1919), was issued after his death. In 1924 over sixty of his shorter essays on Jewish subjects were collected and published in three volumes (*Jüdische Schriften [Jewish Writings]*).

Cohen's position represents the most rigorous and original example of the reformulation of Jewish religious belief in accordance with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). A brief digression on Kant's philosophy, one of the greatest in Western intellectual history, is necessary at this point in order to indicate what Cohen took from Kant and where he departed from him.

Like all forms of philosophical idealism, Kant's "critical" idealism places great emphasis on the activity of the mind as determining what is real. Unlike the most extreme forms of speculative idealism, which view all reality as a manifestation of mind, however, he sought a compromise between thoroughgoing rationalism and empiricist skepticism. Kant distinguished between reality as known to experience—the phenomena—and an ultimate reality that lies beyond all possible experience—the noumena or things-in-themselves. Phenomena are known only insofar as they conform to the essential structure of consciousness; noumena are unknowable, although their existence is a necessary presupposition of philosophy. In Kant's system, man's knowledge is saved from a complete



# מדרש ירושלם

עיר הנצח

באספקלריא של חז"ל

מאת דניאל שפרבר

קליגרפיה: אפרים פאוקר

הביא לדפוס  
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# AND TOO SAW EVERY THING

that He had made, and behold

it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Yet this spot, which was the first point of creation, and which was destined to be the Divine City and the site of the holy Temple, had as yet no name. God recalled the various names by which it would be called at different times. Seventy names and titles would it bear in the course of its checkered history. But out of these seventy titles, two stood forth as those most suited to be the real name.

Thus Shem, the son of Noah, who is sometimes called Melchizedek, sensing the unique qualities of holiness of this place, called it *Shalem*, which means Perfect, that is the Perfect City. He was king of the region, and also served as priest to the Most High God. A virtuous and a learned man, he even set up an academy in this very place, where he instructed people in the teachings of God. While Abraham, beloved servant of God, called it *Adonai Yir'eh*. This he did after an Angel of the Lord had saved his son Isaac from his own sacrificial knife, an event which took place on this self-same spot. And the name he gave it means: God will reveal Himself to mankind in His aspect of Mercy and Compassion.

God said unto Himself: Shem-Melchizedek is a virtuous man; I should call it by the name he gave it — *Shalem*. But then will not my servant Abraham be offended? For he has named it *Yir'eh*, expressing My compassion towards man. Yet I would not wish to hurt Shem either, who is righteous and spreads knowledge of my Torah. I shall therefore combine both names into one new one, manipulating the letters a little, but not altering their numerical value. It shall be called *Yeru-Shalem*!





# AND GOD Looked DOWN

upon the earthly Jerusalem that was to be, and He was filled with a yearning for just such a place within His own celestial kingdom. For He saw it was to be a city of extraordinary beauty and unparalleled in holiness. Indeed, when in later years, in the twenty-sixth generation of Man, Moses ascended through the seven heavens even unto the Throne of Glory itself, as he passed through the third heaven, which is called *Shehakim*, he heard a mighty throng of Angels chanting paeans in praise of Jerusalem.

God wished always to be close to the Perfect City, and never to let its memory fade from before Him, so that even if the Earthly City undergoes periods of destruction and desolation, its image shall ever be there before Him, clear and vivid. So He made for Himself another such city in the heavenly realm to serve as a counterpart to the Earthly Jerusalem. And He placed it in one of the seven heavens. Some say it was fixed in the fourth heaven, which is called *Zevul*, while others assert it is contained in the seventh and uppermost heaven called *Aravot*, close by the Divine Throne of Glory. And it was graven upon His palms, with its walls continually before Him (Isaiah 49:16). And He so made it, that they function in sympathy and harmony. Thus Jerusalem that is builded on earth is as a city that is joined together with its heavenly twin (Psalms 122:3). And both cities together are called Yerushalayim, that is: two Jerusalems.



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upon her requests and answer them with favour, and all mankind will flow towards her. Yet the throngs will not jostle one another, nor strange folks fall into strife. No contention will be within her borders; a great calm will reign over her.

And all that come within her precincts will dwell in friendship and amity, finding new love and communion each man for his fellow. For thus did the Lord solemnly declare, "in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:9), "for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). This will be the true comfort for Jerusalem, this God's supreme gift to the Holy City, that Peace and Prosperity be within her walls (Psalms 122:8), Jerusalem, City of Peace.



*On days when Tachnun is recited, the following is said before washing the fingers:*

על By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept as we remembered Zion. There, upon the willows we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, and those who scorned us — rejoicing, [saying,] "Sing to us of the songs of Zion." How can we sing the song of the Lord on alien soil? If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its dexterity. Let my tongue cleave to my palate if I will not remember you, if I will not bring to mind Jerusalem during my greatest joy! Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of the destruction of Jerusalem, when they said, "Raze it, raze it to its very foundation!" O Babylon, who are destined to be laid waste, happy is he who will repay you in retribution for what you have inflicted on us. Happy is he who will seize and crush your infants against the rock!<sup>1</sup>

*Continue: למנוצח בנגינות (For the Choirmaster; a song . . .), p. 30, and אברכה (I will bless . . .), below.*

*On days when Tachnun is not recited, the following is said:*

שיר A Song of Ascents. When the Lord will return the exiles of Zion, we will have been like dreamers. Then our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with songs of joy; then will they say among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for these." The Lord has done great things for us; we were joyful. Lord, return our exiles as streams to arid soil. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He goes along weeping, carrying the bag of seed; he will surely return with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.<sup>2</sup>

לבני By the sons of Korach, a Psalm, a Song whose basic theme is the holy mountains [of Zion and Jerusalem]. The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, eternal city of God. I will remind Rahav and Babylon concerning My beloved; Philistia and Tyre as well as Ethiopia, "This one was born there." And to Zion will be said, "This person and that was born there;" and He, the Most High, will establish it. The Lord will count in the register of people, "This one was born there." Selah. Singers as well as dancers [will sing your praise and say], "All my inner thoughts are of you."<sup>4</sup>

אברכה I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise is always in my mouth.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, all is known; fear God, and observe His commandments; for this is the whole purpose of man.<sup>6</sup> My mouth will utter the praise of the Lord; let all flesh bless His holy Name forever.<sup>7</sup> And we will bless the Lord from now to eternity. Praise the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

*Before washing the fingers, the following is said:*

זה This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage assigned to him by God.<sup>9</sup>

1. Psalm 137. 2. Ibid. 126. 3. For a clear understanding of this Psalm, the classical commentaries (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, RaDaK, Metzudat, etc.) must be consulted. 4. Psalm 87. 5. Ibid. 34:2. 6. Ecclesiastes 12:13. 7. Psalms 145:21. 8. Ibid. 115:18. 9. Job 20:29.