

# MEMORABLE SEPHARDI VOICES

Compiled by Lucien Gubbay



## The Montefiore Endowment

Schaller House Campus, 44A Albert Road,  
London NW4 2SJ

[www.montefioreendowment.org.uk](http://www.montefioreendowment.org.uk)



Kol Israel Haverim -  
Alliance (KIAH)



Eretz Hemdah  
Institute for Advanced Jewish  
Studies Jerusalem



Memorable Sephardi Voices.  
Published by Chroniclers for the Montefiore Endowment, Schaller  
House Campus,  
44A Albert Road, London NW4 2SJ

ISBN 978-965-436-038-8

© 2020 Lucien Gubbay

Back Cover: 'Tree of Life' embroidered pulpit cover by Estelle Levy

Memorable Sephardi Voices, published by the trustees of the Montefiore Endowment, is a project developed by the Montefiore Endowment in partnership with KIAH (Alliance - Kol Israel Haverim). Eretz Hemdah (Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem), recognising the value of the work, undertook to advise and to check the English language text to ensure the accuracy of both the translations and the interpretations of the Sages' quotations. It will also publish the original Hebrew texts on its own website.

Designed and typeset by Geoff Fisher  
geoff.fisher@yahoo.co.uk

*Printed, bound and distributed by CPI (UK) Croydon CR0 4YY*

**Copies of the paperback edition of Memorable Sephardi Voices  
may be obtained at a cost of GBP £9 each (plus postage) from  
CPI Your Way© at:**

**<https://www.cpiyourway.co.uk/uStore/44/Home>**

*(Scroll down to 'Memorable Sephardi Voices' on the left  
hand side of the opening page.)*



## FOREWORD

by Rabbi Yosef Carmel

Rabbinical Dean of Eretz Hemdah, Institute for Advanced  
Jewish Studies, Jerusalem

From Girona and Fez in the West, sweeping through Aleppo to Baghdad and beyond in the East, the authority and wisdom of the great Sephardi sages spreads. From Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, the Rambam, Ramban, Rashba and Ritva, to the Ben Ish Hai, the Messas family, and Rav Ovadiah Yosef, the lights of justice shone from the East<sup>1</sup>.



My dear friend Mr. Lucien Gubbay has collated, translated, and summarized the profound words of many of these scholars, until now largely inaccessible to the general public, and which for us illuminate some of the darker paths<sup>2</sup> along which we struggle in today's world.

The Golden Mean, or Middle Road, of Maimonides, must be our guiding light, particularly in our generation. Following the Haskalah movements, the Holocaust, and the destruction of the Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East, we must remain true and unwavering to the proper balance of the Golden Mean. Different extremist

---

<sup>1</sup> paraphrasing Isaiah 41, 2

<sup>2</sup> paraphrasing Rashi on Shmuel I 14, 50

groups have arisen throughout the course of history. However looking back, we see that they all faded away, without leaving a permanent mark on the course of the Jewish nation.

It is a great privilege for myself and for Eretz Hemdah to have joined together with KIAH and with Lucien Gubbay of the Montefiore Endowment in this important project. May we all succeed in spreading these words of Torah.

## PREFACE

by Rabbi Dr Abraham Levy OBE  
Hon. Principal of the Judith Lady Montefiore College and  
Emeritus Spiritual Head of the Spanish and Portuguese  
Jews' Congregation, London



The Hebrew word for Jewish Law is Halachah, which may be translated literally as 'walking' or 'moving'. The body of Halachah consists of the work of hundreds if not thousands of great rabbis who have written and ruled on different aspects of Jewish Law, not always agreeing with each other.

Unfortunately it has become common practice today to define Jewish Law as that expressed by one particular set of rabbis, setting aside the work of other rabbis who are equally knowledgeable but no longer so well known in the world of Halachah.

The differing and often more lenient legal interpretations of Sephardi rabbis and others need not always be accepted; but they should be respected and not, as often happens today, be suppressed and even deleted from reissues of standard halachic books.

It is my hope that this book will go a long way to show the genuine flexibility of Jewish Law, with its constant renewal in the light of changing times, for that is what has enabled it to survive and guide the Jewish people for over two thousand years.

## MEMORABLE SEPHARDI VOICES

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to render into contemporary English a selection of the views of those Sephardi sages who have throughout the ages promoted the Jewish values cherished by the Alliance - Kol Israel Haverim (KIAH) and the Montefiore Endowment (ME).

These values are based on an ethos that presents Judaism pleasantly and without aggression; an ethos that approaches halachic decision-making with mildness, stresses the middle way and avoids extremes; an ethos that commits to the concept of Torah in the world around us and not in an ivory tower and stresses the virtue of inclusivity, social harmony and respect for the 'other'. Both the ME and KIAH respect all sincerely held shades of Jewish religious opinion; but feel that to preserve balance, the often overlooked writings of some Sephardi rabbis deserve to be better known.

When we look at the views quoted below, we find that many of them chose to walk in the path of Hillel and the Rambam, embracing the moderation and openness on which their teachings and halachic rulings were based. The self-image of the Sephardi followers of Hillel, as opposed to the greater rigour professed by the Ashkenazi followers of Shammai, fostered in many of them a milder and more inclusive outlook – 'the king's highway', as a Sephardi Haham once described it. However it would not be correct to maintain that all Sephardi sages were more moderate and inclusive in outlook than their Ashkenazi brethren; for many rabbis from both traditions are to be found on each side of the divide between leniency and stringency.

Thinking Jews face many challenges today. One of the most important is the aggressive secularism of modern society that can lead first to indifference and then to total alienation. Another is the growth of extremism at both ends of the religious spectrum, which risks endangering the tacitly accepted, mutually respectful 'middle way'.

There is no central authority in Judaism. Decisions on interpretation and practice are reached on the basis of the majority view of the leading rabbis of each generation, a process that naturally tends towards caution and conservatism, especially at times of rapid social change. Many different and sometimes sharply conflicting views are expressed in such process; and some of the opinions quoted below may fall into that category and not be acceptable to the majority of rabbis. Nevertheless the voices of Sephardi sages who urge that leniency in halachic ruling is a better principle than stressing what is forbidden (*koha d'heitaira adif*) cry out to be heard again in today's perplexing world - and now more loudly than ever.

KIAH and the Montefiore Endowment have worked together to select and publish just a few of the moderate opinions expressed by Sephardi sages throughout the ages in the hope that they may be of some help to contemporary Jews seeking to re-connect to their religious identity. No attempt has been made to provide accurate translations of the quoted texts themselves, but rather to express the salient thoughts contained within them in clear modern English. For those who wish to delve deeper, the full texts in their original languages are readily available on KIAH's Daily Sage website [www.hyomi.org.il](http://www.hyomi.org.il) and on Eretz Hemdah's website <http://www.eretzhemdah.org>.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The initial idea for this publication emerged as a result of discussion between Eli Bareket (KIAH) and Lucien Gubbay

(ME) during which it was agreed that there should be an attempt to make a selection of the moderate views of some Sephardi Sages better known to the general public. It was soon realised that for those without a yeshivah background, the language and modes of expression employed by several of the sages in their writings, even when translated into English, might be a barrier to easy understanding. So it was decided in such cases not to translate the texts in full but rather to provide summaries that express their meanings in clear contemporary English, adding explanations where necessary.

Haya Neeman (KIAH) provided most of the Hebrew texts and biographies from KIAH's Daily Sage Project, an online database of over 850 Sephardic Sages, and helped in the editorial process. Sally Style (ME Librarian) translated the texts and biographies into English, abridged some of them, supplied additional material from her own researches and helped a great deal with the detailed editing. Rabbi Asaf Mittelman (ME) advised on and translated some of the more difficult texts, as did Rabbi Joseph Dweck (Senior Rabbi S&P London). Dayan Ofer Livnat (EH) and Rabbi Danny Kada (ME) located particular texts of contemporary interest.

Lucien Gubbay (ME), the book's principal editor, designed its structure, selected the texts and added more of his own. He composed the précis, summaries and explanations.

Rabbi Abraham Levy (ME) interested Rav Yosef Carmel, Rabbinical Dean of Eretz Hemdah Institute of Advanced Jewish studies, Jerusalem (EH), in the wider significance of the project. Eretz Hemdah then arranged to have the draft checked for accuracy of translation and interpretation; and also for the original Hebrew texts to be published on its own website. Dayan Ofer Livnat (EH) is thanked particularly for his sympathetic advice during the editorial process.

Grateful thanks are also expressed to the many others who encouraged, supported and worked on the project, including Eli Baraket and Orit Shulman (KIAH), and Rabbi Daniel Rosenfeld (EH) who meticulously checked the texts and accompanying notes for accuracy.

## TOPICS

### 1. Torah

1.1 Study and interpretation 1

1.2 Torah scholars and others 7

### 2. Halachah (*Jewish Law*)

2.1 Interpretation 12

2.2 Secular studies in the synagogue building 20

2.3 The use of electricity 21

2.4 Some current problems 25

2.4.1 Conversion to Judaism 25

2.4.2 Nullifying a conversion 28

2.4.3 Women's right to divorce. The Agunah 29

2.4.4 Reciting Kaddish in English  
by mourners at the cemetery 33

### 3. The Role of Women

3.1 The study and teaching of Torah 35

3.2 Women in the public sphere 39

3.3 Dress codes 41

<b>3.4</b>	Kol Isha. Voice of a woman singing	46
<b>3.5</b>	Reciting Kaddish	49
<b>3.6</b>	Bat Mitzvah ceremony	50
<b>4.</b>	<b><u>Charity and the Community</u></b>	
<b>4.1</b>	Understanding the needy	52
<b>4.2</b>	Humility	55
<b>4.3</b>	Levels of charitable giving	56
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>Acceptance of the World</u></b>	
<b>5.1</b>	Secular education and science	58
<b>5.2</b>	Value of working for a living	64
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Some Jewish Attitudes</u></b>	
<b>6.1</b>	Attitude to ‘the other’ (non-Jews)	65
<b>6.2</b>	Racial Prejudice	74
<b>6.3</b>	Attitude to non-practising Jews	75
<b>6.4</b>	Attitude to animals	83
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Israel</u></b>	
<b>7.1</b>	Love of the Jewish people	85
<b>7.2</b>	Israel and the Nations	86
<b>8.</b>	<b><u>The Sages</u></b>	
	More details of their lives and works	91

**9. The Team**

Those responsible for this publication

9.1 The Montefiore Endowment	129
9.2 KIAH	130
9.3 Eretz Hemdah	131
9.4 Complier and Principal Editor	132

## **GLOSSARY**

commonly used Hebrew words and phrases

<b>Ab Bet Din</b> President of a rabbinical court.	<b>Ervah</b> Naked. Indecent.
<b>Agunah</b> A 'chained' woman, denied a divorce by her husband.	<b>Frum</b> Religiously very observant
<b>Aliyah</b> Emigration to the Land of Israel.	<b>Get</b> Bill of divorce.
<b>Bat Mitzvah</b> A girl's coming of age at twelve years old.	<b>Gemara</b> The second component of the Talmud, containing the opinions and teachings of early generations of rabbis.
<b>Bet Midrash</b> House of learning.	<b>Ger</b> Usually a convert to Judaism. Can also be understood by some in a wider sense.
<b>Bohu</b> Primordial matter from which everything was formed.	<b>Gevurah</b> Strong. Stringent legal ruling.
<b>Darshan</b> Professional expounder of scripture.	<b>Gemillut Hasadim</b> Charity and kindness by personal service and money.
<b>Davka</b> As used in the Talmud; precisely or only. In modern use; deliberately intended to annoy.	<b>Haham</b> Sephardi title for a respected senior or chief rabbi.
<b>Dayan</b> Judge of rabbinical court.	<b>Haham Bashi</b> Chief Rabbi of a community or town in the Ottoman Empire, appointed by the Sultan as a state official.
<b>Derech Eretz</b> Literally, the way of the land. Decent behaviour to all one's fellow human beings.	<b>Halachah</b> Jewish Law

**Haredi**

Ultra-orthodox.

**Haskalah**

Intellectual movement in 18th and 19th centuries to acquaint East European Jews with secular languages and culture.

**Hessed**

Compassion. Leniency in legal ruling.

**Hillul Hashem**

Desecration of God's name.

**Kabbalah**

The Jewish mystical tradition.

**Kaddish**

Public prayer glorifying God. In this context, as recited by mourners.

**Kasher**

Religiously permitted food.

**Koha d'heitera adif**

Leniency in legal rulings is better than stressing what is forbidden.

**Kol Isha**

Voice of a woman singing.

**Mahzor**

Prayer book.

**Maran**

The title sometimes used for an exceptionally respected Sephardi rabbi.

**Megillat Esther**

Scroll containing the biblical Book of Esther.

**Midrash**

Literally 'study'. Interpretation of Biblical texts by the rabbis, starting in the second century.

**Minhag**

Custom.

**Mishnah**

The first component of the Talmud. The written summary of Judaism's Oral Law.

**Mitzvah**

A divine commandment.

**Mizrahi Jews**

Non-Sephardi Jews of Middle Eastern origin.

**Mohel**

Circumcisor.

**Parashah**

The weekly portion of the Torah, read aloud in the synagogues on Sabbaths.

**Piyut**

Liturgical poem.

**Pikuah Nefesh**

The principle in Jewish law that places the preservation of human life above almost all other religious requirements.

**Posek**

A leading Halachic scholar who gives a ruling in case of doubt.

**Responsa**

Legal rulings given in response to requests for clarification.

<b>Rishon LeZion</b> Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel.	<b>Talmud</b> The primary source of a Jewish law and practice, second only in authority to the Bible.
<b>Rosh Bet Din</b> Leader of a rabbinical court	<b>Talmid Haham</b> A religiously learned man.
<b>Rosh Kollel</b> Head of studies.	<b>Talmud Torah</b> Religious school for children.
<b>Sefer Torah</b> Scroll containing the Five Books of Moses, written by hand on parchment	<b>Taref</b> Religiously forbidden food.
<b>Semichah</b> Rabbinic ordination	<b>Tefillin</b> Small leather boxes containing texts from the Torah. Worn by men at morning prayers on weekdays.
<b>Shaddai</b> One of the many names of God.	<b>Teshubah</b> Here, the answer to a legal question posed to a halachic authority. In general, repentance or turning back to God.
<b>Shaliah</b> Emissary to foreign lands, usually to raise funds.	<b>Tikkun Olam</b> Restoration or healing of the world.
<b>Shas</b> Israeli religious political party.	<b>Tikkunim</b> Penitential prayers
<b>Shohet</b> Ritual slaughterer of animals for food.	<b>Tohu</b> Primordial energy created from nothing.
<b>Shofar</b> Ram's horn trumpet.	<b>Torah</b> The Five Books of Moses. In a wider sense, also meaning the entire body of religious learning.
<b>Shulhan Aruch</b> The authoritative sixteenth century code of Jewish Law.	<b>Tzitzit</b> Small ritual garment with fringes, worn constantly by men.
<b>Siddur</b> Prayer book.	
<b>Takanah</b> A regulation issued by a leading rabbinical authority, considered as an extension to Torah law.	

**Yeshivah**

College of Torah learning

**Yishuv**

The Jewish community of pre-Israel  
Palestine

**Zaddik**

Exceptionally righteous man.

**Zohar**

Book of Splendour. The classic work  
of Jewish mysticism.



## THE TEXTS

### 1. TORAH

#### 1.1 Interpretation

##### 1.1.1

**The Torah is like a mirror, everyone seeing in it his own image. There are 600,000 interpretations of the Torah and every person understands it differently.**

Every learned and discerning person can find many meanings in the Torah which is like a luminous mirror in which every person sees their own image, their own personal understanding of the Torah, in it. There are 600,000 interpretations of the Torah. Everyone understands it differently; and the Torah reflects all forms of human existence within it.

*Haham Abraham Azulai, Ahava BaTaanugim, Tractate Avot, chapter 5, published by Orot HaHaim, Jerusalem, 1987.*

**\*Haham Abraham Azulai.** 1570-1643.

Haham Abraham Azulai was born in Fez, Morocco and died in Hebron. He studied in Fez before migrating to Israel in 1600 where he continued his studies. He commentated on the works of the RAMAK (Moshe Cordovero) and was the author of many studies of Jewish texts, including *Or Hahama* on the Zohar, *Or HaGanuz* on the Torah according to the ARI (Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi). Haham Abraham was the great-grandfather of the HIDA, Haim Yosef David Azulai.

##### 1.1.2

**A Sefer Torah is not 'pointed' (Editor: written with consonants only and no vowels) so that man can understand multiple meanings.**

**This is because un-pointed letters can yield multiple meanings and create different sparks. So we were ordered not to 'point' the Sefer Torah. The meaning of each word depends on and is specific to the pointing – but without pointing, we can understand a number of wonderful and important interpretations.**

*Haham Haim Yosef David Azulai, LeDavid Emet, Torat HaShelamim, Torah Scroll Halachah, section 13, p. 48, Moshe Aharon Koegel, Livorno, 1786.*

**Editor's Note.** The Hebrew text of a Sefer Torah, as originally written, contains consonants only and no vowels. Signs to denote vowels ('points') were added many centuries ago to make the text easier to read; but a Sefer Torah which is used in the synagogue remains as original and is written without vowel points. Thus a word consisting of a single group of consonants can, with different sets of vowel points attached, have alternative meanings.

**\*Maran Haham Haim Yosef David Azulai, the HIDA. 1727-1806.**

Haham Haim was born in Hebron and died in Livorno, Italy. He was the grandson of famous Kabbalists, Abraham Azulai and Yehuda HeHassid (Rabbinical emissary to North Africa and Western Europe). He studied in Jerusalem as a child and later in libraries and archives in Europe and wrote copiously on a range of subjects, including Talmud, Shulhan Aruch and history, as well as on his journeys and his sermons.

### **1.1.3**

**The Torah is like a rose; and new, elevated secrets are found in every generation. So it is open to interpretation. What excellent flowers the humble rose produces in all its different variations. So the Torah renews itself with many elevated secrets in every generation. Every sage of Israel provides the basis on which one can grow, develop and renew what was received from the Torah. Everything moves towards one place like 'a hammer smashing a rock'.**

**Why does such a variety of different flowers derive from the simple rose? From this question we learn that Torah can be found only in a humble person. Moses, the Master of the Prophets, was praised only for his humility.**

*Haham Yaish Krispin, Perah Shoshana on Bereishit, author's introduction, p. 14, published by Machon Moshe, 1993.*

**Editor's note.** The thrust of the Haham's message is to encourage humility.

**\*Haham Yaish Krispin.**

Haham Krispin was born in Ait Ayoub, Morocco and died in Morocco in 1939. He was Rabbi for the local region, and taught others to do similar work in the surrounding villages. He wrote many books including, *Perah Shoshana* on the Torah, *Orah VeSimha* on Megillat Esther, *Shir HaYehud* on the Song of Songs.

**1.1.4**

**Divine knowledge was lost at the Creation and is revealed to us gradually.**

**Every generation has its own problems and desires, at times when it may seem to man that the Torah is no longer the source of guidance.**

**Editor's Note.** But the Torah remains completely relevant in every generation as the world around us changes.

**We received it at the start of Creation and follow its path with its changing landscape, preparing us for every step we take in moving onwards. Our attention and awareness is renewed with each step forward – though one must have a desire to seek this guidance and act with alertness.**

*Haham Levi Saadia Nahmani, Brit Halevi, Ecclesiastes 12, pp. 203-204, The Mahshevet Levi Institute, Jerusalem, 2000.*

**\*Haham Levi Saadiah Nahmani.** 1921-1995.

Haham Nahmani was born in Marrakesh, Morocco and died in Jerusalem. He taught in yeshivot and batei midrash in Marrakesh, Casablanca, and Jerusalem as well as in universities and after-school classes. He was a founder of the Bet Shmuel Synagogue in Jerusalem. His books include commentaries on the Zohar, contemporary issues, and the Redemption.

### **1.1.5**

**In these utterances it was not the purpose of the Prophets and our Sages to close the gate of investigation entirely and to prevent the mind from comprehending what is within its reach.**

**This is imagined by simple, idle people who represent their ignorance and incapacity as wisdom and perfection; and who regard the distinction and wisdom of others as irreligion and imperfection, thus taking darkness for light and light for darkness.**

**The whole object of the Prophets and the Sages was to declare that a limit is set to the scope of human reason where it must halt.**

*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) Guide for the Perplexed 1:32:5, 1190.*

**Editor's Note.** Although the Rambam here quoted the prophets and sages who argued that the human brain has its limitations, he said there is room for people to question and investigate rather than blindly to accept.

**\*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), the 'Rambam'.** 1135–1204.

Born in Cordoba, Spain, the Rambam died in Egypt and was buried in Tiberias, Israel. He was the foremost intellectual figure of medieval Judaism. Scholar, rabbi, astronomer, physician and philosopher, the Rambam possessed a brilliant mind and is regarded as one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. At first violently rejected by some rabbis, his teachings are now considered a pillar of traditional Judaism.

He produced many Jewish and non-Jewish writings including, *Guide of the Perplexed*, the *Mishneh Torah* and *Commentary on the Mishnah*.

### **1.1.6 The Six Days of Creation.**

**Editor's Note.** This example has been included here to illustrate the wide range of possible interpretations of the sacred text by some highly respected sages.

**In the name of the great God, and the fearful, I will begin to write novel interpretations on the explanation of the Torah, with terror, with fear, with trembling, with sweat, with with dread, praying and confessing with a humble heart and a broken spirit . . . Let such see novel interpretations of the plain meanings of scripture and midrashim in our commentaries . . . .**

**The process of creation is a deep mystery not to be understood from the verses. It cannot truly be known except through the tradition going back to Moses our teacher who received it from the mouth of the Almighty; and those who know it are obliged to conceal it. The Holy One, blessed be He, created all things from absolute non-existence.**

**Now listen to the correct and clear explanation of the verse in its simplicity. We have no expression in the sacred language for bringing forth something from nothing, other than the word 'bara' (Editor: 'created').**

**Now with this creation, which was like a very small point having no substance, everything in the heavens and on earth was created. Time came into being when the heavens and the earth came forth from naught into existence . . . from the moment some substance came into being, time was already a part of it. Everything that exists under the sun or above was not made from non-existence**

at the outset. Instead He brought forth from total and absolute nothing a very thin substance devoid of corporeality but having a power of potency, fit to assume form and to proceed from potentiality into reality.

This was the primary matter created by God . . . After this, He did not create anything more but He formed and made things with it; and from this primary matter He brought everything into existence and clothed the forms and put them into a finished condition. Know that the heavens and all that is in them consists of one substance, and the earth and everything that is in it consists of one substance. The Holy One, blessed be He, created these two substances from nothing; they alone were created, and everything else was constructed from them.

This substance is called 'tohu'. If a person wants to choose another name for it (*Editor: this primordial matter*) he could consider calling it by another name since it has taken on no form to which a name should be attached. The form which this substance finally takes on is called 'bohu' in the sacred language, which is a composite word made up of the two words 'bo' 'hu' (*Editor: in it there is substance*).

**Editor's Note.** This seeming concurrence of modern scientific discovery with ancient mystical revelation is truly remarkable. Though expressed in the language of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Ramban's vision of Creation is not inconsistent with current theories of modern science.

**\*Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides), the 'Ramban'.** 1194 – 1270.

The Ramban was born in Gerona, Spain, and died in Acre, Israel. One of the outstanding Talmudic scholars of his age, as well as a renowned rabbi, halachist, kabbalist, philosopher and physician. He was on friendly terms with the King and the Christian nobility of Aragon, Spain.

The Ramban emerged triumphantly from his famous public disputation with a Christian scholar after which he was rewarded by the King.

Eventually though, Christian pressure compelled him to flee to Israel where he wrote his great commentary on the plain and mystical meanings of the Biblical text. His many works include: *Commentary on the Talmud*; *Commentary on Sefer HaMitzvot* by Maimonides (with whom he disagreed) and *Discourse on the Inner Torah* (a Kabbalistic work).

## **1.2 Torah Scholars and Others**

**Editor's Note.** Derech Eretz (the way of the land) means the decent behaviour to all one's fellow human beings that is necessary to enable a person to live harmoniously in civilised society.

### **1.2.1.**

**One cannot receive the Torah of Moses without receiving the character traits of our father Abraham.**

**A person involved with the Torah but who does not have the face of our father Abraham – the face of lovingkindness, the face of charity with the Torah of kindness on his lips – cannot receive the Torah.**

**Torah without derech eretz is dangerous. If the Torah of Moses had not been closely connected to the attributes of Abraham, the angels who are the absolute truth of holiness would have refused to give Moses the Torah.**

**This is very important because unfortunately many students of Moses who study the Torah as Torah and as Halachah, forget that Moses was the son of Abraham. They forget the connection between the attributes of our father Abraham and the Law of Moses.**

*Misped LaMashiah, Third Section – The Period of the Omer, p. 197, Manitou Institute Publishing, Dudu Press, Kiryat Arba, 2009.*

**Editor's Note.** The gist of the Haham's message is that there is no merit in scholarship if you lack compassion for others.

**\*Haham Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, 'Manitou'. 1922-1996.**

Manitou was born in Oran, Algeria, and died in Jerusalem. A rabbi with secular education, he fought the German invaders in 1943 then moved to France in 1945 where he taught Torah, philosophy and Jewish identity. As leader of the French School for Jewish Thought, he continued teaching in Jerusalem and also in France from 1968 onwards and became the spiritual guide for many of Israel's French speakers. He wrote on Jewish identity in *Midrash* and *Jewish Thought*, and on Judaism and other religions.

### **1.2.2**

**A Torah scholar lacking virtues, such as ethical behaviour, leaves the world with nothing.**

**A person who holds the Torah but lacks derech erez actually has no Torah at all. A person with derech erez but without Torah is better than him.**

**A gourd (Editor: used as a makeshift bucket) will fail to draw water from a well however many times you try, because it is light and floats on the surface. However, weigh it down with a stone and it will immediately descend into the depths of the well and bring up water.**

**Compare the Torah to the water and the gourd used for drawing up the water to the man. So long as he lacks good traits and derech erez, man is lightweight and floats on the surface of the water; and in emptiness he will leave the world like the gourd coming empty out of the well. However, through good traits and *derech erez*, the gourd becomes heavier – a metaphor for the Torah.**

*Haham Sasson Shanduk, Kol Sasson, chapter 14 – Derech Eretz, p. 115, no publishing information, Jerusalem, 1984.*

**\*Haham Sasson Shanduk 'Ajami', the RASHAM. 1747-1830.**

Born and died in Baghdad, he witnessed many redemptive miracles that protected Baghdad's Jews from persecution and earned him the nickname, 'Ajami' (Persian) from his non-Jewish admirers. The Haham was a man of many talents, being a gifted cantor and composer of

piyutim and a scribe. He was a prolific writer on ethics, Kabbalah, the Psalms and synagogue prayers.

### 1.2.3

**Torah without derech erez leads to the desecration of God's name in public and even within a person's home. Sadly there are students of the Torah who do not act with derech erez. Without derech erez, God's name may be desecrated.**

**This can sometimes occur in small matters. For example, how can a man walk over a floor which workers are in the process of cleaning, and what can result? If this happens in the man's own home and it becomes a habit (God forbid), it will cause the profaning of God's name within that man's house.**

**Apart from this, in my opinion such a person is suspect even in financial matters. The crux of the matter is, as the Fathers say 'The Torah is beautiful with derech erez, and we need to heed this'.**

*Haham ben Zion Abba Shaul, Or LeZion – Wisdom and Tradition, the Gateway Between Man and his fellow Man, article 2 – Respect for Others, Derech Eretz Comes Before Torah, 170, Jerusalem, Or LeZion Institute, Jerusalem, 1995.*

**Editor's Note.** Here the Haham is criticising scholars who behave as in this example because other people will see their behaviour and, knowing that they represent themselves as being learned and loved by God, the result is desecration. They may know in theory what it is to be a good Jew but they do not live it in practice. In their position, to present a bad example to others is hypocritical and profane. They are not in accord with God. Regardless of Hillul Hashem, this behaviour shows lack of respect and consideration for others.

**\*Haham Abba Shaul. 1924-1998.**

Haham Shaul was born and died in Jerusalem. He taught Halachah to all ages and abilities in various institutions. His study companion at

Yeshivat Porat Yosef was Ovadiah Yosef. His works include *Or leZion*: Responsa and rulings on Talmud; fresh thoughts on the tractates *Yevamot*, *Ketubot* and *Shevi'it*; and *Zichron Hadassah* on ethics.

#### 1.2.4.

**Perfection is not found only in Torah scholars but also among ordinary people.**

**There are people who see perfection only in Torah scholars and not among people of action** (*Editor: people who excel in the performance of mitzvot, but not in the study of Torah*).

**They are mistaken. Our sages said, 'Action, and not the Midrash, is crucial,' and 'The Holy One, blessed be he, is prepared to protect and shelter people who perform mitzvot together with Torah students in the Garden of Eden'.**

**So, good people who do not follow the Torah are equal to those who do. 'Happy is the man who grows in Torah and who engages in the ways of the Torah, and who satisfies his creator by living and dying with a good name'.**

**Rabbi Yohanan, who taught the above teaching, revealed to us that it is not davka the one who is great in Torah knowledge, but a person who worked and followed in the ways of the Torah through his good actions and honest behaviour** (*Editor: in hard work and in business*) **who gives satisfaction to his creator.**

*Drash Moshe - Drashot VeHartzaot, Page 311, Orot Yahadut HaMaghreb Publishing, Lod, 1994.*

**\*Haham Moshe Malka. 1911-1997.**

The Haham was born in Atlas, Morocco and died in Petah Tikvah, Israel. In Morocco he served on Casablanca's Bet Din and was confirmed by the Spanish government as Rabbi and Dayan of the cities of Morocco. In Israel from 1967, he was a member of the Chief Rabbinical Council.

Rav Moshe's halachic writings contain the phrase 'koha d'heitaira adif' (the power of leniency is stronger), which summarises his view that leniency in halachic ruling is a better principle than stressing what

is forbidden. The Haham's many writings include *Mikve HaMayim* - Responsa; *Beer Moshe* and *Darash Moshe* - sermons and Torah commentary.

## 2. HALACHAH

### 2.1 Interpretation

#### 2.1.1

**Flexible and progressive halachic rulings will ensure the continuation of Judaism in perpetuity.**

**Anyone who thinks that Halachah is set in stone is very much mistaken. On the contrary, nothing can compare to the flexibility of the Halachah, which can simultaneously give two different rulings to two people; and as teachers know full well, can make one teref and the other kosher.**

**It is only because of the Halachah's flexibility that the people of Israel, by virtue of the many beneficial innovations introduced by the sages of Israel over the generations, have been able to walk in the ways of the Torah and Mitzvah for thousands of years.**

**If the sages of our generation have the courage to make innovations in Halachah, honouring the truth of the Torah whilst staying completely loyal to the body of the written and traditional Halachah, the Halachah will continue to be the way of the people of Israel until the end of all generations.**

*Aseh Lecha Rav, Part 7, question 57, p. 238, The Committee for the Publication of the Writings of HaGaon Rav Haim David Halevi.*

**Editor's Note.** For Haham Halevi, the continuity of Judaism is possible only because Israel's sages in each generation can renew Halachah as appropriate to the changing times. Lenient rulings in response to new situations are not to be regarded as

unfortunate accommodations but rather as a testament to the strength and durability of Judaism.

**\*Haham Haim David Halevi.** 1924-1998.

Haham Haim David Halevi was born in Jerusalem to parents who had immigrated to Israel from Turkey. After fighting in Israel's 1948 War of Independence, he became Secretary to Rishon LeZion Uziel and Head of the Rabbinical Courts of Tel Aviv–Jaffa. The Haham was awarded the Israel Prize for Torah Literature in 1997 for his writings, which include: *Makor HeHaim HaShalem* - on Halachah; *Torat Haim* - on the weekly parasha; and *Ben Israel LeAmim*.

### 2.1.2

**Even though this is not in accord with the clear Halachah . . . nevertheless, this is the case with all takanot** (*Editor: rabbinic ordinances*), **for they diverge from the Halachah in accordance with the conditions of the time, as long as there is a slight support in the earlier or later poskim** (*Editor: leading halachic scholars who determine the law*).

*Tevuot Shemesh, Even HaEzer, no. 47.*

**Editor's Note.** In discussing a change to inheritance laws for women at a rabbinical conference in Morocco, Chief Rabbi Messas wrote: 'This of course is the essence of all takanot - that the law as it stands is not adequate at the present time'.

At the same time as the Moroccan conferences were taking place, Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog in Israel was trying to ensure that matters of inheritance were placed under the authority of the Chief Rabbinate. He realised that the non-Orthodox, and even many of the Orthodox, would oppose this step if daughters were not permitted to inherit. There was no way that this could become the law of the land. The Chief Rabbinate floated the idea of takanot to allow women to inherit, yet this was condemned by the Haredi community and nothing came of it.

There was hardly any such opposition in Morocco. After the vote was taken, all rabbis throughout the country accepted the takanah about inheritance as well as the other takanot, even if they personally were at first opposed.

**\*Rabbi Shalom Messas.** 1909-2003.

The rabbi was born in Meknes, Morocco, where he became recognised as a Torah prodigy at an early age: he also attended a school run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

He first became Chief Rabbi of Casablanca at the age of 36 and later Chief Rabbi of all Morocco. When he departed for Israel in 1978, responding to an invitation by the Rishon le Zion, he was escorted to the airport by King Hassan II who asked the Rabbi to bless him as his last official act in Morocco.

Rabbi Messas, as Jerusalem's principal Sephardi halachic authority, worked hard to preserve Sephardic traditions and to use them in solving current problems. His many works include *Mizrah Shemesh*; *Tevouot Shemesh*; *Shemesh Umagen*; *Beit Shemesh*; and *Veham Hashemesh*.

### 2.1.3

**Halachic decisions should be made on the basis of rigorous intellectual inquiry and not merely by relying on the decisions of the great sages of the past.**

To achieve the lofty purpose of solid and strong national unity in the field of Torah and leadership of the people, (*Editor: In times past*) the Torah gave absolute authority to the Supreme Bet Din in Israel which issued teaching and Halachah for all Israel. Severest punishment was threatened for those who disregard its words and for teachers of Halachah who acted against its teaching<sup>1</sup>.

The posek (*Editor: leading halachic scholar who determines the law*) in Israel is not bound by the precedents of those poskim who preceded him, since there is a risk that the earlier poskim made unintentional mistakes. Therefore (*Editor: in ancient Jerusalem*) the power of the authority of the Supreme Bet Din was limited only to its time on the Chair of Judgement.

The decisions of the Supreme Bet Din are not fixed in law and do not require the judges to discuss and make the same rulings (*Editor: literally, to instruct like them*).

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhedrin 88, Rambam Laws of Mamrim 3*

*Michmanei Uziel, Part 1, p. 376, The Committee for Publishing the Rabbi's Works, Jerusalem, 1955.*

**\*Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.** 1880-1953.

Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel was born in Jerusalem to a distinguished rabbinical family. He served Salonika's large Jewish community from 1921 to 1923 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa on his return to Israel. Elected Rishon LeZion in 1939, he participated in the establishment of the Jewish Agency and acted as the Yishuv's representative to the British authorities as well as a delegate to the Zionist Congress. Haham Uziel was a public figure who served as spokesman in spiritual matters for the Jewish nation. His many written works include *Mishpatei Uziel*; *Michmanei Uziel* – articles and meditations.

#### **2.1.4**

**The Sephardim are imbued with the quality of hessed (kindness, compassion).**

**Editor's Note.** In the first paragraph of this text the HIDA uses kabbalistic language and imagery to compare the traditional leniency of Sephardi interpretations of the halachah to the opposing stringency of traditional Ashkenazi interpretations. He writes that that Sephardim are influenced by the quality of hessed (kindness, compassion) in contrast to Ashkenazim who are more influenced by the quality of gevurah (strength) in their legal rulings; and that these attitudes influence the practical behavior of both communities, with divisions amongst the Ashkenazim arising due to differering degrees of strictness.

The HIDA continues as follows.

'. . . and they (Ashkenazim) are stringent in law, like the quality of strength; and the Sephardim are lenient, since they adhere to the quality of kindness. And there is tension between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim since they are opposites.

The Italians value the quality of beauty and, since beauty

leans towards kindness, they are more balanced in law and behavior and lean towards the Sephardim . . . .

This is the essence of his words (*Editor: Here the HIDA is referring to Rabbi Yosef Shmuel Kaziz*); and blessed is he who knows this.'

*The Diary of the HIDA, entry for the 12<sup>th</sup> of Av 5536, quoting approvingly from Rabbi Yosef Shmuel Kaziz, referenced in the book 'Rabbi Haim Yosef Dovid Azulai' written by Meir Benayahu, p.165, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1959.*

**Editor's Note.** The HIDA's view, quoted approvingly by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and others (see 2.1.5 below), must be regarded more as a broad generalisation than as a hard-and-fast division. Rabbis who regard halachic stringency as a way of demonstrating their love of God and those who regard halachic leniency in the same way are to be found on both sides of the divide.

As pointed out by Rabbi Marc Angel more recently, the self-perception of both traditions is also important. The generally accepted Sephardi emphasis on hessed (kindness) tends to lead many of its rabbis to conduct themselves in accordance with that image, while the Ashkenazi emphasis on gevurah (strength) tends to lead many of its rabbis in the opposite direction. He also compares these contrasting attitudes to those of the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai in the early first century CE and writes that Sephardim consider themselves to be followers of school of Hillel, while Ashkenazim follow the school of Shammai.

**\*Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai** (The HIDA). 1727-1806.  
(see 1.1.2 above)

### **2.1.5**

#### **The strength of the lenient position is greater.**

In several parts of the Talmud we find the the saying 'the strength of the lenient position (*Editor: in interpreting Jewish Law*) is greater' . . . Rashi explains that the strength of a lenient opinion relies both on the posek's understanding

of the topic and his self-confidence; also that there can be no proof of the strength of a stringent opinion since anyone can be stringent even if he is in doubt . . .

In my opinion, much of the tendency that prefers lenient rulings derives from a process of thorough investigation into the works of early and later poskim, including the most recent. By doing so, the rabbi uncovers significant support for the lenient side; and when he sees that many others accept that reasoning, he can then take upon himself the responsibility of ruling towards the side of compassion.

This is not the case when the rabbi is satisfied with more limited research based on what he saw in the Shulchan Aruch and its commentaries. Such a rabbi will say ‘with so many poskim forbidding it, how can I go against them and permit it?’ But he does not realise that he has not yet sufficiently investigated the matter.

How true are the words of the Gaon Rav Yosef Haim from Iraq (the Ben Ish Hai), who writes ‘There are some later authors of responsa who are not accustomed to investigate and search the issues presented to them in later rabbinical writings but rather turn to the Talmud and the rishonim exclusively when preparing their rulings. Most Ashkenazi geonim behave in this way; and with many apologies (*Editor: to them*) due to their knowledge of Torah, their way is not a good one.

The Torah can only be acquired by group (*Editor: study and discussion*), and it is for that reason the rabbis are referred to as ‘men of assemblies’<sup>1</sup>. A tannah also explained ‘I learned much Torah from my teacher, even more from my friends and the most from my students’<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, even if the responding rabbi is a great sage

---

<sup>1</sup> Hagigah 3b

<sup>2</sup> Taanit 7A

and an expert posek, why should he not seek to find out how other recent scholars have responded as a result of their own reasoning and from what they have gathered from the works of early and recent poskim? Perhaps by doing so he may gain new insight that had for a moment been hidden from his expert eyes' . . . .

Also the Gaon Rav Haim Palagi writes in his book *Kol Hahaim* 'I protest that these days some don't exert themselves to consult the books of the later rabbis since they imagine it to be beneath their dignity to quote from recent works. What they are doing is not good; and my own approach is to quote even from the works of my sons and students. It is a wise man who learns from all men'. The approach of most if not all Sephardi hahamim is to study the works of the later rabbis diligently, for by so doing they attain a broad understanding of the topic and are better able to make a halachic ruling on the matter with the strength of leniency' . . .

And it is also worth noting the following words to be found in the literary diary of the HIDA (Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai), written in the name of the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Kaziz: 'The Sephardim embrace the quality of kindness and are therefore lenient in their halachic rulings; and the Ashkenazim embrace the quality of strength and are therefore strict in their interpretation of the law'. . . The HIDA concludes his words by stating 'Blessed is he who knows this'.

*Shevet V'Am Journal, vol.6, pages 96-98, Jerusalem, 1970.*

**Editor's Note.** Haham Ovadia Yosef's discussion was delivered in memory of Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyasher, another Sephardi sage much inclined towards compassion in halachic rulings.

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920-2013.  
(see 2.4.1.3 below)

### 2.1.6

**We should change customs that disgrace us in the eyes of our neighbours, such as poor behaviour when reading Megillat Esther.**

**Regarding poor behaviour when reading Megillat Esther, there are places where it is customary to hit the benches of the synagogue at the mention of Haman's name during the reading of the Megillah at Purim. The same applies when Amalek is mentioned in parashat Zachor . . . . Many distinguished and respected people did not approve of this dreadful custom which causes people to behave in an unseemly manner in synagogue, disturbing others from hearing the reading of the Megillah . . . .**

**Equally bad is that sometimes our neighbours, non-Jews and Gentiles, come to the synagogue, and we disgrace ourselves in front of them when they see these appalling antics. This is a desecration of God's name.**

**Already in Izmir, may God protect her, this custom has been completely banned in the synagogue by an edict issued by the rabbis and the seven dignitaries of the city.**

*Neve Shalom p. 28, Yaacob ben Attar printers.*

*Na Emun, 1930.*

#### **\*Haham Eliahu Bechor Hazan. 1848-1908.**

Born in Izmir, he moved to Israel as a youth where he studied with his grandfather, Haham Haim David. He became Ab Bet Din in Jerusalem in 1869 and served as a shaliah in Europe and North Africa, where he met Moses Montefiore and Edmond de Rothschild. In 1874 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tripoli, and in 1888 Chief Rabbi of Alexandria. Among his writings are, *Zichron Yerushalayim* on the fundamentals of Jewish belief; and *Taalumot Lev*.

## **2.2 Secular Studies in the synagogue building**

### **2.2.1**

#### **Secular Studies can be taught in the synagogue building.**

**Editor's Note:** The legal problem that faced Rabbi Yosef Haim and Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef in their rulings was 'Are secular studies permitted in the synagogue, a holy place?' Halachic sources define three types of activity forbidden in the synagogue: (1) Acts of frivolity; (2) Secular concerns such as meetings for the purpose of imposing taxation on the congregation and; (3) Eulogy of individuals.

Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef ruled that as secular studies can be defined as 'relating to a mitzvah', it is permissible to do them in the synagogue. The issue between the two rabbis was therefore whether secular studies can be regarded as a mitzvah?

Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef stated that as they are preparation for the study of a profession, they can be seen as relating to a mitzvah; and because of this it is permissible to do them in the synagogue. He argued that even if they do not constitute a big mitzvah (such as that involved in the redemption of imprisoned people which concerns saving lives), their purpose is to provide a man with the possibility of earning a living which, though smaller, is still a mitzvah.

*Based on Yabia Omer. Responsa of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef.  
Secular studies in the Synagogue.*

**Editor's Note.** Prompted by fear of Haskalah and secularism, Rabbi Yosef Haim disagreed. He preferred to accept Rabbi Hai Gaon's opinion which allowed secular teaching in the synagogue building only in rooms and places that were not used for prayer or reading the Torah and not sanctified with the holiness of the synagogue.

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920-2013.  
(see 2.4.1.3)

## **2.3 The discovery of electricity**

**Editor's Note.** The discovery and popular use of electricity for domestic purposes caused much controversy, in particular regarding its use on Yom Tob. Though the use of fire is permitted for cooking, heating, lighting, etc. on Yom Tob, one is not allowed to create fire but may use a pre-existing flame. Thus the striking of a match and later the use of electricity for incandescent light bulbs or heating elements, etc. became problematic as it was claimed by some poskim that flame pre-exists in electricity itself. Rishon leZion BenZion Meir Hai Uziel and other authorities, particularly those from North African communities, ruled that the use of electricity is permissible; but those lenient rulings were not accepted by most other authorities, whose views have generally prevailed.

The Rabbis did however struggle to find new interpretations to circumvent, but not disregard rulings that prevented people from benefitting from the new technology. This process continues today with the marketing of new electronic gadgets.

One very minor example of this process of justification is the Biblical prohibition against men shaving parts of their beards and hair, now taken to mean only with a blade directly against the skin (such as with a razor). Another is the use of key cards to open hotel doors on Shabbat. Yet another is the use of Zoom in certain closely-defined circumstances.

### **2.3.1**

#### **Shaving the beard**

*(Editor: As summarised by Rabbi Joseph Dweck, [Senior Rabbi of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London]),*  
'There are many factors that Haham Ovadiah Yosef addresses in a long teshuba, including the prohibition for a man to shave - not only because one may not shave the beard off with a blade completely but because removing the beard was at one time considered 'the way of women'. He disputes this and other points, and rules with leniency (albeit hesitantly) to permit the use of an electric razor. The main reason quoted is that the Talmud only recognised the

prohibition of a single blade (a razor). However, a scissor-type blade that uses a scissor action to cut the hair was not prohibited by Torah. Electric shavers function essentially as scissors and are therefore permitted; and although they cut close, similar to a blade, they are nonetheless permitted’.

*Haham Ovadiah Yosef, Yabia Omer 10, Yoreh Deah 11.*

\***Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920-2013.

(see 2.4.1.3)

### **2.3.2**

#### **Using key cards to open hotel and other doors on Shabbat.**

As summarised by Rabbi Asaf Mittelman (Montefiore Endowment, London), Dayan Amor’s ruling is as follows.

In hotels it is common to find doors that require a magnetic card to open them. In the door there is an electric mechanism which is powered by a battery or connected to the main electric network. This reads the magnetic card and then releases the mechanism which prevents the door from opening. The person can then pull the door handle and open the door.

The mechanism that reads the card transmits a constant electromagnetic current. The card has no electric current running within it, only a chip with the code. The card is either inserted into a slot inside the handle or is waved in front of the card reader which recognises the specific code on the card and allows the door to be opened. In most cases, there will also be a light indicator which will glow green to show that it is the correct card and the door is open, or it will glow red to show that the card does not work.

In all of the above acts, there is no direct use of electricity but rather an indirect action.

These are no indirect actions that call for a Torah prohibition, since even for the stringent who view electricity as a

Torah prohibition, this is not the case here. The electromagnetic current is not created by the card reading action and there is no opening or closing of an electric circuit. The green or red light is generated by LED which is a 'cold' light. It is not done through fire or cooking on Shabbat – which is the case in a filament light – rather by a release of energy of the electrons which are driven to this action by the existing current. Moreover, when the light shows green, this by itself does not open the door, but it merely indicates the situation and therefore is not needed for the entire opening procedure. It is not a useful source of light either. **As a result, one can open hotel doors with the use of a key card on Shabbat.**

*Dayan Amor's Papers (Custody of Rabbi Asaf Mittelman, Montefiore Endowment, London).*

**\*Dayan Saadia Amor.** 1940-2015

The Dayan was born in Fez, Morocco, in 1940 to a family that claimed descent from the Rambam. After studying in Tangier, Saadia Amor moved to the yeshivah in Sunderland in the north of England. He received his semichah from Dayan Yitzhak Weiss.

Dayan Amor was first engaged in Kashrut management in the north of England. In 2005, he became Rosh Kollel for the Judith Lady Montefiore College in London. In 2006, he was appointed Rosh Bet Din of the Sephardi Bet Din of London and became known for his depth of learning which enabled him to issue lenient rulings on current issues.

### 2.3.3

#### Coronavirus and Pesah

**Editor's Note.** The compulsory self-isolation imposed by governments worldwide in response to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 caused particular problems to elderly and vulnerable people living alone and for whom being cut off from family and friends, particularly at Pesah when prevented from joining their families for the Seder, might aggravate mental stress and other health problems.

A fortnight or so before the holiday, the Union of Hahamei HaMaarav, led by Rabbi Eliahu Abergel (President of the Union and Chief Judge of Rabbinical Courts in Jerusalem), ruled that it was permissible on this occasion only for isolated, elderly and vulnerable people to use Zoom to join in a Seder with their families under certain specific conditions, including turning on Zoom before the start of the holiday and leaving it running during the Seder. The press publicised this example of Sephardi leniency in the interpretation of Halacha: but the ruling was promptly rejected by many rabbis, recalling similar opposition to rulings by the first Rishon leZion benZion Meir Hai Uziel and other Sephardi sages regarding the use of electricity on Yom Tob.

A week before Pesah, the highly respected Eretz Hemdah (Institute of Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem), issued its own detailed teshubah to the effect that, though disagreeing with Rabbi Abergel's reasoning, it agreed with his practical conclusion that lonely, elderly or sick people who may find themselves in emotional distress by attempting to celebrate the Seder on their own during the pandemic are permitted to use a Zoom meeting, set up in advance before Yom Tob. Brief extracts of the two rulings are included below.

*From the Teshuba of Haham Abergel and others*

**. . . to alleviate the sadness of the older people and the frail elderly, who are alone in their homes during this crisis and to give them the motivation to continue to fight for their lives and to avoid feelings of depression and despondency which could cause them to give up hope . . . it seems possible to permit (*Editor: them to join a Seder by Zoom*). It is emphasized that this applies only in this emergency situation, during the Leyl Seder 5780, and only for those who need it. It is similar to what is permitted on Shabbat - healing the sick (although the person is not high-risk), in order to heal him completely from his sickness.**

*From Eretz Hemdah's Teshubah*

**. . . Therefore, during the unfortunate time of a pandemic such as the current one, regarding people for whom loneliness during the Seder night may severely harm their mental health and well-being, especially for the ill or elderly who are all at risk during this pandemic, it is permitted for them to celebrate the Seder with their family or friends via electronic devices such as a computer or phone . . .**

**\*Rabbi Eliahu Abergel (born 1948)**

Born in a small town near Marrakech in Morocco, the young Eliahu emigrated to Israel with his family in 1960. He studied at Yeshivat Porat Yosef, where he was considered an exceptional student. He first joined the Rabbinical Court of Beer Sheva as a Dayan, later becoming its Head. For many years he served as Chief Justice of the Rabbinical Courts of Jerusalem, retiring from full-time work in 2018. A renowned posek and author of many books on Halachah, Rabbi Abergel publishes his rulings in *Dibrot Eliahu*, so far in eleven volumes.

## **2.4 Some current problems**

### **2.4.1 Conversion to Judaism**

**Editor's Note.** As the original sources do not define precisely what is meant by a candidate for conversion having to 'accept' the mitzvot, the question of whether a prospective convert can be admitted only if he or she undertakes to accept **all** the mitzvot can become critical when conversion is sought for the purpose of marriage. The attitude of Sephardi sages has traditionally been more lenient than that of their Ashkenazi counterparts.

**2.4.1.1 A convert's acceptance of the mitzvot is not necessarily synonymous with an expectation of his fulfillment of the mitzvot.**

A young man who moved to Israel with his Jewish father and Christian mother always regarded himself as Jewish. He and a young Israeli girl fell in love and wanted to marry. When it became known that he was Christian he decided to convert, be circumcised and receive all the mitzvot. He began learning all the Jewish laws with a rabbi. He became very knowledgeable in these matters, went to the Bet Din and received all the commandments of the Torah. However, he played football on Shabbat; and when asked if he would continue to play he replied that he would because it was his work from which he made a living, and it (the Bet Din) was unsure if they should accept him.

There was a great need (to allow the conversion), and an instance of pikuah nefesh, because the Israeli girl who loved him was already pregnant with his child. So there was the concern that if she was not permitted to marry him she would terminate the pregnancy . . . Therefore I went out of my way to find a way to allow his conversion. **I was persuaded by the words of the Rambam that receiving the mitzvot does not necessarily mean that a person has to perform all of them. Rather he receives them all and, if he transgresses, he accepts the punishment he deserves...**and he accepts all of this, the mitzvot, and the punishment. If so, we do not mind if, at the point of receiving the mitzvot, he decides to transgress and receive the appropriate punishment. This is not considered a lack of acceptance of the mitzvot.

*VeHeshiv Moshe, Yoreh Deah, Siman 51,  
Itach Publishing, Jerusalem, 1967.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe Drihem.** 1906-1966

Rabbi Drihem was appointed Chief Rabbi of Djerba in 1947. In 1957 he emigrated to Israel, bringing with him many writings of the sages of Djerba, some of which were unfortunately destroyed by a fire on his arrival. Others were published after his death. Rabbi Moshe served on Tiberias's Bet Din from 1958 onwards. Among his books are *Darash*

*Moshe* - on the Torah; *Yedei Moshe* – insights on the Talmud; and *VeHeshiv Moshe* – questions and answers.

**2.4.1.2 It is an obligation to accept a convert for the purpose of marriage in order to remove the sin of inter-marriage and to enable the children to remain in the Jewish community.**

According to Gemara one should not accept a convert to Judaism for a specific reason, such as marriage, unless he also sincerely wishes to become Jewish. This is because should the love in a marriage evaporate, then so would the reason for that person's conversion. That convert would be left without the original reason for converting, and could not live a truly Jewish life.

However, if the Bet Din can identify another reason for a person's conversion, such as by seeing a demonstration of genuine interest in Judaism in addition to love for a Jewish woman, then the argument for allowing the conversion would be compelling . . .

Saving the woman from marrying a non-Jew is another important reason.

*B. Uziel, Mishpetei Uziel, Jerusalem 5274, Yoreh Deah 2, 1953.*

**Editor's Note.** In effect, citing the Rambam and others, the Haham permits the acceptance of a convert for the purpose of marriage in order to save a Jewish woman from a proscribed marriage to a non-Jew.

Writing elsewhere, Haham Uziel also noted:

**' . . . and I fear that if we push them (the children) away completely by not accepting their parents for conversion, we shall be brought to judgement . . . '**

**\*Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.** 1880-1953.

(See 2.1.2 above)

### **2.4.1.3 Even if a woman is already married to a man in a civil court she may still be converted.**

Since she is already married to a Jew in a civil court and is living with him without any objections, the conversion is not to be considered to be for marriage purposes even though she may be doing so in order to be accepted by her husband's family.

*Responsa Yabia Omer, Yoreh Deah 8:24.*

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920 – 2013.

One of the foremost Talmudic authorities of his generation, Haham Yosef was born in Baghdad and came to Jerusalem when he was four years old. A rabbi by the age of twenty, he served in various capacities before becoming a Dayan in Jerusalem and then in Cairo. He returned to Israel in 1948 and was elected Rishon LeZion in 1973. His early legal decisions were marked for their leniency, which he advocated on the grounds that 'the power of leniency is superior' ('koha d'heitera adif'). He famously lifted the ban on marriage between Jews and Karaites; freed the agunot resulting from the Yom Kippur War; and paved the way for the arrival of Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

Later, Haham Yosef became known for some harsh pronouncements on a variety of topics. He was spiritual leader of the political party SHAS, won the Rav Kook prize in 1954 and Israel Prize in 1970. His many works include, *Yabia Omer*, *Hazon Ovadiah* and *Hilchot Olam*.

## **2.4.2. Nullifying a Conversion**

**Editor's Note.** Whether a conversion can be revoked if the convert later proves to have been insincere is controversial. The attitude of Sephardi sages has traditionally been far more lenient than that of their Ashkenazi counterparts.

### **2.4.2.1 A convert who was not questioned about his or her motives, was not informed of the mitzvot and the**

**punishments for transgressing them but was circumcised and immersed in the prescribed manner remains a proselyte even if it becomes known that he converted for some ulterior motive.**

Even if he recants and worships idols, he is regarded as a Jewish apostate and not as a non-Jew. If he marries a Jewish woman according to Halachah, they are married. Once he has been immersed, he is a Jew.

*Rambam, Hilchot Issurei Biah 1317, Mishneh Torah.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (the Rambam), (Maimonides). 1135-1204.**  
(see 1.1.5 above)

**2.4.2.2 If a convert reverts back to his or her old ways, that person is viewed as a rebellious Jew. This teaches us that a conversion is never nullified . . .**

*Rabbi Haim Amsellem, quoting from Haham Ovadiah Yosef, Knesset Protocol No. 230. Jerusalem.*

**\*Rabbi Haim Amsellem.**

Rabbi Haim (Emile) Amsellem was born in 1959 in Oran, French Algeria., His family moved to France when he was six months old and emigrated to Israel in 1970. He served as Rabbi in Netivot and later for the Sephardi Jewish community of Geneva, Switzerland.

A founding member of Shas, Rabbi Amsellem was first elected to the Knesset in 2006, where he addressed pressing social issues. He supports an easier conversion process for Israelis who are descended from Jews but are not halachically Jewish.

### **2.4.3 Women's right to divorce. The Agunah ('chained' woman).**

#### **Editor's Notes.**

1. Divorce has always been accepted in Jewish Law as a regrettable aspect of family life. It may even be recommended for a variety

of reasons that lead to marital breakdown, including sexual incompatibility. However a religiously observant Jewish couple may **only** be divorced if the husband, 'of his own free will', presents a valid Get (bill of divorce) to his wife. A decree of divorce granted by a civil court is not accepted as sufficient for divorce in Jewish Law.

2. The Rabbis instituted legal methods to enable women to petition a Rabbinical Court to compel a divorce in certain cases. Maimonides, for example, ruled that a woman who found her husband repugnant could ask a court to compel a divorce by flogging the recalcitrant husband 'because she is not like a captive to be subjected to intercourse with one who is hateful to her'.
3. Without a Get, the woman remains 'chained' to the man – an Agunah - and may not re-marry. As the man suffers no such restriction, his power over the woman is great. An unreasonable husband may exercise this to her detriment, for example by maliciously refusing to give her a Get or by only agreeing to do so in exchange for a sum of money.
4. Within Israel where the Bet Din (Rabbinical Court) has power in family matters, the Rabbis can and do bring strong sanctions to bear on an unreasonable husband who refuses to give his wife a Get. Even though these can include lengthy imprisonment for recalcitrant husbands, they do not always succeed; for according to Halachah (Jewish Law) it is **only** the husband who can deliver a Get to his wife.
5. Outside Israel, where the Bet Din has no physical powers, it will try hard to persuade a recalcitrant husband to give the wife a Get after the couple have obtained a civil divorce. It will do that to the best of its ability; but, as its only sanctions are social, in the case of greed or malice, such persuasion does not always work and in a few cases an unhappy (observant) woman can remain 'chained' to a the man for years, while seeing him (if he is not observant) marry someone else in a civil ceremony and establish another family. As neither the wife nor a Bet Din has the power to compel him to issue his wife with a Get, an unreasonable husband can sometimes cause an unsurmountable problem.

6. Many suggestions have been made by Sephardi and other rabbis for a suitable mechanism to circumvent this problem and the examples included below appear reasonable; but no suggestion proposed has so far has been accepted by a majority of leading rabbis and the problem remains unresolved.

#### **2.4.3.1 What good is there for a woman whose husband causes her sorrow by daily fights?**

It is better to live in a house where there is love than one in which there is hate . . . The Rabbinical Court judge who forces a woman who rebelled to go back to her (*Editor: abusive*) husband is following the law of the Ishmaelites and should be excomm

*Simeon ben Zemah, Shu"t Tashbez, Part 2, 8.*

**Editor's Note.** The Rashbaz goes on to argue that there are precedents which allow the Rabbis to force the husband to divorce her. He writes that if he agrees to divorce her of his own free will, so be it. But if he does not, 'we force him'.

**\*Rabbi Simeon ben Zemah Duran (Rashbaz).** 1361–1444.

The Rabbi was born in Majorca, where he practised as a physician and surgeon and was much esteemed as a rabbinic scholar. After the massacre of the Jews of Majorca in 1391, he left Palma for Algiers where he became one of the religious leaders of the community.

#### **2.4.3.2 It is the duty of every rabbi in every country to seek a solution.**

I cannot hold back my views. Maybe with the gathering together of leaders, rabbis will find a satisfactory solution to the problem faced by our girls in those countries.

Let us hope that by imposing a condition at the marriage ceremony that suggests that should they divorce (in a civil court) and he does not give her a get that day (or within a set time), or if she should have a levirate marriage or if she

should be unfaithful to her husband, then the marriage would be voided. I know that there is no consensus on this...but the lenient opinions may be relied upon in a situation of great need in those countries where the liberal legislation corrupted all religious authority.

*Taalumot Lev, vol, 3, no. 49.*

**Editor's Note.** In other words, the bridegroom should state that the marriage is conditional on his undertaking that, in the case of civil divorce, he will give a get within a specified time.

**\*Rabbi Eliahu Bechor Hazan**  
(See 2.1.6 above)

**2.4.3.3 The bridegroom should make a clear statement to his bride that the marriage is conditional on the approval of the Bet Din of the city, which should enable the Bet Din to invalidate the marriage retroactively.**

*Mishpatei Uziel, Even HaEzer no. 44, Jerusalem 5724.*  
*Also, Voices in Exile Notes 26 and 27 by Marc Angel, 1991.*

**\*Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.** 1880-1953.  
(see 2.1.2 above)

**2.4.3.4 'It is my will'.**

When a recalcitrant husband in the end agrees to divorce his wife as the result of the force of the court, his free consent is assumed at that point.

*Graetz, Naomi, Wifebeating in Jewish Tradition, Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 27 February 2009. Jewish Women's Archive.*

**Editor's Note.** Though only indirectly connected to the above ruling accepted on the authority of the Gemara and the Rambam, it is of interest to note that Rabbi Binyamin Zeev quoted several sages

who were in favour of denying all the privileges of the community to the husband who refused to give his wife a divorce. This would include denying his right to circumcise and educate his son and even the right to be interred in a Jewish cemetery. He did not view these means as coercion but rather as help to the husband to do what is right.

**\*Rabbi Binyamin Zeev** (early 16<sup>th</sup> century).

Rabbi Zeev, the son of Mattathias of Arta (Epirus), was a member of the Bet Din of Arta and became Rabbi of Corfu in 1530. He then moved to Venice before returning to Arta in 1538.

The rabbi was criticised for his lenient views on the problem of Agunah and replied with the publication in Venice of a book containing some 450 of his decisions and Responsa, entitled *Binyamin Zeev*.

#### **2.4.4 Reciting Kaddish in English**

##### **2.4.4.1 Reciting Kaddish at a funeral or a stone-setting of a loved one may present a challenge for a mourner who is not proficient in our prayers.**

It is preferable to recite the Kaddish using the formula our Hahamim have established, even if it requires transliteration and will suffer from slight inaccuracies . . . The Kaddish was carefully formulated by our Sages and no translation can fully capture the meanings and intentions embedded in the Kaddish. When prayers are said in their original language, one fulfils one's obligation even if he does not understand the meaning of the words . . .

If the mourner nevertheless shows reluctance or is unable to recite Kaddish in the original language, he may recite it in English (as prayer may be said in any language - see Mishnah Sotah 7, 1, Shulhan Aruch Orah Haim 101, 4). In such a situation, the optimal way to do so is as follows. The rabbi should first recite Kaddish in its original form on behalf of the deceased. Afterwards, separated by a short psalm (thus enabling an additional Kaddish to be said), the

mourner should recite the Kaddish in English. This should not become the norm, but rather only be done in cases of need.

*Psak Bet Din regarding Kaddish being recited in the vernacular for those unfamiliar with the Hebrew, Sephardi Bet Din, S&P Sephardi Community, London, July 2019.*

### **3. ROLE OF WOMEN**

#### **3.1. Study and Teaching**

**Editor's Note.** The issue of women studying the Torah has provoked discussion since the Talmudic era, originating from Sotah 21a which prohibits Torah study for women; though there is some doubt as to whether this applies only to the Oral Law. The main reason advanced is that women would misinterpret it, leading to dire consequences.

Sephardi rabbis, writing in the context of their own times have expressed differing views. Before the introduction of Jewish schools, fear of the influence of Christian missionary schools on Jewish women lacking knowledge of Torah may have affected the rulings of Sephardi rabbis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and reflecting changing times, some recent rulings exhibit a more progressive attitude.

##### **3.1.1**

**Women can be rabbinic teachers. A woman with knowledge of the Torah can rise to the level of rabbinic teacher.**

If a rabbi and a righteous teacher is truly worthy, he must minister to the whole congregation, which includes the Jewish woman. A woman must not be excluded from religious studies as this would dull her religious feeling. Pushing her out would have a detrimental effect on the education of her children because the Jewish mother cannot develop and nurture vibrant, emotional and boundless religious belief in them if she herself lacks knowledge and religious fervour.

It is permissible for women to be accepted for religious

Jewish studies, and there is complete equality for the Jewish woman in religious life . . . the Torah gives her permission to become a rabbinic teacher if she is suitable for it; and there should be no stopping her on this path. Indeed there have been women who have risen to this level and beyond both in ancient and modern times. In Egypt, 'Thanks to righteous women, our forefathers were delivered from Egypt'.

Moses, who taught women as well as men, fostered righteous women who gave birth to their children in the field, a glorious Hebrew generation, and educated them in a spirit of freedom.

However some rabbis who are not learned Talmudists or teachers in these matters have driven Jewish women away from taking part in Judaism and denied them the opportunity of religious study. They claim that 'anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is actually teaching frivolity and obscenity'. This has led to the destruction of Jewish families and, in the sphere of education within our congregations, has created an anarchic environment.

*Haham Yaacob Moshe Mizrahi, Zerah Yaacob, p. 46, Orot Yahadut HaMaghreb, Lod, 1994.*

**\*Haham Yaacob Moshe Mizrahi. 1888-1948.**

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Haham Mizrahi studied in Damascus before emigrating to Argentina where he became involved in the establishment of many charities.

Haham Mizrahi encouraged the teaching of girls and quoted authority from the Torah for them to reach the level of teacher/rabbanit. Few of his extensive writings have survived. His *Zerah Yaacob* which included sermons, commentaries on laws and igrot was published posthumously.

**3.1.2**

**A woman not studying Torah in modern times is comparable to a woman engaged in idle activity** (*Editor: in direct contrast to the Rambam's view*).

Reality has changed in this modern era and rabbis do not oppose what is happening in women's religious educational institutions, meaning women are not excluded from the study of Torah. Talmud is open to reinterpretation.

*As noted in Ilan H. Fuchs, 'Sephardi' Halachah? The Attitude of Sephardi Decisors to Women's Torah Study: A Test Case' p. 30. 2010. Bar-Ilan University Public Law and Legal Theory Paper No. 02-10.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe Malka. 1911 – 1997.**  
(see 1.2.4 above)

### **3.1.3**

**A woman with proper intentions can study Torah (rather than it being 'idle teaching' as stated by Maimonides).**

The prohibition applies only to young girls before their character has been established. There is no such concern with an adult, particularly nowadays when women study secular subjects.

*As noted in Ilan H. Fuchs, 'Sephardi' Halachah? The Attitude of Sephardi Decisors to Women's Torah Study: A Test Case' p. 30. 2010. Bar-Ilan University Public Law and Legal Theory Paper No. 02-10.*

**\*Rabbi Haim David Halevi. 1924 -1998.**  
(see 2.1.1 above)

### **3.1.4**

**Women are equal to men with regard to religious study and running Jewish schools. Women are not left-overs, rather they are part of the whole.**

First I thank the committee of the Bet Midrash of Darshanim for the great honour of choosing me as Chair of the AGM. Since the day of its establishment it has been

unheard of for there to be a woman Chairperson, maybe because of the quotation from Psalms 25:7: 'And I have not found a woman in all this.' Or maybe it is because of the daily blessing uttered by men thanking God that, 'I was not made a woman'. Is it your opinion that men are the firm basis and essentials of humankind, and the women are not fundamental to it but irrelevant and unimportant in the performing of mitzvot?

Just as the incense of left-overs (in Temple sacrifice) was kosher once in 60 or 70 years, this Bet Midrash was founded 70 years ago during which time only men have chaired the AGM. So now after 70 years, I am delighted that you have bestowed this honour on a woman; but I must tell you that it is still not good enough. Is it obvious that you were unable to find a suitable candidate from amongst the men?

In the Book of Judges it says that 'Deborah was a prophetess, a woman of valour and a judge of Israel'. (Judges 4: 1). So I say to you that this house in which sages and darshanim are educated is the well from which the students drink words of the Torah and wisdom when thirsty and then leave here to be shepherds of holy flocks around the world. Deborah said in her song, 'Hear, kings, listen princes, I will sing to God.' I also say to you (teachers and students) I want you to know that you have not made a mistake with me. I will sing to God. I love Torah with all my heart, immerse myself in it and will lead and guide according to its ways.

*As noted by Rabbi Yoel Leib Herzog, Imrei Yoel – Vayikra, London, pp. 204-206, 1923/4.*

**Editor's Note.** Note the bitter irony of these extracts from a speech by Flora Sassoon when accepting to chair an AGM.

**\*Farha (Flora) Sassoon.** 1859-1936.

Born in Bombay, Farha (Flora) Sassoon was a businesswoman and philanthropist. After her arrival in London in 1901, she also became a famed society hostess despite scrupulously maintaining kashrut at her receptions. Her Jewish scholarship, including knowledge of works found only in manuscripts, was remarkable and her expertise in Sephardi doctrine and practice was said to have been unparalleled.

She championed the rights of women and took on many public religious roles that were highly unusual at that time. When in Baghdad for example, it is said that she herself read from the Torah in synagogue for several months.

### **3.2 Women in the Public Sphere**

#### **3.2.1**

**The women of Libya observed the custom of collecting donations for the charity of Our Matriarch Rahel Imanu, every month.**

Several women in Tripoli and in the provincial towns ran the charity of Rahel Imanu, which collected funds for the Sephardi yeshivot in Jerusalem. Most volunteers were women . . . . Some of the women kept the funds in their homes and would go out collecting donations from house to house every Erev Rosh Hodesh (eve of the new month). Naturally they would receive favourable responses, with every woman donating according to her ability.

To be a Treasurer of Rahel Imanu is rightly considered a great privilege not to be sacrificed. Advanced age, lack of strength, rain or bad weather in the winter or summer never prevented the collection of these donations. Elderly women, doubled over and barely able to walk, could be seen making a tremendous effort for hours at a time by going from house to house.

The mitzvah involved the donor being blessed by the Treasurer, who prayed that she and her family would be protected by the charity because of her righteousness. The donor also showered blessings on the collector of the funds

for enabling her to fulfil her vow to partner those who 'hold the hands' of the students of Torah in the Holy Land.

*Haham Frija (Yeshua) Zoaretz, Hochmat Nashim, p. 9, The Board of Libyan Communities in Israel, Tel Aviv, 1981.*

**\*Haham Frija Zoaretz. 1907-1993.**

Born in Tripoli, Libya, Haham Zoaretz was sent to serve the Jewish community of Homs at the age of 21. There he worked for the Jewish Agency to bring Jews to Israel and was imprisoned as a spy by the Libyan authorities for his efforts.

In 1949 Haham Frija made Aliyah and established himself as teacher and halachic authority in Israel. He was active in the Mizrahi community, became a Member of the Knesset for the National Religious Party in 1955 and wrote copiously on the heritage of the Jewish Libyan community.

### 3.2.2

**We have not found any clear foundation to forbid** (*Editor: women voting in elections*).

It is unreasonable to deprive women of this human right, since in these elections we choose our leaders and give our elected representatives the power to speak in our names, arrange our affairs and tax our property. Women directly or indirectly accept the authority of those elected, obey their rulings and communal and national laws.

*Mishpitei Uziel, vol.4 ch.6, 2000.*

**Editor's Note.** In other rulings, Rabbi Uziel stated that women, no less than men, were endowed with intelligence and sound judgement, also being created in God's image. They can serve as civil judges and hold public office if willingly accepted by the community.

**\*Rabbi ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel. 1880-1953**  
(See 2.12 above)

### **3.3 Dress**

#### **3.3.1**

**It is permissible for a woman to wear tzitzit if she herself so desires, but it is not obligatory.**

Haham Zabah refers to a specific woman who asked for wool and linen and did the work with her own hand for the purpose of making tzitzit. He says she is a woman of worth, of valour who took on the obligation of wearing tzitzit. The Haham ruled that women can wear tzitzit if they wish to do so, but there is no imperative.

*Maskil leDavid – Innovations, p. 210, Machon Pi Yesharim, Jerusalem, 2006.*

**Editor's Note.** Women are not obliged to perform certain mitzvot such as attending the daily services and wearing tefillin and tzitzit; but they can do so if they wish.

During his deliberations, the Haham also raises the issue of shatnez, the rule forbidding the wearing of wool and linen together, because these fabrics are woven together in tzitzit.

A positive mitzvah outweighs a negative one in importance. Should there be a clash, for example in breaking Shabbat in order to save a life, the positive rule to save a life outweighs the negative one of not breaking Shabbat. Similarly, obeying the negative rule of shatnez is negated by the positive instruction to wear tzitzit.

**\*Haham David Zabah.** 1833-1858.

Born in Marrakesh, Morocco, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Marrakesh in 1833. Most of his many works have been lost; but those that survived include *Maskil LeDavid* - commentary on the Tanach and Talmud; and *Moreh Tzedek* - questions, answers and innovations of his Bet Din.

#### **3.3.2**

**. . . accordingly, now that all the daughters of Israel have agreed that to cover the hair is not an indication of**

**modesty, certainly the absence of a head covering carries no disgrace . . .**

Know, my child, that the prohibition of married women to uncover their hair (*Editor: in public*) was quite strong in our community, as it was in all of the Arab lands before the influx of French Jewry. However after their arrival, the daughters of Israel transgressed this law and a great dispute arose amongst the rabbis, sages, and God-fearing learned masses.

Now all women go out with uncovered heads and loose hair. . . . Consequently, I have devoted myself to finding a justification for the current practice, for it is impossible to imagine that we can return to the situation as it was before.

Many thanks to God that we have found numerous openings to enter this area in a lawful rather than an unlawful manner. . . . The upshot of all this is that hair covering for women is only obligatory from the standpoint of custom alone.

*Rabbi Yosef Messas. Collected Letters (no. 1884).*

**Editor's Note.** There is still much learned controversy as to whether the necessity of women to cover their heads is based on Biblical grounds, or whether it is a rabbinic injunction. If rabbinic, such a rule - according to Rabbi Messas - depends only on the social mores of the time and is not to be considered a sign of lack of modesty.

There can sometimes be tension between the desire to follow the Halachah as found in the books and a competing desire to justify widespread behaviour. This is shown in contrasts between interpretations of Halachah in the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi spheres. In much of the Ashkenazi world, those who didn't choose to follow the most stringent interpretations moved away from Orthodoxy to less-demanding versions of Judaism. The Sephardi world lacked such alternative denominations; and the less observant remained within the main community, which today accommodates a wide range of practice without conflict.

Rabbis like Rabbi Yosef Messas felt a strong sense of responsibility for these 'traditional' Jews and did their utmost to find legal

arguments within the Halachah to justify some of their practices, thus incurring criticism from more stringent colleagues.

**\*Rabbi Yosef Messas 1892-1974**

Born in Meknes, Morocco, Rabbi Yosef Messas soon became the outstanding figure amongst the rabbis of Morocco and Algeria. Starting his career in Meknes, he became Rabbi of Tlemcen in Algeria in 1924 before returning to Meknes as Rabbi and Dayan in 1940. He emigrated to Israel in 1964 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Haifa in 1970.

Rabbi Messas was often criticised for the leniency of his halachic rulings in which he attempted to find legal justification for some of the common practices of 'traditional' Jews, such as women neglecting to cover their hair in public. Rabbi Yosef was a prolific author. His major works include *Mayim Haim*, *Ner Mitzvah*, *Nahalot Avot* and *Otsar Hamishtavim*.

### **3.3.3**

**After close analysis of the words of our Master, Rabbi Yosef Karo (Orah Haim 75:2), I saw that the great Rabbi Messas was indeed correct.**

As stated in the Shulhan Aruch, 'Only hair that is usually covered is considered to be *ervah* (*Editor: naked, indecent*); and it is forbidden to recite the Shema facing it'. However, hair that is not usually covered is not considered *ervah* at all. So wrote the Kaf HaHaim, citing the Ben Ish Hai. . . . From here one sees that (viewing) women's hair is considered indecent only when it is uncovered in a place where women normally cover it. But when it is uncovered in a place where women normally do not cover it, it is not considered indecent.

The reason is that hair which is normally covered but has become exposed may lead to erotic thoughts. This is not the case where it is always exposed for it does not then give rise to erotic thoughts in people who are accustomed to seeing it all the time . . . there is no prohibition when the hair is always uncovered in that society . . .

Thus the position of Rabbi Messas stands. It is that this matter is based on local practice; and where the entire local populace goes with their heads uncovered, there is no issue of erotic thoughts. It seems that women nowadays rely on this for they go about with their heads uncovered in the markets and streets and no one protests, for they can rely on a sound ruling.

*R. Moshe Malka, V'heishiv Moshe, 34.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe Malka**

(see 1.2.4 above)

### **3.3.4 . . . Women who wear wigs (Editor: sheitels) are cheating themselves.**

It is their fault and they don't admit it. They think they are allowed because no one has told them they are prohibited; but we tell them that they are prohibited. . . That is what the Sages said: they banned wigs (sheitels). Great Sages, the Vilna Gaon, the Yaabetz, the Hatam Sofer and other gedolim all said that wearing wigs is prohibited.

Women who persist in wearing wigs, thinking they are allowed, fool themselves. Their consciences do not bother them and they become 'a root that bears wormwood and gall'. . . Why should they transgress the words of the Sages? Is it to look a little prettier? Is there any prettiness lacking in nice hats and fancy 'tickels', silky, embroidered? So what is so hard? Let them just wear one of those . . . It is the way of the Torah . . .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5WRdWWDG3g>

**Editor's Note.** To explain Rabbi Yosef's reasoning in his own words, wigs imitate modern fashion and are influenced by the West. Modern wigs can be as attractive as real hair, or more so, thus producing the opposite of the desired effect of hiding a woman's beauty from men<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Yabia Omer 5, Even HaEzer 5*

Though Rabbi Yosef was vehement in his condemnation of sheitels, he was equally emphatic on the necessity for women to cover their hair in public to prevent sexual arousal of men. Not for him are the lenient rulings of Rabbi Messas and others quoted in 3.3.2 above. However, he did rule that a married woman wearing a head covering may show a few centimetres of hair at the front; that a widow or divorcée (but not a married woman) can wear a wig; and that unmarried women can wear their hair loose.

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920-2013.  
(see 2.4.1.3 above)

### **3.3.5**

**It is preferable for them to wear trousers rather than short skirts and dresses, until such time as it is possible to influence them to wear modest clothing.**

The Torah states this prohibition, 'Do not follow the ways of others' (*Editor: wear the clothing of non-Jews*). The conclusion is that Jewish girls should not wear short skirts or mini-dresses; Jewish girls should not be allowed to wear trousers, because they are the clothes of arrogance and licentiousness. And girls who wear short skirts or dresses above the knee should be encouraged to wear modest skirts or dresses, which cover their knees even when they are sitting.

In a situation where the girls do not listen to us regarding the length of skirts and dresses, in my humble opinion it is preferable for them to wear trousers rather than short skirts and dresses until such time as it is possible to influence them to wear modest clothing.

*Yabia Omer 6, Yoreh Deah 14.*

**Editor's Note.** Despite the Haham's unrelenting views on women's modesty, do we see here (written in the 1960s) signs of accommodation to contemporary standards of dress?

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef.** 1920-2013.  
(see 2.4.1.3 above)

### **3.4 Voice of a woman singing. Kol Isha.**

**Editor's Note.** Originally intended to prevent immorality, the Gemara and the Shulhan Aruch strictly forbid men to listen to the voices of women singing. That did not worry the non-European Sephardi sages who mostly lived in the old Islamic world. Consequently, in this particular area, it is perhaps understandable that their discussions do not differ markedly from those of their usually more stringent Ashkenazi counterparts, some of whom may have been more exposed to Enlightenment ideas. Rabbi Yehudah Henkin, for example, stated that because the mitzvah of 'hearing' the Shofar and the Megillah cannot be performed through the radio, Kol Isha does not apply to women's voices on the radio (See 3.5.1 below).

In our now prevailing Western culture, women's voices pose no threat to male hearers and the prohibition (if imposed) is considered offensive and demeaning to women. It is hoped that growing understanding of the world as it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will lead to an adequate response to the challenge posed by this clash of cultures.

#### **3.4.1**

##### **A 'compromise' approach to this issue.**

Rav Ovadiah Yosef and Rav Haim David Halevi permit listening to a female voice on the radio, but only if the listener is not acquainted with the singer. They both rule strictly. Even if the listener once glimpsed a picture of the singer, Rav Ovadiah rules that the prohibition applies – and even if the singer is no longer alive. Rav Haim David Halevi asserts that there is absolutely no basis to permit Kol Isha merely because the woman is singing into a microphone.

*Teshuvot Yabia Omer 1:6 and Rav Haim David Halevi Teshuvot  
Aseh Lecha Rav 3:6.*

\*Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef (see 2.4.1.3 above). \*Rabbi Haim David Halevi (see 2.1.1. above)

### 3.4.2 Further 'compromises'.

#### 3.4.2.1

**A woman is allowed to read with the tunes (*Editor: traditional notes*) in front of the congregation since it is done in a place where God is present . . . where God is present, we are not worried about promiscuity.**

Rabbi Yosef Yadid Halevi wrote that a woman cannot stand in front of ten men and say the Hagomel blessing since it is promiscuous and may cause the men to have immoral thoughts<sup>1</sup>.

My opinion is, that it should be allowed, since there is no worry that anyone might have wrongful thoughts in such a short period of time and as it is also mentioned in the Yerushalmi Talmud<sup>2</sup>. Especially, since in our day and age, women are commonly seen in the streets and have regular interaction with men. I also add, that according to the view of Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai we are not worried about women singing in a place where there is a presence of God such as a synagogue<sup>3</sup>. According to this, we can explain the view of the Talmud<sup>4</sup> that a woman can be called up to the Torah among the seven call-ups, when there are no men who are knowledgeable enough to do so.

*(Editor: One can ask) how is that possible? How can we*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Torat Haham 28*

<sup>2</sup> *Tosfot Succah 47b*).

<sup>3</sup> *Rosh David – Beshalah, 44*)

<sup>4</sup> *Megillah 23a*

allow a woman to read in front of men? For a man is not allowed to hear a woman singing, and reading the Torah with the Taamim (*Editor: traditional notes*) is singing? The answer must be, that a woman is allowed to read with the tunes in front of the congregation since it is done in a place where God is present. The Hahamim therefore were not worried that in such a place a problem with promiscuity or immoral thoughts by the men can arise; and this much challenges the views of those who do not allow women to read the Megillah in front of men.

Similarly, in our view, a woman can recite the blessing of Hagomel in front of ten men, since God is present amongst the ten<sup>1</sup> ; and where God is present we are not worried about promiscuity.

*Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, Yabia Omer, volume 9, Orah Haim 108, 74, Yehave Daat 4,15.*

Editor's Note. In this teshubah, quoted by other authorities, Rav Ovadiah Yosef rules that women can chant blessings in the presence of a minyan of men. Also that women can chant the Megillat Esther and other holy texts in front of men if there are no men capable of doing so; and that, in the case of the Megillah, such chanting would fulfil the mitzvah of hearing the Megillah.

The Rav explains that most rabbis forbid women to read the Megillah on the grounds that men are forbidden to listen to women sing because a woman's singing voice can stimulate sexual arousal. However he said that he does not agree that a woman chanting a sacred text is the kind of singing that stimulates sexual arousal and that, due to the sanctity of the moment and the fact that it is not actual singing, there can be no such concern.

**\*Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef**

(see 2.4.1.3 above)

---

<sup>1</sup>*Tractate Sanhedrin 39a*

#### **3.4.2.2.**

#### **Haham Ben Zion Abba Shaul takes a lenient view regarding the law of women being called up to Torah.**

He questions why the Shulhan Aruch bothered to codify that a woman can in principle be called up to the Torah when it goes on to say that in practice we don't do so. Rav Ovadiah's answer (*Editor: in 3.4.2.1 above*) is that it teaches us that if she was indeed called up by her name she should continue to have the aliyah. Rabbi Abba Shaul's response is that there can be circumstances where 'kvod hatzibbur' (dignity of the congregation) doesn't apply and a woman could be called up. He gives an example of a private family minyan (*Editor: no longer unusual following the coronavirus pandemic*) where a grandmother or other dignified woman is present. In such a case a woman would be allowed to have an aliyah even in the first instance.

*Or Letsion. Volume 2, chapter 9, paragraph 5, Vaagav.*

**\*Haham Abba Shaul**

(see 1.2.3 above)

### **3.5 Reciting Kaddish**

**Editor's Note.** Here for the first time we have had to quote a contemporary Ashkenazi posek. Probably because of the cultural background in which they lived, non-European Sephardi rabbis, if referring to this question at all, were all very stringent in their approach. Until comparatively recently, for example, women remained at home and did not attend funerals. There is however mention in the sources of this being allowed by Western Sephardim in 18<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam.

### 3.5.1

**As we are accustomed to saying Kaddish in unison, there is no problem if a woman joins in and recites the Kaddish from the women's section** (*Editor: of the synagogue*).

This is preferable to her saying Kaddish by herself in a private minyan in her home.

In current circumstances, it is possible that even those who prohibited her saying Kaddish would accept that, where all the mourners say Kaddish in unison, there is no reason to prevent an adult woman from joining in from the women's section. If there are no others saying Kaddish in the synagogue, it would be appropriate for one of the men to say Kaddish so that the woman does not recite it alone.

*Responsa Bnei Banim 2:7. 3 volumes in 1981, 1992 and 1998.*

**\*Rabbi Yehudah Herzl Henkin.** Born in 1945.

Born in Pennsylvania, USA, and raised in Stamford, Connecticut, Rabbi Henkin (an Ashkenazi rabbi) lives in Jerusalem. He received semichah under Rabbi Yosef Eliahu Henkin, his grandfather, and was Rabbi of the Bet Shean Valley before moving to Jerusalem.

Though opposed to partnership minyan, Rabbi Yehudah encourages women to study Talmud. In his view the rules do not apply to women's voices heard on the radio because the mitzvah of 'hearing' the Shofar and that of 'reading' the Megillah cannot be performed by means of the radio.

## **3.6 Bat Mitzvah**

**3.6.1 Those who make a festive meal for a bat mitzvah in this generation are acting properly.**

*Yabia Omer 6, Orah Haim 29.*

**Those who oppose celebrations upon girls' coming of age help transgressors to accuse the scholars of Israel of**

**depriving the daughters of Israel and discriminating between boys and girls.**

*Yehave Daat 2: 5.*

**Editor's Note.** Rabbi Yosef also believed that during this celebration the father should recite the blessing 'Blessed is He who has absolved me of Halachic responsibility for this girl', as is customary to do for a boy who has reached religious majority and is thus obliged to fulfil the commandments.

**\*Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef** (see 2.4.1.3 above)

## 4. CHARITY AND THE COMMUNITY

### 4.1 Understanding the needy

#### 4.1.1

##### **It is important to understand the needs of someone to whom one gives charity**

and to be fully aware of that person's requirements - medical, economic and practical (such as household goods), so that in future one can give the essential help the person needs.

*Shmo Avraham vol. 2, pp. 110, I.A. Itach Printing, Jerusalem, 1976.*

**\*Haham Abraham Bitan.** (died in 2001).

Haham Abraham Bitan was born in Djerba, Tunisia. He served as a rabbi in Djerba before emigrating to Israel with his family in 1958. In Netivot he acted as Haham Rafael Cadir Tzaban's personal messenger, responsible for the allocation of tithes by the merchants of the local market. The Haham published his commentaries in the following books: *Shmo Avraham vol. 1* - original commentary on the Talmud and Responsa; *VeHochiah Avraham* - various sermons; *Shmo Avraham vol. 2* – original commentary on Torah, and sermons; *Yosef Avraham* - a collection of good customs.

#### 4.1.2

**Editor's Note.** Haham Yosef urges people to be kind and considerate to others less fortunate than themselves; and not to delegate dispensing charity to subordinates who may be less sensitive to pain and distress.

**'May your home be open wide, may the poor be members of your household'.**

A person, generous of heart, may wish to have the hungry enter his home and be satisfied . . . yet that person may not always be at home but be spending the day in the market. And even while at home, he may be unaware of those who come begging, having left all such matters to those members of the household in charge of the property and kitchen who may be miserly in giving each petitioner just sufficient to fill his or her immediate needs and may even lock the door to keep them out.

You are therefore commanded that 'the poor be members of your household'. This refers to those members of the household who are in charge of your property and your kitchen or who dwell in your home as tenants. Choose people who were once poor themselves, people familiar with the hardships of poverty that affect the body's health and know how harsh and bitter such deprivation can be for a needy person. Choose people who may be filled with pity for the needy forced to knock at your door, those who will respond to their plea, give them what they require from the food and drink with which the house has been blessed and not send them away empty-handed.

*Hasdei Avot, Chapter 1, Mishnah 5, p. 17, Jerusalem, 1986.*

**\*Haham Yosef Haim, the 'Ben Ish Hai'. 1834-1909.**

Haham Yosef Haim, known as the Ben Ish Hai, was born in Baghdad, Iraq. For many years Haham Yosef Haim refused to fill any official role in the community and continued to earn his living from a family business. He sought to involve people in all levels of Torah study and also encouraged secular disciplines such as astronomy, physics, medicine and economics. His interest in Hassidism created an integration of Sephardi-Kabbalistic and Ashkenazi-Hassidic rulings; and his nusah (prayer style) is current among Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews.

His many books include Torah commentary, ethics, Halachah, sermons, Kabbalah and sciences. His book *Ben Ish Hai*, comprising

sermons and halachot aligned to the weekly Torah readings is still popular and Haham Yosef Haim became known to the public by that name.

#### 4.1.3

**If a poor man is embarrassed to receive charity, give it to him as a loan knowing in your heart that it is a gift.**

If a poor man is embarrassed to receive charity, give it to him as a loan and say to him, 'At this moment you have financial problems; so take this as a loan, and pay me back when you can', knowing in your heart that it is a gift. Show him respect by treating him as a human being just borrowing the money.

*Migdanot LeHezekiah, Mishpatim, p. 96, Eshel Printing, Tel Aviv, 1986.*

\***Haham Hezekiah Hadad.** 1922-2007.

Haham Hezekiah was born in Djerba. He emigrated to Israel where he worked as a milkman in Tiberias. Rabbi Hezekiah studied at the Meir Baal HaNes Yeshivah, located close to the tomb of the second-century 'miracle maker' in Tiberias. Among his many writings are *Michtav LeHizkiyahu* and *Imrei Hezekiah*.

#### 4.1.4

**Those with power must take care to be kind and just to those less fortunate.**

Oppression and violence come from the existence of selfish gluttony in man, a quality that knows no satiety or mercy. Such people are characterised by unchecked arrogance which urges man to do everything he has the power to do, including suppressing the weak, oppressing the downtrodden and enslaving weaker people under his rule.

Judaism's perspective is based on the unity of the world and on the unity of mankind, the crown of creation respon-

sible for the unity of the universe. The poor person is not a superfluous creature in the world to be humiliated, not one you can bully, torment, destroy or even ignore, but is part of the whole and will always be so. And you are commanded to sustain him and not merely provide him with meagre existence but with generosity of spirit and with an open hand.

*Michmenai Uziel, Part 2, Section 2, Thoughts, Article 15, HaOshpek veHaZedek, Tel Aviv, 1939.*

**\*Haham ben Zion Meir Uziel.** 1880-1953.  
(see 2.12 above)

## **4.2 Humility**

**Be aware that charity may not be completely altruistic. It is important to show humility.**

Gemillut hasadim is in the plural. This is because giving charity is not a simple act. A man may imagine that he is just being kind to another person. Though he may think this is so, in reality he is also being kind to himself. So when performing an act of charity he is doing two kindnesses.

*Avot al Banim, p. 18, Itach Printing, Jerusalem, 1975.*

**Editor's Note.** It is important to show humility and to understand that charity may not be completely altruistic. We must be aware of this.

**\*Haham Alter Mazoz.** 1932-1988.

Born in Djerba, Tunisia, he moved to Israel in 1956, settling in and leading the community of Moshav Eitan. He wrote on a variety of subjects including Torah, Pirkei Avot and Talmud, and examples of his work include: *Eim Habanim Simeiha*; *Eim Lebinah* – questions and answers'; *Darhei Avot* and *Avot al Banim*.

### **4.3 Levels of charitable giving**

**Editor's Note.** The RAMBAM described eight ways, in order of praiseworthiness and merit, in which a person can give charity. Level eight is the highest level, in which great respect is shown to the recipient and consideration given to his ability to support himself and his household. Level one, the lowest, is for charity given reluctantly on request.

#### **Level Eight**

**The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift, a loan, form a partnership with him, or find work for him until he is strong enough not to need to ask others (*Editor: for sustenance*). Of this it is said, 'If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side. That is as if to say, hold him up so that he will not fall and be in need'<sup>1</sup>.**

#### **Level Seven**

**One level lower than this is one who gives charity to the poor and does not know to whom he gives; and the poor person does not know from whom he receives. (*Editor: matan beseter, giving in secret*).**

#### **Level Six**

**A lesser degree is where the giver knows to whom he has given but the poor man does not know to whom he is indebted. The famous sages, for example, would go in secret to throw some money into the houses of the poor. This is the desirable way of giving charity when the directors of the kupah are unreliable.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25:35

**Level Five**

. . . the poor man knows to whom he is indebted, but the giver does not know to whom he has given. Some of the famous sages would wrap up their contributions to charity in a scarf slung over their shoulder so that the poor could come and take it without suffering any embarrassment.

**Level One**

**Less than this is when the giver is glum** (*Editor: where the donor gives reluctantly*).

*Moshe ben Maimon, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, Mishneh Torah  
10:7-14.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (RAMBAM)**

(see 1.1.5 above)

## 5. ACCEPTANCE OF THE WORLD

### 5.1 Secular Studies and Science

#### 5.1.1

**Editor's Note.** The following quotations from the Rambam's famous *Introduction to Avot*, and *Guide for the Perplexed* are included to illustrate his crucial thinking on this important issue.

**One should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds . . .**

**Science is not only the surest path to knowing God; it is the only path. For that reason the Bible commences with a description of the Creation . . .**

**Conflicts between science and the Bible arise from either a lack of scientific knowledge or from a defective understanding of the Bible . . .**

**He who wishes to attain human perfection must first study logic, then the branches of mathematics, then physics and lastly metaphysics . . .**

*Maimonides. 'Guide for the Perplexed'.*

\*Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (the Rambam), (Maimonides). 1135-1204.  
(see 1.5 above)

#### 5.1.2

**Secular studies for the purpose of earning a living are equal in importance to studying the Torah.**

According to our sages, it is our duty to teach young people a skill with which they can earn a living<sup>1</sup>. As the Talmud asks 'From what source do we learn that it is a father's duty to teach a trade (*Editor: to his son*)? Hezekiah says 'Enjoy life with the woman you love'<sup>2</sup>. If the verse literally refers to one's wife, then just as one must help marry off his son, so too must he teach him a trade. And if the verse refers to the Torah, just as one must teach his son Torah, so too must he teach him a trade.

We see how highly the sages valued secular studies and the teaching of a skill to a young man, to the extent that in their eyes secular studies were equal to the study of Torah and marriage to a woman. Just as having children is important to one's involvement as part of society, so is knowing a skill that will enable one to earn a living and assume responsibility for oneself and one's dependants fundamental to humanity. Both are as important as studying Torah.

*Shaar Sheni. Thoughts on the education of street youth, ed. Yosef Tobi, p. 110, Jerusalem, 1989.*

**Editor's Note.** As interpreted by Rashi, who stressed the importance of learning a craft in order to earn a living at the same time as studying Torah, the ability to support oneself is a necessary element for the enjoyment of life.

\***Haham Yosef Kapah. (a.k.a. Qafih).** 1917-2000.

Mori Yosef Kapah, was born in Sana'a, Yemen, and emigrated to Israel in 1943. He was appointed to Jerusalem's Regional Rabbinical Court in 1950 and to the Great Rabbinical Court in 1970. He translated into Hebrew scores of manuscripts by early Sephardi sages. Haham Kapah described the lives and customs of Yemenite Jewry in his book *Halichot Teiman*; and he edited the Yemenite siddur, *Shivat Zion Tiklal*.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Kiddushin 30b*

<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiastes 9:9*

### 5.1.3

**A Talmid Haham who has reached the age of twenty-five and acquired in-depth knowledge of Torah must also gain broader knowledge and learn secular subjects.**

It is important for a Talmid Haham also to stand in the temples of natural wisdom. This knowledge will help him in the science of Judaism.

I am from the holy city of Jerusalem, where my holy fathers and teachers raised me on the Torah, on the service of God and on the wisdom of the Talmud. As well as all that, I did not prevent myself from engaging in the study of other areas of wisdom during the twilight hours. In particular I had a keen interest in learning as much as I could about European issues.

*Yosef Pauer, Rabbi Israel Moshe Hazan, The Man and His Thought, p. 66, Maarav Publishing. Jerusalem, 1977.*

**Editor's Note.** 'In the twilight hours' so that this should not interfere with the proper times in which to learn Torah.

**\*Haham Israel Moshe Hazan.** 1808-1863.

Haham Israel Moshe Hazan, was born in Izmir, Turkey. In 1811 he emigrated to Israel and was appointed to the Great Bet Din of Jerusalem in 1842. The following year he travelled abroad to raise funds for the construction of a hospital in Jerusalem and also visited London and Amsterdam in attempts to resist the Reform movement.

The Haham held various positions as Rabbi of Rome, of Corfu and of Alexandria before returning to Israel. He wrote the books *Divrei Emet VeShalom*, *Kinat Zion*, *Kerech Shel Romi*, *Netzah Israel*, *Nahala LeIsrael* and several more.

### 5.1.4

**Investigation, inquiry and a love for the truth prevents blinkered views.**

I have no intention of preventing young men from learning (*Editor: secular*) wisdom and languages because it never

occurred to my forefathers and the wise Hahamim of Italy to do this.

It is my wish however to urge caution and to recommend boys to be discerning and not to accept every idea presented to them without question, with blinkered eyes at face value. Such (blind acceptance of new ideas) is a truly evil trait to which they are tempted not by a sense of thorough investigation and love of truth but rather by craving imagined fame in a desire to find favour in the eyes of their contemporaries.

But those who love knowledge and have strong and bold intellects, know that certain beliefs that were praised in one generation or over several generations, but later fell out of favour, were disgraced and forgotten; while other beliefs that were derided and disgraced over the course of time, later became came to the fore and were praised and unanimously accepted.

*Commentary on the Five Books of Torah, Vaetchanan weekly reading portion, pp. 518-519, Jerusalem, 1993.*

**\*Haham Shmuel David Luzatto.** 1800-1865.

Haham Luzatto was born in Trieste, Italy. In 1821, he translated the Siddur (prayer book) into Italian. He eventually became director of the Rabbinical Court's Seminary in Padua, where he pursued his interest in grammar, literature, bibliography, linguistics and history.

Haham Shmuel David Luzatto was buried in Padua. His published work includes *Kinor Naim* – a book of poetry; and *HaMishtadel* – a commentary on the Torah.

### **5.1.5**

#### **From the tombstone of Haham David Nieto.**

Sublime theologian, profound sage, distinguished physician, famous astronomer, sweet poet, elegant preacher, subtle logician, ingenious physicist, fluent rhetorician, pleasant author, expert in languages, learned in history.

*Velho Cemetery, London.*

**\*Haham David Nieto.** 1664-1728.

Born in Venice, David Nieto was appointed Haham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' community of London in 1701. Nieto was a powerful controversialist. He defended the Oral Torah against Jewish dissidents, Karaites and the followers of the false messiah Shabbetai Zvi. Haham Nieto was one of the most accomplished Jews of his time and was equally distinguished as philosopher, physician, poet, mathematician, astronomer and theologian as well as for his prolific writings.

### 5.1.6

#### **God and Nature are one and the same.**

*(Editor: Quoting from Rabbi Joseph Dweck's M.A. thesis for the London School of Jewish Studies,)* 'Although Haham Nieto enjoyed the support and respect of the majority of his community and those outside it, there were those whose criticism was a source of great challenge and difficulty for him. This emerged strongly after the now famous discourse that Nieto gave on 20 November 1703. It was the Sabbath and he delivered the discourse in the Yeshiva (House of Study) in which he sought to address the elements of Deism that were budding in a society that believed that God did not intervene in the world and in nature.

Nieto insisted that nature was in fact God working through his providence. In other words, 'God' and 'Nature' were one and the same. He asserted that all elements of nature were ascribed to God by the Biblical and rabbinic authors.'

*Rabbi Joseph Dweck, How Best to Respond to Theological and Philosophical Misconceptions About Judaism in the 21st Century Based on Three Principle Historical Examples, pp. 33-35, London School of Jewish Studies, November 2016.*

**Editor's Note.** Nieto's progressive view was deemed heresy, comparable to Spinoza's heresy, by many at the time. However it was ultimately endorsed by Rabbi Zevi Ashkenazi of the Altona community, who quoted Psalm 147 and other texts in its support.

**\*Haham David Nieto.** 1664-1728.  
(see 4.2.5 above)

### 5.1.7

**We must learn to be wise about the truth, have knowledge of the Torah and be people of science; and at the same time understand the sciences.**

Nowadays in the days of the Haskalah, it is necessary for us to know about everything in the world. We must not separate ourselves from anything; and on the contrary, we must absorb everything within ourselves, and make it part of who we are.

Other nations' religious leaders are knowledgeable about matters external to their religion. For the most part unfortunately, this is not the case with us. As a result we put the secular education of our children into the hands of people who have no connection with the Torah.

If our God-fearing sages were more roundly educated, we would be able to produce a generation that could bring together the two worlds of Torah and external wisdom.

Elijah did not come to divide and separate, rather to unite everything in the world and bring people closer to each other.

*Pewamim 142, p. 103, Yad Ben Tzvi, Jerusalem, 2015.*

**\*Haham Yaacob Meir.** 1856-1939.

Haham Yaacob Meir was born in Jerusalem and, in 1882, was sent to Buchara where he encouraged the immigration of Bucharan Jews to the Land of Israel. In Jerusalem he advocated the construction of new Jewish quarters, worked to bring the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities closer together and was in the forefront of efforts to revive Hebrew as a modern language. Deposed by the Ottoman Sultan from his position as Haham Bashi of the Land of Israel, Haham Meir was elected Chief Rabbi of Salonika in 1908 and remained until 1919. In 1921 he was elected Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel.

## **5.2 Working for a Living**

### **5.2**

**One must work to earn a living, which is considered a holy requirement. It is a duty to support oneself and one's family.**

One should not shy away from working for a living, which is in itself considered to be holy. A man should not say, 'From now on I will not engage in business or work, because I will put all my energy into the Torah, so that every part of me can be focussed on holiness.'

It is not possible for Torah to exist without a livelihood. Without flour there is no Torah. One must eat in order to study; so work is also holy. Man must not shirk from working to feed and support himself and his family.

As written in the Gemara, 'Three things must be reinforced – Torah, prayer and derech eretz'. (*Editor: ingredients for a good Jewish life*). So, a man's work is also important and he must give it due attention. He must work conscientiously, assiduously and intelligently, and conduct his business with care.

*Sefer Dvar Beito, Sermon 3 of the eulogy for Rabbi Yaacob Salah Mansour z"l, p. 244, Published by the Institute for the Research of the Jews of Bavel, (Hamachon leHeker Yahadut Bavel), Or Yehuda, 2001.*

**\*Haham Yitzhak Salah Machmal. 1875-1951.**

Born in Baghdad, Haham Machmal moved to Israel with his family in 1905. They returned to Iraq after several months, where from 1906 onwards the Haham taught and supervised schooling. In 1950 Haham Machmal and his family again moved to Israel, this time during the main Aliyah of the Jews of Iraq, but he died in a transit camp on arrival. He wrote *Davar Beito* - a book of sermons; *Netivot Yitzhak*; and booklets on the Hebrew calendar and the leap-year system.

## 6. SOME JEWISH ATTITUDES

### 6.1 Attitude to the 'Other'

#### 6.1.1

##### **God created Man in his image.**

God created Man in his image; and it is unworthy to be in dispute with any (*Editor: of God's*) creations, whether between a Jew and his brother, a Jew and a Christian, or a Jew and a Muslim. This is because in regard to humanity and the betterment of the world, we are all brothers; while in regard to religion, they (*Editor: others*) will follow the religion they wish, but we ourselves will walk in the name of God and his holy Torah. No government has jurisdiction over people's souls, only of their bodies, and so we are permitted to live by the Torah and the Mitzvot.

*Zechut Moshe, sermon 7, The Beginning of Redemption, printed in Mateh Moshe p. 64, 1918.*

**\*Rabbi Moshe Kalfon HaCohen.** 1874-1950.

The rabbi was born and died in Djerba, Tunisia, and was eventually buried in Jerusalem. From 1935 until his death, he headed the Rabbinical Court Tribunal in Djerba with responsibility for religious life there. A founder of Ateret Israel in 1919, he promoted Aliyah, supported the Yishuv and proposed plans for Israel's future for which he liaised with the British authorities and with the Zionist movement. Ill-health prevented him from making Aliyah himself. His numerous works include, *Shoel and Nishal*; *Brit Kehuna* on the Shulhan Aruch; and *Darash Yaacob*, his sermons.

### 6.1.2

**Editor's Note.** The fundamental moral of *derech erez* governs our behaviour in every walk of life and is relevant to how we relate to non-Jews in civilised society. Here the Haham declares that just as he was created and received his attributes at his creation, we must accept that the 'other' is also a creation of the same Creator.

**We all have the same task, which is to solve the brotherhood equation through mutual respect without attempting to turn the other person into an object or to impose on him the relationship of master and servant.**

There is a morality amongst the nations of the world, particularly amongst the righteous, who understand the importance of the adoption and cultivation of the same values which can be defined as preparation for holiness. The righteous among the nations sincerely aspire to build a civilised society in which 'the other' is protected and can live in safety.

*Sod Midrash Hatoldot. Malkei Tzedek, pp. 199-200, Dudu Press, Kiryat Arba (and Hava Press, Bet El), 2009.*

\*Haham Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, 'Manitou'. 1922-1996.  
(see 1.2.1 above)

### 6.1.3

**'And you shall love your neighbour as yourself' refers to all people, not just to other Jews.**

It is written 'And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' This refers to all people, not just to other Jews. It is as if the verse is stating, one must take extra care not to avenge or betray your people; for to love your neighbour, whoever he may be, is a great rule (*Editor: by which to live*).

We can learn that this is the correct understanding of what is written:

‘The stranger who lives with you should be treated like a native and you should love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt’<sup>1</sup>.

You might say that this refers not to a stranger (*Editor: a non-Jew*) but just to a convert, to a stranger who has accepted the mitzvot. However, if this were the case, what would the phrase ‘who lives with you’ be teaching? If he were a convert, he is to be treated as a Jew irrespective of where he lives’.

*Em Lamikra, Leviticus, comments on weekly Torah reading Kedoshim, p. 46a-b, Eliahu ben Amozegh and Friends Press, Livorno, 1863.*

**Editor’s Note.** Haham Eliahu argues that the phrase ‘the stranger among you’ is inclusive and refers to Jews and non-Jews alike, contrary to a commonly held view that the reference is only to a convert, a stranger who has embraced Judaism. He maintains that the use of ‘ger’ has multiple meanings and that in this context it refers to a ‘dweller’ of any persuasion and is relevant to all people and not only just to Jews.

**\*Haham Eliahu ben Amozegh. 1823-1900.**

Haham Eliahu ben Amozegh was born in Livorno, Italy, to a family originally from Fez, Morocco. While studying Torah, he expanded his learning to include secular studies and languages. He taught in Livorno's rabbinical seminary, founded a printing firm and worked to reveal the Torah's inherent truth by considering secular knowledge alongside Torah wisdom.

In 1865, the sages of Aleppo burned one of his books because of his use of science and biblical criticism. The Jerusalem rabbis also rejected the book. Haham ben Amozegh wrote in Hebrew, Italian, and French. Among his works are *Em LaMikra* – Interpretation of the Torah; *Israel and Humanity* – a philosophical work on the role of Judaism in the world; *Introduction to the Oral Torah* – a compilation of articles; *On the Paths of Morality* – a philosophical work comparing Jewish and Christian morality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vayikra 19:34

#### 6.1.4

**Man should love his brother and come to his aid. This means that a Jew must not only help his fellow Jew, but also help non-Jews with whom he should seek a relationship of peace and love.**

This is not only intellectually desirable but also required by the Torah, whose 'ways are ways of peace'. The Torah commands us not to hate the Egyptians, despite our sufferings in Egypt because we were strangers in their land. In modern times this applies all the more so to people who live freely in their own countries.

*Divrei Hizkiahu, pp. 156 - 157, Rabbi Ezra Haim Hashalem Printing, Damascus, Aram Zoba, 1921.*

**\*Haham Hezekiah Shabtai.** 1862-1955.

Haham Hezekiah Shabtai was born in Salonika, Greece. He emigrated to Israel with his parents in 1867 and in 1886 re-published the popular book *Meam Loez*.

After serving in Tunis, Tripoli, Buchara and Jaffa, Rabbi Shabtai was appointed Haham Bashi in Aleppo, Syria, where he remained for eighteen years. In 1926, he returned to Jerusalem, where he became Head of the Rabbinical Court and a member of the Chief Rabbinical Council. His book, *Divrei Hizkiahu*, published in two volumes, contains sermons, Responsa and halachic rulings.

#### 6.1.5

**His Honour was also asked whether it is permissible to attend the funeral of a non-Jew.**

'My friend' he replied, 'To attend is an obligation in order to maintain amity, even for those of lesser (*Editor: moral*) stature among them; and most certainly if he is a righteous person, for he has a share in the World to Come.'

*Otzar HaMichtavim, Chapter 1, letter 240, p. 108, published by Otzrot HaMaghreb, Bnei Issachar Institute, Jerusalem, 1998.*

**\*Haham Yosef Messas.** 1892-1974.  
(see 3.3.2 above)

**6.1.6 As is stated 'You will understand the soul of a stranger because you were strangers in the Land of Egypt'.** And it is fitting that those who have endured suffering and distress and were saved by God to have compassion over anyone else who endures the same suffering.

*Adei Zahav, On the Torah, Part I, Exodus, chapter 22; pp. 313, Jerusalem Institute Publishing, Jerusalem, 1987.*

**Editor's Note.** In recent years Jewish charities have become increasingly involved in helping the wave of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, as well as other vulnerable people in society. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic the closure of schools in the UK affected families who relied on school lunches for their children; the homeless still had to be fed, with the demand on food banks much increased; and support was also needed for vulnerable people, isolated at home and living in what for them had suddenly become a 'strange land'.

**\*Haham Ezra Sasson Dangoor.** 1848-1930.

Haham Ezra Sasson Dangoor was born in Baghdad, Iraq, and first served as a mohel and shohet. He also wrote contracts of marriage, divorce, writs, etc. for the Rabbinical Court. In about 1892, he was invited to serve the Baghdadi community in Rangoon (today's Yangon) in Burma. In 1897 he took over the management of the Great Synagogue of Baghdad and opened a publishing house.

### **6.1.7**

**The laws relating to idolaters no longer apply to the non-Jewish nations.**

Therefore, even were 'Israel to have a mighty hand', we would still not be obliged in any sense to treat the nations of our day according to the (*Editor: ancient*) laws applying to idolatry.

In all that concerns the relations between Jews and non-Jews, both in Israel and abroad, this means that these are to be maintained not only in the interests of peace but because, by halachic definition, non-Jews no longer engage in foreign worship.

Therefore, ensuring the livelihood of non-Jews, visiting their sick, burying their dead, comforting their mourners, etc. are all to be done because of moral obligation.

*Aseh Lecha Rav, Part 9, question 30, p. 73, The Committee for the Publication of HaGaon Rav Haim David Halevi, Tel Aviv, 1986.*

\***Haham Haim David Halevi**. 1924-1998.  
(see 2.1.1 above)

### **6.1.8**

#### **In contrast to the past times, Gentiles today are not idol worshippers.**

There is a question regarding the purchase of prayer houses from Gentiles in order to convert them to synagogues and batei midrash (houses of study). Is it kasher and right to do this?

Gentiles today are not idol worshippers . . . in contrast to past times when priests ruled the Christians and ordered the masses to bow down to images (*Editor: in churches*). Nowadays everyone knows that this is no more than a memory of past times. Even though there are pictures and images in their prayer houses, they are no more than ornamental, and the buildings in which such decorations are installed are not forbidden (*Editor: for use by the Jewish community*).

*Sefer Sheelot uTeshuvot Yam HaGadol, chapter 9, p. 16, published by published by Reuben M Moskowitz, Cairo, 1931.*

\* **Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano.** 1879-1960.

Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano was born in Tiberias. On the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, his family was expelled to Corsica by the Turks because of their French nationality. Haham Toledano returned to Tiberias immediately after the end of the war, where he worked towards the reorganisation of the Sephardi community and its institutions. Haham Toledano collected and studied ancient manuscripts, his most important discovery being the commentary on the Mishnah in the original Arabic by Maimonides.

The Haham later served in Tangier, Cairo and Alexandria; and became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv– Jaffa in 1942. He was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs in 1958.

In addition to historical texts, Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano's published work includes *Yam HaGadol* - Responsa; *Meshiv HaNefesh*; *Sarid uPalit*; *Bat Am* - on the issue of Agunot after the Holocaust; and *Tiberias and its Surroundings* - a collection of Responsa.

### **6.1.9**

#### **The prophets of the Lord and the Torah command us to love the Christians and wish them well in every way.**

In the same way that we pray in our synagogues for the peace and welfare of the government, we are commanded to love them, just as we are commanded to love our Jewish brothers because God calls them our brothers in his holy Torah: 'Do not despise the Edomite for he is your brother . . .'

God's words 'Do not harbour hate towards your brother in your heart' refer also to the Christians because they are our brothers. The prophet Jeremiah ordered us to 'Seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you, and pray for it to God'. Rabbi Hanina, the Deputy of the priests said 'Pray for the welfare of the kingdom'; and in particular we must pray for the welfare of the government in countries in which we have the privilege of living in liberty with the freedom to practice our holy religion, such as in England.

*Perah Shoshan Bet Levi, Announcement and Opinion.*  
*Macintosh, London, 1884.*

**\*Haham Abraham Belais.** 1773-1853.

Haham Belais was born in Tunisia and was a familiar figure at the home of the city's governor. Riots against the governor forced the Haham to flee the city and he reached the Land of Israel in 1810, where he remained for seven years before leaving on a mission to Europe. There he served as Rabbi of Nice, France, for some twenty years before moving to London in 1840 to become the Rabbi of its Portuguese community.

His books, some of which have been translated into French, Italian and German, include *Tevouat Yegev* – on Torah and Talmud; *Aharit LeIsh Shalom* – a commentary on the Shulhan Aruch; *Petah HaBayit* – a collection of sermons; Beer LeHai Roi – on ethics; *Revah VeHatzalla* – poems.

#### **6.1.10**

**Come and see that the Ishmaelites also welcome guests with a fair face . . . They have always had great respect for our holy Torah.**

Come and see that the Ishmaelites also welcome guests with a fair face, as we witnessed in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, when I would go to circumcise their sons.

They would proclaim my arrival throughout the entire town and tell them to gather at their Great Minister's house in honour of the circumciser and teacher, the Jewish sage, where they would arrive in droves to a large room prepared for gatherings. I would preach words of reprimand to them in their tongue, the Kurmanji language, and they would very much enjoy this. I would also at times pronounce judgements for them according to the laws of the Torah.

Once I went to a city named Sepidareh and they all gathered about me and an argument began between them, for they wished to overthrow their old leader and replace him with a young one. They asked me about this and I recounted the tale of King Solomon's son, Rehoboam. They then unanimously thanked me and left the old man in his position until the day of his death. They have always had great respect for our holy Torah.

*Maasei Gedolim, Genesis, Vayerah, section 8 – The Tale of Sodom, their law and their evil custom, p. 255, Jerusalem, Second Edition, 1978.*

**\*Haham Allwan Shimon Avidani. 1881-1981.**

Haham Allwan Shimon Avidani was born in Iraqi Kurdistan and died in Jerusalem. During the First World War, he was drafted to serve in the Turkish army from which he later quit because of illness. His good relations with military officers and with the Turkish governor served him well when he subsequently officiated as Ab Bet Din in the town of Amadiyah, where he helped families make their Aliyah to the Land of Israel.

In 1933 he emigrated to Jerusalem where he achieved public recognition because of his book of sermons and tales on the weekly Torah portion readings, *Maasei Gedolim*. He translated the Bible into Kurdish, wrote piyutim and *Korbanin Vaalvan*, a commentary on the Zohar.

#### **6.1.11**

**Music composed for songs for Shabbat and festivals was also based on Arabic music.**

*Yehave Daat, p. 25, Jerusalem, 1978.*

**\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef. 1920-2013.**

(see 2.4.1.3 above)

#### **6.1.12**

**People of the faith should learn from history the results of destruction, selfishness and religious fanaticism. They should do everything in their power to bring peace and to stop jealousy and hatred.**

*Al-Shams, Issue 282. Translated from Arabic by Prof. Nahum Ilan. 23/2/1940.*

**\*Haham Shlomo Malkah. 1878-1949.**

The Haham was born in Tafilalet, Morocco and died in Khartoum, Sudan. He emigrated to Israel in 1898 and continued his studies in

Tiberias. He served as a member of Tiberias's Bet Din before moving to Omdurman in the Sudan where he tackled the problems caused by Jewish women forcibly converted to Islam during the Mahdi period.

He published numerous articles in the Al-Shams, the weekly Jewish Community paper in Egypt. His articles in Al-Shams were also published as a book.

### **6.1.13**

**After it becomes part of one's nature to love peace, it will naturally lead to the love all creatures.**

*Ahava BaTaanugim, p. 28, published by Orot HaHaim, Jerusalem, 1987.*

\*Haham Abraham Azulai. 1570-1643.

(see 1.1.1 above)

## **6.2 Racial Prejudice**

### **6.2**

**The souls of ALL human beings are powered by the breath of God and created in his image.**

There is a tendency among many of us to see those who are most like ourselves, whether it be in race, colour, creed or thought, as the fairest members of humanity; and to regard those who do not resemble us with varying levels of indifference or disdain.

The shocking murder of George Floyd (*Editor: U.S.A. May, 2020*) has raised the mirror for us to see once again the horror and danger of our own prejudices and of racism in all its various manifestations within our societies . . . In times such as these we must take a long, hard look at our own prejudices and search our souls. After all, it is the soul that makes us human, regardless of race, creed, or colour of skin . . .

The Torah teaches us that the souls of all human beings are powered by the breath of God and created in his image. From this opening lesson of the Torah we learn that human lives do not just matter; they are sacred. During these times we are painfully reminded of the consequences that come to us when we do not live by this lesson. The world's distressing current events remind us once again that we must make this credo supreme in our lives.

*Message to the Congregation on 'Our Shared Humanity', June 2020*

**\*Rabbi Joseph Dweck.** Born 1975.

Rabbi Dweck was born in California to a family originating from Syria. After serving as Rabbi of Congregation Shaare Shalom and as Headmaster of Barkai Yeshivah, in Brooklyn, New York, he was appointed Senior Rabbi of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London in 2013.

## **6.3 Attitude to Non-Practicing Jews**

### **6.3.1**

#### **Should we separate ourselves from secular Jews?**

**Editor's Note.** Traditional Sephardi congregations have on the whole preserved their unity by tolerating differences in belief and practice, providing they were not confronted by open disrespect, thus enabling all members to meet and pray under the same roof. In contrast, the Ashkenazi world tended to split itself into separate divisions, each with its own set standard of belief, observance and behaviour. Rav Kook, though not himself a Sephardi, expressed the rationale underlying the Sephardi attitude of unity so beautifully that one of his texts has been included here to summarise the views of the Sephardi sages quoted below. For this purpose Rav Kook based his argument on the judgement of King Solomon when confronted with two women who came to him claiming the same baby as their own. The true mother was revealed when the king called for a sword

to divide the living baby into two parts so as to give half to each woman.

**. . . And the king said: 'Fetch me a sword'. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said: 'Divide the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other? . . .**

The argument regarding whether we should separate ourselves from secular Jews, or the importance of peace above all, comes because of lack of understanding the true nature of the nation.

Both of these opinions are at the level of the two harlots that came before Solomon. The call of 'fetch me the sword' is a test sent by Divine Wisdom. The woman who declares 'cut it up' must be rejected, because her murmurings reflects the filth that is in her heart in that she said 'let it be neither mine nor yours but divide it'. But the merciful woman, the true mother, said 'give him to her and do not kill him'.

There is no end to both the physical and spiritual disasters brought about by the separation of the nation. This is clearly an idolatrous thought, which even when only in the mind, causes great damage. So long as they are connected to the nation, those who do not believe enforce the righteous just as the wine residue stabilizes the wine; and the attempt to separate them goes against the foundation of holiness.

*Orot Hatechiya, ch.20.*

**\*HaRav Avraham Yitzhak Kook.** 1865-1935.

Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine to be appointed under the British mandate, was one of the founding fathers of modern religious Zionism. An outstanding Talmudic scholar and communal leader of unique distinction, he was a visionary author, philosopher, mystic and poet.

### 6.3.2

**The people of Israel are like a tree that has been planted. Although it now has many separate branches, it has one root.**

All Israel has a share in the world to come. As it is said, 'And your people, all of them righteous, shall inherit the land for ever . . .'<sup>1</sup>

The prophet starts by saying 'All Israel, whether righteous or wicked, have a portion in the world to come.' He then qualifies that to say that it is the righteous who will inherit the land at the time when the people will be as one, with everyone performing all the commandments and living upright, decent lives.

*Kol Dodi 8, p. 2, 1994.*

**Editor's Note.** The Haham's message is that, though people may have followed different paths, they come from the same root. They will all eventually become righteous with a share in the world to come and should be treated accordingly.

**\*Haham David HaCohen El-Maghrebi.** 1866-1938.

Haham David was born in Djerba, Tunisia, and studied under Haham David HaCohen in Gisa. In 1903, on the establishment of the Jewish community of Tattouine, Haham El-Maghrebi became the city's Rabbi, a post he held until his death. His publications include: *Likutei betar Likutei* (commentary on Agaddah); *Neot Midbar* (Oasis, or Beauty of the Desert); and *Hasdei David*.

### 6.3.3

**Editor's Note.** To illustrate his point the Haham here refers to the procedure with which, in ancient times, a penitent would bring a guilt offering to the Temple to atone for his sins.

**One should not shame a sinner in front of other people, so as to avoid profaning God's Name.**

---

<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah 60:21*

‘This is the law of the guilt offering: it is a holy of holies’. God was very kind to the penitent so that he would not be shamed and it would not be known whose sacrifice it was. Therefore he commanded that the sacrifice (*Editor: the guilt offering*) be burned at night, when everyone was asleep in their homes, so that no one other than God, the priest and the penitent would know its source.

From this method of sacrifice we learn a great lesson. If a man knows that another has sinned, the sinner should not be shamed in public for maybe he has already repented.

Those who think themselves zealous and righteous, and who see something inappropriate in someone, should not immediately scorn him in front of others. This can be compared to spilling his blood because (*Editor: stricken with shame and embarrassment*) blood drains from his face as if he had been killed, and this often leads to Hillul Hashem (profaning God’s Name).

*Ahavat Haim, Parshat Zvav, p. 12, published by Hevrat Ahavat Haim, Jerusalem, 1994.*

**\*Haham Menahem Menashe.** 1892-1968.

Haham Menahem was born in Turkey where he studied with the rabbis of Bursa and Constantinople (Istanbul). He fought in the Ottoman army in WW1 after which he moved to Israel, settling near Jerusalem, where he worked as a blacksmith before opening a centre for Torah and prayer.

Haham Menashe personally took on the costs for the food and Jewish education of the children of some new immigrants after 1948. His published works comprise: *Likutei Menashe* on way of life; *Ahavat Haim* including sermons and halachot from *Likutei Menashe*; stories relating to the weekly parashah; and the pamphlet *Shaar Haim*.

#### 6.3.4

**Editor’s Note.** Despite the somewhat convoluted rabbinic language employed, the Haham’s message is clear. All Jews, including the

non-observant, are partners with a share in the world to come. Therefore one should not anger or spite a non-observant Jew. See also 6.3.6 below, where transgressors are described as also being 'sons' of the Almighty.

**All in Israel have a portion in the world-to-come.**

All Israel have a portion in the world-to-come. Perhaps we can explain (the reasoning behind) this that, since we understand that all in Israel are responsible for one another and considered to be partners in fulfilling the commandments and upholding and studying the Torah; and just as partners share benefits, so the people of Israel share each other's merits and good deeds.

The source of this idea<sup>1</sup> teaches that all of Israel have a portion in the world-to-come; and that the phrase 'and your people, all of them are righteous' is appropriate. It means that even if you should find totally 'empty' people within Israel, 'they shall always inherit the land', with the word 'always' including even those who have nothing of their own.

*Peulat Zaddik LeHaim, p. a, Siah Israel Publishing, Jerusalem, 1998.*

**\*Haham Haim Palagi. 1788-1868.**

During his illustrious career in Izmir, Turkey, Haham Haim was ordained as Haham HaShalem in 1813 by his grandfather Rishon LeZion Haham Rafael Yosef. He became Dayan of the Rabbinical Court and Head of Yeshivah Bet Yaacob Rabi in 1828, Ab Bet Din in 1837, and Haham Bashi in 1857. He was a spokesman for the poor of the community, established charities and was involved in founding a Jewish hospital.

The Haham wrote over 80 books, copies of which he always gave away free, including, *Peulat Zaddic LeHaim*, *Aratzot HeHaim*, and *Lev Haim*, on a broad range of subjects including Tanach, Talmud, morals and sermons.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhedrin 10:1*

### 6.3.5

#### **Concerning wine touched by a non-observant Jew, and leniency towards Jews who break Shabbat and other mitzvot.**

**Editor's Note.** In order to keep up with changing times and prevent Jews from assimilating into non-Jewish society, several well-known sages including Haham Ovadia Yosef recommended leniency with regard to Jews who desecrate the Shabbat. They presented arguments that show flexibility and leniency in dealing with Jews who do not perform every mitzvah, including Shabbat.

Haham Ovadiah Yosef was asked to make a ruling concerning wine that had been handled by a non-observant Jew, possibly resulting in the desecration of Shabbat. 'Is it permissible to drink it in order not to embarrass the non-observant Jew, or is this wine prohibited from consumption?' He notes that the author of *Halachot Gedolot* wrote that a non-observant Jew who openly desecrates Shabbat and worships idols, makes yayin nesech (*Editor: libation wine, wine used in pagan sacrifice, which use is as bad as idol worship and the desecration of Shabbat*) and that this opinion is accepted by many other authorities.

After considering the opinions of the sages listed below, Haham Ovadiah declared that although a non-observant Jew may desecrate Shabbat, like all Jews he is still bound by every mitzvah; and for each one he fails to perform he will be judged - not by us now but in the future when he will be punished appropriately.

- a. He recommends that we act with leniency and compassion. Forbidding a non-observant Jew from touching the wine would embarrass him, 'draining the blood from his face'. It would be as if we had spilt his blood, God forbid, and he would be shamed, ostracised and abandoned. To do this to a person is a sin.

- b. We should not treat all situations alike but should differentiate between a situation where it is only individuals who are not observing Shabbat properly. where a more firm stand might be appropriate; and where many are violating Shabbat, and where we need to treat them with mercy to try to bring them back. Also, for example, young people who were not properly educated are guiltless in all this and should not be blamed.

The opinions which Haham Yosef took into account are as follows.

The book *Bnei Zion* suggests that those who do not refrain from forbidden work on Shabbat, but nevertheless still treat Shabbat as a special holy day through kiddush and prayer, should not be treated as true Shabbat desecrators in regards to the issue of handling wine.

This is consistent with the understanding of Rashi and the Tosefists that the reason one would generally be treated like a non-believer (which has implications for several laws, including handling wine) when he desecrates Shabbat, is because Shabbat desecration is equivalent to a rejection of the belief that God created the world and then rested on Shabbat. However, if a person breaks Shabbat by working but also remembers it by saying prayers and blessings, then he cannot be considered to be rejecting the belief in God's role in the creation of the world.

Minhas Elazar asks what is the use of sanctification and prayer on Shabbat if a person then goes on to desecrate it by working? Handling wine would make little difference to the breaking of Shabbat in this case, as this is a lesser transgression than the great offence of working on Shabbat.

The Mahari Asad says that we must not push away people who do not keep Shabbat to the letter of the law unless

they had been previously warned by the Bet Din to cease their behaviour. They must not be abandoned, because they would then be more likely to follow a completely different path in life and move further away from Judaism. In effect they would be ostracised and be more likely to fall under bad external influences.

The Rambam wrote in his letter *Kiddush Hashem* that even an idolater like Jereboam can be forgiven and expect mercy.

The Gaon Haim Palagi in *Haim B'Yad* extends this to discuss the shaving of beards with a razor (which is forbidden, as opposed to cutting a beard, which is permitted) by non-observant Jews. He says that even a rebellious man who repeatedly shaves, knowing it to be wrong, should not be pushed away, because he must not be abandoned.

The Gaon Haim Palagi quotes the Gaon Yabetz and argues for dialogue with men who shave off their beards, saying he would offer explanations to them and try to keep them within Judaism. His concern is that Jews of his generation are rejecting Judaism in large numbers, and that there is a danger that they will assimilate

*Yabia Omer Responsa, Part 1 – Yoreh Deah, Section 11, p. 142, Jerusalem, 1986.*

\*Haham Ovadiah Yosef. 1920-2013.  
(see 2.4.1.3 above)

### 6.3.6

**It is permitted to receive charitable funds from a non-observant Jew.**

‘Praised are they who maintain justice and do righteousness at all times’. This means that those who maintain

justice are praised, teaching us that we are judged as sons. How can this come about? Precisely by giving charity at all times, even when not doing the Almighty's will, even when transgressing. Even then, doing charity demonstrates that we are to be judged as sons.

*Ish HaEmunim, Sermons on the Festivals of Israel, Sermon 3 for Shabbat Teshuva, p. 86, Jerusalem, Zuckerman Printing, 1888.*

**\*Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar.** 1817 -1906.

Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar, son of Rabbi Eliezer Yeruham Elyashar, was born in Safed. In 1853, he was ordained as a Dayan and Halachic Adjudicator by the Jerusalem rabbis and sent as the Sephardi community's emissary to Alexandria with instructions to persuade its community to annul its decision to cease receiving rabbinic emissaries from the Land of Israel. He later became President of the Jerusalem Rabbinical Court and in 1893 was elected Rishon LeZion.

Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar wrote many books, including books of sermons, books of Responsa and piyutim.

## **6.4 Attitude to Animals**

**Editor's Note.** Judaism stresses that animals are part of God's creation and teaches that we must avoid causing pain to any living creature. However, we may harm or kill animals if that is the only way to fulfil an essential human need. The principle that people take priority over animals is stated very early on in the Bible, where God gives human beings the right to control all the animals. Humans are therefore allowed to use animals for food and clothing as well as to provide parchment on which to write the Bible itself.

The Bible contains many instructions on animal welfare. Among them are that a person must feed his animals before himself (derived from Deuteronomy 11:15); animals must be allowed to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus. 20:10, and Deut 5: 14); and a person must relieve an animal's suffering (Deuteronomy 12:4).

#### **6.4.1**

**One should show mercy to all creatures (fish, birds, animals, etc.), not only to those created in God's image.**

It is written that his mercies are over all his works, from the fishes in the depths of the sea to the birds in skies, and even more so over Man who is made in God's image.

*Ma'asei Gedolim, Genesis, Va'yerah, section 8 – The Tale of Sodom, their law and their evil custom, p. 245. Jerusalem, Second Edition, 1978.*

**\*Haham Allwan Shimon Avidani. 1881-1981.**

(see 6.1.10 above)

## 7. ISRAEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

### 7.1 Love for the Jewish People

#### 7.1.1

**I hereby forgive and pardon every Jew, man or woman, young or old.**

Every man, on arriving at synagogue for the evening prayer on the eve of Yom Kippur, before prayers have begun, should say the following 'Whether they sinned against me in body and honour, by force, willingly, by mistake or wilfully, in this incarnation or another, I hereby forgive them fully from now and forever'.

*'The Tents of Yaacob', for Yom Kippur, p. 42, published by Machon Bnei Issachar, Jerusalem, 2009.*

**Editor's Note.** This quotation is a redaction of a relatively common prayer, which appears with variations in both the Sephardi and Ashekenazi traditions, and does not appear to be a unique text prepared by Haham Yitzhaki.

**\*Haham Yaacob Yitzhaki.** 1846-1917.

Haham Yaacob Yitzhaki was born in Dagestan, Caucasus, and died in Jerusalem where he was buried on the Mount of Olives. By 1868, already recognised as a distinguished scholar with connections to other rabbis in Europe, Turkey, Persia, Kurdistan and Israel, the Haham was appointed Ab Bet Din and Chief Rabbi of Dagestan. His particular interest was in Jewish folklore, the dispersal of the ten tribes of Israel from the Holy Land and their connection to the community of Dagestan.

Haham Yaacob moved to Jerusalem in 1907 and is known for his three-part *Ohalei Yaacob* which consists of a mahzor for the High Holy Days and tikkunim for pilgrim festivals and fast days.

## **7.2 Israel and the Nations**

### **7.2.1**

**The gathering of the chosen and the happy will make our Holy Land a land of liberty, and all its inhabitants will be free.**

The gathering of the chosen and the happy will make our Holy Land a land of liberty, and all its inhabitants will be free, regardless of the religion of the people. For all the nations will walk in the name of their God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever.

*The Writings of Rabbi Yehuda Alkali, Volume 2, p. 664.*

*Mossad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem, 1974.*

**\*Haham Yehuda Alkali. 1789-1878.**

Haham Yehuda Alkali was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia. As part of his role as Chief Rabbi of Zemun (now part of Belgrade, Serbia), he wrote his first book *Darhei Noam* in Ladino for the study of the Hebrew language.

Rabbi Alkali's published response to the Damascus libel of 1840 included choosing Hebrew as a language to be shared by all Jews, finding unifying customs for Jews of all ethnic origins and promoting Aliyah (immigration to Israel). Haham Alkali travelled to Jewish communities throughout Europe to gain support for his ideas and finally settled in Jerusalem in 1874. His books include *Kol Hamevasser*, *Sefer Haim*, *Goral LeHashem*, *Mevasser Tov*, *Shem Israel*, *Meoded Anavim*, *Menahem Zion*, and others.

**7.2.2 The ways of God and belief in him are fundamental to the doctrine of 'acting with righteousness and judgement'.**

However, dry judgement and law are not enough. The world and human society will be destroyed and a holocaust will descend on the universe if wisdom and research are not linked to charity and kindness, truth and equality; and if these are not linked to the right to exist for everyone created in the image of God, without discrimination of race, colour or religion.

Tikkun Olam in the kingdom of Shaddai will be possible, and the world's inhabitants will reach this elevated state only through love of one's fellow man, by guarding his rights and by acting with charity and kindness towards him as God desires.

*Eshed HaNehalim (The Cascade of Streams), Part 3, pp. 112-113, Rafael ben Haim Cohen printers, Jerusalem, 2009.*

**\*Haham Abraham David Shalem. 1928-2014.**

Haham Shalem was born and died in Jerusalem, where in 1948 he participated in the battle to defend the city against invading Arab armies. In 1950 he left for Lima, Peru to lead the Jewish community there, later moving to Mexico and then on to Seattle in the U.S.A.

He returned to Jerusalem in 1977 to run the Sephardi Orphanage and the Or Hamizrah Institute which published ancient manuscripts. His books include: *Eshed HaNehalim* – a commentary on Ecclesiastes; *Neot Desheh* – a prayer book for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; and a Spanish translation of the Psalms.

### **7.2.3**

**We should not say 'They hate each other; it's not my problem'.**

If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its burden, would you not help it? You would surely help it. If you see it lying down under its load, would you leave it?

Just as when sometimes the leader of one nation is defeated by the leader of another and you see him in misery, do not say 'Those two are enemies, what have I to do with them?' but rather help him with your prayers. As our sages said 'Pray for the welfare of the kingdom'.

*Metzudat. David. Mitzvah 489, pp. 457-458, published by Yerid HaSefarim, Jerusalem, 2013.*

**\*Haham David ben Zimrah. The Radbaz. 1479-1573.**

In 1492 Haham ben Zimrah was exiled from Spain and moved with his family, first to Fez in Morocco and then on to Safed in Israel. He later

became Ab Bet Din in Cairo; and in 1517, was appointed the Haham Bashi of Egypt.

A successful businessman and intellectual, the Haham was prominent in social, political and religious circles. He established the current dating system (counting from the Creation) after abolishing the old Seleucid method. He returned to Safed in 1553 as a member of its Rabbinical Court. His works include: *Questions and Answers of the Day, Radbaz; Divrei; Yakar Tiferet; Metsudat David; Michtav leDavid; and Magen David.*

#### 7.2.4

**Editor's Note.** In the following texts the Haham is referring to the statement in the Talmud 'Whoever lives in the Land of Israel is like one who has God, but whoever lives outside the Land of Israel is like one who has no God'<sup>1</sup>

#### **Everyone who lives in the Land of Israel**

Everyone who lives in the Land of Israel, and this even means the non-Jew, is like a person who has God. Because he lives in the Land of Israel, a place with the Divine Presence, with the eyes of the Lord your God upon it, anyone who lives in Israel finds refuge in the shadow of God . . .

#### **A person who lives outside the Land of Israel**

However a person who lives outside Israel, even if he serves God exceedingly, even then he appears to have no God because he finds refuge in the lands of the nations. It seems as though he serves other gods like the other people living there - just as a Frenchman who lives in Morocco is like a Moroccan, and a Moroccan man who lives in France appears to be French.

*Pi Hahamim, Meir Einayim, pp. 71-72, published by Orot Yahadut HaMaghreb, 2000.*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ketuvot 110b*

**Editor's Note:** Here we see a sharp contradiction to the previously expressed tolerant view of humanity. Haham Meir is saying that everyone, Jew and non-Jew, is accepted in Israel; but not those, however righteous, who live outside Israel. This example has been included here to demonstrate that not all Sephardi sages shared the tolerant, accepting view of humanity held by many of their fellows; and that what some may regard as extreme opinions also form part of the diverse tapestry of religious interpretation.

**\*Haham Meir Toledano.** 1886-1950.

Haham Meir Toledano, son of David, was born in Meknes, Morocco. By 1912, Haham Meir Toledano had become one of the sages of the Etz Haim yeshivah. His writings include Responsa, commentary on the Torah and the Talmud, and sermons. They were published by the Toledano family in *Meir Einaim*, and in part of the book *Pi Hahamim*.

### 7.2.5

**There was a respectable and well-connected family among the Arabs, a family that hated killing, looting and plundering.**

This family maintained a prayer house at the tomb of Idrus in whom the congregation believed in as a prophet. They visited his grave once a year, celebrated his memory and made their vows in his name. This prayer house was important and holy even to other neighbours in the desert. It served as a refuge for Jews who sheltered in it during sudden attacks by desert bandits who would storm the village with the intent of killing and plundering them.

*Ben Eden Le Teiman, Volume 1, p. 4, published by Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1947.*

**\*Haham Mehalel HaAdani.** 1883-1950.

Haham Mehalel HaAdani was born in the city of Aden, Yemen, which at the time, was home to Yemenite, Jewish, Indian, Somali and British merchants. He emerged as a broad-minded sage because of his interest in philosophy, history, industrial beginnings and the diverse social fabric of his native city, Aden. In 1930 the Haham emigrated to Israel and settled in Tel Aviv.

Haham Mehalel HaAdani's writings include: *Or HaHozer* - a commentary on the Torah and the Prophets; *Ben Aden and Teiman* - on the personalities and daily life in Aden and its surroundings; *Peirush Mehalel Haadani* - on the *Ketubim (Writings)*; and other works on the lives, customs and culture of the Aden community as well as those of Yemen and its varied populations.

## 8. THE SAGES

More details of their lives and works

Abergel, Eliahu  
Alkali, Yehudah  
Amor, Saadia  
Ben Amozegh, Eliahu  
Amsellem, Haim  
Ashkenazi, Yehuda Leon  
Avidani, Allwan Shimon  
Azulai, Abraham  
Azulai, Haim Yosef David (HIDA)

Belias, Abraham  
Bitan, Abraham

Dangoor, Ezra Sasson  
David el Maghrabi  
Drihem, Moshe Cohen  
Duran, Simeon ben Zemah (RASHBAZ)  
Dweck, Joseph

Elyasher, Yaacob Shaul

Halevi, Haim David  
Haim, Yosef (BEN ISH HAI)  
Hazan, Bechor  
Hazan, Moshe  
Henkin, Yehudah Herzl (an Ashkenazi posek)

Kalfon, Moshe  
Kapah (a.k.a. Qafih), Yosef  
Kook, Avraham Yitzhak  
Krispin, Yaish

Luzatto, Samuel David

Machmal, Yitzhak Salah  
Maimonides, Moshe ben Maimon (RAMBAM)  
Malka, Moshe  
Malka, Shlomo  
Mansour, Yitzhak Salah  
Mazoz, Alter  
Mehalel HaAdani,  
Meir, Yaacob  
Menashe, Menahem  
Messas, Shalom  
Messas, Yosef  
Mizrahi, Yaacob Moshe

Nahmanides. Moshe ben Nahman (RAMBAN)  
Nahmani, Levi Saadia  
Nieto, David

Palagi, Haim

Sassoon, Flora  
Shabtai, Hezekiah  
Shalem, Abraham David  
Shanduk, Sasson ('Ajami') (RASHAM)  
Shaul, Abba

Toledano, Meir  
Toledano, Yaacob Moshe

Uziel, ben Zion Meir Hai

Yitzhaki, Yaacob  
Yosef, Ovadiah

Zabah, David  
Zeev, Binyamin  
Ben Zimra, David  
Zoaretz, Frija

**Rabbi Eliahu Abergel**, son of Rabbi Yosef Abergel, was born in 1948 in the town of Al-Qala De Fragna near Marrakech, Morocco. The young Eliahu first learned in yeshivot in Marrakech and Casablanca, and in the yeshivah of Baba Sali in Arfud, before emigrating to Israel with his family at the age of twelve. He then studied at Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Jerusalem with Rabbi Raphael Rosilio and Rabbi Elazar Abuchatzzeira.

In 1968, Eliahu received rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, Rabbi Amram Aburabia and Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (the Tzitz Eliezer). In 1986, Rabbi Abergel was awarded two separate types of semichah, one enabling to serve as a Dayan for a rabbinical court and the other qualifying him to serve as Chief Rabbi for one of Israel's large cities. The judicial semichah was bestowed by the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliahu and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Avraham Elkana Shapira; and the city semichah by Rabbi Eliahu, Rabbi Shapira and Rabbi Shalom Mashash; but Rabbi Abergel never served as a city rabbi, choosing instead to pursue the career of a dayan in the rabbinical court.

He was appointed to the rabbinical court in Beer Sheva, where he eventually became its Head Judge and later served for many years as Chief Justice of the rabbinical courts in Jerusalem. He retired in 2018 from full-time work as Chief Judge of the Rabbinical Supreme Court of Jerusalem, but he continues to consult, write and assist the court with complicated cases.

As well as displaying sensitivity to the needs of the people of Israel wherever they may be, he has not been afraid to rule on difficult and complex issues. The rabbi has also laboured tirelessly to help to unbind agunot and often risked travelling to dangerous, far-away places to find husbands who had abandoned their wives; and he sometimes agreed to serve as a trustee in adoption cases.

Rabbi Abergel, a renowned posek, is the author of many

volumes of Halachah. He publishes his rulings in his series *Dibrot Eliahu* (eleven books so far), which received approbation from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef and many others.

**Haham Yehuda Alkali** was born in 1789 in Sarajevo, Bosnia. As a child he studied Torah with his father Haham Shlomo, who was a dayan of the Sarajevo community, and with Haham Eliezer Papo, author of the *Peleh Yoetz*. In 1825, at the age of 27, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Sephardi community of Zemun (today part of the city of Belgrade, Serbia), where he wrote his first book *Darchei Noam* (in Ladino), for the study of Hebrew.

In 1840, in response to the Damascus blood libel and the general situation of Jews in the Balkans and elsewhere, he awoke to the need for a solution to the Exile. Rabbi Alkali's ideas included choosing Hebrew as a language to be shared by all Jews, finding unifying customs for Jews of all ethnic origins, promoting aliyah (immigration) to Israel and establishing political life there. Haham Yehuda Alkali published these ideas for the first time in *Shlom Yerushalayim*, first in in Ladino, then in Hebrew and then in his famous book, *Minhat Yehuda*. As they received widespread publicity many years before the First Zionist Congress, the Haham became known as the Herald of Zionism.

Later in life, Haham Alkali wrote more books on these topics – *Kol Hamevasser*, *Sefer Haim*, *Goral LeHashem*, *Mevasser Tov*, *Shem Israel*, *Meoded Anavim*, *Menahem Zion*, and others. He also traveled to Jewish communities throughout Europe, where he tried to promote his ideas. In 1852 he established the Shlom Yerushalayim Company for the settlement of the Land of Israel; but that collapsed soon after he left the city.

The Haham emigrated to Israel with his wife Esther and settled in Jerusalem. He died there four years later in 1878 before seeing any of his plans materialise. The town of Or

Yehuda is named after him; and five of his students established the city of Petah Tikvah.

**Dayan Saadia Amor** was born in Fez, Morocco, in 1940 to a family that claimed descent from the Rambam. The name Saadia was used only for the greatest rabbis in the family; and his grandmother, sensing that the baby was destined to be one of those, denied its use to any of her other grandchildren.

After studying for a time in Tangier, the young Saadia moved to the yeshivah in Sunderland in the north of England where he learned under Rav Babad and others. He received semichah from Dayan Yitzhak Weiss, who remarked that Saadia preferred to be tested alone so as not to cause embarrassment to others when displaying the depths of learning of which he was uniquely capable. He married Esther Possenheimer, herself descended from a distinguished rabbinic family, and the couple were blessed with three sons, three daughters and many grandchildren.

Dayan Amor first engaged in Kashrut management in the north of England. In 2005 he became Rosh Kollel for the Judith Lady Montefiore College in London, where he succeeded in teaching and shepherding three separate cohorts of students through their studies to achieve semichah. In 2006, he was appointed Rosh Bet Din of the Sephardi Bet Din of London, the oldest Bet Din in England. Dayan Amor became known for the depth of his learning which enabled him to produce lenient rulings on current issues, as well as for the love he inspired in his pupils. He died in Manchester on 7<sup>th</sup> Shevat 5775 (2015).

**Haham Haim (Emile) Amsellem** was born in 1959 in Oran, French Algeria., His family moved to Lyon in France when he was six months old. In 1970 they all emigrated to Israel. The young Haim graduated from the Kisseh Rahamim Yeshivah where he was ordained as a rabbi. He

served as Rabbi of the Sharsheret Moshav and Head of Rabbi Abuhitzeira's yeshivah in Netivot; and later he was appointed Rabbi of the Sephardi Jewish community of Geneva, Switzerland.

A founding member of Shas, Haim Amsellem was first elected to the Knesset in 2006, where he addressed pressing social issues. He supports an easier conversion process for Israelis who are descended from Jews but are not themselves halachically Jewish.

The Haham lives in Har Nof, Jerusalem, and is married with eight children. He has edited Torah research articles and books written by past Sephardi Sages. His own books are *Zera Yisrael* and *Makor Yisrael*, which address the issue of conversion.

**Haham Allwan Shimon Avidani** was born in 1881 in the village of Narwa in Iraqi Kurdistan and died on 27 Tammuz 5741 (1981). He traced his family back to Avidan the Gideonite from the Tribe of Benjamin, and accordingly signed his books 'Avidan the Gideonite'. The young Shimon studied Torah with his father, Haham Shimon Avidan, who taught him to become a rabbi, a shohet (ritual slaughterer) and mohel (circumciser). On reaching adulthood he moved to the town of Amadiah to lead its community.

In 1917 during the First World War, at the age of 35, he was drafted to serve in the Turkish army, reportedly because of his strength, courage and bodily size. Because of the harsh conditions in the army (he would not eat non-kosher food), he grew weak, became ill and defected. He was captured and sentenced to death for desertion. By the grace of God, he met a senior Turkish officer who was suffering from acute toothache. The sage wrote him an amulet that relieved the officer's pain. Seeing his stature and wisdom, the officer annulled the death sentence and released him from the military draft. His good relations with military officers and with the Turkish governor served him

well when he subsequently became Ab Bet Din (Head of the Rabbinical Court) in the town of Amadiah.

In Amadiah, Haham Amsellem led the Aliyah movement and helped groups of families make their Aliyah. He emigrated to Jerusalem in 1933 and eventually settled in the Zichron Yosef neighborhood outside Jerusalem's Old City walls, living below the Amedi community's Hanavi Yehezkel synagogue and serving as rabbi, teacher, shohet, mohel, preacher and halahic adjudicator. The Haham became known to the wider public mainly because of his book *Maasei Gedolim* of sermons and parables on the weekly Torah readings. He translated the Bible into Kurdish, composed piyutim, and wrote *Korbanin Va'alvan*, a commentary on the Zohar.

**Haham Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi** was also known by his nickname 'Manitou'. The Haham was born in 1922 in Oran, Algeria. He received a traditional Jewish education at the Etz Haim Talmud Torah and then continued learning in French state schools before going on to study Talmud with Rabbi Moshe Fingerhut and Kabbalah with members of his family, as well as philosophy and psychology in academic institutions.

In 1940 Haham Ashkenazi joined the Jewish Scout Movement, which at the time operated clandestinely against the German occupiers. He was given the nickname Manitou ('Great Spirit' in the language of the Algonquin Amerindians) in the Scout Movement.

In 1943 Manitou enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. He participated in battles for liberation from the Germans and was wounded in Alsace.

Following the end of the war in 1945, the Haham emigrated to France where, as part of efforts to rehabilitate the French Jewish community, he and Robert Gamzon established the School for Young Jewish Leadership in Orsay. Alongside Emmanuel Levinas and André Neher, the

Haham continued to teach Torah, philosophy and Jewish identity. He also led the French School for Jewish Thought.

After the Six Day War of 1968 Haham Ashkenazi emigrated to Israel where he established the Maayanot Institute and Merkaz Meir for Israel studies. During that period he also taught French-speaking students in Machon Meir. Haham Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi was accepted as their spiritual leader by many of Israel's French speakers and he also continued to teach in France as well.

The Haham died in Jerusalem in 1996 at the age of 74 and was buried on Har HaMenuhot. Many of his available writings are based on lectures he gave on Jewish identity as viewed through Midrash and Jewish Thought, and in the differences between Judaism and other religions. His books include *Sod Halvri*, *Midrash Besod HaHafachim*, *Sod Midrash Hatoldot*, and *Misped LaMashiah*.

**Haham Abraham Azulai**, son of Mordecai, was born in Fez, Morocco in 1570. As a young man, he studied Torah and Halachah with the sages of Fez before turning to Kabbalah, the Torah's concealed wisdom.

In 1600 he emigrated to the Land of Israel, surviving a shipwreck on the way but losing all his writings at sea. Haham Azulai settled in Hebron, where he studied and commented on the work of RAMAK (Rabbi Moshe ben Yaacob Cordovero) in the book *HaOr Yakar*.

In 1619, following the outbreak of a severe epidemic in Hebron, the Haham left for Jerusalem. When the epidemic reached Jerusalem, he fled to Gaza, vowing that if he was ever able to return to Hebron he would publish all his written work. Haham Abraham returned to Hebron after the epidemic subsided and lived there for the remainder of his life, dying in 1643. The HIDA (Maran Haim Yosef David Azulai) was his great grandson.

Some of the Haham's writings have remained in manuscript form. Those published include *Or HaHama* – a

concise commentary on the Zohar; *Or HaLevana* – commentaries on the Zohar; *Zoharei Hama* – a summary of the book *Yerah Yakar*; *Or HaGanuz* - the hidden lore of the Torah according to the ARI, Rabbi Isaac Luria; *Hessed LeAbraham* – explanations on the Bible; *Ahava BaTaanugim* – a commentary on *Tractate Avot*.

**Maran Haim Yosef David Azulai**, known as the HIDA, was born in Hebron in 1727. His mother was the daughter of the kabbalist Yosef Bieler, who had immigrated to Jerusalem from Europe during the Aliyah headed by Rabbi Yehuda the Hassid. The Haham's father, Haham Rafael Yitzhak Zerahia, was the son of the kabbalist Abraham Azulai.

The HIDA was said to have been left for dead at the age of seven months when his grandmother, sensing that the breath of life was still within him, picked him up, wrapped him in a warm cotton sheet and revived him.

Maran Haim Yosef David Azulai learned Torah in Jerusalem from his primary teacher Haham Yonah Navon, author of the *Nehepa BeKessef*, and from Haham Yitzhak Rappaport at the yeshivah of Haham Haim Benatar, known as the Or HaHaim. He later continued to study at the Bet El (kabbalist) yeshivah with Haham Yom Tob Elghazi.

In 1755 he left the Land of Israel for the first time to act as a Rabbinical Court emissary to North Africa and Western Europe. He travelled abroad for a second time in 1770 when, during his stay in Tunis, he learned of the death of his wife Rahel, mother of their four children. He remarried on his return to the Land of Israel and undertook his third journey abroad in 1781. Wherever he travelled, Maran Haim Azulei inspected the collections of books he found in libraries and archives. He discovered many works still in manuscript form and made copies of several of them.

After completing his third journey, Maran Haim finally settled in Livorno, Italy, at the request of the Livorno

community. He devoted much of his time there to writing and publishing his work,

Maran Haim Yosef David Azulai died in 1806 and was buried in Livorno. In 1960, on the initiative of Rishon LeZion Haham Yitzhak Nissim and Haham Elihu Touaf, his remains were brought to Israel and buried in Jerusalem's Har Hamenuhot cemetery.

Maran Haim Yosef David Azulai wrote over 80 works on many topics, mainly books on Halachah, commentary and sermons. They include *Birkei Yosef* – on the Shulhan Aruch; *Ahavat David*; *Ptah Einaim* – on Aggadah in the Talmud; *Mahzik Beracha* – on topics relating to prayer; *Kiseh Rahamim* – on the *Masechtot Ketanot*; *Zarua Yamin* – on *Tractate Avot*. He also wrote books on history and on his journeys, such as *Shem Gedolim* and *Maagal Tov* as well as books of biblical commentary, such as *Lehem MeShamaim* and *Hohmat AN"CH*.

**Haham Abraham Belais** was born on 18 Av, 5533 (1773) in Tunisia and was brought up in the Grana community, whose members originated from Livorno. He was a familiar figure in the home of Hamuda Bey, the city's governor; but in 1808 he was forced to flee from Tunis, penniless, because of riots against its governor: he reached the Land of Israel two years later. In 1817 the Haham left for Europe on a mission for the Rabbinical Court. He reached Nice, France, where he served as the Rabbi for some twenty years. In 1840 he moved to London where he served as Rabbi for its Portuguese community.

Haham Abraham Belaish died in 1853. Some of his books are: *Tevouat Yegev* – on Torah and Talmud; *Petah HaBayit* – a collection of sermons; *Beer LeHai Roi* – on ethics; a book of Responsa; *Revah VeHatzalla* – poems. His work has been translated into French, Italian and German.

**Haham Eliahu Benamozegh** was born on 13 Iyar 5583 (1823) in Livorno, Italy. The Benamozegh family had originally come to Italy from Fez, Morocco. Eliahu was brought up by his mother's brother, Haham Yehuda Koriat. While studying Torah, he expanded the scope of his studies to include secular topics and languages. He was Darshan (preacher) and Dayan, and also taught in the city's Rabbinical Court seminary.

Haham Benamozegh founded a printing firm in Livorno. He sought to reveal the Torah's inherent truth by comparing secular knowledge with Torah wisdom in his writing. In 1865, the sages of Aram Zova (Aleppo) burned his book because of his use of science and biblical criticism; the Jerusalem sages did not accept his book, but avoided burning it.

Haham Eliahu Benamozegh died on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar Aleph (5660) (1900) and is buried in Livorno. He wrote in Hebrew, Italian, and French. Among his books are: *Em LaMikra* – interpretation of the Torah; *Israel and Humanity* – a philosophical work on the role of Judaism in the world; *Introduction to the Oral Torah* – a compilation of articles; *On the Paths of Morality* – a philosophical work comparing Jewish and Christian morality.

**Haham Abraham Bitan** was born in Djerba, Tunisia. He began learning Torah with Haham Halfon HaCohen and later served as Rabbi of the Haham Yaacob Houri synagogue in Djerba. He married Falila Houri and the couple had three children.

In 1958 Haham Abraham Bitan emigrated to Israel with his wife and two of their children. They first lived in a maabara (transit camp) near Rechovot and later settled in Netivot. A few years later, his father and mother also came to Israel along with his third son and also settled in Netivot.

Haham Abraham Bitan was a colleague of Haham Rafael

Cadir Zaban and participated regularly in his weekly classes. He was also Haham Rafael Cadir Zaban's personal messenger, responsible for the allocation of tithes by the merchants of the Netivot market. He died on 25 Heshvan 5761 (2001) and was buried in the Netivot cemetery.

Haham Abraham Bitan published his original commentaries in the following books: *Shmo Avraham A* – on the Talmud; and *VeHohiah Avraham* – various sermons; *Shmo Avraham B* – on the Torah, and sermons; *Yosef Avraham* – a collection of worthy customs.

**Haham Ezra Sasson Dangoor** was born in 1848 in Baghdad, Iraq. He studied Torah in the Bet Zilcah study house, served as a mohel and shohet, and wrote contracts (marriage, divorce, Rabbinical Court writs etc.). Between 1880 and 1886, he held a formal appointment as Contract Writer. Towards 1892, he was invited to serve the Baghdadi community in Rangoon (now Yangon) in Burma. In 1897 he took over the management of the Great Synagogue of Baghdad and opened a publishing house.

Haham Ezra Sasson Dangoor was appointed Haham Bashi (Chief Rabbi) of Baghdad's Jewish community in 1923. He died on 13 Tevet, 5690 (1930) and was buried in Baghdad. His writings include *Imrei Kohelet* – a commentary and translation into Arabic of *Ecclesiastes*; *Minha Belula* – laws, customs and piyutim (liturgical poetry); a book of Responsa; and a *History of Baghdad*.

**Rabbi Moshe Drihem** was born in Djerba, Tunisia in 1906 and served on its Bet Din under Rabbi Idan. After Rabbi Idan's death in 1946 he continued as Dayan and teacher under the Chief Rabbi of Hara Saghira (the Jewish 'Small Neighbourhood'), where he established the minhag of sending newly-weds on Aliyah after their wedding. Many of his students became rabbis.

Rabbi Moshe emigrated to Tiberias in 1957 and served

on Tiberias's Bet Din from 1958 until his death in 1966. Many of the writings of Djerba's rabbis that he had brought with him to Israel were destroyed in a fire soon after his arrival at the Aliyah camp near Acre. Others were published after his death. Among his own books are *Darash Moshe* on the Torah; *Yedei Moshe* – insights on the Talmud; and *VeHeshiv Moshe* – questions and answers.

**Rabbi Simeon ben Zemah Duran (Rashbaz).**

Rabbi Simeon was born in Majorca, where he practised as a physician and surgeon and was much esteemed as a rabbinic scholar. He left Palma for Algiers after the massacre of the Jews of Majorca in 1391 and became one of the religious leaders of its community.

**Rabbi Joseph Dweck** was born in California in 1975 to a family originating from Syria. He studied in Jerusalem at Yeshiva Hazon Ovadia under the tutelage of former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. He also studied psychology and philosophy at Santa Monica College in California and was awarded a B.A. in Liberal Studies from Excelsior College. Rabbi Dweck received his Semichah from Rabbi Ovadia Yosef under the auspices of the Sephardic Rabbinical College of Brooklyn, New York and an M.A. in Jewish Education from Middlesex University at The London School of Jewish Studies. Rabbi Dweck served as Rabbi of Congregation Shaare Shalomn Brooklyn, New York from 1999 to 2014 and also as Headmaster of Barkai Yeshivah, a Jewish day school in Brooklyn. He was appointed Senior Rabbi of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London, in 2013. He is Deputy President of the LSJS; a President of The Council of Christians and Jews and an Ecclesiastical Authority of The Board of Deputies of British Jews. Rabbi Dweck is also a member of the Standing Committee of the Conference of European Rabbis.

**Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar**, son of Rabbi Eliezer Yeruham Elyashar, was born in Safed in 1817. His father was the city's leading shohet and bodeq (inspector) and served as Dayan and Cantor for the city's Kushta community.

In 1824, when Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar was seven years old, his father died. His mother, suffering from poverty, was forced to sell her home and belongings and went to work as a seamstress to support her only son. In 1828 his mother re-married, this time to Haham Binyamin Mordecai Navon, Head Judge of the rabbinical courts of Jerusalem, who adopted Yaacob Shaul Elyashar and became second father, teacher and rabbi to him. Yaacob Shaul Elyashar was already considered a Torah prodigy when he reached Bar Mitzvah age, yet he chose to earn his living from commerce.

At the age of fifteen, he married a girl who had also been orphaned. Their eldest daughter and first two sons (a third came later) were born while the couple was still living in Haham Binyamin Mordecai Navon's home.

In 1853, he was ordained as Dayan and Halachic Adjudicator by the Jerusalem rabbis and sent on behalf of Jerusalem's Sephardi community to Alexandria as emissary with instructions to persuade the Alexandrian community to annul its decision to cease receiving rabbinical emissaries from the Land of Israel. Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar succeeded in that task and was then asked to remain in Alexandria as the city's Rabbi, which invitation he declined.

In 1869 he was appointed President of the Jerusalem Rabbinical Court, replacing Haham Abraham Ashkenazi who had taken up the position of Rishon LeZion. In 1893, following the death of Haham Rafael Meir Panigel the eldest of the Jerusalem rabbis, Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar himself became the Rishon LeZion. He served in this role for thirteen years until his death on 18 Tammuz 5666 (1906). Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar was buried in the Mount of Olives cemetery. Four years after his death,

in 1910, his son Haham Nissim Elyashar founded Jerusalem's Givat Shaul neighborhood in his name.

Haham Yaacob Shaul Elyashar wrote many books, including several books of sermons – *Ish Emunim*, *Derech Ish*, *Divrei Ish* and *Olat Ish*. His books of Responsa include *Simha LeIsh*, *Maaseh Ish*, *Sheal Halsh* and *Pnei Hama* (which includes original comments by his son). *Bnei Binyamin*, *Krav Ish* contains complementary material and comments on the book by his adoptive father. He wrote several other books and piyutim.

**Haham Hezekiah Hadad** was born in Djerba. He emigrated to Israel in 1922, where he worked as a milkman in Tiberias. Rabbi Hezekiah studied at the Meir Baal HaNess Yeshivah, located close to the tomb of the second-century 'miracle maker' Meir Baal HaNess in Tiberias. Among his many writings are *Michtav LeHizkiahu* and *Imrei Hezekiah*.

**Haham Yosef Haim, the 'Ben Ish Hai'** was born in 1834 in Baghdad, Iraq. He fell into a deep pit at the age of seven and, after his rescue, decided to devote his life to Torah. He first began his studies in his father's library and then continued with Haham David Hai Ben Meir, his maternal uncle. Yosef excelled in his studies and by the age of fourteen had already published halachic Responsa anonymously.

In 1851, he married Rahel, the daughter of Haham Ovadiah Somech, and the couple had a daughter and two sons. His father died in 1859, and despite the fact that Haham Yosef Haim was only 25 years of age, the Jewish community now considered him its leader. Haham Yosef Haim however refused to fill any official role in the community and continued to earn his living from a family business. The Haham sought to involve people from all levels of the community in Torah study – made evident by his sermons which show numerous layers of interpretation, each

directed to different parts of public perception and which include many parables.

Haham Yosef Haim was also proficient in secular disciplines, including astronomy, physics, medicine and economics; and in his writings he encouraged general studies. His extensive knowledge of Torah included Kabbalah and Ashkenazi as well as Sephardi halachic interpretations. Haham Yosef Haim took a keen interest in Hassidism and he introduced this into his method of halachic decision-making, creating an integration of Sephardi-Kabbalistic and Ashkenazi–Hassidic rulings. His nusah (prayer-style), influenced by the customs of HaAri, overtook those that preceded it and is now current among Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews; and his halachic method gained acceptance in India, Persia, Syria and the Land of Israel.

In 1869, Haham Yosef Haim left on a journey to the Land of Israel with his brother, Haham Yehezkel. They made pilgrimages to tombs of zaddikim in the Galilee and spent a few days at Benayahu ben Yehoyada's tomb. Haham Yosef Haim testified that deep secrets were revealed to him at Benayahu's tomb; and that he gave several of his books titles relating to Benayahu ben Yehoyada for that reason. He made every effort to have his books printed in the Land of Israel so as to support its Jewish community, and did his best to ensure that contributions made to the Land of Israel actually reached their destination.

The many books written by the Haham include Torah commentary, ethics, Halachah, sermons, Kabbalah and sciences. His book, *Ben Ish Hai*, contains sermons and halachot corresponding with the weekly Torah portions. *Ben Ish Hai* can be found on the bookshelves of many homes, and Haham Yosef Haim was named after it. His book *Benyahu* contains interpretations of Torah verses, some of a Kabbalistic nature. *Torah LiShma* (which he wrote under the name Yehezkel Kahli) is a book of his Responsa, *Or Haim* is a collection of sermons for joyous

occasions, and *Ben Yehoyada* is a series of books on Torah and Talmud.

In 1908 Haham Yosef Haim left Baghdad to visit the tomb of Yehezkel (Ezekiel) the Prophet. A year later, he tried to repeat the same pilgrimage but was prevented from reaching his destination by illness. He died on 13 Elul, 5669 (1909) and was buried in Baghdad; but his remains were eventually laid to rest on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

**Haham Haim David Halevi** was born in Jerusalem in 1924 to parents who had emigrated from Turkey to the Land of Israel. As a child he studied Torah at the Orah Haim Talmud Torah with Haham Ezra Hadaya. He continued his studies at the Porat Yosef yeshivah, alongside Haham Ovadiah Yosef, Haham David Haim Shlush, Haham Zion Levi and Haham ben Zion Abba Shaul. Haham David Halevi was ordained to the rabbinate in 1948 by Haham Ezra Attiah, and subsequently by the yeshivah president, Rishon LeZion Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel. He completed his teacher training at HaMizrahi Teacher Training Seminary concurrently with his yeshivah studies.

After serving in the Tuvia Yeshivah's Student Battalion during Israel's 1948 War of Independence, Haham Halevi was appointed to several posts including Secretary to Rishon LeZion Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel. In 1951 he became Rabbi of the city of Rishon LeZion and in 1964 was elected to the Chief Rabbinical Court's Council as its youngest member. The Haham was appointed Head of the Rabbinical Courts and Rabbi of Tel Aviv – Jaffa in 1973.

Mekor Haim regularly gave Torah classes to lay people; and those classes formed the basis of his book *Mekor HaHaim HaShalem*, the first volume of which was published in 1967 and the last in 1974. A year later, the section of the book entitled *Kitsur Shulhan Aruch – Mekor HaHaim*, was published and then was chosen as the principal halachic

textbook in state religious schools. In 1997 the Haham was awarded the Israel Prize for Torah Literature.

Haham Haim David Halevi died in 1998 and was buried in Jerusalem's Har HaMenuhot cemetery. He wrote many books, including *Bein Israel LaAmim*, *Mekor Haim* – on the weekly Torah Readings; *Devar HaMishpat* – Maimonides's halachot on the Sanhedrin; *Netzah Israel* – Jewish thought on the Torah; *Aseh Lecha Rav* and *Maim Haim*, both collections of his Responsa.

**Haham Eliahu Bechor Hazan** was born in Izmir in 1848. He moved to Israel in his youth and studied with his grandfather, Haham Haim David. Haham Eliahu Hazan became Ab Bet Din in Jerusalem in 1869 and shaliah to Europe and North Africa, where he met Moses Montefiore and Edmond de Rothschild. In 1874 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tripoli and in 1888 became Chief Rabbi of Alexandria. He died in 1908. Among his writings are, *Zichron Yerushalayim* on the fundamentals of Jewish belief, and *Taalumot Lev*.

**Haham Israel Moshe Hazan** was born in 1808 in Izmir, Turkey, and emigrated to Jerusalem with his family in 1811.

Proficient in Arabic, Spaniolit (Judeo-Spanish), Turkish and Italian, he was recognised as a Torah scholar while still young. In 1842 the Haham was appointed to the Great Bet Din of Jerusalem and travelled abroad in 1844-1845 to raise funds for the construction of a hospital in Jerusalem. His journeys took him to London and Amsterdam to resist the Reform movement; and in 1846 he was chosen to officiate as Rabbi of the city of Rome.

The Haham left Rome in 1852 to set out for Israel. He passed through Corfu on his way and agreed to remain there at the insistence of its Jewish community. 1856 saw him moving again, this time to Alexandria to serve as its Rabbi. He returned to Israel in 1861 and settled in the Jaffa

but later became ill and moved to Beirut for a change of air but failed to recover his health.

Haham Israel Moshe Hazan died in the winter of 1863 and was buried near Sidon. He wrote the books *Divrei Emet VeShalom*, *Kinat Zion*, *Kerech Shel Romi*, *Netzah Israel* and *Nahala Lelsrael* and more.

**Rabbi Yehudah Herzl Henkin** was born in Pennsylvania USA, raised in Stamford Connecticut and now lives in Jerusalem. Not a Sephardi, he received semichah under his grandfather Rabbi Yosef Eliahu Henkin, and served as Rabbi of Bet Shean Valley before moving to Jerusalem.

Though opposed to partnership minyanim (men and women praying together in public), Rabbi Henkin encourages women to study Talmud. In his view the rules of kol isha do not apply to women's voices heard on the radio because the mitzvah of 'hearing' the Shofar and 'reading' the Megillah cannot be performed through the radio.

**Haham Yosef Kapah (a.k.a. Qafih)** was born in Sanaa, Yemen, in 1917. His grand-father, Mori Yihya Kapah belonged to the Dor Deah Movement which sought to revive the halachic rulings of Maimonides and Rabbi Saadia Gaon. Yosef Kapah learned Torah from his grandfather Mori Yihya Kapah and from Mori Ratsha Tzarum. He emigrated to Israel in 1943.

Haham Kapah was appointed to the Jerusalem Regional Rabbinical Court in 1950 and to the Great Rabbinical Court in 1970. His work in Torah was directed primarily to translating into Hebrew scores of the manuscripts written by early Sephardi sages. Mori Kapah described the lives and customs of Yemenite Jewry in his book, *Halichot Teiman*. He edited the *Shivat Zion Tiklal*, the Yemenite siddur (prayer book). He died on 18 Tammuz 5770 (2000) and was buried in Jerusalem.

**HaRav Avraham Yitzhak Kook**, one of the founding fathers of modern religious Zionism, was born in Griva (now in Latvia) in 1865. He died in Jerusalem in 1935.

In 1904 Rav Kook took up a rabbinical post in Jaffa, which included responsibility for the mostly secular Zionist agricultural settlements nearby. He spent most of the First World War in London as Rabbi of the Spitalfields Great Synagogue before returning to Palestine; and in 1921, after Britain had assumed the mandate, he became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine

Despite the fact that many of the new agricultural settlers were hostile to religion, Kook defended their behaviour in theological terms. His stance was at first deemed heretical by the traditional religious establishment; and in 1921 his detractors bought up the whole edition of his newly published *Orot* to prevent its circulation.

Rav Kook tried to build bridges between the secular Zionist leadership, religious Zionists and non-Zionist orthodox Jews. He believed that even the anti-religious Zionist pioneers were part of the divine process in which Israel was being redeemed from its 2,000-year exile by all manner of Jews, sacrificing themselves to build up the land to lay the groundwork for ultimate messianic redemption.

An outstanding Talmudic scholar and communal leader of unique distinction, Rav Kook was a prolific author, a visionary thinker, a philosopher, mystic and poet.

**Haham Samuel David Luzatto** was born on 1 Elul, 5560 (1800) in Trieste, Italy. His mother died in 1814, when he was fourteen years old, and he began working to contribute to his family's livelihood. In 1815 he started studying with Haham Abraham Eliezer Halevi, Rabbi of Trieste; and in 1821, he translated the Siddur (prayer book) into Italian and had it printed. In 1828 he began to teach in the

Rabbinical Court's Seminary in Padua, of which he eventually became director and where he continued studying grammar, literature, bibliography, linguistics and history. In 1828, the Haham married Bilhah-Bathsheba Sagra and they had three sons and a daughter. Haham Samuel David Luzatto died on 9 Tishrei, 5625 (1865) and was buried in Padua. His published work includes *Kinor Naim* – a book of poetry; and *HaMishtadel* – a commentary on the Torah; and several morality plays.

**Haham Yitzhak Salah Machmal** was born in Baghdad, Iraq on 13 Tishrei 5636 (1875) and studied at Bet Zalicha yeshivah. In 1905, he emigrated to Israel with his entire family but soon returned to Baghdad because of his poor health. He then began to teach at the Midrash Talmud Torah and to train teachers of Hebrew and Judaism for the community. In 1950 the Haham Machmal again emigrated to Israel with his family. He died there on the eve of Shabbat, 4 Sivan 5711 (1951). He is the author of *Davar Belto* - a book of sermons; *Netivot Yitzhak*; and additional books on the Hebrew calendar and leap year system.

**Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) (RAMBAM)** was born in Cordoba, Spain in 1135 and died in Egypt in 1204. He is buried in Tiberias, Israel. The Rambam was the foremost intellectual figure of medieval Judaism. Scholar, rabbi, astronomer, physician and philosopher, he possessed a brilliant mind and is regarded as one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. At first violently rejected by some rabbis, his teachings are now considered a pillar of traditional Judaism. He produced many works of Jewish and general interest including, *Guide of the Perplexed*, the *Mishneh Torah* and *A Commentary on the Mishnah*.

**Haham Shlomo Malkah** was born in Tafilalet, Morocco in 1878 and died in Khartoum, Sudan in 1949. He emigrated to Israel in 1898 and continued his studies in Tiberias. There he served as a member of its Bet Din before moving to Omdurman in the Sudan, where he tackled the problems caused by Jewish women forcibly converted to Islam during the Mahdi period.

The Haham published many articles in *Al-Shams*, the weekly Jewish Community newspaper of Egypt. His *Al-Shams* articles were also published as a book.

**Haham Moshe Malka** was born in Atlas, Morocco and died in Petah Tikvah, Israel. In Morocco he served on Casablanca's Bet Din and was confirmed by the Spanish government in his position as Rabbi and Dayan of the cities of Morocco. In Israel from 1967, he served on the Sephardi Rabbinical Court's Board and was a member of the Chief Rabbinical Court's Council.

Rav Moshe's halachic writings contain the unique phrase 'koha d'heitaira adif' (the power of leniency is stronger), which summarises his view that leniency in halachic ruling is a better principle than stressing what is forbidden, which is also the view of many of the sages quoted in *Memorable Sephardi Voices*. Haham Moshe's writings include *Mikve HaMayim – Responsa*; *Beer Moshe* and *Darash Moshe* – sermons and Torah commentary.

**Haham Yitzhak Salah Mansour** was born in Baghdad in 1875 and moved to Israel with all his family. After several months in Israel the family returned to Iraq where, from 1906 to 1942, he taught Tanach, Talmud and Ivrit (modern Hebrew), and trained and supervised schooling. In 1950 Haham Machmal and his family again moved to Israel as part of the general aliyah of the Jews of Iraq. Poor conditions in the Israeli transit camp led to a sudden deterioration in his health and he died there.

**Haham Alter Mazoz**

Born in Djerba, Tunisia, he studied under Haham Shaul Mekiktz Sheli and his uncle Haham Shlomo Mazoz. He moved to Israel in 1956, settling in and subsequently leading the community of Moshav Eitan near Kiryat Gat.

He wrote on a variety of subjects including Torah, Pirkei Avot and Talmud; and examples of his work include *Im Habanim Simha*; *Im Levinah* – questions and answers; *Darchoi Avot*; and *Avot al Banim*'

**Haham Mehalel HaAdani** was born in 1883 in the city of Aden, Yemen. He received an extensive Torah education in Aden, where he became known as a broad-minded sage because of his keen interest in philosophy, history, industrial beginnings and the richly diverse social fabric of the city. Aden, at the time was home to Yemenite, Jewish, Indian, Somali and British merchants, as well as to others from diverse parts of the world; and the Haham wrote extensively about the lives, customs and culture of the Aden communities, and particularly about its Jews.

In 1930 Haham Mehalel HaAdani emigrated to Israel and settled in Tel Aviv, where he continued his spiritual and literary activities. He died on 28 Tishrei 5710 (1950), leaving behind books, only some of which had been published. His son had several more published after his death. The Haham's writings include: *Or HaHozer*, a commentary on the Torah and the Prophets in three sections; *Ben Aden and Teiman*, on the personalities and daily life in Aden and its surroundings in three sections; *Peirush Mehalel HaAdani*, on the *Ketubim* (Writings) in three sections; *HaNefesh HaHaya*, a philosophical essay; *Hochmat HaKodesh*, a commentary on Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook's book *Orot HaKodesh*.

**Haham Yaacob Meir** was born in Jerusalem in 1856 and studied Torah under Rabbi Menahem Bechor Yitzhak and

Rabbi Aharon Azriel, an Elder of the Bet El Synagogue. He was among the founders of a Bikur Holim society in 1879. In 1882, he was sent to Buchara, where he was instrumental in encouraging the emigration of Bucharan Jews to the Land of Israel. In 1888 the Haham was appointed a member of the Bet Din of Rabbi Yaacob Shaul Elyashar in Jerusalem.

Haham Meir encouraged the construction of new Jewish quarters in Jerusalem. He worked to bring the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities together and was at the forefront of the effort to revive Hebrew as a modern language. In 1899, Haham Yaacob Meir was appointed Deputy Head of the Bet Din and was subsequently inducted as Haham Bashi of the Land of Israel, only to be deposed by the Ottoman Sultan six months later in favour of Haham Eliahu Moshe Panigel. In 1921, after the end of Ottoman rule, he was elected Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel. Haham Yaacob Meir died on May 26, 1939.

**Haham Menahem Menashe** was born in 1892 in Turkey, where he studied with the rabbis of Bursa and Istanbul. He died in Jerusalem in 1968.

The Haham fought in the Ottoman army in WW1 after which he moved to Israel, settling near Jerusalem. He worked as a blacksmith before opening 'Hevrat Ahavat Haim', a centre for Torah and prayer as well as a Talmud Torah. He was involved in charitable work to help the needy and arranged for mass visits to the graves of zaddikim in the Galil in order to encourage them to pray for the people of Israel.

Haham Menashe personally took on the costs of Jewish education and food for the children of some new immigrants after 1948. His following works were published: *Likutei Menashe* - on way of life; *Ahavat Haim* - including sermons and halachot from *Likutei Menashe*; stories relating to the weekly parashah; and the pamphlet *Shaar Haim*.

**Rabbi Yosef Messas** was born in Meknes, Morocco, in 1892 and died in Israel in 1974. Starting his career in Meknes, he soon became the outstanding figure amongst the rabbis of Morocco and Algeria. Rabbi Messas became Rabbi of Tlemcen in Algeria in 1924 before returning to Meknes as Rabbi and Dayan in 1940. He emigrated to Israel in 1964 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Haifa in 1970.

The Rabbi was often criticised for the leniency of his halachic rulings in which he attempted to find legal justification for some of the common practices of 'traditional' Jews, such as women neglecting to cover their hair in public. Rabbi Yosef was a prolific author whose major works include *Mayim Haim*, *Ner Mitzvah*, *Nahalot Avot* and *Otzar Hamishtavim*.

**Rabbi Shalom Messas** was born in Meknes, Morocco, in 1909 to a family with traditions stretching back to Spain and Portugal. He first studied with his father and with Meknes's Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yitzhak Sebag, who soon recognised him as a prodigy in Torah learning. He also attended a school run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

Rabbi Messas was appointed Chief Rabbi of Casablanca at the age of 36 and later of all Morocco. When he departed for Israel in 1978 at the invitation of Rishon leZion Ovadia Yosef, he was escorted to the airport by King Hassan II who asked the Rabbi to bless him as his last official act in Morocco. Rabbi Shalom Messas worked hard as the principal Sephardi halachic authority in Jerusalem to preserve Sephardic customs, and to find traditional ways to solve current problems. He died on Shabbat Hagadol, 2003, at the age of ninety, and was buried in Har Hamenuhot in Jerusalem.

He edited many books by other halachic authorities. His own works include *Mizrah Shemesh*, *Tevouot Shemesh*, *Shemesh Umagen*, *Beit Shemesh* and *Veham Hashemesh*.

**Haham David HaCohen El-Maghrebi** was born in Djerba, Tunisia in 1866. He studied under Haham David HaCohen Gisa. In 1903, with the establishment of the Jewish community of Tattouine, Haham El-Maghrebi became the city's Rabbi, a post he held until his death in 1938. His publications include: *Likutei betar Likutei* - commentary on Agaddah); *Neot Midbar* – Oasis (or Beauty) of the Desert; *Hasdei David*.

**Haham Yaacob Moshe Mizrahi** was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1888 and died in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1948.

In 1908 he enrolled in the Maselton family's Bet Midrash for rabbis in Damascus and a year later joined in the wave of emigration of Damascus Jews to Argentina, where he organised the large community of Boca Barracas, Buenos Aires. He set up the Kenis Talmud Torah and a synagogue in his home. The Haham was involved in the establishment of the Bnei Emet cemetery, in the charities Bikur Holim and Gemillut Hasadim, and from 1920 he ran the school Or HaTorah.

The Haham encouraged the teaching of girls, citing authority from the Torah for them to reach the level of teacher/rabbanit. Haham Moshe's wife took a prominent role in all his activities for the community.

He left an extensive collection of writings, most of which have not survived. His *Zerah Yaacob*, which included his sermons and original comments on laws and igrot (letters of advice), was published after his death.

**Haham Kalfon Moshe HaCohen** was born in 1874 (5634) on the island of Djerba in Tunisia to Haham Shalom HaCohen and his wife Tarki. He studied with his father and with Haham Yosef Berreby, who was subsequently appointed Chief Rabbi of Tunisia. In 1891 at the age of seventeen, he moved to the town of Zarzis. Four years later he married his cousin Masida and they had two sons and four daughters. He later contracted an illness that permanently damaged his eyesight.

Haham Kalfon returned to Djerba hoping to continue his studies but his eyesight made that more difficult. He repeatedly refused to serve on the Rabbinical Court until 1917 when Haham Moshe Zaqen Mazouz died and he agreed to replace him. Haham Kalfon served as head of the Rabbinical Court Tribunal from 1935 until his death.

Haham Kalfon Moshe HaCohen issued many important takanot and was vigilant in preserving religious observance throughout the island of Djerba. He held classes on Mishnah and poskim (halachic rulings) in his home every Sabbath and provided his pupils with the intellectual tools necessary for such study.

The Haham was renowned for his modesty and for his identification with the poor of the community. He avoided eating meat on weekdays and categorically refused to benefit from the status of his public position. He was among the founders of the Atereth Zion movement in 1919 that promoted Aliyah to the Land of Israel, supported institutions in the Yishuv (pre-state Israel) and promoted instruction in the Hebrew language. Haham Kalfon Moshe HaCohen also purchased a dunam (1/4 acre) of land in Jerusalem's Bet Hakerem neighbourhood. *(Editor: that this was a real rather than a symbolic purchase is attested by the fact that my maternal grandfather Dr Hillel Farhi, a renowned Cairo scholar and physician, also purchased a dunam of land in what later became Israel, land which his family retained until the early 1970s).*

In his essay Geulat Moshe, Haham Moshe presented detailed propositions for the structure of the future State of Israel. The Haham corresponded with the British High Commissioner for Palestine and maintained an ongoing correspondence with the world leaders of the Zionist movement. When the state was eventually established, he ruled that Israel's Independence Day should be celebrated in Djerba for three days each year.

In 1943 the Germans invaded Djerba. Though they were

ultimately defeated, the war badly affected the Haham's health. In 1949 he applied for the necessary certificate to enable him to leave the country but his failing health prevented Aliyah to Israel.

Haham Kalfon Moshe HaCohen died in 1950 and was buried in Djerba. His remains were brought to Israel some 55 years later in 2005, when they were re-buried in Jerusalem's Har HaMenuhot cemetery.

Haham Kalfon was the author of some 40 books, several of which were published during his lifetime and some posthumously: others remain as manuscripts. His most important works include *Responsa Shoel and Nishal* - in 9 volumes; *Brit Kehuna* - 4 volumes of commentaries on the Shulhan Aruch and Jewish customs; *Darash Yaacob* – an anthology of sermons; and *Yad Moshe* - on the Torah.

**Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides) (RAMBAN)** was born in Gerona, Spain, in 1194 and died in Acre, Israel in 1270. One of the outstanding Talmudic scholars of his age, he was also a renowned rabbi, halachist, kabbalist, philosopher and physician, and was on friendly terms with the King and the Christian nobility of Aragon.

Ramban emerged triumphantly from his famous public disputation with a Christian scholar, after which he was rewarded by the King. Eventually though, Christian pressure compelled him to flee to Israel where he wrote his great commentary on the plain and mystical meanings of the Biblical text. His many other works include: *Commentary on the Talmud*; *Commentary on Sefer HaMitzvot* by Maimonides (with whom he disagreed); and *Discourse on the Inner Torah* (a kabbalistic work).

**Haham Levi Saadia Nahmani** was born to Rina and Haham Yaacob in Marrakesh, Morocco in 1921 after their previous children had died in infancy. He was named after Haham Eliezer Halevi, his parents' rabbi, and after Haham

Saadia Rabah at whose tomb his parents had prayed for children.

Levi Saadia Nahmani studied with his father, with Haham Yaacob Hazut and with Haham Abraham Abitbol and was ordained by Haham Shalom Messas. He taught in the Otzar HaTorah Talmud Torah and in 1954 was appointed to the Neve Shalom yeshivah. He also taught Bible and Talmud in the teachers' Bet Midrash in Casablanca.

In 1964 the Haham emigrated to Israel and settled in Jerusalem. He was one of the founders of the Bet Shmuel synagogue, an institute of Torah study for adults and for youth. Haham Nahmani taught Torah and Judaism in universities and ran afternoon lessons for youth. He died in 1995 and was buried on Har HaMenuhot in Jerusalem.

Haham Levi Saadia Nahmani wrote *Brit Halevi* - a commentary on the Zohar; and various booklets including *VeAnta HaShira HaZu* - on contemporary issues and the Redemption.

**Haham Haim Palagi** was born in Izmir, Turkey in 1788 to Cali Kadin and Haham Yaacob Palagi and died there in 1868. He married at the age of nineteen and was ordained as Haham HaShalem by his grandfather, Rishon LeZion Haham Rafael Yosef.

The Haham did not accept any public position while his father was still living; and it was only in 1828 that he agreed to serve as a dayan in the Rabbinical Court and as Head of the yeshivah Bet Yaacob Rabi in Izmir. In 1837 Haham Haim Palagi was appointed President of the Great Rabbinical Court of Izmir; and in 1857 he was appointed Haham Bashi, the highest rabbinical office in Izmir.

Haham Palagi championed the poor of his community and often reprimanded its wealthy individuals in his sermons. He legislated takanot (halachic enactments) and founded charitable institutions. He also worked to establish a Jewish hospital in Izmir, for which he succeeded in enlisting the support of renowned philanthropists.

The Haham began writing the first of his more than 80 books at the age of sixteen. They cover a broad range of topics, and include 7 books on the Bible, 9 on the Talmud, 15 on Midrash, sermons and morals, and 24 books on Halachah, Kabbalah and Responsa. When he had completed a book, Haham Palagi would hold a seudat mitzvah (festive meal) at which he distributed his books gratis, never selling any of them. On 11 Ab 5601 (1841), a fire broke out in Izmir which destroyed the Jewish neighbourhood together with some 54 of the Haham's books. Over the years, Haham Haim managed to restore many of his writings and to have them reprinted, leaving only a small number in manuscript form.

Haham Haim Palagi died on 17 Shevat, 5628 (1868) and was buried in Izmir in an official state funeral, attended by Turkish military and state officials as well as by representatives of foreign countries. His books include *Peulat Zaddik LeHaim* – his first book; *Semichah LeHaim* Responsa – which he wrote with his grandfather and teacher, Haham Rfaek Yosef Hazan; *Rahamim LeHaim*, *Artzot HaHaim*, *Lev Haim*, *Haim LeRosh*, *Kol HaHaim*, *Matza Haim*, *Tzeddakah Haim*, *Peulat Zaddik LeHaim*, *Ginzei Haim*; and *Birkat Moadecha LeHaim* – published a day before his death.

**Farha (Flora) Sassoon** was born in Bombay, India in 1859. She was a businesswoman and philanthropist. After her arrival in London in 1901, Flora also became a famed society hostess whilst scrupulously maintaining kashrut at her receptions. Her Jewish scholarship, including knowledge of works found only in manuscript form, was remarkable and her expertise in Sephardi doctrine and practice was said to have been unparalleled. She championed the rights of women and took on many public religious roles that were highly unusual at that time. When in Baghdad, for example, it is said that she herself read from the Torah in synagogue for several months. Flora died in 1936.

**Haham Hezekiah Shabtai** was born in 1862 in Salonika, Greece. In 1867 he emigrated to Israel with his parents and studied in the Hessed El yeshivah in the Old City of Jerusalem where, in 1886, he jointly wrote the popular book *Meam Loez*.

In 1889 the Haham was sent by the Rabbinical Court as an emissary to Tunis and Tripoli. He then went on to Bucharra. A year later he was appointed Associate Haham Bashi in Jaffa and in 1904 became Haham Bashi in Tripoli, Libya. In 1908 Haham Shabtai was appointed Haham Bashi in Aleppo, Syria, where he served in that capacity for eighteen years. In 1919 he left for London and Paris on a fund-raising mission, after which he returned to Jerusalem. Seven years later he became Rosh Bet Din. Haham Hezekiah Shabtai died and was buried in Jerusalem on 23 Av 1955. His book, *Divrei Hizkiahu*, in two volumes, contains sermons, Responsa and halachic rulings

**Haham Sasson Shanduk ('Ajami') RASHAM.** He was born and died in Baghdad (1747-1830), where he is said to have witnessed many redemptive miracles that had protected Baghdad's Jews from persecution: that earned him the nickname, 'Ajami' (Persian language) from his non-Jewish admirers. The Haham was a man of many talents, being a gifted cantor, a composer of piyutim and a scribe. He constructed models of the Temple, designed a curtain for the Ark, and was a prolific writer on ethics, Kabbalah, the Psalms and synagogue prayers.

**Haham Abraham David Shalem** was born in Jerusalem in 1928 and ordained to the rabbinate with the support of the Rishon LeZion Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel. In 1948 he participated in the defence of Jerusalem against the invading Arab armies.

In 1950 he moved to Lima, Peru to become the leader of its Jewish community. He later moved to Mexico and then

on to Seattle in the USA before returning to Jerusalem in 1977. There he ran the Sephardi Orphanage and the Or HaMizrah Institute, which publishes ancient manuscripts. His books include: *Eshed Nehalim* – a commentary on *Ecclesiastes*; *Neot Desheh* – a prayer book for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; and a Spanish translation of the Psalms.

**Haham Abba Shaul** was born and died in Jerusalem. He taught Halachah to all ages and abilities in various institutions. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef was his study companion at Yeshivaht Porat Yosef. The Haham's writings include *Or LeZion* - Responsa and rulings on Talmud; innovative comments on tractates *Yevamot*, *Ketubot* and *Sheviit*; and *Zichron Hadassah* - on ethics.

**Haham Meir Toledano**, son of David, was born during the month of Iyar 5646 (1886) in Meknes, Morocco. His principal teacher was Haham Shlomo ben Amara.

In 1912 Haham Meir Toledano became one of the sages of the yeshivah Etz Haim where he worked as a teacher. He also spent his evenings teaching Torah in Meknes and its surroundings.

The Haham died on 14 Adar, 5710 (1950). His writings include Responsa, original commentaries on the Torah and Talmud, and sermons. They were published by the Toledano family in *Meir Einaim*, part of the book *Pi Hahamim* on its sages.

**Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano** was born in Tiberias in 1879 to Miriam-Remo and Haham Yehuda Toledano. His father, who had once headed a yeshivah in Meknes, Morocco, had immigrated to the Land of Israel in 1862. The future Haham began his studies with Rabbi Hai Eliakim, and continued them in his father's yeshivah.

In 1896, at the age of seventeen, he married Masouda

Hannah, Moshe Aharon Shlush's daughter. He was ordained to the rabbinate in that same year and began teaching at his father's yeshivah.

In 1914, on the outbreak of the First World War, his family was expelled to Corsica by the Turks, along with 800 residents of the Galilee because of their French nationality. Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano served as a rabbi in Corsica but returned to Tiberias immediately after the end of the war, where he worked towards the reorganisation of the Sephardi community and its institutions. His efforts brought about the founding of the Bet Mikra LaAm cultural centre where current newspapers could be read; but that had to be closed within a year because of religious opposition.

Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano worked on the restoration of the holy sites located in the city's surroundings and tried to involve the Hovevei Zion Society and the Jewish National Fund in redeeming the land surrounding the tombs of Maimonides and Rabbi Akiva; but he failed to arouse their interest. Instead he founded the Maimona Society that bought from the Arabs the land on which the first neighbourhood on the outskirts of Tiberias was built.

The Haham collected and studied ancient manuscripts, mainly from Spain and North Africa, dating as far back as the Geonic period (589 – 1038 C.E.). His most important discovery was Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah in the original Arabic.

In 1926 he responded to an invitation to serve as Dayan in Tangier, where he devoted himself to culture and to instilling a love for the Hebrew language and the Land of Israel in its Jewish community. He also founded the Torah VeHaim study house for rabbis and teachers in Tangier.

He was appointed Ab Bet Din (Head of the Rabbinic Court) and Deputy Chief Rabbi of Cairo in 1928; and later to the same position in Alexandria. Haham Moshe Toledano became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv–Jaffa in 1942.

At the end of the Second World War, following the

Holocaust, he established a special rabbinical court for agunot, married women whose husbands had left or disappeared without granting them a divorce. The Haham was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs in 1958, a position which he held until his death.

Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano wrote books on religion, research and Responsa. He was also involved in the publication of historic texts. His published work includes *Yam HaGadol* – Responsa; *Meshiv HaNefesh, Sarid U'Palit, Bat Ami* - on the problems of of *Agunot* after the Holocaust; and *Tiberias and its Surroundings* – a collection of articles. Haham Yaacob Moshe Toledano died on 24 Tishrei 5720 (1960) and is buried in the Har HaMenuhot cemetery in Jerusalem.

**Haham ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel.** Haham Uziel was born in Jerusalem to a distinguished rabbinical family. He served Salonika's large Jewish community from 1921 to 1923 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa on his return to Israel. Elected Rishon LeZion in 1939, he participated in the establishment of the Jewish Agency and acted as the Yishuv's representative to the British authorities as well as a delegate to the Zionist Congress. Haham Uziel was a public figure who served as spokesman for the Jewish nation in spiritual matters. His many written works include *Mishpatei Uziel and Michmanei Uziel* – articles and meditations.

**Haham Yaacob Yitzhaki** was born in 1846 in Dagestan, Caucasus, and died in Jerusalem in 1917, where he was buried on the Mount of Olives.

Haham Yaacob studied Torah with his father and also received a secular education. By 1868, already recognised as a distinguished scholar with connections to other rabbis in Europe, Turkey, Persia, Kurdistan and Israel, he was appointed Ab Bet Din and Chief Rabbi of Dagestan. The

Haham wrote copiously for various Jewish newspapers and was particularly interested in Jewish folklore, focussing on the dispersal of the ten tribes from the Holy Land and their connection to the community of Dagestan. He acknowledged the influence of this Jewish community on the conversion of the Khazars.

In 1907 Haham Yaacob moved to Jerusalem and with Menahem Ussiskin, founder of Hovevei Zion, bought land to settle immigrants from the Caucasus, establishing Beer Yaacob in 1908. He is well-known for his three-part, *Ohalei Yaacob* which consists of a mahzor for the High Holy Days, tikkunim for the three pilgrim festivals and unpublished tikkunim for the fast days.

**Maran Ovadiah Yosef.** One of the foremost Talmudic authorities of his generation, Haham Yosef was born in Baghdad in 1920 and came to Jerusalem with his family when he was four years old. He first studied at the Bnei Zion yeshivah in the Bucharan neighbourhood of Jerusalem; and in 1933 continued at the Porat Yosef yeshivah in the Old City of Jerusalem where Haham Ezra Attiah, its Rosh Yeshivah, became his spiritual mentor.

In 1937, when eighteen years old, he replaced Haham Douek at Ohel Rahel, the Persian community's synagogue in the Bet Israel neighbourhood. His expressed differences with the Ben Ish Hai's rulings provoked some objections but, with Haham Ezra Attiah's encouragement, he pursued his approach and published his reservations in a series of books entitled *Hilchot Olam*.

In 1940, at the age of twenty, he was ordained as a Rabbi and a Dayan by Haham Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel. In 1944, he married Margalit, Abraham Fatal's daughter, and the couple had eleven children.

By 1945 he was already officiating at Jerusalem's Rabbinical Court. In 1947, Maran Ovadiah Yosef moved to Egypt, where he was the associate of Chief Rabbi Nahum Effendi,

Head of the Rabbinical Court and Rosh Yeshivah at Ahava VeAhva.

In 1950 Maran Ovadiah Yosef left Egypt to return to Israel. He continued his studies at the Bnei Zion study house and officiated as Dayan at the Rabbinical Court of the city of Petah Tikvah, where he followed Sephardi custom in his rulings. He ruled to permit levirate marriage rather than halitza (the process by which a childless widow and a brother of her deceased husband may avoid the religious duty to marry), contrary to the amendments made by Israel's Chief Rabbinate.

In 1952, he published Hazon Ovadiah, his book on Passover halachot. In 1954, he was awarded the Rav Kook Prize, founded the Or HaTorah yeshivah for young Sephardi men, and published the first volume of his Responsa, Yabia Omer.

In 1958 Maran Ovadiah was appointed Dayan in Jerusalem's regional Rabbinical Court, and in 1965 became a member of the Great Rabbinical Court. In 1968, he was elected Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. During the period of his term as Rabbi of Tel Aviv, he continued to contribute to strengthening the Sephardi approach to halachic ruling, whereby 'enforcement through permission is the preferred way'. He was awarded the Israel Prize in 1970.

In 1972, Maran Ovadiah Yosef was appointed Rishon LeZion. During his term, he annulled the ban on Jews marrying Karaites who accept the yoke of the commandments. He established that Beta Israel are Jews on all counts, a historic ruling that led to the application of the Law of Return to the Jews of Ethiopia. He also freed from their marriage bonds the agunot (women bound by marriage to an absent husband) of soldiers missing in the Yom Kippur war. In 1977, he published the first volume of the Yecheve Daat, a series based on the Voice of Israel radio programmes on Halachah.

In 1983, Maran Ovadiah's term as Chief Rabbi ended as

a result of a law limiting the term of Chief Rabbis. A year later, the SHAS political party was founded with Maran Ovadiah as its spiritual leader; and he presided over its supreme authority, the Torah Sages Committee.

Maran Haham Ovadiah Yosef, described as 'Rabbi of the entire nation', died in 2013. An estimated one million people participated in his funeral in the Sanhedria cemetery.

**Haham David Zabah** was born in Marrakesh, Morocco in 1833 and studied under the city's sages, Shlomo Asbag and Moussa ben David Ohayon. In 1833 Haham Zabah was appointed Chief Rabbi of Marrakesh.

He died in 1858 and most of his many books have been lost. Those that have survived include *Maskil LeDavid* - a commentary on the Tanach and Talmud, sermons and more; *Moreh Tzedek*; and *Questions, Answers* - innovative rulings of his Bet Din.

**Haham David ben Zimrah.** Haham David ben Zimrah, the son of Haham Shlomo Ben Zimrah and known as the RADBAZ was born in Spain in 1479.

In 1492 when he was thirteen years old, all Jews were expelled from Spain. David ben Zimrah and his family moved to Fez in Morocco and then on to Safed, where he studied with Haham Yosef Saragosi, Haham Levi Ben Habib, and Rabbi Yosef Taitachak.

Haham David ben Zimrah eventually left for Egypt, where he was appointed Head of the Rabbinical Court. He earned his living there from commerce; and his worldly success enabled him to support Torah scholars and to develop ties with government officials.

When the Ottomans conquered Egypt in 1517, Haham David Ben Zimrah was chosen to lead its Jewish community. His outstanding student was Rabbi Bezalel Ashkenazi, author of *Shitta Mekubetzet* (on the Talmud). Another famous student of his Bet Midrash was the ARI. In 1553,

Haham David ben Zimrah returned to the Land of Israel and settled in Safed.

The Haham introduced the calendar system based on the date of the Creation, which is the one we use to this day. Two of his declarations are famous and still considered accurate. The first concerns the verse 'Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married'. This he clarified on the ground that 'she was of the seed of Dan, who reside in the mountains of Cush'. The second maintains that the location of the Holy of Holies is beneath the Dome of the Rock, on Temple Mount.

Haham David ben Zimrah died on 21 Heshvan 5333 (1573) and was buried in the ancient cemetery of Safed. His halachic Responsa were collected in the RADBAZ's *Responsa and Divrei David*; his book *Yakar Tiferet* contains commentary on *Metzudat David* by Maimonides which clarifies the reasons for the commandments; the Haham's commentary on the Song of Songs is entitled *Michtav LeDavid*; *Magen David* is a book of Kabbalah concerning the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The RADBAZ's Talmudic principles are set out in *MeHarerei Nemeirim*, a book written by Haham Abraham Akara.

**Haham Frija Zoaretz** was born in Tripoli, Libya in 1907. He was sent to Homs by the rabbis of Tripoli at the age of twenty-one to serve there as rabbi, cantor, shohet, halachic adjudicator and Hebrew teacher. The Haham worked for the Jewish Agency to bring Jews to Israel and was for a time imprisoned by Libya as a spy.

In 1949 Haham Frija Zoaretz made Aliyah and established himself as teacher and halachic authority. He was active in the Mizrahi community and became a Member of the Knesset for the National Religious Party in 1955. He wrote copiously, mostly on the heritage of the Jewish Libyan community. After his death in 1993, the Adnei Paz Talmud Torah was founded in Netanya, where a street bears his name.

## 9. THE TEAM responsible for this publication

### 9.1

#### *The Montefiore Endowment*

Sir Moses Montefiore Bart's Deed of Foundation of 1866 provided for the future transfer of the assets and administration of the Ramsgate Synagogue and the Judith Lady Montefiore College to the Elders of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London. Following Sir Moses's death in 1885, the Elders assumed responsibility for what became known as The Montefiore Endowment at Ramsgate.



In 1989, the Elders transferred their interest to a registered charity The Montefiore Endowment at Ramsgate, governed by independent trustees. In 2007 all the assets were transferred to The Montefiore Endowment, a new charitable company limited by guarantee.

Among the aims set out in the governing instrument of the Charity are 'the promotion of the advanced study of the Holy Law as revealed on Sinai and expounded by the revered Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud . . . and teaching the

benefit of tolerance, mutual understanding, social harmony and integration, in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Law as expounded by the revered sages of the Mishna and Talmud and as demonstrated in the life of Sir Moses Montefiore'. The Montefiore Endowment's current policy is based on its trustees' interpretation of the way in which Sir Moses himself might have wished his Endowment to be administered in the very different circumstances of today's world.

In addition to maintaining the Synagogue and Mausoleum at Ramsgate, together with the collections of manuscripts, books, artefacts, ritual textiles and ritual silver deriving from them, the trustees now emphasise the educational aspect of their work. This includes The Gap-Year Fellowship programme in Jerusalem for carefully selected school leavers who undertake to serve the community on their return to the UK; the Montefiore Semicha Course and the Montefiore Dayanut Programme; supporting other organisations with similar aims; sponsoring Ph.D students at university for research into topics relevant to its aims; and appropriate publications.

## 9.2

### **Alliance-Kol Israel Haverim (KIAH)**

**Editor's Note.** This entry was contributed by KIAH.

'Alliance-Kol Israel Haverim (KIAH) is a leading educational organization in Israel. Founded in 1860 in France, it sparked a massive change in the Jewish world, establishing 280 modern Jewish schools in Islamic lands; promoting education for women; founding leadership training institutes for educators, rabbis, and local community leaders; resurrecting the Hebrew language; founding Mikve Israel, the first

agricultural school in Israel. All of these formed a foundation for creating a modern and enlightened generation, connected to an open and inclusive Jewish tradition, and becoming a cornerstone of the founding of the State of Israel. Today in Israel, Kol Israel Haverim encourages educational excellence and local leadership in the periphery, cultivates a unifying Israeli Judaism, and creates connections to the Sephardic Jewish traditions, and to French Jewry.

The rich heritage of Sephardic Jewry, as reflected in the fields of textual commentary, Responsa, philosophy, Piyyut, as well as a rich communal life, offer an open and fruitful meeting between Jewish tradition and modernity, promoting a moderate and inclusive Jewish identity. Alliance–Kol Israel Haverim integrates and shares this worthy heritage for all, in order to create a Jewish identity that moves beyond ethnicity, and includes *Clal Israel*.

Kol Israel Haverim initiates intervention and empowerment programs in schools and in the community, and trains educators and local leaders as agents for sustainable social and educational change, from a worldview that fosters a connection between educational achievements and identity processes. Kol Israel Haverim promotes the Jewish tradition as unifying, diverse and inclusive of all'.

### 9.3

#### **Eretz Hemdah**

Eretz Hemdah Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies was established in Jerusalem in the year 5747 (1987) to prepare judges and spiritual leaders for the national-religious community in Israel and abroad. There was a pressing need for leaders who combined great Torah expertise with a strong Zionist background, a combination which was not easily found in Israel at that time.

The Institute aims to train a new generation of leading

Torah scholars imbued with loyalty to their people and their land, leaders with broad horizons who will work on uniting the nation through active rapprochement. It features an intensive and comprehensive eight-year curriculum to prepare students for certification as dayanim (Rabbinic Judges) and Rabbis of cities as well as equip them to serve as Ramim (lecturers) and Deans of college-level and graduate-level yeshivot. Certification as a dayan is officially recognized in Israel as a Ph.D. equivalent.

Its many other other areas of activity include: The 'Eretz Hemdah – Gazit network of Rabbinical Courts for Monetary Matters; The Responsum Project: B'mareh Habazak – 'Ask the Rabbi'; Batei Midrash in the Diaspora; and Hemdat Yamim – A Weekly Leaflet of Divrei Torah

#### 9.4

#### **Compiler and Principal Editor**



Lucien Gubbay has his roots in the Middle-Eastern Sephardi community of Manchester, England. He traces his family back through Cairo and Aleppo to Baghdad in the early 1600s; and on his mother's side through Cairo, Damascus and Turkey to Spain. Educated at Balliol College Oxford, he then served for a time in the Royal Air Force.

Gubbay currently chairs the Montefiore Endowment and is a past president of London's Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation. A consulting engineer by profession, he teaches and writes on Jewish history, is an honorary research fellow of the London School of Jewish studies and also of the Jewish Studies' Department of University College London. His publications include *Origins; Ages of*

*Man; The Jewish Book of Why and What; Quest for the Messiah; The Sephardim; Our Glorious Tradition; Two Worlds; Sunlight and Shadow, The Jewish Experience of Islam; Death and Mourning in Jewish Tradition; A Bath of Wine for the Sabbath; Who We Are And Where We Came From; the section on England in the Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World. He has also contributed new English translations for S&P prayer books, including the recently published Shabbat Prayer Book.*

## ***Notes***

---

## ***Notes***

---

***Notes***

---

## ***Notes***

---

***Notes***

---

## ***Notes***

---

***Notes***

---