

# **YITZHAK SHIRION**

## **MEMOIRS**

*Translated from Hebrew by Ami Argaman, the author's great-grandson*

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## MY HOME TOWN

I was born on the 11 Nissan 5631 [April 2, 1871], in the town of Disna in the Vilnius district, to my father, Reb Yehezkel, son of Reb Yaakov Halevi Zalkind, blessed be his memory, of a distinguished family from the town of Shakalov in the Mohaliv district, and to my mother, the Lady Sheina, daughter of Rabbi Avraham Rabinovich blessed be his memory, from a family of honorable Rabbis and merchants from the aforementioned town of Disna.

Disna is a county town situated near two rivers. One river is “West Dvina”, the great river which flows from the Smolensk district’s mountains, and which covers a long territory of Western Russia, passing through many important cities, most notable among them: Polotsk, Witebsk, Dvinsk (formerly Dinburg), and Riga, capitol of Latvia, and finally empties its waters into the Baltic Sea. At the point where the River Dvina passes through the town of Disna, there is a fairly large and attractive island where important fruit trees grow, as well as various vegetables and other produce. The island’s crop is owned by the chief priest of the Orthodox Church in the town. At the same location, the river merges with the Disenska River, an important river passing through the northern part of town, where it is large and very deep. The town of Disna is named after it.

The main inhabited area of the town is located on the right side of the river (on its descent route toward the sea). That territory is part of the Vilnius district and belongs to Poland. The area on the left side of the river, named Slobodka, includes only a small portion of the town’s population, and is part of the Witebsk district, which belongs to Soviet Russia. Therefore, at this spot, the Dvina River is the border between Poland and Soviet Russia. Beyond the Dinska River there is only a small urban settlement, and a few miles further is the beginning of a rural area, situated geographically within the Polish Vilnius district.

During Czarist times, Disna used to be an important market town. The vast majority of the town’s residents – altogether numbering about twenty thousand – were Jews who engaged in trade and commerce, while the minority of them consisted of craftsmen. Some important merchants in the town and around it were leasing forests from property owners in the area, rafting their wood along the Dvina River to Riga and from there on to Germany. There was also some considerable trade in asbestos, which grew there in abundance and was stored in warehouses. There, skilled laborers would extract the waste of the asbestos, pack it in large packages and send it to Germany – usually to their regular agents who then sold it in the local markets. A few important merchants were involved in exports of various types of grain, such as oats, rye, wheat and barley, etc. Most of the Jews were involved in trade of groceries, fabrics and small wares, and some were also wholesale distributors of alcoholic beverages. There were plenty of ways to make a living there. The land was fertile, and the peasants from the surrounding villages would bring their produce to town, sell it and purchase their own numerous

necessities. There was also no shortage of brokers, loan sharks, tavern managers and the like, as was common in those days.

All the Jews in town were Hassidic followers of CHABAD, divided into the Liadi, Lubavitch, Kopost and Staroselye courts. The veteran Hassids of each court used to go to their own “Rebe” for holy days, particularly the High Holidays, to derive the effect of holiness directly from the Rebe. Emissaries and returning students would be sent by the various rebes to town, to preach the Kabbala and other Hassidic teachings to their followers, who would gather at their local Rabbis’ houses, mainly on Friday nights and during the third meal of the Sabbath. The services in all the synagogues in town were performed only according to the Kabbalist CHABAD style of the late Rabbi Luria, and not even one “Minyan” of ten worshippers could be assembled for an Ashkenazi-style service. Whenever an “opponent” Jew – that is, non Hassidic – settled in town and wanted to pray in public in a synagogue, he had no choice but to use the CHABAD style.

The aforementioned emissaries, along with the local treasurers, would periodically collect the coins out of special charity boxes of MRM (Mirsculous Rabbi Meir) for the Land of Israel. Such boxes were present in every house, rich or poor, and the keys were kept only by the treasurers. The funds were sent to the Rebes, who transferred them to the Land of Israel. Coins were dropped into the boxes during family celebrations, while praying for the healing of the sick or against harsh governmental decrees at troublesome times. The women donated their coins every Friday evening prior to lighting the candles. Poor women were just as adamant about keeping this custom; even those women who used to sit all day as well as a large portion of the night in the open market, selling fruits and vegetables, freezing in the cold winter and roasting in the summer sun, and still hardly earning their bread, could not forfeit their right to drop their penny, or pennies, into the MRM box every Friday night prior to lighting the candles. This charity was considered so important because everybody fully believed that the powers attributed to the Miraculous Rabbi Meir, in whose name they donated their pennies for those who served God in his land, prayed in front of the Wailing Wall, in the holy sites and by Tombs of the Righteous, would eventually protect them against any kind of trouble or disaster.

I recall one time, when I was seven or eight years old, I was playing at the house of my friends, of a very important family that had lost its fortune. The father of that family had gone to the great commercial city of Riga to look for a business or a job there, but had not found any yet. The mother and several children remained in the house, and their financial situation was very grave. The children needed bread, and there was none. Succumbing to her distress, the mother took the MRM box from the wall and tried to pull a few pennies through the slot on the cover of the box, to buy bread for her children. But the pennies were big in size, and the slot narrow, so she needed to rattle it back and forth in hope that some pennies would find their way out. However, in the meantime she realized what she was doing and screamed; “Oh, My! What has come to me? MRM funds!” and she hung the box back on the wall.

Such was the sense of sacredness among the folks in regards to maintaining the [Jewish] settlement in the Holy Land.

## MY FATHER AND HIS FAMILY

My father, Reb Yehezkel, son of Reb Yaakov Halevi Zalkind blessed be his memory, was a member of an important and distinguished family in the town of Shakalov, in the Mohaliv district in White Russia, located by the Dnieper River. The town was known for its scholars and leaders.

My grandfather, Reb Yaakov, son of the Late Eliahu Halevi Zalkind, was among the leaders of Shakalov, a financial supporter and an important and respected community activist. Likewise was his brother, the late Reb Leib Zalkind. Both were involved in wholesale trade of fabrics. My grandfather used to import large portions of fabric from Prussia and distribute them – through his agents – to many Russian towns.

My grandfather had four sons and five daughters, all important and honored. The elder son, the late Reb Yisrael Aharon Mordechai Zalkind was also involved in the wholesale textile trade. As a first-class merchant he was granted the privilege of residing outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement, so he could live in Moscow for three months every year. He maintained commercial ties with the big factories of that city and would send large quantities of merchandise from Moscow to the great fairs in various districts of Central Russia, such as the famous fair of Nzsni-Novgorod and others, as well as famous fairs in White Russian towns such as Beshenkovichi, Lubavitch and others. His trade was quite extensive. He was very rich and charitable.

The second son, the Late Reb Shmuel Zalkind, settled in Moscow, where he established himself as an agent for textile merchandise. He served as trustee for great merchants from various towns in Russia, who would come to Moscow to buy merchandise from the factories there and made their purchases through him, or would send him their written orders. He lived in Moscow for about thirty years and was very respected by all his acquaintances there. He was the primary treasurer of the great synagogue there, and faithfully served many public needs. He won the respect of government officials, too, and did a great deal for the benefit of Jews from the Pale of Settlement, who were not allowed to live in Moscow but would come there anyway in pursuit of livelihood, which was not available for them in their own towns, due to the overcrowded conditions and the excessive competition among Jews in towns within the Pale of Settlement. Whenever the Moscow police arrested them, either individually or through organized raids conducted at night in residential dwellings and hotels, Reb Shmuel would be notified immediately and rush, using his friendly contacts with police officials, to bail them out at least temporarily, and in most cases he succeeded.

All that was possible as long as the Supreme Governor of Moscow was the Gentile Righteous Prince Dolgorukov, and all the senior and junior police officials were aware of his favorable attitude toward the suffering Jews. However, around 1896, Russian Czar Alexander the Third fired Prince Dolgorukov from his position, appointing his brother, Great Prince Sergei Alexandrovitz, a Jew hater, as Commissioner of Moscow. One day he issued an order to deport

all the Jews from Moscow, except for soldiers of Czar Nikolai the First and their descendants, who were granted the status of honorable citizens for generations, and had special documents. About forty thousand Jews were forced to migrate from Moscow then. They were allowed to take their money and belongings. Almost all of them immigrated to America, where entry was unlimited at the time.

My uncle Reb Shmuel Zalkind, at age 65 and with sufficient funds for his living, came with his wife to settle in Jerusalem. His brother-in-law, Reb Moshe Witenberg, and his sister, Lady Khasha, greeted him with honor. She gave him an apartment in a house she owned in the Nissan-Beck neighborhood, where I lived too, and he felt happy. He did not engage in any business or trade, but rather devoted the remainder of his years to public advocacy of the learning and charity institutes of Jerusalem. He was named by the leaders of the “Torat Haim” [“Torah of Life”] Yeshivah, headed by the Yeshivah’s founding chief, Reb Yitzhak Vinograd<sup>1</sup>, as an honorary treasurer for the Yeshivah. He lobbied for the Yeshivah as best as he could, raising funds for it among his many friends and acquaintances in Russia, as well as Moscow immigrants in America, who trusted his recommendations. He himself paid the Yeshivah fund one hundred golden Napoleons (80 Palestinian Pounds), to preserve his and his wife’s rights, after their death, to have study sessions and Kadish prayers said for them in accordance with the Yeshivah’s regulations, for his two sons had died in Russia. He was a good man, always willing to help and benefit the poor and the downtrodden. He died at age seventy-three, and has been laid to rest honorably on the Mount of Olives, In the Prushim<sup>2</sup> Community Cemetery, in a grave he had dug in advance.

My grandfather’s third son was my father, the late Reb Yehezkel, and the fourth son was the late Reb Ellahu Zalkind, who spent all his days in the county city of Mohallv, and was involved in the retail business.

My grandfather’s five daughters were: the elder, Fayeh Blumeh, who married a scholar, chief of a Yeshivah in Shakalov. In old age she was widowed and went along with her sister, Khasha, and her brother-in-law, Reb Moshe Witenberg, to Jerusalem. She lived here for several years, died and was buried on the Mount of Olives. The second daughter was Khasha, wife of Reb Moshe

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Yitzhak Vinograd, son of Rabbi Haim Matmid, chief of the “Torat Haim” Yeshivah, which was second only to the “Etz Haim” (Tree of Life”) among the Jewish community, was known, aside from his knowledge of the Torah, as a smart interpreter, as well as a cantor who composed some melodies for high holidays prayers. After his death, his brothers, the Great Rabbis Yoseph Eliahu and Simcha Vinograd and his brother-in-law, the Great Rabbi Zerach Epstein, served as chiefs of the “Torat Haim” Yeshivah, and were famous scholars as well. The Vinograd family was well known in Jerusalem at the time this book was written.

<sup>2</sup> [Jews who had left their countries leaving their wives and families behind, to learn the Torah in Palestine. However, sometimes the reference is to all non-Hassid ultra-Orthodox Jews. – aa]

Witenberg, who was, in his town Witebsk, a great merchant and banker. At sixty, still childless, he moved to the Holy City of Jerusalem and was quite active there, as will be detailed later. The third daughter, Toyveh, was married to Mr. Avraham Yaakov Idlson, son of one of the leading merchants of Mohaliv, a dignitary, an honored citizen for generations from the time of Czar Nikolai the First. Reb Avraham Yaakov Idlson had a big house in one of Mohaliv's main streets, and was for several years an acting member of the City Government of Mohaliv. His son, Dr. Yitzhak Idlson<sup>1</sup> and his grandson, Mr. Avraham Idlson live now in Tel Aviv. The latter is a member of the management of the Commerce and Industry Company in Tel Aviv.

The fourth daughter, Fasheh, married a member of the affluent Rivlin family in Shakalov, and the fifth, Sheineh, married a distinguished man from the family of the late Rabbi of Kopost.

My grandfather's brother, the late Reb Leib Zalkind, also had sons and daughters who have assumed important positions in life, both in their home town of Shakalov and in various other towns in Russia, wherever life has taken them.

About one of Reb Leib Zalkind's sons, Reb Kalman, I heard from my uncle, Reb Shmuel Zalkind: Reb Kalman had a large textile shop. The business was run by his wife, while he concerned himself only with learning the Torah and worshipping. He had seven sons, all scholars and important merchants, and he acquired the right to pass by the ark in the Great Synagogue of Shakalov during the closing service of Yom Kippur. There was this old man with his solemn face, standing in front of the pillar, wrapped in his prayer-shawl and its silver fringes over his head, surrounded by his seven sons, all of them god-fearing scholars with their shawls and the fringes over their heads, assisting him with great enthusiasm in singing the common melodies for the closing service. This prayer would instill feelings of sacredness and awaken rejoicing repentance in the hearts of all the attendees.

My late father married young and opened a wholesale textile shop in Shakalov. About two years after the wedding, his wife gave him a daughter named Belleh. Due to a difficult childbirth and a consequent ailment, his wife died a few weeks later. The girl thrived and grew beautiful, and when she came of an age, my father married her to a member of his family named Gershon Zalkind, a very important fellow, who at the age of twenty was already certified as a rabbinical teacher. However, he did not wish to take any rabbinical job, and later went on to learn commerce and bookkeeping. Upon being certified, he traveled to the great city of Kiev, where he accepted a position in an important Jewish bank. Talented and industrious as he was, he rose to the position of the bank manager, and after several years became a partner as well. He lived a pleasant life, gave much of his money to charity, was involved in public service and in the synagogue, and made himself a name as one of the influential figures in Kiev.

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<sup>1</sup> Died one and a half years ago in Tel Aviv

Father married a second wife, but she proved barren. He lived with her for ten years, and once they realized that she was not capable of providing him with children they divorced, and he compensated her with a decent amount of money.



## MY MOTHER

My late mother, Lady Sheina, was born in the town of Halovici, in the Disna district of the Vilnius County. Her parents were the late Reb Avraham Rabinovich and his wife Gittel, from an affluent family. Her grandfather had been a Rabbi in her hometown. At a young age she was married to an important man in Disna, the richest in town. She gave him one son and three daughters, and when they were still young, the husband took ill and died. He left her houses and lots and a big textile shop.

After her husband's death, his head clerk, who knew all the ins and outs of the business, planned to commit fraud. He falsified promissory notes for large amounts of money, written supposedly to him, and forged her late husband's signature. The widow had been told by her husband that he owed no money to anybody. In fact, the entire town's folks knew that, because he was very wealthy and had no need for loans. However, since the falsification was done successfully, and she – a young woman with four children – did not know how to defend herself properly, the court decided in his favor, ordering her to pay the scoundrel the full amount of the suit plus his expenses. He auctioned off much of the merchandise from the shop, for cheap prices of course, and so her losses were considerable. Not long afterwards, the same crook was caught forging governmental monetary notes and was arrested, tried, and sent to Siberia.

The textile shop survived anyway, albeit somewhat diminished. The widow continued to run it energetically. She would travel to fairs in the towns of Beshenkovichi and Lubavitch to buy her merchandise. Father, who was a textile wholesaler, and brought his merchandise to sell in those fairs, met her as a customer and married her, in spite of the fact that she already had four little children, since he actually wanted a woman who had been proven fertile, so he found her suitable in more than one way. She made a condition that he move to her town, Disna. He concurred, liquidated his business in Shakalov, came to Disna, and proceeded to run her textile shop as well as her houses. With his own money he expanded the shop and built a new house on one of her lots, a big, handsome house with a wall around it.

About a year after their wedding they suffered a great catastrophe, which undermined their financial standings significantly. Father went to Moscow to buy merchandise for their textile shops, and spent several weeks there. As mentioned, mother had a whole list of houses left to her by her first husband. Busy as she was with the running of the shop and the houses, she did not notice that the houses' fire insurance had expired. Her insurance agent's office failed to notify her, since the agent himself had been out of town for some time. Meanwhile a great fire erupted in town, and almost all her houses were consumed by the fire. The damage was vast. They were left only with the new house father had built with his money, the shop, which was not touched by the fire, as well as the lots with the burnt houses and some other empty lots with decent values.

My mother gave birth to myself and to my brother Simcha, who is six years my junior.

## MY FATHER'S DEATH

We lived the life of a happy family until a terrible tragedy occurred to us, when I was about ten years old.

One Saturday in the late afternoon, father went, as usual, for a stroll along the river. Suddenly he was struck by a seizure and his face twitched. Gravely ill, he was taken home, and the leading physician in town was rushed to his bed. The doctor said that he had to be taken immediately to some famous spa. Mother went with him, but on the way his condition deteriorated and he could not continue. He asked mother to take him to his hometown of Shakalov, so that he could die there and be buried alongside his ancestors. She accomplished that with great difficulties, since his body was already paralyzed. A room was cleared for him in a house he had inherited from his father together with his sister Fasheh, and a 24-hour caretaker was assigned to him, because he could no longer get out of bed. Mother had to return home to her children and her business. She sent him money for his expenses and would come to visit him every so often.

On 15th Shvat 5642 [February 4.1882], he died at age fifty-one. I was about eleven years old, living at my mother's house with my brother Simcha and her children from her first husband. Father was conscious till his last moments, and I always imagine how terrible his sorrow was when he could not see his two beloved children prior to his death.

Mother remained again a lonely widow with six children. Life turned tough on her. The number of textile shops in town increased, and the competition stiffened, driving her eventually out of business. She made her living from renting apartments in her houses to government offices, officials and others.

A year after father's death, another disaster struck. The modern, big house that father had built was rented out to offices of the local city government. One bitter day, I was told in the "Heder"<sup>1</sup> where I was learning that a fire had broken out in our house. I ran home quickly and found it burning, mother standing and watching helplessly and all the children crying bitterly. From mother I learned that the houses' fire insurance had expired a few days earlier. Busy as she was, she failed to notice that fact, and the house was actually uninsured. The firemen were able to extinguish the fire after only the roof and some of the inner walls were burned, so much of it remained intact.

Later on we found out that the reason for the fire was that one or more city officials were interested in burning the city archives, documents and all. During the formal investigation, one official, himself a major suspect, tried to blame the homeowner for the fire. The investigating

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<sup>1</sup> [An equivalent of early elementary religious schooling in European Jewish communities – AA]

judge summoned her for questioning, but once he realized that the house had not been insured at all against fire, he dismissed the accusations against her on the spot.

## MY COMING OF AGE

I received a traditional [Jewish] education in a “Heder”. At age thirteen I began my general studies as well. At age fifteen I passed the admissions test for a city government school, graduated with good grades and earned an award: an excellent and comprehensive Russian history book, which I keep with me to this very day. I continued my studies at home and after a year of studying persistently I went to the county city of Mohaliv, where I studied with private tutors for over a year. In the opinions of teachers and testers I was ready to be admitted to the eleventh grade in the Gymnasium, but just prior to the beginning of that particular school year, the Russian Ministry of Education issued a regulation limiting the ratio of Jewish students admitted to high schools to five percent, so I could not achieve my goal.

In addition to the general studies, I also attended lessons of the Gemara and its interpreters, which were taught in the Great Synagogue of Zukerman in Mohaliv, two hours each day in the early evening, by a lecturer who was one of the town’s Dayyans<sup>1</sup>.

One evening, after the evening service, which was conducted following the studies in the Great Synagogue, a Jewish man, about thirty five years old, went up to the stage, solemn faced and smartly dressed, and introduced himself as the preacher of Kaminitz, who had just begun to make himself a name as an excellent lecturer. He announced his interest in lecturing for a few evenings in that Zukerman Synagogue and then in other synagogues in town, and that he would dedicate the income from his first two lectures for the benefit of the Bread for the Poor society in town. He began his lectures by quoting by heart a chapter from the Mishnah (the exact chapter I do not remember), and based on that chapter he delivered a beautiful address that pleased his audience very much. Not too many people attended the first evening, however the news about his beautiful speeches were rapidly spread in town and in the second evening a larger audience was present, and the number of participants kept increasing every evening.

The target of his lectures was the younger generation, which by and large tended to shift away from Judaism and from Israeli nationalism, and to turn into “enlightenment” and assimilation. His purpose was to awaken and enforce among them sentiments of returning to the ideals of the ancient People of Israel, of living the Torah and all of the nation’s sacred assets. With his penetrating words he strove to instill in his audience’s hearts a special love for our Holy Land and for its settlements. He injected many sources of wisdom and science into his lectures, quoting from opinions of various scholars and philosophers, and he possessed that special ability to explain rather profound matters in a manner that even a large audience could comprehend.

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<sup>1</sup> [a Jewish religious judge – AA]

He continued to give his lectures in Mohaliv for thirty consecutive evenings: Seven times in the Zukerman Synagogue, and the rest in other synagogues in town. I went every evening to listen to his lectures, rain or shine, even when he delivered them in distant synagogues. His lectures lasted through late at night. Once the quality of his lectures became known in town, many of the educated youth came to listen to him, as well as students who happened to be at home at that time, on vacation from their various Russian universities. The synagogues were filled to their capacities during his lectures. Everybody stood crowded for hours to enjoy this excellent speaker's words.

From Mohaliv he continued to other Russian towns and then to London, where a famous society assigned him as a national preacher. He then traveled to various countries and cities, advocating national unity and love of the Holy Land.

His message was received well in both my brain and heart, and he made an ardent Zionist out of me.

## CONTEMPLATING IMMIGRATION

The governmental decrees that were often issued against Jews in Czarist Russia at that time, the tyrannical government, and the constant humiliation of Jewish pride, made life in that country loathsome to me. I made up my mind to leave it.

At that time I read and heard about activities of Jewish youth: the BILU pioneers, who were in their beginning stages then, and the great activities of “Hovevey Zion” [Lovers of Zion] who strove to awaken the feelings of love for the Land of Israel and to promote self esteem among the Jewish people. Influenced by them, as well as by the wonderful speeches of the Preacher from Kaminitz, who had inspired the love of Israel in me, I decided to do all that I could to go to Palestine. I corresponded about it with my aunt, Lady Khashe, wife of the great Moshe Witenberg, who in 1884 had move out of their town of Witebsk and settled in Jerusalem. She encouraged my ambitions.

In order to travel from Russia abroad, a passport had to be obtained from the County Minister, and in order to obtain it, one had to submit a birth certificate as well as a domestic travel document. In order to obtain those two documents, I came back from Mohaliv to my hometown of Disna. Mother requested my birth certificate from the local government-appointed Rabbi, but he could not find a record with my name in his birth registrar. The reason for this, my mother told me, was that my Brith [Jewish ritual circumcision ceremony] had happened on the fourth day of Passover. The appointed rabbi, free-spirited as he was, used to violate Passover dietary laws in public. Father, a pious Jew, refused to invite him to the Brith and neglected to notify him about my birth. Therefore, I was never recorded in the birth registrar, and now I could not obtain a birth certificate. I was advised to go to Shakalov, where Father had been registered in the citizens' registrar, to register there as his son. I would have to explain the delay in registration as due to the fact that I was born in a different town. I took my farewells from my brothers and sisters in Disna, as one traveling afar, and along with my mother I went on to Shakalov. There I submitted an application to the right place to be registered as a son of the late Reb Yehezkel Zalkind, native of that town, declaring that I was seventeen years old. In response, I was notified that first I had to report to a government committee that would estimate my age. The committee estimated my age to be fourteen, although my body was adequately developed for my real age. The government's intention was that once a candidate's time comes to report to his military service, his body would be even stronger. I was registered and received both a birth certificate and a domestic travel document. I went then to the county city of Mohaliv, to obtain a passport from the County Minister so I could travel to Palestine. However, I was told there by reliable sources that the minister was quite stringent in granting such passports to young people, and that I would have to wait several months for this answer, which was likely to be negative anyway. I was advised to go to Odessa instead, where such a passport was supposedly more obtainable. I took my farewells from my mother, who returned home, and from my other relatives in Mohaliv, and went on to Odessa.

Upon my arrival in Kiev, I went to the house of my sister Beilah and my brother-in-law Gershon Zalkind, whom I had mentioned earlier. They and their sons welcomed me warmly, and I stayed with them for over a month. My brother-in-law provided me with a letter to one of his acquaintances in Odessa, a well-known merchant named Nathan Grinberg, whom he asked to advise me in the matter of obtaining the passport.

Upon my arrival in Odessa, I paid Mr. Grinberg a visit and gave him the letter from my brother-in-law. Reb Nathan Grinberg was a devout Breslov Hassid. According to the teachings of his Rabbi Machman of Breslov, every Jew, and especially his own followers, had to live in the Land of Israel. If that was not possible, he had to at least visit there once. If even that was not feasible, he had to use all his resources to help another Jew who wished to go to the Holy Land. Reb Nathan was therefore delighted for the opportunity that I provided him with, to fulfill his Rabbi's commandment. He welcomed me with obvious joy, asked me to move my belongings from the hotel to his house, gave me a room for myself there, abandoned his own business temporarily, and devoted himself to my matters.

Rabbi Nathan summoned a government lobbyist whom he considered dependable, and entrusted him with arranging my passport. The Governor of Odessa at that time, General Ziloni, was known as a Jew hater. The lobbyist contacted an official from among his acquaintances in the governor's passport department, and was told by him that a fourteen year old boy could not be allowed to go abroad, unless he was accompanied by a guardian. The lobbyist found an old Jew, an Austrian citizen, who was traveling through Odessa to Palestine, and was willing to be my guardian on the way there. I submitted my application for a passport to the Governor, and the aforementioned old man registered as my guardian. The formal reason for my travel to Palestine, stated on the application, as was suggested by the friendly official, was my wish to go to Jerusalem to pray for my late father's soul, as was common among many Russian Orthodox. I remained with the old Jew in the waiting room in the governor's office, and after a short while was let into the governor's reception room. A few moments afterwards, General Ziloni entered the room – An old man, tall and solid looking in his uniform – along with his adjutant. He first attended to other applicants, then turned to me. Upon reading my application, he asked where my guardian was. The old man was sent in, but his sight infuriated the general who screamed: "Get out, dirty Jew!" Then he proceeded to ask me why I wanted to go to Palestine. I clarified my purpose, as was stated on the application, and assured him that I intended to return shortly afterwards to Russia. He responded: "I thank your main aim is to evade military service." I presented him papers indicating that I was exempted from military service anyway, but he paid them no attention. Dejected, I left and headed back to Mr. Grinberg's house. There I found the lobbyist waiting for me. I told him what had transpired. He comforted me and promised: "Do not despair, give me a few days, and I will get you your passport." And so it was. Within a few days, the man brought me an official passport with my name and correct age, requiring no guardian, signed by the Governor of Odessa General Ziloni himself.

On 10 Kislev 5659 [November 14, 1888], I boarded a nice ship of the Russian Sailing and Commerce Company. I cannot recall what the name of that ship was. Reb Nathan Grinberg escorted me to the ship, bringing plenty of supplies for the voyage – which of course I paid for – and stayed with me on the ship almost until sailing time. I thanked Mr. Grinberg for the fatherly love he had shown me and for all the goodness that he had done for me, and promised him to write to him upon reaching my destination, and to tell him about life in Jerusalem and all that would happen to me. I later kept my promise, and wrote to him often from Jerusalem. Whenever poor people of his acquaintance went to Jerusalem, he would provide them with letters of recommendation to me, and I tried my best to help them there.



## AT SEA

On the same day (10 Kislev 5659 [November 14, 1888]) in the afternoon, the ship sailed out of Odessa. In the evening, a storm erupted. All the Jews traveled in third class, which meant on deck. As the storm intensified and it became colder, we were given inappropriate sleeping quarters on the bottom of the ship. The next day, the storm tapered off, the sky cleared, and the further we went, the higher the temperature rose, and once we moved from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, the air turned quite warm, because the sun pampered us with its pleasant rays.

After 36 hours of the voyage, we arrived at the port of Istanbul, where our ship stopped to load and unload various merchandise, destined for the several ports on our way. At night, Istanbul was especially lit, in honor of Sultan Abed El Hamid's birthday. The entire beach was flooded with lights galore, illuminating the Bosphorous, the Sultan's palace and other gorgeous buildings. The fabulous sights of the surroundings were visually striking. The next morning, our ship sailed on.

The Jewish travelers on this ship were two Jerusalem residents and one from Tiberius, who were returning from Russia, two old couples on their way to settle in Jerusalem, and several women, among them some new immigrants and some returnees.

One of the two Jerusalem residents, who were returning from Russia, was the late Reb Yeshaya Orenstein, a veteran resident of Jerusalem, on his way back home after selling citrons in Russia. He was a typical Jew, a CHABAD Hassid, a great scholar and always joyous and delightful. He served as a secretary for the CHABAD's Kolel<sup>1</sup>, and was a confidant of the Great Rabbi of Brisk, Yahosua Leib Diskin, whose Yeshivah he helped to run. On the ship we became close. He was intrigued by what he considered the chivalrous act of a youth like me, leaving his parents and family's house and traveling alone to a faraway and unknown country, where usually only the elderly go to spend the rest of their days learning the Torah and praying. Spending the time in his company was quite a pleasant experience. He knew how to tell nice jokes, as well as serious accounts about great men, including from Napoleon's time.

Our ship visited various ports, and one morning it anchored at the Port of Izmir. There it stopped for 24 hours, so we were allowed to go to town for the entire day. Reb Yeshaya Orenstein, who had already gone that route several time earlier, invited me and some other passengers to go downtown with him. First he took us to a vegetarian restaurant, owned by a devout Sepharadi

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish community in Jerusalem at that time was divided into congregations of people who would come from the same town or country, and/or affiliated with the same school of thoughts within Judaism. Each such congregation was called "Kolel", Donations from abroad were sent to a given Kolel, and the funds were supposed to be divided equally among its members

Jew, where we were served dairy food and cooked vegetable for lunch. We found the meal delicious, after not tasting any cooked food during our voyage. For desert we had fruits and pastries. After resting for a little while, Reb Yeshaya took us to the wine cellar of a pious Jew. We drank Izmir's fine wine, and took several bottles along with us. After strolling down the streets of Izmir, we returned to our ship and sailed on in the evening.

During the trip there were a few more storms at sea, some stronger than others. I did not suffer at all from sea sickness, but some of the others suffered miserably. Of course, as a healthy, young man I helped those who suffered by providing them with medications, and with whatever else I could do for them. On 24 Kislev 5649 [November 28, 1888] in the morning, we arrived safely at the Jaffa port.

## MY ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

On 24 Kislev 5649 [November 28, 1888] in the morning, we arrived safely at the Jaffa port. The Turkish law in Palestine at that time permitted Jews from abroad to enter the country only for three months, as tourists. A Jew was not allowed to leave the ship and come ashore unless a known Ottoman citizen, of good standing, vouched for him that he would, indeed, leave the country at the end of that period. My entry was made possible through the guarantee furnished by the Mukhtar [community leader] of Jaffa, Haim Goldberg, who was also known as Haim Becker. He was famous for his involvement in helping Jewish travelers arriving at the Jaffa port, for a fair compensation, of course.

We got off the ship at noon time and went to the Jewish hotel of Mrs. Miryam Horowitz in Jaffa, which was located in a primitive Arab house. Then we dined and rested. The same evening, which was the first night of Hanukah, I headed on to Jerusalem in a horse cart, since there was still no train in Palestine.

After several hours of riding we arrived at The Gate of the Valley (Bab El Wad). There the driver stopped, allowing his horses much needed rest to strengthen themselves for the climb up the mountains toward Jerusalem. We entered a sort of a hotel, run by a Jew, to rest. The owner served us a small cup of Arab coffee, that is, blackened water, which according to local custom we were obliged to accept and to pay two Turkish dimes for it.

Inside one of the caves at the Gate of the Valley I lit, along with Mr. Epstein, a young Jerusalem book dealer who was traveling with me, the first candle of Hanukah, blessing “Shehecheyanu”<sup>1</sup> twice – once for the land and once for the candle.

Following a short rest in the Gate of the Valley, we boarded the cart again and continued on to Jerusalem. Mr. Haim Becker’s guarantee was good only outside Jerusalem, and upon my arrival at Jerusalem the next morning, I was detained at the first police station and was told to provide another guarantor, who would vouch for me that I would leave the country after three months. I notified my uncle, Reb Moshe Witenberg, via a messenger. Although I had corresponded with his wife, my father’s sister, prior to my trip, he was totally surprised, because she had never told him a thing about my coming. Nevertheless, he agreed to vouch for me. As a Russian citizen he furnished his guarantee not to the police station, but rather to the Russian consulate here.

I was released and came to my uncle’s house. I promised him that I would cause no inconvenience regarding his guarantee, and that by the end of the three month period I would go either back to Russia, or to America, where entry was unlimited at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> [Blessing God for maintaining and preserving us – aa]

However, Providence apparently wanted me to stay in the Land of Israel. Reb Moshe owned a large building in his town of Witebsk in Russia, with stores, offices and apartments. He left the responsibilities for managing and renting to his brother's son-in-law, Mr. Hillel Rappaport. On the second or third day of my stay at my uncle's house, he received a telegram from the aforementioned building manager, informing him that one of the tenants, still owing a good sum for his rent, refused to pay and was about to leave town. The authorization he had did not empower him to stop the tenant from leaving. However, he was able to issue a temporary foreclosure of the renter's belongings, until he received full authorization from the building owner, certified by the Russian consul here. I offered my uncle to write the authorization for him, since I had the opportunity, in my hometown Disna, to learn proper drafting of letters and official documents: during school vacations I worked as an intern at a lawyer's office. However, Reb Moshe did not believe that I could properly draft such an important document, so he called on another Jewish man, who claimed to be an expert writer in Russian, and had written for him letters for the Russian bank with which he was doing business. The bank, of course, could not care less about the letters' style or grammar. That man drafted the authorization, but when Reb Moshe submitted it to the consul for certification, the latter refused to sign it, since it was written in poorly constructed Russian and was laden with errors. In the absence of any decent Russian writer in Jerusalem, Reb Moshe was forced to assign me to draft the authorization, which was then accepted willingly and certified by the consul. This job raised my value in Reb Moshe's eyes. He realized that I could be an employee who would not cost him dearly. He decided, then, to take the necessary steps to enable me to stay past the period I was originally allowed.

He approached the local Mukhtar in this matter, who had contacts with Turkish officials. The Mukhtar appealed to the police station, but was told there that had the guarantee been furnished originally to them, they could provide him now with it, in return for the customary gratuities. However, since the guarantee was issued through the Russian consulate, the police clerks were too fearful to do anything about it. Nevertheless, Reb Moshe did not give up, and searched for other ways.

We realized that the only way I could stay was by taking on Ottoman citizenship. I was aware of the poor political conditions for Ottoman citizens, but since I desperately wanted to remain in the Land of Israel, I agreed even to that.

Two weeks prior to the end of my authorized stay in Palestine, I became ill with hay fever. The doctor ordered me to go to Hebron, where the air was clearer than in Jerusalem, and to stay there for at least one month. Fearing that I might not become an Ottoman on time, we decided that I should register in Hebron. The head of the Hebron community at that time, who was also in charge of the CHABAD Kotel there, the late Chief Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Salonim, a friend of my uncle, arranged for me to be registered by the Ottoman registrar in Hebron.

As a nationalist Jew who was about to immerse himself in the land of his forefathers, I felt a moral obligation to change my foreign last name to a Hebrew one. Although I grieved the

abandoning of my family's name Zalkind, which had been known as a very important family in Russia, my sense of obligation to take on a Hebrew last name prevailed. Once I made up my mind about it, I began searching for an appropriate name from the Bible.

The day before going to register as an Ottoman citizen, I studied Chapter 59 of the book of Isaiah. There the prophet is furious about the evil of the people, about the lack of justice and fairness, etc., but in the end, He who had chosen the People of Israel will force them to mend their ways. In Verse 17, the prophet expresses God's will in this matter, saying: "He put on righteousness as armor." Armor – Shirion in Hebrew – is a protection, and it will protect its people forever, as it is explained the following verses. I took a fancy, then, to the name "Shirion", and recorded it as my last name in the citizen's registry. That day I became a complete resident of Palestine, with full rights of living in this country.

The Governor ("Mutztaref") of Jerusalem at that time was Rouf Pasha, a Turkish zealot, an upright and stringent official who strictly enforced his government's laws. He caused great difficulties to the original Jewish settlements, which were established during his term. He inflicted particular hardships on the settlement of Petach Tikvah, by denying it a license to build the first house for the first settlers. They were subjects of foreign governments, and therefore he had no power over them, but when it came to lands, there was no Treaty Law. Only the great energy of the settlement's founders kept them going. The late Reb Moshe Solomon, a German citizen, received support and advice from the German consul in Jerusalem; Reb Yehoshua Schtemper, an Austrian citizen, recruited the support of his government's consul; and other settlers were helped by their own foreign governments, which helped them to stay put and strengthen the settlement's position, step by step.

That governor strictly enforced the law forbidding immigration of foreign Jews to Palestine. However, there were a number of energetic Jewish activists, who lobbied tirelessly for repealing this decree, both in Istanbul and in Jerusalem.

The leading activist in this matter was the late Mr. Nissim Bachar, representative of the Alliance Society, which enjoyed great clout in Istanbul. Second to him was the energetic public activist, the late Reb Nissan Beck, the director of the Wolyn Kolel in Jerusalem, who was particularly dedicated to repealing this decree. He was a clever man, handsome and solemn-faced. Rouf Pasha held him in great esteem, and wanted to promote him to the position of "Chacham Bashi" [The official Chief Rabbi] of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem. However, this high post could be held only by an Ottoman citizen, and Reb Nissan Beck did not wish to forfeit his Austrian citizenship for an Ottoman one.

The intense lobbying paid off and an order was received from Istanbul to allow unlimited immigration of Jews from foreign countries. Rouf Pasha summoned Mr. Bachar and Mr. Beck to him, gave them the happy tidings and asked them to spread them in public. This happened exactly at the end of my first three-month period in Jerusalem. I remember Reb Nissan Beck's

arriving at my uncle Reb Moshe Wittneberg's house, conveying the news to him with true delight and excitement.

A few years later, the prohibition on immigration of Jews from abroad was reinstated. Only a fixed number of tourists were allowed in, and upon entering they received the famous "red note", allowing them to remain only a few months in the country. The decree prohibiting immigration of Jews would be abolished and then reinstated from time to time, in accordance with Sultan Abed el Hamid's politics.

## AT THE HOUSE OF MY UNCLE REB MOSHE WITENBERG

I stayed at the house of my uncle, Reb Moshe Witenberg, because he found me useful. He had a private bank in Jerusalem, which did business with large banks in St. Petersburg, the capital city of Russia, and was also involved in purchasing and selling securities of the Russian government, as well as of various Russian companies in the St. Petersburg stock market. I was his secretary, his Russian correspondent and his bookkeeper, to his satisfaction.

My intention was to move into one of the Moshavot<sup>1</sup> that were founded in Palestine at that time, and to engage in agriculture. However, not long after recovering from my original hay fever, I fell ill with an even harsher malady, malaria, which lasted for over three months and weakened me considerably. My aunt, Reb Moshe Witenberg's wife, saw how badly I suffered and concluded that I could not adapt to the country's climate. She offered me a loan, to be returned once I settled down, so that I could go to America, where entry was unlimited then, and opportunities for success were numerous. However, I refused her offer, telling her that I had come to the Land of Israel, and my wish was to stay there, and whatever happens, happens. Upon recovering from my ailment, I devoted myself to working in my uncle's bank business and managing his many houses in Jerusalem.

Reb Moshe was a highborn, learned CHABAD Hassid. His father, the late Reb Reuven Witenberg, had visited, at a young age, the great Rabbi Seneer Zalman Schneerson of Liadi, author of the Book of Eclectics and the Set Table, and later became a distinguished, wealthy merchant in his town of Witebsk. In old age, Reb Reuven took his wife and went to Jerusalem where he lived for few years, and then died and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

Naturally, Reb Moshe received his traditional education in the "Heder", and was a pious Jew, dedicated to learning. In the house that he had bought in the Old City, near Nablus Gate, he established a synagogue, with a women's gallery, where all the nearby neighbors would come to pray. Every day, following the morning service, he gave a lecture on the Set Table, and between the mid-day and the evening services he taught a lesson on Ein Yaakov<sup>2</sup>.

Every day, at set hours, he would learn Mishnah and Gemara with me. During the winter he would rise several hours before dawn. He lived on the first floor, and my room was on the third floor. Old as he might have been, the man would climb up the uncovered stairs, even when it rained, to my room. He would knock on my door and would not leave until I promised him that I

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<sup>1</sup> [Agricultural settlements – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [A collection of legends and homilies from the Talmud – AA]

was coming down. And, of course, down I came at once. Together we would learn a chapter from the Mishnah, with the favored Tiferet Yisrael<sup>1</sup> interpretation.

Later, he would engage in learning the Book of Zohar<sup>2</sup> whereas I would study the Bible and Hebrew. In the afternoon, we would learn together a page of the Germara.

He was also a good reciter, who recited from the bible on every Sabbath. His reciting was done in accordance with correct grammar rules and with fine pronunciation. He told me how he had learned grammar: his father, like all Hassids at that time, was opposed to learning grammar, as well as to excessive Bible learning. However, Reb Moshe wished to learn grammar anyway. What did he do? Every day he had a two-hour lunch break, and his mother would give him five kopecks as an allowance. He took only one hour for lunch, and in the second hour he used his mother's money to hire a tutor and learn grammar. Since reciting every Sabbath was becoming difficult for him, he sought to teach me how to recite, too, and I became the regular reciter in his synagogue.

At the same time I began studying Arabic with a tutor. However, my lack of funds forced me to quit before I was able to acquire any decent proficiency in that language.

About a year and a half after my arrival here, the granddaughter of Reb Moshe Witenberg's brother, Miss Ziporah, daughter of Reb Haim Raphael Witenberg of Witebsk, came to his house for a visit, by invitation. Six months afterward, we took our marriage vows.

Of money she had none, as neither did I have any. For about six months we continued to receive our room and board at Reb Moshe's, which served as a sort of payment for my extensive and complex work for him. Reb Moshe Witenberg was already about seventy years old, a devout, learned and charitable Jew, yet also quite stringent and a bit of a miser, and the same could be said about his wife. My wife and I were young and, wishing to live at least according to the means of that time, we could no longer stay with an elderly couple who had long ago lost their zeal for life. However, we had none of the necessary means, since man should not live by bread alone. I also saw no purpose in continuing to work for him. I felt that my energy was wasted, in the absence of any personal initiative, and my sense of pride – as well as my wife's – was suffering from being supported by him.

I decided to do something for our future, and presented him with a demand: either he gave me some minimum wage for my work, which would allow me some independence, or he should compensate me with a suitable sum for the two years I had worked for him, and I could go my way. He rejected both options, wanting me to continue to work under the existing conditions. My wife and I refused, and after lengthy negotiations, and mediation by friends, I managed to

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrew for "The Splendor of Israel" – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [Hebrew for "brilliance – AA]



received from him one thousand golden Franks (about 40 British Pounds), and his wife gave us an apartment she owned in the Nissan-Beck neighborhood. We parted from our uncle and aunt on good terms.

About that time, Ms. Ruchama Ran, granddaughter of Reb Moshe Witenberg's sister, came from Russia to Jerusalem. She was an educated young woman, as was becoming common in the 1880's in Russia. At first she lived with Reb Moshe, and replaced me there as a Russian correspondent and bookkeeper. Shortly afterwards, a young, scholarly man with a teaching permit, educated and very decent, named Reb Yossef Menachem Ashbal, arrived in Jerusalem. Within several months, Reb Yossef Menachem Ashbal married Miss Ruchama Ram. He continued his studies in the Yeshiva, but had no real prospects of obtaining a rabbinical position. For livelihood, his wife opened a store on Jaffa Shreet for modern hats. However, the demand for such merchandise was rather small at that time, and after a short while she was forced to close her store. Reb Yossef Menachem Ashbal was hired then as a teacher for Torah and religious studies in the Moshavah of Gedera, and was excellent at it. However, being a pious and traditional Jew, he was somewhat uncomfortable with the free-spirited atmosphere in the Moshavah, and with his superiors in the school. His salary was barely adequate for his family's survival. After a few years, he took a position as a schoolteacher in the Moshavah of Petakh Tikvah. There, his talents were more appreciated, and he could afford to live a little better. With limited funds he began to plant an orange grove. Throughout the years, with the help of his sons, and especially the agricultural expert among them, Moshe, the grove grew and its boundaries were expanded, and when he retired from his teaching position, he could live off it.

Reb Yossef Menachem Ashbal and his wife Ruchama had sons and daughters, all of whom excelled in their studies, they were: Dr. Dov Ashbal, who graduated from the Hebrew teachers' seminar in Jerusalem and then went on to study in a university in Germany, obtained his PhD, and he is now the University of Jerusalem's meteorologist. The second, Aminadav, is today one of the directors of the Community Training Society in Jerusalem, and the third, Moshe, a learned agriculturist, is now an executive of the Yachin company in Petakh Tikvah. There were two daughters: one, Rivkah, is a doctor of microbiology, and serves as assistant to Professor Adler at the Hebrew University. The second, Tzviyah, is also an educated woman. In his old age, Ashbal left his teaching job and devoted himself to the learning of Gemara. He then settled in Tel Aviv and there, too, he was always involved with studying the Torah and worshipping, gave lectures to audiences in the synagogue and engaged in charity as well. He died in 1938, at age 82, with a great reputation.

## A MILLSTONE ROUND MY NECK

By the time I left my uncle's house, a millstone was already round my neck, and we even had a child, who would later die at the age of one. Therefore, I could not afford to engage in some idealistic work<sup>1</sup>. I had no choice left but to turn to commerce, which was in quite a depressed state then, in the absence of any commercial movement, since there was no metropolitan region in Palestine. Under those conditions, I had to start out with whatever limited means I had. My strong points were my knowledge of Russian and German, and my desire to live off the fruits of my own labor, and not to, God Forbid, need help from anybody. My youthful energy and the faith in my father's God, who would not abandon me, gave me the strength and the courage to overcome any problem.

I rented a shop inside Jaffa Gate, for a small amount. I began by importing paper and stationery needs from Europe. Being short of funds, I was helped by generous loans from my many friends and acquaintances, who had come to know me and trust me during my stay at Reb Moshe Witenberg's house. Although my inventory circulation was rather small, my profits were decent. I checked the advertisements in German and Austrian newspapers and also contacted Chambers of Commerce in large cities in those countries, and I discovered excellent sources of merchandise. I always managed to bring new goods, which were not to be found in other shops here, and thus I established a very good clientele. At that time, there were no commercial or secular publishing houses in Palestine. Such publications were established only several years afterwards, by the Wise Reb Avraham Moshe Luntz, who, in the year 1905, began publishing The Land of Israel Almanac and the yearly book Jerusalem, both of which studied the country, its antiques and characteristics; and other such writers, who published parochial as well as scientific books.

The main customers of paper in Jerusalem were both Jewish and Christian institutes of teaching and charity, whose publications were printed by the few printers that were in Jerusalem at that time. There were only two paper merchants, who did only as much as the limited demand for this merchandise required. They bought their outdated types of paper from a Viennese merchant who would visit the country once per year. I, upon opening my paper shop in the city's new quarter, found more sophisticated suppliers of various types of paper, and thus was better prepared to satisfy my customers.

Once, during my shop's second year of business, I was invited to the office of Reb Israel Dov Frumkin and Reb Avraham Zachs, directors of the General Retirement Home. That institute, then still located in the old city, was in its beginning phases. They were preparing to print their annual Memory Book, as they had done in previous years, but this time they wanted to expand its contents. They wanted to order a large amount of paper, and suggested that I submit my bid. I

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<sup>1</sup> [A reference to the pioneers' ideals of agriculture and/or industry – AA]

told them that I neither wished nor could afford to compete with the other merchants, but that I had a practical proposal for them, through which I could save their institute a considerable sum, without having to compete. My condition was that they should give me their word, that if they found my proposal suitable, they would order the paper from me. They promised me so, and I explained to them that in the factory, the paper was paid for not according to quantity, but rather by weight. The paper they had theretofore used for their book was too thick. I proposed to buy for them a better quality paper, 20% lighter in weight than the previous paper, so they could save both on the purchasing price and on costs of shipping the books to Europe and America. Moreover, the book would look better. I furnished them with a sample of that type of paper. Reb Frumkin, who had a printing house himself, approved of my idea, and after a trial printing with the sample I had provided, the directors accepted my proposal and ordered the paper from me.

Thus I acquired a good client through honest, commercial means which served the interests of their institute as well. With time, I acquired for myself additional good clients in the same manner. I imported new types of high quality, beautiful paper, of various sizes and weights, enabling printers who were expanding their operations, as well as newly established printers, to publish attractive-looking books and pamphlets.

My energy was pushing me further toward expanding my business, and later I opened a state-of-the-art shop for house tools, dishes, lamps, etc., and a special warehouse for iron and brass furniture. I brought the most modern goods from Europe. In Palestine there were still no domestic manufacturers. The most progressive housewives – both Jewish and non-Jewish – were quite pleased by this opportunity to fill their kitchens and dining rooms with fine dishes and other important items. Of course I, too, was handsomely rewarded for this opportunity I provided them with.

In the Year 5686 [1925/6], I opened a branch of my paper shop in Tel Aviv. That trade was progressing well and I was doing business with almost all the publishing houses and printers in the towns and Moshavot.

At that time, when my business still did not demand my entire time, a side job presented itself to me, which proved beneficial to many, including, to a certain extent, to myself.

One day an elderly man came to me with a request. He was a member of the famous Sovotnik sect, who lived in Central Russia, in the counties of Sanakov and Samara. They observed the Sabbath on Saturday, in accordance with Jewish law, and were, by tradition, descendants of Jews who had assimilated among the gentiles. Russian Czar Nikolai the 1<sup>st</sup> ordered them to quit their practice of observing the Sabbath. However, there was one large village, inhabited solely by Sovotniks, who refused to adhere to the Czar's decree. As punishment, he ordered them exiled to remote places in the Caucasus. Those emigrants congregated in their new place, where they adopted the Jewish religion in its entirety. There they engaged in farming, raising cattle and planting orchards and vineyards, and some of them made a fortune for themselves. The

wealthiest man among them also built a synagogue, where the man talking to me had served as a custodian for ten years. In old age, he came to Jerusalem along with his only daughter. What little money he had was gone. His daughter took a job as a maid at the house of Mr. Avraham Soloniak, an official of the Russian consulate in Jerusalem, whereas he was living in poverty. The daughter had reached an age, but had no sufficient means to marry, so he wished to appeal to the rich man he had once worked for to help him out. However, that rich man spoke only Russian, and he could find nobody in Jerusalem who could write a letter in proper Russian. Once he heard that I could do that, he turned to me. I did so, and to make certain that the letter was, indeed, written properly, he gave it to his daughter, to show to Mr. Soloniak, her employer. Upon receiving the letter, the rich man sent the old man four hundred Rubles to help in marrying his daughter, and granted the man himself an annual income of 25 Rubles for the rest of his life.

The next day, Mr. Soloniak came to me, expressing his satisfaction with the letter I had written for the old man, and told me that a little problem, which had bothered him for quite some time, might be solved now. Many Jews who were Russian citizens used to come to the consulate with their businesses and interests in Russia, submitting applications, papers and various documents to be certified by the consul. However, those papers were written in very poorly constructed and senseless Russian, filled with errors, which upset the consul so badly that in some cases he refused to certify them with his signature. He, Soloniak, being a Jewish official who was dealing mostly with the affairs of Jews in the consulate, was frequently embarrassed. Therefore, he proposed to send people turning to the consulate to me, so that I could complete their papers properly. First he asked me to do so for the large teaching and charity institutes in Jerusalem. Those institutes, which received their income mainly from Jewish donations in Russia, appealed also for support to wealthy Jews in Central Russia, whose contributions for their brethren in the Holy Land were significant, and they spoke no language other than Russian. Directors of those institutes would turn to Soloniak to help write their letters and printing materials to the contributors, but as busy as he was he had to turn most of them down. I promised to do that for him. From that day on, the large institutes began coming to me to translate their letters, brochures and rules into Russian, which tend to change very often, and I did so willingly and without reward. I did the same for individuals of limited means, who turned to me with their consular matters, and I would help them for free. However, there were also in Jerusalem wealthy Jews from the Russian-protected state of Bukhara, as well as from Russian towns in Central Asia, like Tashkent, Samarkand, and other towns from the Caucasus and Georgia. They still owned estates and large shops in their towns, and in European Russian towns, which were run by their relatives or partners there. They needed at times to produce various documents, such as contracts, authorizations, and others, including wills, which needed certification by the Russian consul here. I did charge them a fee for my labor, half of which I took for myself, and the other half I dedicated to some important charity. This type of work continued until the world war, when Turkey joined Germany, the Russian consulate was closed, and the Russian clients were forced to leave the country.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah<sup>1</sup> in the Year 5655 [1894], my young brother Simcha arrived in Jaffa from Russia. At that time, immigration of Jews from abroad to Palestine was prohibited. I went to Jaffa a few days prior to the arrival of the ship, and through extensive lobbying, and certain expenses, I managed to get him off the boat and took him to Jerusalem,. He worked for some time in my shop, and then opened his own shop. About two years after his arrival here, he married. His wife gave him one son and four daughters, all of whom married here and are working, each in his profession.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Jewish New Year – AA]

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Once my own finances were reasonable stable, I began to show interest in public affairs as well.

In the year 5655 [1894/5], a few leading young Jerusalem men organized in order to observe and improve the social and economic state of the young generation in Jerusalem, who were fine and moral people, but economically weak. These young men established an association named “Akhvah”<sup>1</sup> the purpose of which was to aid young people who wished to abandon their idle lifestyle<sup>2</sup> and to turn to more honorable kind of life, to involve themselves with scholarly and scientific work, or with commerce and labor. The original founders were Reb Yeshayah Raphaelovitz, Reb Gavriel Gavriellovitz, Reb Moshe Eliyahu, son of Reb Avraham Zachs, Reb Eliyahu Haim Kahanne, Reb Yitzhak Nachum Levy, Reb Haim Hamburger, and I. Shortly afterwards, other distinguished young men joined us, such as, Reb Zalman Solovicik, Reb Eliezer Perlman, Reb Yitzhak David Man, and many other good men.

The association furnished its needy members with assistance and support in obtaining credit, as well as jobs and work. Thus, with combined efforts, it helped quite a few young men stand on their own feet financially. The association grew in terms of the number of its members and expanded its activities, showing interest in public enterprises and assisting in stabilizing them. As the association was gaining strength in Jerusalem, it wished to extend its objectives to other towns in the land, and opened chapters in Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Safed, Tibertus, Hebron , Petakh Tikvah and Haifa. The best young men in those towns willingly joined the association, working hard for its goals. Later, chapters were also opened in New York and London, which did a great deal for the Land of Israel and its charitable institutions, especially during the World War.

To this day, the association’s Jerusalem center is still active, and has considerable impact on public affairs. Many young Jerusalem residents, both parochially schooled and liberally educated, have lent their support to this growing and expanding association. Other chapters of the association, in various places, are also productively active.

In the year 5669 [1908/9], the Akhvah Association, per demands of many of its members, decided to build for its members a special neighborhood in the New City of Jerusalem. Using money collected from the interested members, the association purchased land above the Warsaw Houses, on Meah Shaarim Street, which extends southward up to the Zichron Moshe neighborhood. The land was divided into lots, which were given to the members by lottery. A year later, the lots’ owners went to work to build the neighborhood they called “Akhvah”, and soon the construction of the first 21 houses was completed, and their owners settled in them. Sometime afterwards a synagogue was built on a community lot allocated by the neighborhood,

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrew for “Brotherhood” – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [A reference to the Yeshivahs of the “kolels”, where the students produced no work, and were totally dependent on donations, mainly from Jews from abroad – AA]

with the help of a large donation from an American Jew named Reb Yaakov Sheinman. Within several years, the neighborhood grew, adding many houses built by private individuals. Now the Akhvah neighborhood includes several hundred houses. In recent years, the synagogue was expanded by its financiers, with the help of the residents, adding another building and a women's gallery. It was adorned, and it is now one of the biggest and most beautiful houses of worship in the city.

In Jaffa, too, members of the Akhvah association built a nice neighborhood for themselves, with the same name, which after the war was added to Tel Aviv. Also, members of the association in Tiberius built themselves a nice neighborhood, named "Akhvah", outside the Old City there.

I was also an active member of the Bney Israel<sup>1</sup>, established in Jerusalem in the Year 1898, by the public activist Reb Alter Rivlin; Mr. Avraham Soloniak, who had come to Palestine as a pioneer with the Biluym<sup>2</sup> and then became a senior official in the Russian Consulate in Jerusalem; Reb Yitzhak Nachum Levy; and other well known public activists in Jerusalem. The goal of this association was to unite the various Jewish communities in Jerusalem into one Israeli community. For this purpose, they recruited influential activists from those communities. Another objective of this association was to fight the Mission, which had spread its nets to win over Jews in Jerusalem, particularly among the poor strata of Middle Eastern Jews, by providing them with free medical care, medications, and hospitalization in a large and modern hospital, and with schools for the children, including free meals and clothing as well as financial assistance for their parents.

The Bney Israel association declared a ban on the Mission and its institutions. It paid a physician to receive poor patients from all the Jewish communities and do home visits, all at no charge. Medications were sold to them very inexpensively. The association announced, with the consent of the rabbis and community leaders, that every Jew who died in the Mission's hospital would not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Soon enough a Sepharadi woman died in that hospital, and the Chevra Kadisha<sup>3</sup> refused to bury her on the Mount of Olives. The Mission's hospital's directors turned to the English consul, asking him to exert his influence on the leaders of the Sepharadi communities and convince them to allow her burial in the cemetery on the Mount of Olives, but all his lobbying was to no avail. Then the Mission's directors sought to use force. They hired porters, who took the dead woman to the Mount of Olives. However, in response to a call issued by the Bney Israel association, a throng of Jerusalem Jews gathered on the road to the Mount of Olive, forcefully preventing the entry of the deceased into the cemetery. The porters ended up burying her in an adjacent empty field. Following this event, the Mission's hospital's

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrews for "Children of Israel" – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [The first group of Zionist pioneers, who arrived in Palestine in the 1880's – AA]

<sup>3</sup> [The Jewish burial society – AA]

directors would no longer admit critically ill Jewish patients, and when other Jewish patients there became critical, they would make special efforts to transfer them on time to a Jewish hospital. The Bney Israel association was active for several years, but then, for various reasons, its activities gradually diminished until it disbanded altogether.

I was also a member of the Early Maccabees association in Jerusalem. On Passover eve, in the Year 5656 [1896], an Early Maccabees convoy arrived in Jerusalem from England, numbering twenty one men of the best of our brethren in England. They were led by the well-known Zionist lawyer Herman Bentwich and the famous author Israel Zangwill. They spent a few days in Jerusalem, visited – and were quite impressed by – other Jewish towns and Moshavot, and contributed to the institutions in the Holy City. During their visit they laid the foundation for the establishment of a chapter of the Early Maccabees Association in Jerusalem.

This association was later reinforced by a few members from England who settled in Jerusalem, lead by the well known Jerusalem man Reb Shmuel Raphaeli, who returned to Jerusalem after a stay of a few years in London, where he had become a member of the association. When the association was established in Jerusalem, a few young Jerusalem men, myself included, joined it.

Mr. Shmuel Raphaeli had come to Jerusalem as a child with his parents, where he received both traditional and liberal education. All his days he was involved in commerce, and at the same time was engaged in literature and research,. He was knowledgeable in both new and old Hebrew literature, and translated several books from English to Hebrew, including scientific studies. His main scientific work was studying the Hebrew coins from the periods of the Second Temple, and the Greek and Roman conquests. He wrote an important book on the ancient coins and collected a good number of them, which he later donated as a national collection for the museum of Belzalel School<sup>1</sup> in Jerusalem. There they were stored inside special cabinets, and the collection is named after Reb Shmuel Raphaeli.

The Early Maccabees' activities were disrupted for two or three years, but then were resumed by energetic young men in Jerusalem. The association opened chapters in other towns and worked for the benefit of the community for several years. It was disbanded when the World War erupted, and has not been re-established since then.

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<sup>1</sup> [Israel's most reputable art school – AA]



## MY SON

On Friday night, 25 Sivan 5656 [June 6, 1896], my son Aharon Yehezkel, shall he live long, was born. He was named Aharon after my wife's grandfather, the ADMOR<sup>1</sup> from Starosselieh in Russia, and Yehezkel after my later father.

The late ADMOR Rabbi Aharon was for thirty years a veteran student of the old Rabbi Zalman Schneersien of Liadi, author of the [CHABAD Book] TANYA and the Set Table. He was a great scholar of the Torah and was known for his just and virtuous ways, and he wrote valuable books about the Hassidic school of thought. After the death of the old Rabbi Schneersien, many of his followers chose Rabbi Aharon as their ADMOR.

At that time, I was residing in the Nissan Beck neighborhood, outside Nablus Gate. Near the neighborhood stood a large building, bought in the Year 5658 [1897/8] by a rich man named Reb Shmuel Strauss from Germany, who established a Yeshivah there, named Orr Chadash<sup>2</sup>. Studies were held there according to the Moralists system, set by followers of the late genius Rabbi Israel Slanter. A part of the building was set aside by the generous Shtrauss for apartments for the scholarly students of the Yeshivah. The nicest apartment in the building was given to the famous genius, Rabbi Schneer Zalman Liadier, the chief rabbi of Lublin, who was known as a righteous and a genius and as one of the greatest CHABAD Hassids. In his old age, in the Year 5658 [1897/8], he moved to the Holy City of Jerusalem, where he lived in the first year inside the Old City. The Rabbi from Lublin set his residence at Reb Shmuel Shtrauss' building, not far from my own apartment building, a few days prior to the birth of my aforementioned son.

My uncle, brother of my father, Reb Shmuel Zalkind, knew the Rabbi from Lublin (L'vov) from childhood. The Rabbi from Lublin's father was a butcher-and-inspector in the town Beshenkovici, in the Mohalib County. That town hosted a large annual fair, which lasted two months or longer, and all the great wholesalers of textiles would bring their merchandise there to sell to the retail merchants, who would gather from the entire area. My grandfather, Reb Yaakov Zalkind of Shakalov, who was a great wholesale textile merchant, also used to come there every year with his merchandise. Having four children of "Heder" age at home, for whom he kept a live-in tutor, he did not wish to leave them unsupervised for such an extended period of time. Therefore, he used to move his entire family, including the children's tutor, to Beshenkovichi, for the duration of the fair. They used to go to pray at the same synagogue where the butcher and his son worshipped. The son was already known, as a youth, for his superior intellect. My father and the aforementioned uncle Shmuel used to meet him daily, and knew him well.

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<sup>1</sup> [A Hebrew acronym, meaning Our Master, Teacher and Rabbi, attributed to great rabbis – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [Hebrew for "new light" – AA]

My uncle Reb Shmuel told me a story exemplifying the genius and fantastic memory of the youth Reb Zalman, who later became the genius Rabbi from Lublin. One time, a book dealer brought books, by various authors, for sale at the synagogue. After the service, the dealer handed the worshippers books to look at and decide which of them they wished to purchase. The youth Reb Zalman also took one book to look at. After a short while, the dealer came back to check on the readers, and asked the youth, too, if he wished to buy the book. The youth returned the book to him, saying that he no longer needed to buy it, because he already knew all which was in it. To the amazement of the synagogue attendees who gathered around him, he proceeded to quote complete paragraphs from the book.

When my son was born, my uncle Shmuel, who was here, too, a friend of the Rabbi from Lublin, went to offer him the honor of serving as a godfather. The Rabbi accepted the honor, with one condition. Since he held his own services at his home, but had no reader, and he had heard that I was a good reader, he asked that I would come every Sabbath to his private service to read the Torah. I promised to do so. My son's B'rith was held on the Sabbath, with the Rabbi from Lublin serving as godfather. In his honor, many Torah greats attended the B'rith, Hassids and otherwise, including some who I had not even invited. The entire house and court were swarming with guests.

I fulfilled my promise and would come every Sabbath, after reading in my own neighborhood's synagogue, to the Rabbi's synagogue, to read there too. The Rabbi followed the CHABAD Rabbi's practice: he prayed along with the public, but stood alone in an adjacent room, and entered the synagogue room itself only for the reading of the Torah. Every Sabbath he would ascend to the Torah on the third Aliyah. Listening to his whisper, I noted that he knew the reading's rules and tunes very well.

Every weekday, after the morning service, he used to stroll in the fresh air, along with his servant, reciting 18 chapters of the Mishnah. He was sharp and extremely knowledgeable in all aspects of the Verbal Torah, including all the commentary and the rabbinical literature. He regularly answered written questions sent to him from various locations abroad. Here, too, many Torah sages would come to him to listen to his innovative interpretations. I recall one time, when many Jerusalem Torah greats came to visit him during the Passover week and waited for him in the synagogue. I was present there too. While waiting, one of the visitors mentioned one of the great early articles. Everybody there knew of the article, but none could remember where it could be found. When the Rabbi entered and was asked about it, he answered that it originated in a book he did not have, but it was also used as a preface for the women's book *Tzene Ure'eina*<sup>1</sup>. He immediately went into his wife's room, producing that book, and showed them the article, printed as preface. Everybody was amazed by the extent of his knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> ["Come out, women, and see" – AA]

He was an impressive-looking person. His head was much larger than normal, his forehead high, his eyebrows long and thick, and his appearance suggesting a superior man. He lived at the house of the generous Strauss for two years, throughout which I read the Torah at his services. I stopped doing so only when he moved to a house located too far from my neighborhood, which had been built especially for him by a rich admirer from the town of Riga.

In the Year 5661 [1900/1], the Great Rabbi Zalman Liadier of Lublin was elected chief judge of all the Hassidic Kolels in Jerusalem.

He died on the Sabbath, 5 Nissan 5662 [April 12, 1902]. On Saturday night, a very large crowd attended his funeral. He had asked not be eulogized, and not be taken by the regular route to the Mount of Olives for a known reason<sup>1</sup>, but rather through the village Tur, a much longer route, which increased the burden on the bearers. Of course, his request was granted. I, too, was among the people escorting him to the grave that was dug for him up at the Mount of Olives, in the CHABAD Kotel section. His memory is blessed by all the people who had known him, and to this day, I can still envision the image of his noble face.

This only son of mine, Aharon Yehezkel, may he live long, was actually my fourth. Before him I had two boys and a girl, all of whom died very young, due to the difficulties and the agony involved in raising children here in general, and in particular for us, since my wife and I were alone here, without a family or relatives. My wife, being naturally weak and anguished over her earlier, dead children, could not breastfeed and I had to employ a wet nurse – an almost unattainable task here those days. The first two boys died of ailments. The third – the girl – died in a tragedy. As I mentioned, my wife could not breastfeed, and only with much difficulty could I find a wet nurse for her, a Georgian Jewish woman, who consented to breastfeed my baby-girl only on the condition that she could keep her in her house. She lived near us. One night, when the baby-girl was twenty-three days old, the nurse, while deeply asleep, put her hand over the baby's face, strangling her to death. We gravely mourned this terrible tragedy.

When my son Aharon Yehezkel – whose raising was also tough – was six years old, I sent him to a children's teacher, to learn the Bible, the Mishnah and Gemarah according to the old, traditional methods. His studies progressed well. At the age of twelve I enrolled him in a small Yeshivah, affiliated with the Orr Hadash Yeshivah at the Strauss court. There he learned Gemara with commentary from one of the excellent students of the Yeshivah, Reb Yossef Shaulson, under the supervision of the famous Yeshivah's educator the late Rabbi David of Kovna, and he did quite well there.

When he reached Bar Mitzvah age, on Wednesday, 28 Sivan 5669 [June 17, 1909], I held a great feast, and invited many of Jerusalem's great and sages. The Bar Mitzvah boy gave an impressive sermon, which indicated deep understanding of the material. The feast began at 10 in the

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<sup>1</sup> That route passed through a valley called Gey Ben Hinom, which legend has it that it is the gate of hell

morning and lasted all day. We had a nice band that played after the sermon and during the meal. In the evening many of his young friends arrived, and supper was served, including meat, fish and other delicacies. The dinner continued passed Midnight, with much joy.

My son studied in the Yeshivah every day until noon, and in the afternoon he was taught general studies by private tutors. Among them was Mr. Horowitz, who was a math teacher at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jerusalem, and other expert teachers. At the age of fourteen he was admitted to the seventh grade of the Lemel School for boys. At the age of sixteen he graduated that school as first in this class, as is recorded in his final grade card. He then entered the teacher's seminar of the German Jewish Aid Society.

During his second year at the seminar, the famous Language War erupted at the Aid Society's schools. Most of the students and teachers went on strike, demanding to establish the Hebrew language as the general studies' language. My son, too, was among the students who insisted on that demand, and recruited other students who were still pondering upon the issue. All the efforts and schemes made by the seminar's management, headed by the general principal of the Aid Society's schools, Mr. Ephraim Cohen, along with the Deputy Chief of the Aid Society in Berlin, Dr. Paul Nathan, who came to Jerusalem especially for this matter, were to no avail.

Once, Dr. Paul Nathan invited a group of the rebelling students, and my son among them, to Mr. Ephraim Cohen's house, in an effort to talk them into returning to their studies. They promised to send them, upon graduating the seminar, to further studies in Germany, paid for by the Aid Society. Even this effort came to naught. The students held on to their rebellion. I myself was invited by Mr. Cohen to his house once, and in the presence of Dr. Nathan, he asked me to exert my influence on my son to return to the seminar. However, I answered that the national education of our children was more important for me than the studies themselves. We were Hebrews, and we would not allow our national language to be defeated by a foreign one. The vast majority of the students ended up leaving the Society's seminar, and only a small contingent of students remained there, whom the rebels labeled "traitors".

Within a few weeks, a group of national teachers, headed by the principal Reb David Yelin, was able to establish a new seminar, purely in Hebrew. My son immediately enrolled in that seminar.

Upon completing the seminar's third year, he joined the department for commercial studies, founded by the Hebrew seminar, and graduated it in the Year 1914 with mostly very good grades.

When the World War erupted, some of his seminar graduate friends were conscripted and sent to the military school in Istanbul, to become officers in the Turkish army. However, him being my only son, for whose upbringing I had literally and figuratively shed my own blood, who was my only reward in life, I decided to take all the available legal steps to allow him to fulfill his military duties here. Through extensive expenses, I obtained a special certificate for him from Mr. Shimon Rokakh in Jaffa, as an assistant in supplying wood for the government's railroad. Later,

when the government stopped the wood supply, he moved to Haifa to work as a bookkeeper at the oil factory of the engineer Klimaker. The government nationalized the factory, keeping Mr. Klimaker there as the manager. That, too, was considered by law as active military duty. My son came to Jerusalem often on factory business. The last time he came, in the month of Heshvan 5677 [November 1916], the English army was already positioned beyond the Jerusalem mountains, and I felt that our salvation might be near, so I did not let him go back to Haifa. He remained here, and I obtained for him a legal permit as supervisor of entrenchment construction around Jerusalem. Thus he stayed here until 24 Kislev 5677 [December 19, 1917], when the triumphant English army entered Jerusalem, and our city was liberated from its sufferings.

After the war, my son began working in my shop, where he works to this very day.

On 13 Sivan 5679 [June 11, 1919], he made his marriage vows to his heart's choice, Miss Hannah, daughter of Reb Yossef Lifshitz from Kovna, Lifthuania, who had come to Palestine approximately ten years before the war and settled in Jaffa.

Reb Yossef Lifshitz was among the founders of the Kupa-Am<sup>1</sup> in Tel Aviv. When a branch of this bank was opened in Jerusalem, he moved there as the branch manager, and remained in that position for twelve years. With his energy and dedication, he elevated the bank to a very high standing. The Jerusalem public, knowing the manager's honesty and loyalty, trusted the bank. Its business increased and expended, rendering it a leading Jewish bank in town, second only to the Anglo-Palestine bank. After twelve years of work, at old age, he retired.

Their marriage begot the oldest daughter Adina, who has graduated the Hebrew Gymnasium here, and is now a student in the chemistry department at the university; and the son Amazia and the daughter Hadassah, who are attending the Ma'aleh High school in Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrew for "the people's fund" – AA]

## REB MOSHE WITENBERG'S ENTEPRISES

In the Year 5655 [1894/5], I managed to play a major role in the establishing of a great and important thing for Jerusalem in general, and for its Jewish institutes in particular.

As I have mentioned, my prominent uncle, Reb Moshe Witenberg, had come to Jerusalem in the Year 5642 [1881/2] from the town Witebsk in Russia, and settled there. The man's wealth reached the sum of half a million Russian Rubles, an enormous fortune for that time. Because God denied him any offspring, he set out to establish his own legacy in the Holy City of Jerusalem by building magnificent houses and neighborhoods there.

In the Year 5644 [1883/4], he bought two large houses inside Jerusalem, near Nablus Gate, containing about twenty apartments of 2-3 rooms each. In the Year 5645 [1884/5], he built a 39-apartment neighborhood on a beautiful, elevated lot, above and south-east of the Meah Shearim neighborhood, and called it Shearey Moshe<sup>1</sup>. The street which runs adjacent to this neighborhood has recently been named Witenberg Street.

He bought additional buildings both inside the Old City and outside Nablus Gate, as well as the famous "grove" in Northern New Jerusalem from Mr. Moshe Breinsker, which was planted with various fruit trees, and sold it for construction purposes. And indeed, on that land were built the houses of the Horodna Kolel, the Vilnius Kolel, and the "Russian Refugees" houses, by the financiers of these institutes. He also purchased a large piece of land from Arabs, above the Beit Yisrael neighborhood, and then sold it to the Bukharian Jewish community leaders, in order to expand their large Rehovot neighborhood in Jerusalem.

He also purchased from Arabs a large piece of land up on the Mount of Olives, in partnership with the prominent Reb Pinchas Nimenski from the town Uman, Kiev County, in Russian Ukraine, who had settled in Jerusalem, for the purpose of building a cemetery for the Chevra Kadisha of the CHABAD and Wolyn Kolels. The Hassidic Kolels had quit the non-Hassidic Chevra Kadisha, and each Kolel established its own cemetery. However, not far from that piece of land, the house of an important Arab Effendi<sup>2</sup> was located. The Effendi used his clout to prevent the issuance of any governmental license for a cemetery on that land. None of the lobbying helped, and the required license has not been given to this day.

Reb Moshe used to seed wheat every year on that land, using an Arab land-tenant, for there were no Jews in that area, and in general, Jerusalem Jews did not engage in farming. The annual contract which he signed with the Arab had a special clause, forbidding the Arab to plow the land with a donkey and bull together or to sow the land with two kinds of seed<sup>3</sup>. The wheat was

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<sup>1</sup> ["Moshe's Gate" – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [A prominent Arab landowner – AA]

<sup>3</sup> [Both practices are prohibited by Jewish Law – AA]

preserved dry from the time of reaping, for the purpose of making the special Passover matzo. After the harvest, he would allocate the proper donations and tithes, while performing all the land-related commandments. The wheat was reaped with the utmost care, to prepare it for a Passover Matzo. On Passover Eve, the flour was used for baking Matzos. Reb Moshe always came to witness the baking process, inviting the Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant, the chief rabbi of Jerusalem at that time, who also was present during the entire baking process, joyfully participating in saying the customary praises, and Reb Moshe would then honor him with matzos for his Passover Seder.

When the Great Rabbi Yehoshuah Leib Diskin of Brisk came to settle in Jerusalem, he established there, in the Year 5641 [1840/1], an orphanage for poor orphans. For this purpose he bought a large courtyard from Arabs inside Jerusalem, paid a portion of the purchase sum in cash and signed post-dated bills for the remaining amount of one thousand Napoleons. He was hoping to raise that money from generous donors abroad, but was rebuffed and the funds were not forthcoming. The payment dates for the bills were nearing, and the late Rabbi was in distress. When he had settled in Jerusalem, he took on Ottoman citizenship. In accordance with the Ottoman law, he could be sent to jail for failing to pay his debts. The Arab creditors would certainly have no inhibitions in this matter.

The payment date was nearing, and help was nowhere. Two Jerusalem activists, friends of the late Rabbi, took the initiative. They were Rabbi Ellezer Dan, chief of the Etz Haim Yeshivah, and Rabbi Shaul Haim Horowitz, rabbi of the Meah Shearim neighborhood and vicinity, and chief of its Yeshivah. They appealed to Reb Moshe Witenberg to save the Rabbi of Brisk from jail. Reb Moshe turned a favorable ear to their request. He agreed to pay the thousand golden Napoleons, on condition that the house would be registered under his name, and he would put it in a trust fund for the benefit of that orphanage, as well as other institutes of Torah and charity in Jerusalem, as he deemed appropriate. And so it transpired. Reb Moshe paid the Rabbi of Brisk's debt, the courtyard was registered under his name, and he entrusted it in a way that the rooms used by the orphans would remain as an orphanage, and the rest of the rooms in the court would be rented out privately, and the income would be divided into four portions: One quarter for the orphanage itself, and three quarters for three other institutes of Torah and charity in Jerusalem, as indicated in the trust papers, a quarter per each institute. The orphanage grew and developed with time, and moved to a large building outside the walls. Now the guardians also rent out the rooms where the orphans used to live, and hand the income every year to the orphanage management and the other institutes, per the trustor's legal will. This is done so to this day.

Reb Moshe Witenberg's first purchase in Jerusalem was of the two aforementioned houses, near Nablus Gate, inside the walls. This purchase was somewhat chivalrous. The houses belonged to a Christian Arab. Some brokers proposed to Reb Moshe to buy them. He entered into negotiations with the owner, but lost the deal to the Catholic Latin monastery in Jerusalem, which bought the houses. Reb Moshe regretted missing this purchase, because these two houses were among the most beautiful in the Old City. He decided to take all feasible measures and monetary efforts to

buy them from the monastery. That decision was quite courageous, since the Latin monastery had considerable financial means. The houses were located on Via Dolorosa, which had historical ties to the Christian religion, and the idea of taking them out of the monastery's hands was entirely unrealistic. However, enter Reb Moshe's powerful will, which nothing could stand it its way. He found some people with access to the Jerusalem Latin Patriarch's interpreter and assistant, and through them he found a way to achieve his goal. The interpreter was a Christian Arab with a great appreciation of gold. He became fully involved in the matter, using all his influence with the Patriarch. With good sense and moderation, he opened the way for negotiations between Reb Moshe and the Patriarch regarding the purchase of the houses. The negotiations lasted for an entire year before ending successfully. The houses became Reb Moshe's property. He had to pay their price, in addition for five hundred gold Napoleons as profit for the monastery, and a matching sum for the interpreter.

Officially, the negotiations for the purchase of these houses were conducted directly between Reb Moshe and the Patriarch himself. Reb Moshe used to go often to the monastery during that time. However, the Patriarch spoke only French, a language Reb Moshe had no knowledge of, and none of his acquaintances could be used as interpreters. Reb Moshe turned for help to Ellezer Ben Yehuda, who was fluent in French. Ben Yehuda agreed. Reb Moshe lived in the Old City whereas Ben Yehuda resided quite far, in the Mahaneh Yehuda neighborhood. Therefore, Reb Moshe bought a donkey which his servant would take to Ben Yehuda, who would ride the donkey back to Reb Moshe, and together they would walk to the monastery.

Such meetings were, indeed, frequent. When the purchase was concluded and the houses registered under the Reb Moshe's name in the government's files, Reb Mosh asked Ben Yehuda how much he would like to be paid for his considerable efforts. How surprised was he to hear Ben Yeuda maintaining that he had already been compensated sufficiently. In what form? asked Reb Moshe and Ben Yehuda answered: In as much as a Jew managed to snatch two large houses in the holy city Jerusalem from the grasp of the rich Catholic monastery. He refused any payment. Reb Moshe was very impressed by this gesture of Ben Yehuda, who was poor and ailing, and deprived of the means for his necessities. He immediately subscribed to Ben Yehuda's newspaper Hatzvi<sup>1</sup>, although he actually did not approve of the heretical articles which were printed in it too often. Upon receiving the paper, he would hide it lest anyone in his household might read it. He also offered Ben Yehuda to accept interest-free loans from him whenever his need arose.

Ben Yehuda insisted on talking only Hebrew to him, even while coming to ask for an interest-free loan, although Reb Moshe himself, like most of the devout Jews of his generation, was against using the holy language for secular matters. Reb Moshe even offered once to loan him twice or three times more than he had asked, if he only spoke Yiddish to him. However, Ben

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<sup>1</sup> ["The Deer" – AA]



Yehuda responded that he would rather give up the entire much-needed loan than the privilege of speaking Hebrew. Reb Moshe seized the best rooms of one of these houses for his own apartment, and the rest he rented out privately. He set a synagogue there, where the tenants would pray regularly, as well as residents of neighboring houses. He also gave lectures for the congregants after the morning service and between the mid-day and evening services. Reb Moshe also rented out privately the apartments in other houses he owned, including the Shaarey Moshe neighborhood, but he always charged discount rates. Years passed by, Reb Moshe was getting older, and he had done nothing to make sure that the public would benefit from the considerable income which his houses yielded. Of children he had none. I was aware that various people tried to talk to him about that subject, yet to no avail, because he was difficult to persuade. Once, the Year 5655 [1894/5], the famous activist, Reb Yisrael Dov Frumkin, invited me to discuss this issue. Frumkin explained that Reb Moshe, being old and childless, had to prepare for the future. Real estate assets were subject to the Ottoman law, even when owned by foreign citizens. Foreign consuls had no authority in that area. According to the Ottoman law, if a childless person died, leaving behind real estate property, 25% of it would go to the Turkish government, 20% to his wife (he remarried, at age 70, after his first wife died), and the rest to his relatives. Since I was his only relative in Jerusalem, it fell on me to make the utmost effort to prevent such important Jewish property in the holy city Jerusalem from landing into alien hands. The only way it could be done was by the owner putting his assets in a formal trust, for the benefit of whoever he wished, in the Muslim religious court in Jerusalem. Such trust fund is called Waqf in Arabic, which means “Standing”, that is, the property can be neither sold nor mortgaged. The trustees, who are to be appointed by the trustor, would have to execute everything per his will, as described in the official trust paper, and signed by a religious judge. Then, neither the government, nor his wife, nor other relatives whom he had not named as beneficiaries, would be able to touch the property.

Being still young then, I did not consider it proper for me to approach Reb Moshe on this matter myself. After thinking long and hard about it, I had an idea: Reb Moshe had a brother in the town Witebsk in Russia, named Reb Zeev Witenberg, a little younger and wealthy himself. As I had heard from Reb Moshe himself, the brother was smart, learned and a great scholar. I decided to contact him regarding this matter. In the letter that I sent to him I explained in detail the entire issue, including the damage that his brother’s property in Jerusalem was liable to sustain if the matter was not settled in time. For this, I wrote, we needed him to come himself to Jerusalem and exert his personal influence on his brother. Reb Zeev, who had many businesses in his town as well as a large family, refused to come here. However, I did not let go and kept on sending him letters, warning him that unless he rushed here to settle the matter it might soon be too late, and that he would be personally to blame if such fortune, and the real estate assets in the Holy City of Jerusalem in particular, would land in the hands of strangers, which would be an unredeemable sin.

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Finally, my words found their way into Reb Zeev's ears. He notified me that he would come to Jerusalem soon, and so he did. He arrived in the month of Tamuz in 5656 [June/July 1896], supposedly only in order to visit his brother and see the Holy City of Jerusalem. His brother, Reb Moshe, greeted him with delight, and on the first Sabbath of his stay invited all of Jerusalem's greats and scholars for a special dinner in his honor. The guest gave them an excellent, sharp and knowledgeable lecture on Torah matters, and thus won his brother's respect.

A few days after his arrival, Reb Zeev began persuading his brother. He held many conversations with Reb Moshe, suggesting that they should memorialize his name in Jerusalem by great acts of charity. He also assured his brother that he and his sons, themselves being rich, wanted no part of it, and that only the interest of the poor and the institutes of charity in Jerusalem was guiding him. Eventually, Reb Moshe was convinced and decided to put all his assets in Jerusalem in a Waqf trust fund. Within a few days, the trust fund was written in detail and submitted to the Muslim religious court in Jerusalem. Upon paying a good sum as tax for the government, the court legally approved the trust.

Reb Moshe divided his assets into three portions. One, named as The First Trust, included the Shaarey Moshe neighborhood and the two houses in the Old City inside Nablus Gate. Another portion was named The Second Trust and included a large courtyard outside Nablus Gate, in the Musrara neighborhood, with a certain number of apartments, and the third portion consisted of a house he owned in the Old City and a shop on Batrak Street in the Old City.

He appointed five trustees. Throughout his lifetime, all the above-mentioned assets belonged to – and were managed by – himself. After his death, the appointed trustees were to rent the assets out, and distribute the net income, after paying governmental taxes and necessary repairs, in the following manner: The First Trust fund – 20% for 10 scholars who would spend a predetermined number of hours per day studying in his own academy; 5% for each of Jerusalem's Torah institutes – Etz Haim Yeshivah and Torah-studying school, Meah Shearim Yeshivah and the Torah-studying school in Mishkenot Yisrael neighborhood; 5% for the Torat Haim Yeshivah, 5% for Bikur Hollm hospital, 5% for Misgav Ladach hospital, 5% housing assistance for the poor from CHABAD Kolel, 3% for the poor from Carline Kolel, 5% wedding funds for poor brides and grooms, 29% for his late brother Reb Aba Witenberg's sons and daughters and their heirs, who live nowadays in Soviet Russia, and 10% for his relatives in Palestine and their heirs. The Second Trust fund was to be distributed as follows: 30% would be set aside every year as a special fund for interest-free loans, to be granted to needy Jerusalem Jews, against the mortgaging of gold or jewelry, for three months, without charging any fee from the debtors, even for expenses; 10% "wedding funds" for assisting poor brides and grooms; 30% for Michael and Beinish, sons of his late brother Reb Aba Witenberg and their heirs, and 30% for his relatives in Palestine, whose names are mentioned in the trust papers.

On 18 Nissan 5659 [March 29, 1899], Reb Moshe Witenberg passed away at ripe old age and with excellent reputation, and was buried in the CHABAD Kolel's cemetery in Jerusalem.

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The management of the assets included in the aforementioned trusts was given then to the trustees – Reb Yehoshua Shlank, Reb Mordechai Shlank, Reb Yaakov Blumenthal, Reb Levi Yitzhak Eidelson and me – and we executed his will strictly by its word. After some years, three of the trustees died, and only two of us – Reb Yehoshua Shlank and me – remained. After a while I realized that such a task was difficult for only the two of us to perform, and the trusts suffered to a certain extent. I came to Reb Yehoshua Shlank with a demand to add more trustees. According to the legal trust papers, if one of the trustees passes away, the remaining trustees have the right to choose a substitute trustee as they deem appropriate. After some considerations, we chose five additional legal trustees, known as honest men, good activists who make their livelihood in earnest – Reb Eliahu Cohen, Chief Rabbi David Kovner, Reb Naftali Forush, Reb Yaakov Haim Margovski and Reb Yochanan Shlank (son of Reb Mordechai). Shortly afterwards, Rabbi David Kovner passed away, and we remained six trustees. Upon joining us, the new trustees checked the books and accounts and found them in good order. All the trustees perform their duties loyally and devotedly for no personal gain, except for Reb Yochanan Shlank who supervises the houses, rents them out, collects the rent payments, oversees maintenance and repairs and receives a certain percentage of the income as a compensation for his efforts. Prior to adding the new trustees, the acting supervisor was the late trustee Reb Yehoshua Shlank, who was also paid in the same manner.

The income from renting the trust is divided annually in accordance with the instructions in the trustor's legal will. Immediately upon his death, we founded the Yeshivah for which he allocated 20% of the first trust. We named it Torat Moshe Yeshivah, per his expressed will while alive, and set it in his private academy, inside his courtyard in the Old City, near Nablus Gate. We settled ten scholarly students there, to study daily at predetermined hours, and divided the money among them. After the upheavals of the Year 5680 [1920], we moved the Yeshivah to his academy at the Shaarey Moshe neighborhood, where it has remained to this day. Among the Yeshivah members there is one well known rabbi who presents the daily lesson. The students commemorate the day Reb Moshe died every year. On that day, they learn all day long for the ascent of his soul, and visit his grave. Only during the last few years, due to the upheavals, the visits to his grave had to be canceled, and we hope they can be resumed soon.

The “wedding funds” are divided among needy brides and grooms from the entire Ashkenazi Jewish public in Jerusalem. It can be said that practically there is almost no poor bride or groom who does not receive support from the late Reb Moshe Wiltenberg's estate. Of course, the large numbers of beneficiaries reduces the amount that each one of them can receive. Money for the relatives, all of whom live, financially strained, either in Russia or in America, is sent annually to their places of residence.

During the first few years, we could not begin using the money which was designated for interest-free loans, because the amount was too small. We would have been able to accept only a limited number of applications, and thus steer envy and a sense of deprivation among other needy town folks. Instead, we deposited the money from the rent in one of the large banks here,

and once we accumulated the sum of one thousand Palestinian Pounds, we began our operation. According to the will, the fund was to grant an interest-free loan of up to ten Pounds for every applicant, for a period of three months, against a mortgage of gold, without charging the borrower any fee, even for expenses. The trustees were all busy people, and could not devote their time for this matter, which required much care. Therefore, we decided to use the services of a charity-loaning institute in Jerusalem, named Shearey Khesed<sup>1</sup>. This is a government-certified institute whose directors are knowledgeable and skilled in this matter. We drew a formal contract, certified and approved by the Jerusalem district court, to transfer the money from the late Reb Moshe Witenberg's trust fund to the loaning institute. The contract was signed in the Year 5693 [1932/3], with the following terms and conditions: We transferred all of our loan-designated money to their fund, and they were responsible for the entire amount. They were to grant an interest-free loan of up to ten Pounds to every Jewish applicant, for a period of three months, against a mortgage of gold, without charging the borrower for any expense, per a written order by one of the trustees. The responsibility for collecting the loan fell entirely on the institute's directors, and our trust was not to suffer any loss due to unpaid loan, or any other loss. Another condition was that the directors commit themselves to returning the entire amount given to them within six months of such a request by the trustees. We could transfer to the institute any further income we had coming for this purpose in the coming years.

The funds designated for rent assistance for the poor members of the CHABAD and Carline kolels, are distributed by us according to a list which the officials in those kolels compile annually by lots. Money is also sent regularly to the Torah institutes, hospitals and relatives in Palestine. All this is quite telling about the great – and complex – charitable benefits, both general and individual, that are derived from the all-important estate of the late Reb Moshe Witenberg in Jerusalem, which is almost unparalleled among private estates. It is only a pity the houses are quite old-style, lacking the minimum luxury that is expected nowadays, and are rapidly deteriorating, so the income is slowly diminishing.

May God hold my many efforts in establishing these enterprises in my favor.

Reb Moshe left behind him cash in the amount of 365 thousand Rubles in Russian government notes, in one of Petersburg's large banks, as well as a young widow, whom he had married about three years prior to his death. In her Ketubah<sup>2</sup>, he had allocated her five thousand Rubies, giving her no right to the money he would leave after his death. She found out that according to the Russian government's law, of which Reb Moshe had been a citizen, the wife was entitled to a quarter of the entire sum he had left behind. Therefore, she did not bother even showing the Ketubah, and asked the Great Rabbi Reb Shmuel Slant, then Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Jerusalem, who had originally married her and Reb Moshe, to furnish her with an official

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrew for "gates of charity" – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [A Jewish marriage certificate – AA]

certificate that she was Reb Moshe's legal wife. She told Reb Shmuel nothing about her intentions, but he understood her scheme very well. He offered to give her such a certificate only on condition that she would not go to court with it, but use it only as a leverage against Reb Moshe's brother, so that he did not cause her any difficulties in obtaining a Khalitzah<sup>1</sup>, and against the rest of the legal heirs, who should grant her a decent gift of money, in addition to the sum allocated to her in the Ketubah. She refused the late rabbi's conditions, and he denied her the certificate, warning her that if she tried another way to go to court and demand her part of the inheritance, in defiance of the laws of our holy Torah, she would reap no benefit from the money and would end up regretting her actions. She did not listen to the rabbi's admonition, turned to a well known Sepharadi rabbi, received a certificate from him, certified it with the Russian consul in Jerusalem, hired a well known Jerusalem advocate, and went with him to the Russian capital St. Petersburg. She filed her petitions in court through a prominent lawyer there, and won the sum of 90 thousands Rubles she was entitled to in accordance with Russian law. She paid Reb Moshe's brother, Reb Zeev, 10 thousand Rubies for Khalitzah, 10 thousand to the Jerusalem advocate who had accompanied her, and additional 10 thousand to the Petersburg lawyer and her own travel costs. She returned to Jerusalem with a sum of about 60 thousand Rubies to marry the son of a famous rabbi. She purchased real estate assets and engaged in various monetary businesses. However, in the end, just as the Great Rabbi Reb Shmuel Slant had predicted, almost nothing was left of the great fortune she had inherited in accordance with the laws of the state, but in defiance of the laws of our Torah.

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<sup>1</sup> [An old Jewish law requires an unmarried brother of the deceased marry the widow. To release her from this bond, she has to perform a ritual in which she takes of her shook hits the brother-in-law with it and spits on him. The outdated law has been known to serve as an extortion tool for greedy brothers-in-law – AA]

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## THE KOLELS IN JERUSALEM

Records have it that the Ashkenazi settlement in Jerusalem was revived in the Year 5572 [1811/2], with the return of the disciples of the Vilnius Genius from Safed. They were joined by Hassids who were fleeing the cholera epidemic in Safed, which claimed many victims. They settled in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, next to their Sepharadi Jewish brethren, who had lived in Jerusalem since the days of the late Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman. These new settlers were busy all their days studying Torah and praying, and their scant livelihood was provided to them by the money sent to them from a charity fund set up by the Jewish leaders in Vilnius, Shakalov, and other places. It was called the “MRM Fund”, named after the Miraculous Rabbi Meir, and special charity boxes for this purpose were set out in each and every Jewish household.

The financiers of the MRM Fund lived at that time in Vilnius, and from there they appointed a committee of the community’s elders in Jerusalem, to manage the matters of the community, which was named the Vilnius Kolel. Members of the committee were referred to as the Kolel’s appointees. The appointees would send messengers to Vilnius to receive the money that had been raised by the fund, because it was still impossible to send the money by mail. The messengers traveled by sailing vessels, for there were no ships yet. The round trip excursion lasted several months and was quite dangerous. When the messengers managed to return safely to Jerusalem, they would hand the money to the kolel’s appointees, who distributed it in accordance with a list compiled by the Vilnius financiers. Some of the money was divided evenly per capita, and some was “earnest money<sup>1</sup>”, according to the value of each Kolel member, per instructions from the financiers.

Much has been written already by historians about the history and lives of these settlers. They suffered a great deal at the hands of the Arab residents, who made their lives miserable, and to a certain extent from their Sepharadi brethren, particularly with respect to economic and social matters.

The primary leader of the Ashkenazi community at that time was the Great Rabbi Yeshaya Bordaki, who served as the deputy Austrian consul in Jerusalem. Responding to lobbying by the leader of the Jewish community in Vienna, the Austrian government agreed to offer its protection to all the Jerusalem Jewish residents, who had come from Russia with Russian passports. Rabbi Bordaki, in the name of the Austrian government, protected them against Arab tyranny by providing everybody with Austrian protection documents.

After several years, other Jews began to come to Jerusalem and settle in it, both Hassids and non-Hassids, from various countries such as Poland, Galicia, Ukraine, Germany, etc. At first they,

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<sup>1</sup> [Money designated by the donators in Europe to family members or to people from their own communities – AA]

too, belonged to the Vilnius Kolel, since money from their countries was also sent to the appointees of the MRM Fund. However, they soon discovered that the appointees were cheating them out of their shares in the distribution, and the “earnest money” given to them was far short of their real value, according to the amount sent from their countries of origin. They sent their own emissaries to the Rabbis and financiers in their countries, and after exerting great efforts they managed to separate themselves from the Vilnius Kolel. First, the Poland Kolel was established, and the money raised by Polish financiers was sent directly to their own trustees. People from Hrodna, Wolyn, Galicia and other places followed the Polish example, and so when I arrived there were more than twenty separate Kolels in Jerusalem, and the trend was continuing. Some Hassid Kolels, such as Wolyn, Galicia, CHABAD and others, parted from the Vilnius Kolel even on the issue of burial. Each Kolel established its own burial society, and purchased land on the Mount of Olives to bury its dead.

## **THE CHABAD KOLEL**

As early as in the Year 5556 [1795/6], several Hassidic families were settled in the holy city of Safed. They were known as CHABAD Hassids, disciples of the old Great Rabbi Zalman of Liadi, author of the Book of Eclectics and the Set Table, and his relatives, headed by the Righteous Great Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Witebsk.

Around the Year 5590 [1829/30], all the CHABAD Hassids of Safed moved to the holy city of Hebron, by order of their Great Rabbi Duber, son of Rabbi Meshulam, who was called “the middle Rabbi”.

All the CHABAD Hassids who had immigrated to Palestine up until the Year 5612 [1851/2] settled in Hebron, and since its establishment until the upheavals of the year 5680 [1920], the Jewish community in Hebron consisted almost entirely of CHABAD Kolel people. The Rabbis from Russia would send them the MRM funds, which were collected among CHABAD communities. The old synagogue in Hebron, named after our forefather Abraham, was bought with the Middle Rabbi’s own money, and to this day it belongs to his heirs.

The CHABAD settlers in Hebron were all excellent people, both in learning and in character, and all their days they were engaged in learning Torah and worshipping the Creator. They all settled in one quarter of the city, called the Jewish Courtyard, which was divided inside by alleyways and surrounded by a wall, for security purposes. There was only one little gate for coming and going out, which was closed at night to protect against thieves and robbers.

The Jewish residents of Hebron were protected by the main Sheikh there, Sheikh ‘Abd al Rachman the Negro, who defended their lives and property against whoever may wish to take revenge against them. In return, he was registered on the “Distribution” list of CHABAD Kolel as “the Black Rabbi,” and received a decent sum each time funds were sent for the CHABAD Kolel people. When such funds were delayed, the trustees would borrow money from him, for an exorbitant interest rate, for the livelihood of the Kolel members. The Sepharadi Jewish Community in Hebron also paid this ‘Abd al Rachman a certain fee for his protection. However, the Jews in Hebron suffered terribly during the Arabs’ great revolt, as is told by the history books of the Land of Israel.

In the Year 5612 [1851/2], a CHABAD community was established in Jerusalem as well. Since then, the Elder Rabbi from Lubavitch and the rest of the Rabbis began sending the MRM funds to the trustees in Jerusalem, who would forward to the trustees in Hebron their share of the Distribution. CHABAD people in other towns and Moshavot in the land also received their share of the Distribution funds from the trustees in Jerusalem.

When I was working for two and a half years for my uncle, Reb Moshe Witenberg, who served as the Kolel’s president, I assisted him with business of the Kolel, too, on a volunteer basis, of course. Therefore, I am quite familiar with the way the Kolel was managed, since the time I had



arrived and even before that, as was told to me by reliable people among the Kolel's elders, and I hereby document what I know.

MRM funds from all of the CHABAD communities, spread over most towns in Belarus, Ukraine and many towns in Central Russia, were collected by Rabbinical emissaries, each for his own congregation of Hassids. Each emissary would give the funds to "his" own Rabbi, along with a list of the generous financiers of each community. Once the Rabbis accumulated a good sum of money, they would send it to the Kolel trustees in Jerusalem, who would divide the funds among member of the Kolel in accordance with the rules set by the Kolel founders.

In the Year 5648 [1887/8], the important MRM Rabbis and financiers approached the formidable Reb Moshe Witenberg, who had moved to Jerusalem in the Year 5642 [1882] from his home town Witebsk in Belarus, and was known as an honest and decent man, a scholar and among the most prominent CHABAD Hassids, to take upon himself the presidency of the Kolel in the Holy Land. Reb Moshe accepted the appointment on one condition: each community abroad would send its MRM funds directly to Jerusalem rather than through the rabbinial emissaries, a system which he considered to be unnecessarily wasteful. The communities' financiers, most of whom did their work for goodness' sake, accepted Reb Moshe's demand as correct. Reb Moshe took upon himself the presidency of the Kolel. Since then, many financiers began sending the funds directly to Jerusalem to Reb Moshe, and soon enough, the rest of the financiers followed suit, including those whom for obvious reasons were not interested in this new arrangement. Once he accumulated sufficient funds for Distribution, per the Kolel's list, Reb Moshe would hand the money to the Kolel trustees, who would distribute the funds among the people registered in the Kolel books, as well as newcomers equipped with notes from the financiers in their European communities, certifying them as belonging to the Kolel.

The largest portion of the accumulated sum was divided equally among all members of the Kolel, according to the number of people in their households. This was called "the regular Distribution" (or money per capita). According to early rules, every member of the Kolel who was residing in the Holy Land was entitled to these funds, including those whose financial status did not justify it but they were not willing to give up their share for the needier. The rest of the money was divided as a "Distribution supplement", or "advance money," to those known as great scholars of both the written Torah and the Myth, and considered the learning to be their occupation, and family members of CHABAD's rabbis. Even women who were originally members of great CHABAD rabbis' families, and whose husbands may have not even belonged to this Kolel, were entitled to this Distribution. The size of "advance money" per each beneficiary was determined through special instructions, given to the trustees in Jerusalem by the rabbis or the financiers abroad.

The Distribution was conducted at set times, twice annually. In addition, smaller amounts were received more frequently at the CHABAD Kolel's management in Jerusalem, from various European towns, to be divided immediately among the Kolel members, without waiting for the

large Distribution. The same was done with funds that the Kolel received as its portion from the General Committee in Jerusalem. This was called “the small Distribution,” and was divided per capita. It normally amounted to a few pennies per person, but it did not stop members of the Kolel from waiting sometimes for hours in line to receive those pennies.

One time I saw a skilled blacksmith waiting by the trustee’s house, among a large crowd, to receive his portion of perhaps eight or ten pennies. I asked him, “How come you leave your job for such a long time, during which you surely would have made more money than here?” he answered, “Well, would you expect me to give up my share to the trustee?”

The Kolel management also used to receive money from various donors, to be distributed to given beneficiaries, per the donors’ wishes. These were called “individual funds.” Funds sent for Kolel members who lived in Hebron, Safed or Tiberius were transferred by the management in Jerusalem to the Kolel trustees in those places.

The Ashkenazi Jewish community in Hebron included about one hundred families, almost all of whom were CHABAD Hassids. When I arrived here, the community leader in Hebron was Reb Levi Yitzhak Salonim, a native of Hebron and great-grandson of the old Great Rabbi of Liadi. Reb Levi Yitzhak, a smart and learned man, was also important and prominent, and was mainly involved in trade with the town’s Arabs and with Arab farmers in the vicinity. He did well for himself. Other Ashkenazi Hebron residents were involved in trade, like the partners Reb Alter Rivlin and Reb Eliezer Klonski, who ran large-scale fabric and banking businesses, and other merchants as well.

About two hundred families of our Sepharadi brethren lived in Hebron. They were all craftsmen who made their living through trading with the Arabs. The prominent Sepharadi Jew, the late Reb Malkiel Mani, son of the Kabbalist Reb Eliahu Mani, chief rabbi of Hebron, was a government-appointed justice of the peace in Hebron for several years. Then he resigned his post and worked as a lawyer in Hebron for many years. He conducted all his business with the Arabs of Hebron and its vicinity, who trusted him completely, respected and admired him for his honesty and wisdom. Years later, Mr. Malkiel moved his residence to Jerusalem and worked here as a lawyer for several years. Then he was appointed a district judge in Jaffa, and in this important post he served to the day he died. His brother, Rabbi Seliman Mani, was the Khakham Bashi<sup>1</sup> in Hebron.

The lives of Hebron’s Jews were quiet and calm. They lived for many years in peace with the Arabs, and only after the pogrom engineered there by Arab inciters in 5699 [1929], when 54 Jews were murdered, were they forced to leave Hebron and settle in Jerusalem. When a few of them attempted several years later to return to Hebron, they were forced out by Arab inciters

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<sup>1</sup> [Ottoman-appointed religious community leader – AA]

(from the sect of the Mufti<sup>1</sup>, and the all-so-important Jewish settlement in Hebron was totally ruined.

The CHABAD Kotel trustees in Jerusalem and in other towns in Palestine were appointed by the rabbis and financiers abroad. Some of them did their work as volunteers, but most, needing a source of livelihood, did so for pay. The vast majority of the Kotel members were decent people and modest learners. However, among the Distribution recipients were some troublemakers who were rude to the trustees, and some who treated the trustees as if they were their own clerks who must report to them, just because a portion of the funds came from their own hometowns, and a little of that even from their relatives. They wasted no opportunity to harass the trustees.

When I arrived in Jerusalem in the Year 5640 [1888], the CHABAD Kotel here had two trustees. The main trustee was a Jew from the Southern Russian town of Kherson, and was thus referred to by all as “the Khersonian” (I cannot recall his first name). He had already been serving as a trustee for several years. People said about him that when he had first arrived there, he was a nice, good-tempered man. But then the Kotel’s troublemakers, by giving him so much grief, had turned him into a mean person. Sometimes, the greatest pests would come to him demanding advances, although they already owed the Kotel fund more than what was coming to them in the next Distribution, or even the one after that. He, of course, did not accept their demands, but they would keep on harassing him, complaining that they needed money for the livelihood of their households. He lived in the Old City, near Temple Mount, from where the Mount of Olives could be seen. The story goes that in such cases he would open the window in his room and point at the cemetery on Mount Olive, as if saying – Why don’t you ask the dead, I have none! This trustee died during the festival of Purim, and his adversaries escorted him to his burial, singing and celebrating the whole way.

After him, Reb Michael Baruch Reizes was appointed primary trustee, and Reb Mordechai Shlank as secondary trustee. Reb Michael Baruch had come to Jerusalem from the town Poltava in Russian Ukraine. In his town he owned a large distillery. He got in trouble with the government there, was arrested and faced severe punishment. His friends, the great merchants in town, spent a fortune to ransom him from jail, and sent him to Jerusalem. He arrived here penniless, along with his wife and two children. But being a long-time follower of the Rabbi of Kopost, he was immediately appointed by that rabbi as the CHABAD Kotel’s trustee. He was paid ten golden Franks and eight Schillings per week for his work as a trustee, and an equal sum for his position in the General Committee, as an authorized representative of the CHABAD Kotel. Jews from Inner Russia, America and South Africa would collect their MRM funds from all the various communities, and then send them to the General Committee in Jerusalem, established in the Year 5626 [1865/6] by the Great Rabbi Auerbach and Rabbi Shemuel Slant, the chief rabbi here, with the consent of the various, established Koles in Jerusalem. The General

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<sup>1</sup> [The Muslim religious leader in Palestine – AA]

Committee would forward each Kolel, via its trustee or authorized representative, the percentage it was entitled to in accordance with their agreement. Reb Michael Baruch also received his share of the Distribution and “advance money”; however, all these sources of income together barely sufficed for his scarce livelihood and for the small apartment he was renting in Reb Moshe Witenberg’s courtyard. Nevertheless, he was content with his lot, and served the Kolel devotedly and loyally.

I knew him well, since we lived in the same courtyard for a certain period of time, and we used to meet, during the hot summer nights, on the roof of the closed courtyard, to breath fresh air, enjoy the cool breeze, and discuss matters of our small world.

I also had the opportunity to tell him about matters of the wider world. I was working for my uncle Reb Moshe Witenberg, as correspondent of his private bank, and for purposes of his business with the stock market in Petersburg, he subscribed regularly to the prestigious Russian newspaper The Stock Market News. The paper was published in Petersburg, selling about one half million copies, featuring many pages, and reporting, in addition to extensive coverage of the stock market business, about all the political and general issues in Russia and the wider world. Some of the best writers contributed to it. (Later, Mr. Zeev Jabotinski served s the paper’s London correspondent, signing his articles as Vladimir Zash.”) Three times per week we received a special edition, dealing with scientific, literary and health issues, edited by important, professional writers.

I translated a few humorous articles from this newspaper for Ben-Yehuda’s newspaper Hatzvi. Reb Moshe would read the stock market news, whereas I read articles and editorials regarding world affairs, politics, and the literary and scientific editions. Reb Michael Baruch, a man of culture, was eager to hear my summary of the news from this paper. This man was the personification of goodness. He did his best to help the decent Kolel members, who lived in poverty. Sometimes he would receive funds to be distributed to the most needy and decent Kolel members, subject to the judgment of the Kolel management. He made great efforts to verify who were the real needy, and was very glad when he managed to direct the donations to them. Some member pretended to be very poor, but in actuality received direct support from their relatives abroad, which were more than sufficient for their livelihood. At times he would ask me, too, to investigate a certain member’s real finances, so that he could send the support for the poor and those of modest means.

However, even this man was harassed by the troublemakers among the Kolel members, who would make his life so miserable that at times he would lose his patience and order them out of his house. One day, while sitting in my room on the third floor of the house, I heard noise and shouting coming out of Reb Michael Baruch’s room. I went down there at once, entered his room and witnessed a terrifying scene: Two strong men stood there, looking, indeed, like orthodox Jews. They maintained that they had recently come from Russia, and that they belonged to the CHABAD Kolel, although a confirmation from their town’s CHABAD financiers, to the effect

that they were entitled to a share of the Kolel's Distribution, had not arrived yet. They entered his house uninvited, while he and his family had their unimpressive lunch, and demanded advance money against their share of the Distribution. When he argued that he was not authorized to give them money from the Kolel's fund until such time as they produced the proper documentation, one of them knocked the shaky table with his fist, the dishes fell and shattered, his frail wife almost fainted, and the children were trembling in terror. I could see that they were ready to beat Reb Michael Baruch up and ruin his house.

An idea popped into my mind how to save him. I rushed down the court's stairs to the street, where I ran into a low-ranking Arab policeman (Called "Zabatiyah" during the Turkish rule). I told him that unwanted men had entered the courtyard, and I promised him two "Bishliks" (A Turkish coin at that time, equaling roughly one schilling) for removing them from the courtyard, leading them to the nearest alleyway, and leaving them there. The policeman accepted my offer and entered the house. The men obeyed and followed him, and once in the alleyway, he set them free. I paid his fee, and thus managed to save the trustee and his family.

Among the resident Kolel members there were also people who always harassed him with unjustified demands for money. These bothersome people (the likes of whom could be found in other Kolels as well) were, in truth, victims of their own upbringing. They had received neither education nor instruction in proper behavior, and had no beneficial skills for either themselves or for society. They usually married young without securing any means for maintaining a family, had troubles raising their children and experienced bitter lives. And yet many among the Kolel members did well in their studies as youngsters, and once they grew up they were admitted to local Yeshivas, where they were paid a monthly grant, and along with their share of the Distribution and Advance Funds made ends meet, albeit not very comfortably. Some Kolel members were financially supported by their relatives in Russia or America, and their material status was quite good.

Funds from the regular CHABAD Distribution, and likewise those of other Kolels of Russian and Polish communities, generally barely covered the rent, and in some exceptional cases, a portion of the livelihood of their recipients. Some made a scant living from labor and crafts, since there wasn't much work to be done in the land at the time. Kolels from other countries, such as Holland, Germany, Hungary and others, fared better. The MRM sums were greater, and Kolel members in Palestine were fewer, and therefore the Distribution for those Kolels proved adequate – and at times even more than adequate – for their livelihood.

During the war between Russia and Turkey in 1878, the Russian government was advised that Russian Jews were collecting funds, sending them to Palestine, and thus, in fact, strengthening the Turkish government. The Russian government prohibited, then, the sending of money to Palestine. That prohibition was not revoked after the war, but it remained on paper only. In reality, the government did not enforce it, and did nothing to prevent the dispatching of funds to

Palestine. Nonetheless, as I found out from the CHABAD Kolel here, the MRM financiers deemed it appropriate to take precautions.

The financiers there claimed that the money to the Holy Land was in fact for citrons ordered there by Russian Jews, for personal use or for sale. As evidence, they presented the citron trade between Palestine Jews and Russia, which had already existed to some extent. All the correspondence between the financiers in Russia and the CHABAD Kolel's trustees in Jerusalem referred only to citrons and their prices. Every six months, the trustees would send to the financiers a list with names of all the Kolel members. Since the Distribution was divided per capita, the number of dependents had to be listed next to each head of household. However, since officially it was a matter of citron trade, the trustees would cleverly list the number of citrons each of them sent, which represented the number of dependent. Copies of these lists returned certified by the MRM financiers in Russia, and were used to calculate the division of funds among Kolel members.

Since earlier days, it was a matter of practice in the CHABAD Kolel, as in other Kolels, to issue promissory notes to Kolel members against their future Distribution portions, for a period not to exceed two years. That would be done only when they could demonstrate a special need for money, such as a wedding or either the birth of a son or daughter, a trip abroad, or emergency medical care, and the like. In normal years, when the funds from abroad were received in an orderly fashion, and the Distribution was divided on time, the bills would be paid back to the creditors exactly on time, from the Distribution portions of the debtors. There were some rich Jews in Jerusalem, who had no other ways to use their money, and many of them were eager to accept such notes, for which they charged 6-7% annual interest.

The notes, as mentioned, could be issued for no longer than two years, and only against a certain portion of the amount due to the debtors out of the Distribution. When a Kolel member had a great need for money, he would provide his creditor with a mortgage note on money he would receive from the Distribution after two years, and guarantee not to ask the trustees for money, or promissory notes, until such time that the mortgage was paid off. The trustees would approve the mortgage and register it in the Kolel book. Such a loan would yield 10-12% annual interest. (At that time, there was no government law limiting the legal interest rate.)

In time, when for various reasons the Distribution funds decreased, and on the other hand, the number of Kolel members increased, the Distribution would be divided only once every nine or ten months, and in smaller portions. The trustees could no longer pay the notes on time, and thus their values gradually diminished. Finally, the interest rate for new notes reached 25-30%, and the mortgages lost their values altogether.

The trustees, led by Reb Moshe Witenberg and other prominent Kolel members, realized that the whole practice of promissory notes was heading toward bankruptcy. They decided to take action. They gathered the most distinguished and loyal Kolel members for a meeting, where they

decided not to issue any more notes against future Distribution funds. They empowered Reb Moshe Witenberg and the trustees to strike an agreement with the creditors regarding payments of the existing notes, in a manner which would serve both sides best. Subsequently, Reb Moshe convened a meeting at his house of the creditors who owned the majority of the promissory notes, and explained to them that they could lose their entire investments. He provided them with a practical proposal: They would forgive 25% of the total sum of the notes they owned, and the Kolel would guarantee the eventual payment of the remaining 75%. He offered his personal guarantee that their money would be returned in two years, in four installments, one quarter of the sum every six months, in addition to 6% annual interest. More than 25% of a Kolel member's portion of the Distribution could not be taken, because no more notes were being issued. After lengthy deliberations, most of the debtors signed the agreement, and the rest followed suit. Most of the Kolel members also gladly accepted the terms of the agreement. The payments were made on time, and the entire practice of promissory notes was discontinued in the CHABAD Kolel. That happened in the Year 5653 [1892/3], stabilizing the Kolel's finances.

Even after the death of Reb Moshe Witenberg, in the year 5659 [1899], the Kolel continued to be run under the same arrangement, by the two aforementioned trustees, along with a new trustee, Reb Leib Menochin, who had come from the town of Holem in the Mohaliv District, an honest and respectable man.

In the beginning of the year 5674 [latter part of 1913], a dispute broke out between followers of the Lubavitcher Rabbi and those of the Rabbi of Bobruisk. The Kolel split into two, and the financiers abroad of each side sent their MRM funds to their trustees in Jerusalem. That dispute was liable to ruin the entire Kolel. The best financiers abroad rose to the challenge, and sent a delegation to Jerusalem, consisting of Rabbi Modivski of the town Khorol, Rabbi Rephaelovitz of Krimentzog and the prominent Reb Nathan Gurary from Krimentzog, to make peace between the two rival sides here on the spot, and reunite everybody into one unit. The delegation stayed for a certain period of time in Jerusalem, sparing no efforts to reconcile the two sides, to no avail. The dispute remained unresolved, and the mediators returned to Russia rebuffed.

In the month of Av [July/August] of that year, the world war broke out, and the delivery of funds from Russia to Palestine was discontinued. With the rise of the Bolsheviks to power, the sending of money from Russia to Palestine was prohibited altogether, and even immigration from there was halted.

The Kolels were dwindling in numbers and became shadows of themselves. Their income came only from real estate in Palestine, left to them by generous donors before the war, and some small funds still sent from Russian Jewish immigrants in American and South Africa. Since after the war, these Kolels have been run by people who are not properly selected by members of the Kolels, and they managed them without any public scrutiny. Those poor members of the Kolels who live in Palestine, including elderly, widows and orphans, receive only minimal support, and those who have no private sponsors experience terrible poverty.

The Kolels from other European countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Austria, Germany and others are run according the pre-war arrangements, albeit at a somewhat reduced level. However, since the transfer of money from these countries abroad was prohibited, the conditions of these Kolels deteriorated too, and the aid they provide to poor scholars, widows and orphans had to be sharply reduced. With the rise of Hitler to power in Germany, and the occupation of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, the Kolels from those countries were totally ruined, and the sufferings and distress of their poor have deepened significantly.

During the pre-war years, and even after the war, some Kolels' directors managed to purchase houses and courtyards, built largely with money from private donors, and some from Distribution funds. They are:

The Horodna Kotel, which owns a good number of houses in various neighborhoods, both in New Jerusalem and in the Old City. All those houses are rented, and the income from the rent goes to the Kotel's fund and is distributed to its poor.

The Kolels from Vilnius, Warsaw, Sienburgen, and the largest among them, Ungarin [Hungarian], built complete apartment complexes. The apartments are rotated among the Kolels' poor, who reside in them for periods of three years each, determined by lots.

MRM funds from America were sent, prior to the world war, to the Knesset-Israel General Committee in Jerusalem, and were divided, after deducting certain amounts for religious and general purposes, among the various Kolels. Each Kotel was entitled to a certain percentage, in accordance with an agreement between the Kolels and the General Committee.

In the year 5656 [1895/6], the few American Jews in Jerusalem established a separate Kotel named "Tiferet Yerushalayim"<sup>1</sup>. After the World War, a larger number of Jews from America came to Jerusalem to settle in it, including important pious Jews, Rabbis, scholars, elderly, young people and even poor folks. Following these immigrants' lobbying with Rabbis and MRM financiers in the large American cities, the Kotel grew, and since then, their MRM financiers have been sending most of the funds collected in American cities directly to the Kotel's management in Jerusalem, forwarding only a given amount to the General Committee in Jerusalem, to cover religious and general expenses. The American Kotel members elect, through secret ballots, a large committee of a certain number of members, for a given period of time, as a general committee. That committee appoints a smaller executive committee and a control committee that conducts an annual review of the management's finances and submits them for approval by the general committee. The needy American immigrants receive more-or-less-adequate support for their livelihood from the Kotel's fund. This Kotel also has its own synagogue in the Meah She'arim neighborhood, and a building in the Akhva neighborhood, where the committee is located, as well as several apartments, which are rotated among the

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<sup>1</sup> [Hebrew for, "the Glory of Jerusalem" – AA]



Kolel's poor per lots for a certain number of years. The Kolel also owns a number of houses in Jerusalem, entrusted to it by private donors, and the apartments there are given to the Kolel's poor to live there rent-free for a few years.

Sometimes in the early 1930s, recent prominent immigrants from American founded the American Brethren Association, aimed at assisting their fellow countrymen. They considered the terms they received from the burial society of other non-Hassid Ashkenazi Kolels in Jerusalem to be unfair, separated themselves from it and founded their own burial society. Uniting their efforts, they purchased a piece of land on the Mount of Olives, and after negotiating with the management of the general burial society, they obtained a license to bury their dead in their own lot. According to the association's bylaws, they are committed to assist their sick members with treatment, medical care and financial aid, and their work in this area is very important. A number of this association's members built together an apartment building, where they themselves, or others whom they wish to have there, reside. In the building they dedicated a large, beautiful hall for a synagogue, used for both prayer and studies, and appointed a famous rabbi to teach the residents every day a lesson in Jewish writings and commentary.

## **RABBI SHMUEL SLANT – JERUSALEM’S CHIEF RABBI**

When I arrived in Jerusalem, the position of Ashkenazi chief rabbi in town was filled by the Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant. That year, 5649 [188/9], was the 50<sup>th</sup> year of his tenure as a rabbi. In addition to being a great Torah scholar, he was also quite savvy and knowledgeable in worldly matters. He was ordained Rabbi in Jerusalem at the young age of twenty-three, when the Jewish community here was still small and concentrated in its entirety within the Old City. He grew up with the community and knew most of its members and the ways of their lives.

All public matters were referred to him, and he had the final say-so on all of them. Many private matters as well as disputes between individuals were settled by him as well. There was a regular court, which convened daily at the office of Reb Yehuda the Hassid’s Ruins Synagogue to judge between disputants. However, more complex and important matters were referred to the Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant himself, because he possessed great understanding and was very skilled at questioning both parties, and usually he was able to persuade the guilty party to confess. I heard that in his wisdom, he had been successful even in criminal cases, using his witty investigative skills to obtain confessions, to get thieves to return the stolen property to the original owners, and the like. Through his affable manners he gained influence even in that circle of people who were lacking in morals. The informers and slanderers feared him and obeyed his orders to avoid evil. Many used to come to him for personal advice, and he would receive everybody graciously and answer their questions pleasantly.

All the cases among Jews were handled by the community courts, and their decisions were accepted by the disputants. First and foremost, because almost all the community members received Distribution money, and whoever disobeyed the court would be fined by deducting money from his portion of it. However, even those who were not dependent on the Distribution willingly accepted his decisions. Especially inclined were Ottoman citizens, because litigation at the Arab Turkish court was risky, due to the practices of bribe-taking and injustice, which prevailed there. Even Arabs who had disputes with Jews elected to refer their cases to the community court, knowing that justice would be assured there for them as well.

My uncle, Reb Moshe Witenberg, an enlightened, wise man of many deeds, held Rabbi Shmuel Slant in great esteem and admired him for his acumen. Being a CHABAD Hassid of that generation, he generally did not care for the non-Hassids and their great Rabbis. However, he considered Rabbi Slant to be on a higher level. Reb Moshe used to visit the Great Rabbi once a month on the first day of the [Jewish] month. Many times he asked me to join him, a task I was just too happy to perform. Rabbi Shmuel would discuss interesting current issues with Reb Moshe, but at time also told him beautiful tales from the Hasidic folklore, particularly about CHABAD great rabbis.

I remember one of his stories to this very day: Confidants of the Old Rabbi [of CHABAD] asked him: Why do the other rabbis in Poland, Austria and elsewhere present, according to their own

followers, signs from God, whereas he was not forthcoming with any? The Rabbi, referring to Jewish writings, replied that signs are needed for ignorants. CHABAD Hassids, most of whom were well educated in the Torah, had no need for such signs.

Like all of Jerusalem's Russian-originated Jews, the Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant used the contacts of the famous leader Reb Yeshayah Bordaki, who served as Deputy Austrian Consul in Jerusalem, to obtain Austrian citizenship. He was quite respected by his consul, as well as by other consuls and senior local government officials, who visited him during holidays and other occasions. Particularly frequent were the visits by the English consul, who used to discuss various matters with him.

He was very active in establishing the Etz Haim Yeshivah and Torah learning center, the first of its kind among the Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem. He founded them along with the Great Rabbi Meir Auerbach of Kalish, in the Year 5615 [1854/5]. It was his initiative to establish the Knesset Israel General Committee, chartered with unifying the various Kolels in Jerusalem (which served the Jews of Jerusalem according to their countries of origin) in the matter of receiving and organizing the funds that arrived from Russia, America, Africa and elsewhere. The funds were sent in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Slant who would forward them to the General Committee. The money was used for general public and religious purposes, such as salaries for judges, justice-guides in the Old City and the outer neighborhoods, to government-related matters, etc. The rest of the money was divided proportionally among the Kolels, in accordance with an agreement made by Kolels' trustees.

The General Committee was serving, then, as the center for all of Jerusalem's public affairs, and as the address where both public and individual problems were handled. I had the honor of knowing the Secretary General of the Committee, the late Dr. Yosef Rivlin, who was a man of exquisite qualities, wise, energetic and active. He was the prime mover of things within the General committee, who in essence functioned as its main director and was very dedicated to all of Jerusalem's affairs.

After the death of Dr. Yosef Rivlin, another director was appointed in his place for the General Committee. However, current affairs were actually handled then by the trustees of the various affiliated kolels. At that time, a number of kolels departed from the General Committee and sent their own emissaries to America, South Africa, etc., to raise funds from their own sources – that is, people who had come from the same European regions, for distribution among their kolel's members. The main financial setback was dealt to the General Committee by the aforementioned establishment of the American Kolel, which completely disassociated itself from the General Committee. The new Kolel has appropriated most of the MRM funds arriving from American Jews, and only a small portion of it is still directed to the General Committee to support the religious institutes and the non-affiliate poor in Jerusalem. Consequently, the General Committee's income was sharply reduced, and naturally it had to cut down on its public activities.

The Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant died on 30 Av 5669 [August 17, 1909] at the age of ninety-three, after serving as Jerusalem's chief rabbi for seventy years. A big funeral was held for him, attended by almost all the Jews in Jerusalem, from the various committees.

In commemoration of their founder, the directors of the General Committee established an important institute in his name, an interest-free loan fund which they called Shmuel's Treasure Fund. This program, which became well known throughout the Diaspora, was well supported all over the world and good sums were received for this interest-free loan fund. Directors of the Shmuel's Treasure Fund provide interest-free loans against appropriate collateral to townspeople who apply for them, for pre-determined periods of time, with convenient terms and at no cost. The Fund built the neighborhood Kiriya Shmuel<sup>1</sup> south east of the neighborhood Rehavya, and it offered convenient loan terms for building the houses of the neighborhood's residents. In time, the neighborhood grew and expanded after large, beautiful buildings were built by private individuals who paid their own costs.

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<sup>1</sup> ["The City of Shmuel" – AA]

## THE GENERATION'S COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS

The most important community activists at the time of the Great Rabbi Shmuel Slant, who involved themselves in the city's public interests, were: Rabbi Yosef Rivlin, Reb Yoel Moshe Solomon, Rabbi Zalman Son of Rabbi Nachoom Levi, Rabbi Nissan Beck and others. Their tremendous energy and initiative led to the building of most of the neighborhoods outside the Old City, beginning with the Nahalat Shiv'ah neighborhood to the Beit Yaakov neighborhood and all the neighborhoods around them East of the Old City, and the Meah She'arim and Beit Israel, etc., north of the city.

All the aforementioned activists belonged to the non-Hassid sect, except for Rabbi Nissan Beck who was a Hassid. He was the Trustee for the Wolyn Kolel, and at the same time he worked hard on many general public interests.

The main figure behind the construction of the new neighborhoods outside the Old City, beginning with Nahalt Shiveah and onward, was the founder and director of the General Committee and the public activist par excellence, the Great Rabbi Yossef Rivlin. The building of New Jerusalem, and extending Jewish settlement in Palestine in general, were his life mission. He gave his heart and soul to these objectives. In Jerusalem he was nicknamed, "Reb Yossi Neighborhood-Builder". And he is credited with much of the building of New Jerusalem. Nevertheless, after devoting himself to public activity and to everything which was worth its while in Jerusalem, he died poor, leaving no property for his family to inherit.

Rabbi Nissan Beck built the first neighborhood outside Nablus Gate, which was named after him, Nissan Beck neighborhood. He also built the large, central synagogue for the Hassids of the Old City, named Tiferet Israel. He began building this glorious synagogue with limited means, and upon completing the construction of the walls up to the dome, he was forced to discontinue the construction for lack of funds.

At the same time – this happened in the year 5630 [1869/70] – the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Kaiser Franz Joseph the First, came for a visit in Jerusalem, after attending the opening ceremonies of the Suez Canal. The Austrian consul to Jerusalem introduced Rabbi Nissan Beck to the emperor as the leader of the Austrian Jews in Jerusalem. Rabbi Nissan Beck used his graceful, pleasant manner and great efforts to convince the honorable emperor himself to come and visit the synagogue construction site. The emperor looked at the drawings for the building, prepared by the famous architect Mr. Schik, found them beautiful and ended up donating one thousand Austrian Guildens from his own pocket. He also made an entry in the book presented to him by Rabbi Nissan Beck, writing that the building would glorify the community of Austrian Jews in Jerusalem. Equipped with such an impressive paper from Emperor Franz Joseph (who bore the title "King of Jerusalem"), Rabbi Nissan Beck went to Austria to raise funds among its Jews for building the synagogue. He first approached the Great Hassid Rabbi, Master and Teacher Rabbi Avraham Yaakov of Sedigora, who decided to sponsor the project. Donations

from the Rabbi's followers in Austria and Russia streamed in. The synagogue was finally completed in the year 5632 [1871/2]; it was named after the late Great Rabbi Israel of Rozin, father of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov of Sedigora. Its attractive style resembles that of the great synagogue Beit Yaakov, which is located at the Hurvah ["Ruins"] of Rabbi Yehuda the Hasid. It is magnificently installed on high grounds inside the holy city of Jerusalem. From its eastern windows, the splendor of the site of the Holy Temple can be seen. To this day, Jerusalem's residents refer to it as Rabbi Nissan Beck's Synagogue.

Rabbi Nissan Beck, who devoted his entire life for the good of his community, was forced to sell the private house he owned in the neighborhood that was named after him, due to an unpaid mortgage, and move to a rented apartment in the Old City. Rabbi Nissan Beck passed away in the month of Kislev, the year 5650 [Nov-Dec 1889], after suffering from a mortal ailment, at the age of seventy seven. He was properly eulogized by Rabbi Akiva Yossef Schlessinger, author of *The Hebrew Heart*, and other rabbis. And like many other hard working Jerusalem community activists, who spent their days in the service of their people, he left behind him nothing material to be inherited, and his sons were forced to immigrate abroad in search of livelihoods.

The leading public activist, who was involved in both the general and private matters of Jews in Jerusalem and their dealings with the local government, beginning about sixty years ago and for many years afterwards, was the late Mr. Nissim Bachar. He had arrived in Jerusalem in the year 5641 [1880/1], as a representative of the Alliance Israelite Univeselle (AIU) society in Paris, to establish the society's School of Education and Crafts here. His task was quite difficult, because he encountered stiff opposition to his activities from the Ashkenazi rabbis. In their views, such a school would serve as a spoiler for the orthodox Jewish education in Jerusalem. They felt that the establishment of a secular school for education would be a source from which free-spirited, atheistic notions would be spread. Although his attempt to reconcile with the rabbis failed, Mr. Nissim Bachar opened the AIU society's school in the year 5642 [1881/2]. The Ashkenazi rabbis and sages immediately issued a ban on him and his school. They spared no effort to harass him and ordered their flocks not to send their sons to that school, lest they themselves would be excommunicated and thus lose their share of the Distribution funds. The vast majority of Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem endorsed the ban. Some of the Sepharadi rabbis, too, were opposed to the opening of the school, but they stopped short of issuing an official ban. Therefore, almost all of the school's students were Sepharadi. During the school's early years, it portrayed a spirit of Judaism and Israeli nationalism. Expert teachers taught Hebrew there, along with French, Arabic, and a broad spectrum of general sciences. The students of the early classes were well educated in the Jewish national field, and very knowledgeable in languages and the sciences. The most famous among them were the late Professor David Yelin and Reb Yossef Meyuchas, as well as Mr. Avraham Elmaliach, may he live long, and others. Most of the early students, who were also known as good, loyal and educated Jews, are no longer among us.

In addition to the general school for the sciences, the AIU society also opened a vocational school for crafts here, with Mr. Nissim Bachar as its principal. Seven different types of trades

were taught there: Carpentry, blacksmithing, welding brass and iron, mechanics, making brass instruments, weaving and dyeing – all taught by specialists. This school also admitted students from other Middle Eastern cities, who received full room and board within the school premises. The school's products had a reputation as handsome, solid crafts.

Years later, a different attitude that prevailed among the AIU society's directors in Paris had a great effect on the society's schools, which lost much of their national and religious characteristics. Only in the last few years has the national spirit been revived there, and the teaching of Hebrew language and literature was broadened considerable and adjusted to fit the program of the National Education Committee. The AIU Society also established a school for girls in Jerusalem.

Mr. Nissim Bachar used his position as the representative of the great AIU society, which carried much clout within circles of the Ottoman government in Istanbul, and was known from its early days as the main protector of the rights of Jews in the East. Being a man of tremendous energy and intelligence, who was well respected among government officials, he successfully promoted the general interests of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Mr. Nissim Bachar used to come frequently to Reb Moshe Witenberg's house, to consult with him regarding various public matters that were on the agenda at the time.

Years later, the AIU society transferred Mr. Nissim Bachar from Jerusalem to America, to represent it there, and sent another principal to the school for sciences. Mr. Albert Antabi, who had been a principal of the society's school in another town, was sent to Jerusalem as the vocational school's principal and the AIU society's representative for administrative and political matters. Mr. Antabi was a hard working, energetic person, and although he had the tendency to display a touch of tyranny, he did much to promote the interests of the Jews in Jerusalem. He also represented the prominent Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), on behalf of which he established, in the year 5659 [1898/9], a weaving mill in Jerusalem for simple merchandise. Also on behalf of the JCA he establish a loan fund, with 150,000 Golden Francs in capital, to provide loans for Jews in Jerusalem – merchants, artists and craftsmen – against promissory notes, which were co-signed by dependable people, to be paid back in installments and with low interest.

The same year, JCA founded a construction company to build neighborhoods for Yemenite Jews who were immigrating to Jerusalem, to be paid for in small installments. It also built the Tzadok Hacoheh neighborhood, named after the Chief French Rabbi, the late Rabbi Tzadok Hacoheh, where the houses were sold with comfortable payment terms to Jews of various affiliations in Jerusalem. In the year 5662 [1901/2], MR. Antabi built in Jerusalem, on behalf of JCA, 35 houses for the craftsmen and laborers who worked for the company, offering long-term mortgages.

Mr. Antabi was particularly useful for the Jews in Jerusalem during the World War. Being a fearless, courageous man, he was not intimidated even by the Turkish general commander, the tyrant Jamal Pasha, and he managed to rescind some of his anti-Jewish decrees. In the last year of the war, Mr. Antabi died, still in his prime years.



## **ELIEZER BEN YEHUDA AND HIS ERA**

Bigger and better authors have already written about Ben Yehuda the man, his great historic contribution to the revival of the Hebrew language and his formidable achievement, namely the Dictionary of Old and New Hebrew. However, since I knew him personally, beginning in my early days in Jerusalem and until his very last day, I feel compelled to mention the man and the ways of his productive life, to the best of my knowledge.

As an owner of a printing house, a publisher of a newspaper and printer of his own dictionary, he visited quite frequently in my paper wholesale shop. While conducting commercial negotiations, we also used to discuss general well as private matters, which were on the agenda at the time. We knew each other quite well, since his first wife, the late Deborah, was a native of my hometown Disna. I had even known her grandfather, whose house was located across from ours. Although he was already quite old when I was a child, I still remember him well, as being a good, people-loving man, and particularly fond of children. Deborah's parents lived in Moscow at the time, and a few years after my arrival here, her father, Mr. Yunes, a distinguished man and a known author, came to settle in Jerusalem. As a fellow townsman and a friend, he visited me often, and we used to exchange memories about our hometown.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda was a sickly person. As a young man he suffered from lung disease and even coughed up blood. In addition, his financial situation was rather tight, since due to his frail health condition he had to resign his post as a Hebrew teacher in the AIU school and to live on the limited pension he received from the society. The small printing house he had and his weekly publication Hatzvi ["The Deer"] provided him with only minimal income.

The purpose of his life was to revive Hebrew and to establish it as the language of the Jews of Jerusalem and Palestine. It is common knowledge that his house was the first one where only Hebrew was spoken and "fed" to his children from infancy. In his encounters with other Jews, once he sensed that the person he was talking to could understand even just a little bit of Hebrew, he refused to speak any foreign language. As the vast majority of Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem were of the old school, and the usage of Hebrew for non-religious matters was antagonistic to them, they loathed him and harassed him frequently. Once he was caught, inside the Beit Israel neighborhood, by a gang of radical young zealots who took him to their schoolroom, shut the door and demanded that he speak Yiddish to them, or else they threatened to beat him up. However, even under such conditions he refused to budge and insisted on taking Hebrew, and they, indeed, pounded him with some fine blows. He was hated by leaders of the old community because in his paper, Hatzvi, he wrote against the system of Distribution and idleness, advocating work and education, and sometimes expressed views contradicting theirs. For this they persecuted him and even declared a ban on him and on his newspaper.

His house was a meeting place for the early educated and intelligent Jerusalmmites. However, even some Yeshiva students, who sought education and knowledge of the Hebrew language and

literature, used to come to his house in secret. He would greet them gracefully and help them in attaining their objectives. By nature he was modest, good hearted and he easily befriended anyone he encountered. The Sepharadi Jews - even the Orthodox of the old community, but particularly the young - agreed with him and accepted him, helping him with his tasks, and therefore he felt more at ease and at home with the Sepharadi community.

He was the main force behind the establishment of the Midrash Abarbanel library in Jerusalem in the year 5662 [1891/2]. He founded and headed the Language Committee, the purpose of which was to design new words and concepts missing in our language. The absence of such words made it difficult not only to express thoughts and literary ideas in Hebrew, but even basic terms necessary for daily application. It was he who revived very many words by adopting them from Arabic and Aramaic, in which he was fluent, while re-adjusting them to fit the structure of the Hebrew language. Although he faced opposition regarding this matter from some great writers and linguists, such as Echad-ha'am<sup>1</sup> and others, he finally prevailed: Almost all the words he invented were accepted by the modern writers and the general public, and lately even by his foes.

He was among the first promoters of Hebrew preschool, and was gratified by seeing, in his lifetime, a young generation thinking in and speaking only Hebrew at home and in the street, children at play and adults in their daily activities. Since the children were exposed to no other language except Hebrew, their parents and other adults relatives were forced to learn the Hebrew language themselves. Many old men and women began attending evening language classes.

When the revolt erupted against the rule of the German language and in favor of establishing Hebrew as the language of education<sup>2</sup>, first in the Technion in Haifa that was sponsored by the German Jewish Aid Society, and later in the Teacher's Seminar and in the rest of that society's schools in Jerusalem and around the country, he stood at the forefront of this struggle, using his newspaper and his influence all the way until the total victory.

An interesting anecdote underlines Ben Yehuda's devotions to all the properties of the Jewish people, and it is worth mentioning. A Russian Jewish scholar, named Khabolsohn, agreed to convert to Orthodox Christianity in order to secure a position as a professor in the university in the capital city St. Petersburg. However, in his heart of hearts he remained loyal to his people, was involved in Jewish affairs, and used his considerable influence at the central government to advocate both general Jewish interests and private matters of individuals who appealed to him. When the professor reached the age of seventy, leaders of Russian Jewry prepared a splendid celebration for him, using the Hebrew papers Hamelitz and Hatzfira as well as foreign language Jewish papers to advertise their extravagant plans. Ben Yehuda launched a campaign, writing both in his Jerusalem paper and in the Hebrew papers in Russia, protesting the idea. He

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<sup>1</sup> [The pen name of the Zionist author and philosopher Asher Zvi Ginzburg – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [Known in Zionist history as the Language War – AA]

maintained that by abandoning the Jewish religion, Khabolsohn actually had betrayed the Jewish people as well. Ben Yehuda's arguments were well received by the Jewish leaders in Russia, and the oh-so-anticipated birthday celebration of the proselytized professor was canceled.

At the onset of the World War, Ben Yehuda was forced to immigrate with his family to America, returning after the English conquered the country. When [the Jewish] Sir Herbert Samuel was appointed the first High Commissioner in Judea, the joyous Ben Yehuda was elated, believing this to symbolize the rise to the throne of kings from the House of David. However, he died before even having sufficient opportunity to be disappointed by that commissioner of ours.

## LIFE IN JERUSALEM

The number of Jews residing in Jerusalem fifty years ago totaled about fifteen thousand, about eight thousand of them Ashkenazi, and the rest Sepharadi of the various Middle Eastern communities. This number was increasing a very little bit due to the arrival of new immigrants, most of whom were old people who depended on the Distribution system, or on the support they received from their sons or relatives abroad. Some of them brought their children or grandchildren with them, to establish a new generation for them in the Holy Land. Among the Kolel's administrators here, some were not all too happy about these immigrants, for obvious reasons<sup>1</sup>. However, in many cases, the Distribution financiers abroad ordered the administrators to help the new immigrants with Distribution money.

The Kolel administrators considered working for a livelihood to be degrading. They did not encourage commerce either, since any such activities could cause a decrease in the Distribution funds from abroad, if Jerusalem were perceived as a city like all cities in the world, where people could make a living by working and trading. For the same reasons, some of the administrators and community leaders in Jerusalem were opposed to the establishment of the new Moshavot [farm communities] in Judea and the Galilee, who made their living from the land, fearing that donors abroad would prefer to direct their contributions to aid farmers in the Moshavot, and thus reduce the Distribution funds, the beneficiaries of which were elderly people, scholars, widows, orphans, and Yeshiva students. Therefore they issued statements abroad denouncing the Moshavot, their lifestyle and the ways and manners of their inhabitants.

Most of the [Jewish] residents of Jerusalem lived in the Old City, in premises they rented from Arab owners, which were known as Right of Possession premises, namely: if a Jew rented such a premise from an Arab for three years, he would be granted a Right of Possession paper from the local court, and no other Jew were allowed to rent it anymore. Only a small number of houses belonged to Jews. However, many had moved already to the new neighborhoods that were built outside the walls. The apartments in those neighborhoods were also built quite simply, lines of apartments with shared walls between them, and each generally included only one internal room, one external room and a balcony, and a kitchen with a primitive oven. The rich had double-sided apartments of the same type, and those were already considered "mansions".

Life in Jerusalem was, at that time, as simple as it could be. "Luxurious" amenities such as a bathroom, hallways, etc were neither available nor expected. The residents of our city had no idea what electrical lighting even was. The houses were illuminated with small, simple kerosene lamps, usually #4 lamps with 11 candles each. Around the year 5650 [1889/90], when some merchants introduced the #30 Blitz kerosene lamp, which produced much rounder and larger

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<sup>1</sup> The more claimants of Distribution funds, the less the share per capita

light, they were bought first only by the large churches, and large crowds would come to observe this wondrous light. Heating, during the coldest days, was done by wood coals lined up in an open brass instrument called “mangel”. The burning charcoal and the heat produced smoke that was harmful to the eyes and lungs. Even the wealthy residents – proportionally to that day and age - fared no better.

All the Jews lived within families. Single lifestyle almost did not exist. If somebody came to Jerusalem still single, widow/er or divorcee, they quickly settled down among relatives, friends, or any kind of family, since motels or boarding rooms did not exist. They married as soon as they could and arranged housing for themselves.

The necessities were very inexpensive. A medium-sized family could live comfortably on ten golden Francs – 5 Schillings – per week. The local flour cost 3 Grooshes [“pennies”] per rotel<sup>1</sup>; meat cost 12 Grooshes per rotel; 10 eggs cost one Groosh; and the rest of the products cost proportionally to these prices.

Buying ready-made bread was not the common practice. There was only one bakery, run by one named Berman who came from Odessa in Russia. He used to bake buns from white flour, which he imported from Russia, and sell them in a small store he rented on the Street of the Jews. His customers were few, either people with discriminating taste or just sick. A few hospitals in the city and aid institutes for the poor and for orphans, who had no bakeries of their own, bought bread from him. Otherwise, each family baked its own bread. At every street or neighborhood there was a public oven, operated by an independent baker. The housewife would prepare dough two or three times per week, made of flour or mixed with either semolina or Russian flour. On weekdays they shaped it as a regular loaf, whereas on the Sabbath they would form a Chalah from it. The oven operator used to send his employees to collect the loaves of dough from the houses and return them baked. Some bakers, though, used to “confiscate” a small portion from each loaf, and by the weekend they would have enough to bake something special for themselves. Various cakes were baked in such ovens as well. On Friday, the women would send bowls with the traditional meat-stew to be left in the oven and returned hot on Saturday morning. The operator was paid a monthly wage by each family, according to the number of family members. During the festival of Purim, the oven operator and his employees would visit all their customers at their homes and receive the traditional Purim gift, proportionally to the prominence and means of the customer. Some even treated them to wine and pastries in honor of the holiday.

There were no public laundries in town then. Every housewife washed her family’s clothes by herself, from time to time with the help of a paid maid, generally a girl from one of the Middle East communities. The laundry day was a day of hard labor and considerable burden for the housewife.

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<sup>1</sup> [A weight measure equal to approximately 0.5 KG or slightly under one pound – AA]

The Arab residents supplied the Jews of Jerusalem with milk. Jews were not involved in raising cattle. Arab owners of sheep and goats would bring their herds to the Jewish court yards, milk their beasts right then and there, and sell the milk to the Jews hot straight from the nipple. Some Jewish milkmen went to the nearby Arab villages, bought milk from farmers raising small cattle, and delivered it to the houses of Jews. Sour milk and butter were brought to town by Arab farm women in small leather containers and primitively-made clay pitchers. The butter was made from unstrained milk, and therefore was mixed with goat's hair, and had to be thoroughly cleaned and the hair removed, to the greatest extent possible. Even the wealthy and the new immigrants from Europe, who were used to clean food, had no better food to eat. Jewish milk products were neither available in Jerusalem nor imported from abroad. In Hebron, Safed and Tiberius Jews made good, tasty cheese and brought it for sale in Jerusalem. Only years afterwards, Jews in Jerusalem began raising cattle, and even imported Dutch cows and other brands, supplying the community with milk and its products, such as sour milk, sour cream, cheese and good, clean butter.

The poultry products, chickens and eggs, were supplied to Jerusalem by the Arab villages, especially from around Hebron and Gaza, until such time that the Jewish Moshavot in Judea and in the Sharon were ready to expand and raise more chickens, enough to sell poultry and eggs to the residents of Jerusalem.

Potatoes were not grown in Palestine, but rather imported from Russia at a high cost. The potato was considered a luxury at that time, and was used for making fruit-salad for desert. The best and least expensive fruit was the local grown orange. Export of oranges to Europe was very limited then. The technical and financial means necessary for extensive export operations were not available yet. Agents of European fruit firms did not come often to Palestine, and there were not enough export specialists here. Also, the annual production of the citrus fruits was much smaller than that of recent years. The orange grove growers had to sell much of their oranges within Palestine, and of course at a very cheap price.

Due to the poverty of the vast majority of residents, the poor construction of the apartments, the crowded conditions and the puddles of standing water next to the dwelling places, the hygiene was quite inadequate. And since delivery of water to the city from remote springs was not done yet, the residents had to drink rain water accumulated in the cisterns inside the court yards, drained from rooftops as well as tiles on the ground, none of which was too clean. The water stayed inside the closed cistern all year long, with no sanitary supervision whatsoever. Naturally, many diseases were common in the city, especially swamp fever and malaria, which hit the weak in particular. (Weak people were aplenty, since even the young generation, most of whom still studied in the old schools where physical education was unheard of, did not develop very well physically.) Among young children, too, the mortality rate was very high. Worse yet was the health conditions in rain-deficient years, when the cisterns would empty early in the summer. Then Arabs used to bring water for drinking and cooking in leather containers from undetermined sources, where the sanitary condition were quite doubtful and unsupervised, and

sell the water to the residents at a high price. At times, when such a “water master” was late to come, or ran out of his supply after being inundated with customers, the thirsty people would implore him to hurry up and bring more of the filthy water to quench their thirst.

In years with inadequate - or even non-existent - rains, the crops, too, were insufficient. Consequently, the prices of essential items such as grain, flour, fruits and vegetables would shoot up. The poor in particular suffered from this, since they could not afford to store such necessities in advance. If by the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Heshvan [mid to late October] there was still no rain, the rabbis would order their followers to fast on Mondays and Thursdays, to repent and pray for deliverance and blow the Shofar [horn].

Transportation from Jaffa Gate to the new neighborhoods was available only by two-horse carriages. The coachman would take 5-6 passengers, each of whom paid the fair of two Turkish dimes, and take them to either the main gates of Meah She’arim neighborhood or Mahaneh Yehuda neighborhood off of Jaffa Street. There the passengers would get off and walk to their homes. The most pious, or those who wished to appear as the most modest, refused to sit in the carriage next to a woman. They would wait to make sure that the carriage is filled only with men, or otherwise choose to sit in the front next to the coachman. Some of the rich would hire a cab for themselves, which took them directly home for a fair of about one half Franc, on streets that were, of course, only more or less paved.

Only two roads really qualified for such a term: Jaffa Street, which stretched from Jaffa Gate to the Meah She’arim neighborhood, and continued all the way to the City of Jaffa, and a street that is nowadays called Hanevi’im [“The prophets”] Street. However, even those roads were paved with stones, gravel and sand, and no tar at all. Thus, in the summer, the dust that rose from them was blinding and harmful to the lungs, and in the winter, puddles of water were formed in many sections on the road. The rest of the streets were no more than unpaved lanes. Inside the Jewish neighborhoods there were not even any lanes. In the winter, swamps were formed there with moldy water and croaking frogs, and in the summer, once the water evaporated in the sun’s heat, those swamps would produce stench and mosquitoes which penetrated one’s lungs, causing swamp fever and malaria.

The passenger-transporting carriages were stationed only by Jaffa Gate, and sometimes by the gate of Meah She’arim neighborhood, but never elsewhere. Therefore, when the merchant returned from his lunch break at home to his office or store on Jaffa Street (where almost all the businesses were located) or in the Old City, he could not catch a ride and had to walk in the blazing summer heat and in the stormy winter winds and rains. Hence, the merchant had to decide whether to even go home for lunch, or eat at work. Special porters were hired to deliver such lunches from home to the work place. One can only imagine how “pleasurable” and “tasty” was such a meal. No decent restaurant or café could be found in the commercial centers, except for a number of taverns that could only offend a self-respecting person.

Life in general was quite miserable then. Even those who did earn enough for their livelihood, and perhaps more, could not make their lives pleasant due to the lack of basic necessities. In addition, the zealotry and resistance to anything new on the part of the old-school disciples, who were the vast majority in town at the time, prevailed everywhere and stood in the way of any progress, even when it had no religious effect whatsoever.

Among the circles of Orthodox zealots there was the tendency for exaggerated piety, which the more moderate Orthodox did not approve of. Within those circles, anybody who violated even the most banal of practices, would be fined or even denied his entire share of the Distribution funds, and ostracized by his congregation. Practically rigid was the rule of administrators and directors of the more well-to-do kolels, such as the Ungarin, Siebenburgen and others, where each member's share of the Distribution funds was quite adequate for livelihood.

The women in those kolels, young and old alike, had to shave their heads bald. Overly pious women used to visit the womenfolk periodically, to verify that the shaving had been done as ordered. If a woman did not pass their inspection, they would notify the administrators, who did not hesitate to deny their families their share of the Distribution funds. Even wearing a wig, which was already quite common practice among the most pious women in the diaspora, was forbidden in Jerusalem. The women of Jerusalem covered their heads and a portion of their foreheads with a large scarf called "Yazma".

All the men, including boys, were forced to wear "Shtreimels"<sup>1</sup> on their heads on the Sabbath and on holidays, including Saturday nights. Failing to do so was considered a transgression. I did not get a penny from Distribution funds, and therefore was not subject to orders from those aforementioned zealots, so I did not wear a Shtreimel. I recall one Saturday night, while walking down an alleyway in the Jewish quarter of the Old City, wearing an ordinary hat, I ran into a gang of such zealots who protested, "Who is this Sheigetz<sup>2</sup> who dares not to wear a Shtreimel on Saturday night?" They were about to assault me, but I managed to get away.

Men wore "Kaftans" [Turkish tops] made of fabric or silk with color stripes, sewn according to the Eastern and Arab fashion. On the Sabbath and holidays, some of the most prominent men would wear white kaftan and slim, white pants. The kaftan has no buttons and was fastened with a belt around the hips. Over the kaftan, the men wore a long, usually black jacket with wide sleeves, also designed according to the Arab fashion, called "Jabba". The women wore long, simple dresses resembling Arab dresses.

People of the old community in Jerusalem married their sons and daughters, like their forefathers before them, at a very young age. The match was made by professional matchmakers who

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<sup>1</sup> [Tradition large hats made of animal furs – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [A derogatory term for a non-Jewish male – AA]



mediated between the two parties, and were paid by them as soon as they were able to finalize a matchmaking deal. The decision was made by the parents, and the young couple had no say in the matter. The factors in a match were the family background, the size of dowry each side committed itself to, the groom's knowledge in the Talmud and Jewish law, etc. Usually, the father of the bride offered to feed the newlywed couple at his table for a given number of years, and in return he was entitled to the groom's share in the Distribution funds for those years, as well as to any monetary award he would receive in his Yeshiva. The groom did not see the bride before the wedding ceremony. Only "progressive" parents allowed the bride and groom to see each other for a few minutes with the family members present. This would be done in some side-street, generally the Armenian Compound adjacent to Zion Gate inside the walls of the Old City. However, they dared not open their mouths and say a word to each other during the meeting.

Once the two sides agreed on all the terms, the bride's parents would invite the groom and his parents to their home. Men and women sat separately, and the official terms were written down: The sums of dowries by each side were recorded, which either had been or would be deposited in the new couple's name, the period of time for which the bride's father, and sometimes also the groom's father, committed himself to support the couple, the jewelry, gifts, etc. committed by each side, as well as the wedding date. The inscriber read the terms aloud, and the ceremony ended with the breaking of a defective porcelain dish (not a good one, to avoid violating the commandment that forbids the destruction of property), and with congratulating the couple and the in-laws, at a set table with wine and fine food, all according to the in-laws' station in life. At that time, the bride's parents would give the groom a gift of a golden or silver watch, with a chain, while the groom's parents decorated the bride with golden rings and bracelets on her hands. The rest of the jewelry, as recorded in the terms, would be furnished to her on the wedding day.

A few days prior to the wedding, the bride's father would send the groom a Talit [prayer shawl] and a shtreimel hat, while the groom's father would send the bride shawls and other embroidered works, shoes and other such needs. The wedding was usually held at the nearby synagogue, after which the groom's father would give a feast at his house, inviting the in-laws, relatives and friends of both sides. They would serve meat, fish, and all sorts of tasty foods. They would sing joyful songs, tell jokes and sometimes even be entertained by hired comedians. Various Eastern dances would be featured, especially the Hora, in which was everybody would participate. The ladies danced with the two mothers and the bride in a separate room. In Hassid families of certain circles (such some of the Carline Hassids and others), the "proper dance" would be performed according to their age-old tradition: the bride, her face covered with a thick shawl, would hold one end of a silken handkerchief, and each of the participants would, in his turn, hold the other end, completing one circle around the party room.

Once the dancing was over, everybody returned to their seats, and said the blessing for the food and the seven Benedictions. After that, the party coordinator or the comedian would announce

the “Sermon gifts”<sup>1</sup> for the groom. All, or at least most of the attendants would hand their gifts to the coordinator/comedian, who announced each gift and its giver, sometimes with rather vulgar quips at his expense. The gifts were mostly light gold and silver dishes, especially spoons, wine and liquor glasses as well as other household and kitchen goods. Some even offered cash money for the groom’s father to buy with it whatever the couple may wish.

Musicians were not invited at all to weddings, which were held inside the walls, since that would contradict the practice of [eternal] mourning over the destruction of Our Temple. In weddings that were held outside the walls, sometimes musicians would play their instruments, but only during the party – not during the wedding procession itself.

During the seven days following the wedding, named The Seven Days of Feast, the groom’s father would invite his in-laws and their entire family for a festive meal, according to his station and means, adding every day different guests, as is the customary practice, for the reading of the Seven Benedictions. During that week, the groom and bride refrained from leaving their home at all, to protect themselves against evil spirits and bad luck. Such practices are still being observed among some of the Old Community people in Jerusalem.

A modern band, with note-reading musicians and a proper conductor, did not exist at that time in Jerusalem. There was only one band of amateur instrumentalists, lead by a “conductor” named Reb Hayim Hassid, who was also known as “Reb Hayim Friday” (although I do not know the reason for his nickname). This Reb Hayim, who had some musical knowledge, was a pious Jew, a Carline Hassid, poor as could be but always joyful and good spirited. He and his band were sometimes invited to play at the wedding feasts in the neighborhoods outside the walls. Reb Hayim Friday and his band played only in front of men, not in front of women. They were not paid by whoever held the party, but rather the dancing participants themselves would pay for the particular tune they requested. Generally it was the horah, but there were other tunes as well. Reb Hayim Friday and his group were also invited to other prescribed celebration, like the traditional water-drawing festival held in various synagogues during Sukkot, and other such events. During the festival of Purim, Reb Haim and his men would make rounds at dinner time among the houses of the rich in Jerusalem, entertain them with their tunes and receive generous Purim gifts in return.

For weddings of “progressive” people, from among the aristocratic Jewish families in Jerusalem, rare as they were, the fine orchestra of the Jerusalem-stationed Turkish army was invited, for a given fee, and with a special permit obtained from the military commander. After a special education center for the blind was established in Jerusalem, a special department there was dedicated to teaching the blind student’s music. The institute’s directors hired a certified teacher,

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<sup>1</sup> Called so because the next week, the groom had to deliver a sermon

who developed a very fine band made up of his students. This band would be invited to modern weddings and important social balls, and the payment went to the institute.

## COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY FIFTY YEARS AGO [in the 1890's]

Commerce in Jerusalem, at the time, was rather poor and undeveloped. There was still no railroad in the country. Passenger transportation between Jerusalem and Jaffa was limited to horse carts, which traveled on a road that had been paved by the Turkish government in the year 5630 [1869/70], in honor of Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph's visit to Palestine.

The port in Jaffe was a primitive one, and included only one simple customs building and a warehouse for storing the merchandise unloaded from the ships. European ships, not too big ones, used to anchor there not very frequently, and some not regularly either. They brought both passengers and merchandise destined for Jaffa and the inland areas, particularly Jerusalem. However, since the water there is not deep enough, and there are large rocks, located near the beach and within close proximity to each other, the ships anchored at a distance from the beach, and the passengers and merchandise were transferred to the beach by smaller row boats.

In the winter, during storms and high winds, the ships could not anchor in the Jaffa port at all, and would continue north to the Haifa port, which is naturally easier for anchoring. However, once anchoring in Haifa, the ships could unload only cargo destined for Haifa and its vicinity, since Haifa was not connected to Jaffa, Jerusalem, and the rest of the towns and Moshavot in the center of the country by either railroad or proper roads. Hence, the Jaffa-bound cargo had to be transferred to another ship, or held inside the same ship for its journey back. If on the way back the sea was still too stormy for anchoring near Jaffa, the ship would go on to either Alexandria or Port-Said in Egypt and so on and so forth. Only when the sea calmed down could the ships come back to Jaffa and unload their cargo. Therefore, sometimes passengers had to wait days, weeks, or even months before they could arrive at Jaffa, and important products would be stranded too, resulting in losses to merchants and hardship for the consumers. For that reason, the mail from Europe and America was sometimes delayed for long period of times.

The construction of a railroad between Jaffa and Jerusalem was completed only in the year 5652 [1891/2]. The bid for the project was won by our townsman Mr. Jossef Navon Bey, who in turn sold it to a French Catholic firm that built the railroad. That company's main interest was in facilitating the travel of the many Catholic pilgrims who came to tour the holy sites in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine. However, in practicality, the railroad was used for the transportation of all passengers and merchandise.

Prior to the construction of the railroad, the merchandise was delivered from Jaffa to Jerusalem by way of the road connecting the two towns, either in freight carriages harnessed to horses and mules, or, mostly, on camels, which served as a much cheaper alternative delivery method than the carriages. However, during the winter, following rainfalls, the camels could not walk, since their legs would slip in the mud and once they fell, they could not get up again. Therefore, the camel drivers used to keep the camels, merchandise and all, in their villages, waiting for the

ground to dry. This further delayed the arrival of the merchandise to Jerusalem by several additional days.

Until the World War, the import of merchandise from Europe was mainly done by Jewish merchants who collected commissions for their work. Heavy grocery merchandise, such as sugar, coffee, rice and the like, was also imported by Arab wholesalers. Arab merchants were also involved in importing grain (the harvest of which in Palestine never sufficed for the population's needs) from Trans Jordan in the east, barley from Gaza and its vicinity, and they also dominated the trade of other kinds of products which grew in Palestine, Trans-Jordan and Syria. The trade in vegetables, fruits, chickens and eggs was also the Arabs' domain.

The center of the fruit and vegetable trade in Jerusalem was in the Old City, on Bazaar Street. This was a rough trade. The producers of all the vegetables and fruits were the peasants from villages around Jerusalem, as well as more distant from areas such as Hebron, Gaza and Jaffa.

The peasants from those villages used to bring their products every day to Jerusalem. Arab brokers would leave town before dawn to meet the peasants with their loaded donkeys, and cut a deal with them right then and there. Then they would take them to town to the leading vegetable merchants, unload their merchandise into the merchants' storage bins, and pay them, not what had been agreed at their meeting outside the city, but rather only what the merchants were willing to pay, which was considerably less. None of the poor peasants' complaints and pleading did them any good, because they had nobody to turn to for help. The Turkish policemen at that time, as well as other lawmen and court judges, were all Arabs from Jerusalem, and usually relatives of the merchants. The peasant knew in advance that in appealing to these government representatives, even if his cause was absolutely right, he stood no chance of winning his case, since injustice was prevailing everywhere. I was often an eyewitness where peasants, being practically robbed in broad daylight, were beaten harshly after daring to insist on their rights to be paid the deal price, which was more than what the merchant was willing to pay. They were forced to take what they could get and leave, because the merchants and brokers were all backing each other, never intervening in somebody else's bargaining. Jewish merchants kept clear of this trade, unwilling to try to match the Arab merchants and brokers. The Jewish consumers had to buy their food from the Arab merchants, and the peasants were forced to sell it to them, in spite of their unjust and cruel treatment, having no viable alternative.

In the last few years prior to the World War, several Moshavot began to send their fruits and vegetables to the Jewish merchants in Jerusalem, who gradually expanded that trade. After several years, especially during the first few post-war years, the Moshavot were able to supply all of the Jewish fruit and vegetables merchants' needs, relieving them of their dependency on the Arab market.

Arab merchants were also engaged in import of fabrics and textiles for the peasants and Bedouins, and other special products, as well as various types of perfume and spices imported

from Egypt and Syria. To this day, there is a special market in the Old City called the Perfume Market.

The import of construction materials, that in the past was very limited here, was expanded by two Christian Germans, of those who had immigrated to Palestine in the 1870, most of whom were members of the famous Templers Society from Württemberg County.

Some of these Templers settled in Jerusalem. They were mostly skilled craftsmen, although some had liberal professions: physicians, pharmacists, architects, etc. Together they bought a large piece of land in a valley located south of the walls of Jerusalem, close to the spot where years afterward, a train station was built for the Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad. With the help of loans they received from their society in Germany, each family built a house on the land allocated to it, calling the result the German Neighborhood. Once they settled here, other immigrants joined them, and they expanded their neighborhood by building additional beautiful, modern-style houses and public buildings for their community, as well as pretty gardens. This is one of the loveliest neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Among the aforementioned German craftsmen there was one carpenter named Hugo Willand, and a blacksmith named Paul Abarle. Both, like the rest of the German craftsmen, were quite skilled, and each of them opened a shop in the Old City.

A few years afterwards, leaders of the Christian churches, both Catholic and (Russian, Greek, and Armenian) Orthodox, began to build, in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the country, new church buildings, large, fancy monasteries, and hostels for the pilgrims who were starting to arrive in large numbers to visit their holy sites in Palestine. Their expert architects and contractors, who were brought especially from abroad, awarded the carpentry and iron works to these two Germans.

Since the shops here did not have the various necessary materials for large, beautiful buildings, the two German craftsmen began importing the products from Germany and elsewhere in Europe: The carpenter Willand brought the various building woods and appropriate tools, whereas the blacksmith Aberle imported crude iron and other goods necessary for iron works. With more and more buildings built for the Christian institutes, houses for rich individuals, and even Jewish neighborhoods, for which the materials had to be purchased from them, the two Germans developed and expanded their businesses, making a fortune for themselves. After a few years, they left the work itself to other craftsmen, concentrating on the trade itself and continued to prosper.

Around the year 5652 [1891/2], a row of large, spacious and comfortable warehouses was built on Jaffa Street, adjacent to Jaffa Gate, near the Armenian Convent. The two Germans moved their tight, uncomfortable storage rooms in the Old City to these new warehouses. I myself had the opportunity to see their invoice sheets, where the word Carpenter in German was printed on the one and the word Blacksmith in German on the other.

Around 1895, the (former carpenter) German wood merchant established the first factory for cement tiles. From that point on, the new houses were paved with cement tiles, rather than the stone tiles used before. The factory did very well for itself.

It should be noted that the two aforementioned Germans employed only Arab laborers and clerks, and not even one Jew. On the other hand, another German Christian named Eilander, who a few years afterwards also opened a shop for iron and building materials, which started poorly but soon grew and developed well, employed only Jewish clerks, whom he found to be loyal and honest, and he treated them very decently.

Once the English victors entered Jerusalem, the new government ordered all the German merchants to sell their shops to non-Germans and leave the country. Only after world peace was established did many of them return to Palestine, but they did not resume their former businesses.

Since then, Jewish hardware shops grew and expanded, and new shops were opened by Jews, Arabs and other Europeans, almost all of whom did well in their businesses. The first Jewish shop in Jerusalem for iron-work materials was opened in 1880 by Mr. Perlman, and the firm still has two operating branches in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv.

The textile trade in Jerusalem at that time was totally dominated by Jews. Almost all the textile merchandise was brought from Beirut, where great wholesale merchants were based, who had imported their large inventories of various fabrics and linen and wool cloths from England and elsewhere. The Jerusalem merchants would travel to Jaffa and there board a ship to Beirut, or otherwise send their orders through local Jewish brokers in Beirut. Only a few merchants would import expensive wool cloths directly from England.

The textile warehouses were concentrated inside the Old City, on a street named The Batrak Market in the Christian Quarter. Other storages were located on The Street of the Jews, and later some textile shops were opened in the Meah She'arim neighborhood.

At the time of my arrival here, there was only one shop in Jerusalem featuring ready-to-wear clothing for men and children, as well as coats for ladies, owned by Mr. Yoel White. Mr. White imported his merchandise from Istanbul and Vienna. This was usually outdated fashion, which mattered very little in Jerusalem at that time. There was not a single shoe store offering ready-to-wear shoes: the residents of Jerusalem did not trust ready-to-wear shoes, and would rather order their shoes from local shoemakers. One Jew, who came from London, opened here a shop for ready-to-wear shoes he had brought from England. Although his merchandise was fine, he could not find any customers for it, due to their mistrust of ready-to-wear shoes. Soon he was forced to close his store.

In general, commerce in Jerusalem developed very slowly. The main factors necessary for its development were lacking. For one thing, there were no representatives of European factories

and export shops, who would cultivate strong relations between the manufacturers in Europe and the local merchants. There were also no banks interested in expanding commerce, who would extend credit with reasonable terms for qualified merchants to expand their businesses.

Some kind of a bureau of commerce did operate here, sponsored by the Turkish government and headed by an Arab merchant, and some merchants with Turkish citizenship were members of it. However, that bureau exhibited no interest in matters of commerce and merchants, and offered no action on their behalf. Its use was limited to the rare issuing of official commercial certificates, when a given merchant required them for his dealings with the government.

There was only one worthy commission-based import shop in Palestine, owned by a German Christian and named Breish et al. It dealt mainly with import of groceries, and to a lesser extent of other goods, such as hardware, small-ware, and the like. There were two or three other very small commission-based operations.

The first Jewish commission-based shop was established in Jerusalem and Jaffa by Mr. Ze'ev (Wilhelm) Gross. The Hungarian-born Mr. Gross, who also had a general and commercial education, was a graduate of the Frishberg Yeshivah. He was the son-in-law of the late Rabbi Zalman Spitzer, who headed the Israel Congregation in Vienna. He left a big shop he was managing in Vienna, named Yaakov Schreiber et al, which he had opened with his wife's relatives. As a nationalist Jew he came to Jerusalem, establishing here, in 1888, a commission-based shop. In 1889 he opened a branch of his shop in Jaffa and settled there. He was both an Orthodox Jew and an enthusiastic Zionist, and was among only a few in Jerusalem who wrote letters of support to Dr. Herzl even prior to the First Congress. He served as a delegate to the First [Zionist] Congress in Basel and to other Zionist congresses. He was an idealist, dedicated to the good of others, helping many small merchants and craftsmen, particularly Jewish makers of tools from olive trees in Jerusalem, and investing considerable efforts in distributing their products abroad. In his offices in Jerusalem and Jaffa he employed young, religious and educated [Jewish] natives of Palestine as aides and clerks. He was very interested in their commercial development, and even sent some of them to Central Europe and England to study commerce. With the help and energy of his aides and clerks, his shop grew and developed. Although once the community expanded other commission-based shops were opened, Mr. Gross' shop was still the biggest and most important. During the World War, Mr. Gross stayed in Vienna as a Hungarian citizen. He returned to Palestine in 1921, already old and spent, and died in Tel Aviv in 1927. His early aides and clerks are now important merchants in Palestine. His first aide, Mr. Mordechai Kaspi, who managed his Jerusalem shop throughout its existence, now holds an important position in this country. He is a prominent merchant and public activist, serving both as Vice Chairman of the Jerusalem Bureau of Commerce and Consul of Latvia in Palestine.

Citizens of foreign countries had the same right to trade in Palestine uninterruptedly, as did local citizens. Moreover, whereas local citizen merchants were required to pay a commercial tax (although a rather minute fee, since commerce did not amount to much at that time), the foreign



citizen merchants were exempted from it, due to the Turkish Treaty Law. They were all protected by the consuls representing their governments.

Any legal disputes between two people holding the same citizenship were litigated by their consul, in accordance with the law of their own land. For major trials, the consul would appoint three of his prominent subjects to serve as a jury under him. If the litigants were citizens of different countries, the litigation would be held in the consul of the defendant's country. When one of the sides was an Ottoman citizen, the litigation was held at the Ottoman government's court, according to its degree of severity and in accordance with the law of our land. The Ottoman court could not summon the foreign citizen directly – it had to be done through his consul. A government policeman was not allowed to as much as step on the threshold of a foreign citizen's house without obtaining a warrant from the consul first. The latter would send his own policeman, called "Kawas", to summon his subject to the Ottoman court. During the litigation, or trial, an official of the consulate was present, to guarantee that none of his rights were violated.

The only area where the Treaty Law did not apply was real-estate deals. For those, even foreign citizens were subject to the Ottoman law. Nevertheless, within the cities, foreign citizens were allowed to purchase as many houses and lands as they wished. Seventy-eighty years ago, the opportunities existed to purchase many lands and lots for really meager prices. However, Jewish leaders at that time did not envision Jerusalem's economic future, and failed to take advantage of those opportunities. The only ones who did comprehend this great potential were the Christian leaders. The directors of the Greek, Russian, Armenian and Roman churches and monasteries seized this unusual opportunity and bought most of the land in Old Jerusalem and its close vicinity, particularly outside the Jaffa Gate, near the gate itself and long stretches of land along Jaffa Street and its adjacent streets. At first, all these lots were empty and neglected, except for some ramshackle horse and donkey barns along Jaffa Street, as well as a few shoddy stores and sleazy taverns. However, once commerce began to develop in Jerusalem, the directors of the land-owning monasteries started to build there. At first they built modest buildings, mostly containing small stores, offices and commercially convenient storage rooms. Consequently, the owners of stores and shops, which previously had all been concentrated inside the Old City, began moving their businesses to these new and more convenient locations. As the monasteries' rental income was piling up, they used it, together with donations they received from members of their churches abroad, as well as donations collected from pilgrims visiting the holy sites, to add additional floors to those buildings and build new ones. The new buildings were large and modern, and included beautiful stores, offices, and wonderful hotels, like the one which was first called Howard Hotel and then Hotel Fast, built by the Armenian Convent on Jaffa Street; and the Greek monastery's handsome Grand New Hotel, built inside the walls next to Jaffa Gate, with an attractive row of stores on the ground level. Later, other fabulous hotels were built, to accommodate the many tourists from America, England and other countries, who came to visit the historical sites in this country.

The local city government, too, owned lots on Jaffa Street, where it built stores, hotels and offices, all of which provided it with a handsome income. The city government also had a little park with trees and flowers near the center of Jaffa Street, as recreation for the city's residents.

The first more-or-less modern Jewish hotel was opened in the 1880's by Mr. Lipha Kaminitz. It was gradually improved, and there the Baron and Baroness Edmond D. Rothschild lodged during their visits to Jerusalem.

The second modern Jewish hotel was opened by Mr. Yerachmiel Amdurski. Other hotels were opened later, including some first-class ones, following the English occupation. Large, splendid shops were also opened with ample inventories of various merchandise, to meet the growing demands of the new times.

At the time of my arrival, there was no industry whatsoever in Palestine. Not only did the Turkish government at that time not promote industry, but it actually did all it could to obstruct any such development. It was interested in increasing imports from abroad, from which it could levy at first 8% of the merchandise's value, raising it later, after extensive deliberations with the large foreign countries, to 10%. On the other hand, due to the Treaty Law, it could collect no tax at all from locally manufactured merchandise. The foreign governments, too, were interested in promoting their exports. Being that the tariff on goods – even used goods entering the country's ports were taxed – was one of the main sources of income for the government, it is not hard to understand why it thwarted any initiative to develop local production.

I recall that in in the year 5651 [1890/1], two Jews who had arrived from Russia, Mr. Shmuelsohn and Mr. Nachman Ram (both were later among the early farmers in Hadera), joined forces to establish a factory for matches in Jaffa, with the help of a big factory for this produce in one of the large cities in Russia. They promised the government a given percentage of the profits and obtained a license for opening their factory – of course, with the help of the “special method”, which was quite prevalent among officials of the old Turkish government. They brought the necessary machines and tools from Russia, as well as a manager and skilled professionals, the raw materials and the chemicals needed for this production. They maintained that they stood a fair chance of succeeding, mainly thanks to the very low wages here. However, once they ran out of the first delivery of chemicals, and the second delivery they ordered arrived at the Jaffa port, the customs authorities refused to allow it in the country, because the license they had obtained did not clearly stipulate whether future deliveries of chemical could enter the country. After many deliberations and great expense, they managed to enter the chemicals and complete the next line of production, but the import of additional chemicals in the future was barred. Therefore they were forced to close the factory, sustaining considerable losses, and any future attempt at establishing a factory in Palestine was now doomed in advance.

Only years later, with great difficulties, some people managed to open small factories here for soda water and a number of household industries. Only after the English occupation did the

industries of various products begin to develop in Palestine, and were gradually expanded thanks to the initiatives of industrious professionals who came from abroad.

## **BANKS AND POSTAL SERVICE**

Three banks operated in Jerusalem at the time of my arrival fifty years ago. One, named Bank Yaakov Valiro, Inc., belonged to Mr. Haim Aharon Valiro. It had been established a few years earlier by his late father, Reb Yaakov Valiro. The bank served as Emperor Franz Joseph's main money supplier during his visits to the Middle East, and as an agent for the Austrian consulate in Jerusalem. It also served as an agent for the famous S. Montague Bank in London, which used its services to conduct its financial transactions in Palestine and Syria. Bank Valiro's main business was the purchasing and selling of land, even in places which were deserted at that time, correctly envisioning that in time they would become central and increase greatly in value. And indeed, after Jaffa Street and King George the 5<sup>th</sup> Street began to develop following the English occupation, the bank's lands, part of which were used to build warehouses, offices and apartments, are now one of the major commercial centers of Jerusalem. Mr. Valiro was also respected by the members of the consular community in town and the prominent European citizens here. He himself was an Ottoman citizen, and frequently would loan money to the government administration here.

One time, the Pasha [Governor] of Jerusalem demanded an unreasonably large loan from him. Doubting that the Pasha would ever repay such an amount, he denied the request. The furious Pasha ordered him placed under house arrest as punishment. Immediately, all the foreign consuls in Jerusalem gathered and submitted a vehement protest to the pasha against Mr. Valero's illegal arrest, and he was released at once.

Bank Valero was also involved in providing mortgages for real estate purchases, and to a lesser extent, in giving credit to local merchants. The bank closed once Turkey entered the World War.

The manager of this bank, during almost its entire existence, was Mr. Moshe Yitzhak Goldschmidt, of the Dutch Jewish immigrant community in Jerusalem. He was also an important public community activist who served as the leader of the German and Dutch Jewish communities in Jerusalem, director of the Charity Committee of the Frankfurt Jews in Jerusalem, the head administrator of the Holland-Deutschland Kolel, and a member of the Building Committee of the Shaarey Tzedek ["Gates of Justice"] hospital, within which he was the moving force.

Another bank in Jerusalem then belonged to Mr. Frutiger, a Christian German. This bank, too, was mainly involved in purchasing and selling lands within the boundaries of New Jerusalem. Through its Jewish aides and contractors, it built the neighborhoods Machaneh Yehuda, Sukat Shalom and Batey Perlman, where the houses were sold to Jews with long term, convenient payments. This bank closed when its owner died.

There was a third bank, of the Hamburger brothers. Indeed, this was more of an old-style community financial service. The owners – the brothers Neta Zvi and Pinchas Hamburger, were of the old community, natives of Jerusalem, and did not have much commercial and general

education. This bank was located in a small shop on Bazaar Street in the Old City. The furniture included an old-type iron box, a table and a few, very simple benches. The bank's basic capital was very little, but the owners, being religious, honest and involved in the community life, soon earned the trust of the directors of the teaching and charity institutes and the administrators of various kolels in Jerusalem, who made them their agents. The directors would sell all the checks and paper money they received from their many supporters in Europe and America to the brothers Hamburger, and then deposit what they received in return in this bank. The bank's business expanded, and they become the main buyers in town for foreign bank checks. There was also extensive trade in Jerusalem in Russian paper Rubles. Although their worth in gold was written on them, in accordance with Russian law, the Russian government's treasury could not be required to pay with gold for them. Therefore, the Ruble's value here, like elsewhere outside Russia, was fluctuating very frequently, and the trade in it was quite speculative. Bank Hamburgers held contacts with big banks in large European and American cities, and therefore many merchants in Jerusalem bought from it checks of those foreign banks. They were also involved in discount trading of notes from certain merchants and in various bank transactions.

In addition, the brother Hamburgers served as agents of the Russian postal service. Ships of the Russian Company for Shipping and Commerce brought the Palestine-bound mail from Russia – including letters with money, money equivalents and registered mail, as well as regular letters – to Jaffa, where it was forwarded to the company's local agency. The recipients of letters and deliveries from Jerusalem and elsewhere in the country were responsible for picking up their mail from the aforementioned agency, by showing their identity cards. Jewish institutes and individuals who received money or letters from each arriving ship, could not go there themselves each time, or even send a special envoy, since the travel with money from Jaffa to Jerusalem was quite dangerous. Only the Austrian post office would transfer everything it received in its Jaffa office to Jerusalem: An Austrian consulate official did so personally, with armed escort. The brother Hamburgers, Austrian citizens and personal friends of the Austrian Post Office manager in Jerusalem, obtained a special license, arranging for the Austrian mail delivery to carry to Jerusalem all the Jerusalem-bound mail from the Russian Post Office in Jaffa, and then deliver it to them for distribution among the recipients for a fee. All the institutes in Jerusalem, as well as many individuals, furnished the brothers Hamburger with permits allowing them to transfer their mail from Jaffa to Jerusalem via the Austrian postal service. This provided the brothers with a handsome income.

The brothers Hamburger's bank did excellent business, and they had good prospects to develop very well, if it was not for their rather amateur style of management. The owners were graduates of the old-style parochial teaching [“Heder”], and had no commercial education. The older brother, Rabbi Neta Tzvi, was the main Mohel<sup>1</sup> in Jerusalem, which occupied much of his time, and was also involved in the business of the Hungarian Kolel, of which he was a member. The

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<sup>1</sup> [A person who conducts ritual circumcision – AA]

younger brother-partner, Rabbi Pinchas Hamburger, was also heavily involved in charity work. There was no government supervision over banks then, and a periodical audit by an authorized accountant was not legally required. Therefore, the bank's business affairs were neglected. They also ran into trouble by providing loans to unsafe businesses, as well as giving charitable interest-free loans to individuals, without adequate guarantees. After a few years the bank had to announce bankruptcy, and its owners, the brothers Hamburger, remained penniless for the rest of their lives.

There were money exchangers in Jerusalem who also were involved in buying and selling Russian paper Rubles, bank notes of various governments and silver and gold coins. Due to constant shortages of small Turkish coins, such as the Turkish dime and the Bishlik [equivalent to nickel], the exchangers would bring these small coins from other cities within the Turkish Empire. For breaking a golden Turkish Pound to ten dimes, per demand and in particular before the holidays, they charged a commission of five percent.

Other individual brokers in Jerusalem used to buy promissory notes from loan sharks, of whom there were quite a few in Palestine. They were in great demand, especially by merchants whose credit in the banks was insufficient for their businesses. Of course, the interest rate of such notes was very high, since it could not be limited by law.

In 1891, a German Christian bank in Berlin opened a bank in Jerusalem, named Deutsche Palestine Bank. The manager of this bank, a specialist in his profession, was sent from Berlin, as were a number of other senior officials. Most of the clerks were local German residents, who were educated in Germany and had some knowledge of bookkeeping and the banking business, and others were Arab graduates of the Syrian-German orphanage in Jerusalem, named Schneler after its director. Mr. Yossef Chakhamshvill, the current manager of Barclay's Bank in Tel Aviv, served as the treasurer of this German bank until it closed, following the English occupation. Shortly after it opened in Jerusalem, new branches of the German bank were also opened in Jaffa and Haifa. The bank, which was involved in all facets of banking, was quite instrumental in developing commerce in Palestine. Although its basic capital was not great, it managed to win the trust of most of the merchants and businessmen, who deposited there good sums of their money. In return, the bank extended credit to merchants according to the level of guarantees they could offer. Thanks to its recommendations, German factories and exporters furnished local merchants with merchandise on credit. As mentioned, the bank closed with the English occupation of Palestine.

Around the Year 1900, the large French bank Credit Lyonese opened branches in Jerusalem and Jaffa. This bank was involved only to a limited extent in regular commercial transactions. It obtained shipping bills of merchandise sent to merchants here, for collection on behalf of French and other firms, as well as promissory notes issued to local merchants by European firms. It would extend credit only when first-class collaterals were provided. Its main objective was to receive money through deposits. Being a branch of one of the largest European banks, it was

trusted by the wealthiest individuals and institutes in Palestine, such as rich Arab Effendis [landlords], or directors of various monasteries, who had no better way of letting their money work for them. They deposited their money in this bank for various periods of time, earning a meager interest. Then, the Jerusalem branch would send the deposited money to its central branch in France, where it was used for making hefty profits.

A few years after the English occupation of Palestine, other large banks were opened, where customers could deposit their money with much better terms. People could also invest their capital in buildings or in commerce and industry, which yielded much larger profits. Therefore, the number of deposits in the French bank was sharply reduced, and its profits could no longer cover the operational costs. Then the French bank's branches in Jerusalem and Jaffa closed, and several of its clerks were transferred to the bank's branches in Egypt.

In the year 5663 [1902/3], the first national Jewish bank opened in Jaffa, named The England-Palestine Company, LTD. The London Colonial Zionist Bank sent a manager for it, an educated and energetic banker, also known as a ardent Zionist, Mr. Z. D. Livontin. He had been one of the founding fathers of the Moshava of Rishon Letzion, and thus was well acquainted with the land and its conditions. About a year later, a Jerusalem branch of the bank opened, followed by additional branches in other towns and even a few Moshavot. Mr. Livontin appointed qualified local people as branch managers, while he served as a general manager from his headquarters in Jaffa. The bank was very instrumental in developing the new Jewish Moshavot, as well as the new town Tel Aviv and new neighborhoods in Jerusalem. It did so by establishing cooperatives, consisting of the various builders, to which it could extend credit under good terms. However, its main objective was the developing of commerce in Palestine. It assisted the merchants by extending credit to each of them in accordance with its commercial status, but then was very strict about demanding prompt repayment of the loans, so that both the bank and its clients could continue to develop and progress, in spite of its relatively small basic capital. This bank saved many of the merchants who were exploited by the loan sharks and their brokers, and helped them to consolidate their businesses. The bank overcame the resistance of the brokers, who considered it an unwelcome, threatening competition, and managed to attract the important merchants and many of the wealthiest depositors.

The EPC Bank provided great assistance in developing contacts between local merchants and European factories and exporters. Its industrious clerks were always at the clients' disposal, offering advice and important information from the experience they had acquired through years of work in the profession.

The bank kept good relations with senior government officials, and thus was able to help many in the Jewish community with both general and private matters. The bank was also very helpful to the Jerusalem charity institutes, by extending credit to them.

Once the bank's businesses expanded significantly, Mr. Hopin, a highly educated man, was sent here from Holland, to serve as advisor and assistant to Mr. Livontin.

When Turkey entered the World War alongside Germany, the bank, as an English institute, was forced to minimize its businesses and finally to close. Its managers were transferred to Egypt from where they did the best they could to provide assistance to Jewish merchants in Palestine and especially to the many refugees who had immigrated from Palestine to Egypt. Upon the English occupation of the country, the bank managers returned to their offices in Palestine, resuming their energetic work.

Once Mr. Livontin, the first general manager, aged, he resigned his post and was replaced as general manager of the bank by Mr. Hopin who, with his energy and profound understanding of the banking business, expanded and increased the bank's multilateral transactions. With the help of his industrious aides and clerks, he made it one of the two leading banks in Palestine.

Following the English entry into Palestine, branches of the National Egyptian Bank opened in Jerusalem and Jaffa. This bank served as an agent for the local English government, in addition to its involvement in all normal banking activities. The legal currency in Palestine then was the Egyptian Pound.

A few years afterward, this bank's branches closed, and were replaced by the famous London Barclay's Bank, with branches in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and other towns in Palestine and the main town in Trans-Jordan, Amman. This bank had branches in many big cities overseas, and in many English dominions and colonies. Replacing the Egyptian National Bank as an agent for the local government, it used the government's support to establish itself as the leading bank in Palestine. Of course it conducted many business transactions and earned the trust of the public at large.

In 1927, the Government of Palestine canceled the status of the Egyptian Pound as the legal currency here, establishing the Palestinian Pound in its place, equal in its value to the English Pound Sterling, although it was not divided into shillings like the English Pound, but rather to mils. Each Palestinian Pound is divided into one thousand mils. (One Pound and one Half-Pound are issued on paper notes; coins made of white metal are of one hundred, fifty, twenty, ten and five mils; and brass coins are of two mils and one mil each.) This currency is the legal one now in Palestine and in Trans Jordan. The license to exchange the Egyptian Pound and its parts with the Palestinian Pound, plus the value difference (The Egyptian Pound is about 21.2% higher in value than the Palestinian Pound) was awarded by the government solely to Barclay's Bank, which also had the monopoly on distributing the Palestinian Pound. The government also conducts all its financial transaction through this bank.

With time, Barclay's Bank opened a branch in Tel Aviv, at first in a rental apartment, and then in its privately own building there. Other branches were opened in various quarters of that city, as well as in the suburban neighborhood of Ramat Gan.



Bank Ottoman and the Italian Bank di Roma, which had operated in Palestine even before the World War, expanded their business after the war along with the development of construction, commerce and industry in Palestine, and they, too, opened new branches in Tel Aviv. A German Bank Der Tempelgesellschaft (of the Templer Society) also opened in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa. Through the years, additional general and private banks opened in Palestine, and various banking transactions were initiated.

Officially, the Turkish Postal Service operated in Palestine, but it was ineffective, disorganized and insecure. Therefore it failed to earn the trust of merchants and the many Jewish and non-Jewish learning and charity institutes in Palestine, who were using the Turkish Postal Service only for delivery of simple letters inside the country. For the purpose of sending and receiving money and valuables, registered letters and even regular letters to and from abroad, everybody used the Austrian Postal Service, which had operated in Jerusalem and the coastal cities ever since the visit by Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph in the year 5630 [1870]. Check notes of up to 1200 Golden Franks could be sent here through the Austrian Postal Service from most countries, except for Russian, Egypt and America, and be cashed in the Austrian Post Office in Jerusalem. Similar checks could also be sent abroad through the Austrian Postal Service.

The Austrian Post Office operated for many years in the Old City, in a small house of two or three rooms. The public was not allowed to enter the house: everybody had to stand outside. Buying stamps, sending and receiving both regular and registered letters and packages, all had to be done through an external window. Even when it was windy and rainy, the customers had no choice but to stand outside, where there was no protection from the pouring rain and cold. While the letter was submitted through the window, rain drops would fall on the envelope, blurring the address. Of course there was no place in the office to sign a receipt for incoming registered letters or packages; so the recipient had to go home or find another place to do so, then return to the post office window to receive it. There were no postal messengers who would deliver the letters to their recipients. A few years prior to the eruption of the World War, the Austrian Post Office moved to a larger house, in front of the Tower of David, where some more modern arrangements were established, and later rental post office boxes became available.

Letters, packages and money from Russia was received at the Russian Shipping Company office in Jaffa. From there, such mail items were transported to Jerusalem and delivered to their Jewish recipients by the previously-mentioned firm of the brothers Hamburger, for a special fee.

The visit in Palestine by German Emperor Wilhelm the Second, in 1898, was followed by the establishment of a German post office and a French one, in Jerusalem and Jaffa. After a while, an official Russian post office opened, the Jerusalem manager of which, throughout its existence, was one of our brethren Mr. Avraham Solomiac, who had served for many years as an interpreter for the Russian consulate in Jerusalem. Since the Jewish charity institute as well as the (Greek and Russian) Christian Orthodox churches and monasteries were supported mainly by members of their religion in Russia, the Russian post office became the biggest and most important one.

When Turkey entered the World War, the Russian and French post offices in Palestine closed, leaving only the Austrian and German ones. After the country's occupation by the English, these two closed too, along with the Turkish post office, and a well-organized English postal service was established in Palestine. Almost all the clerks of the closed post offices were hired by the English Post Office.

Several years afterwards, a telephone service was established in Palestine, which had not been available at all under the Turkish government.

After the Turkish securities were nullified, at the end of the Russian-Turkish war, Turkish paper money was no longer accepted in Palestine, due to the government's bankruptcy. Only the Turkish Golden Pound was accepted here, the value of which was about 23 Golden Franks. The nominal price of this currency was one hundred Grushes, but in the commercial markets, its value varied between one city and the other. For example, in Jerusalem, Beirut and the Galilee towns, the value of the Turkish Golden Pound was 124 Grushes, whereas in Jaffa and its vicinity it was worth 141 Grushes. One Turkish silver coin, named Majidi, had the nominal value of 20 Grushes, but it was worth 23 Grushes in Jerusalem and 26 Grushes in Jaffa and vicinity. This coin was also available in halves and quarters. A basic metal coin was called Bishlik. Its nominal value was two and a half Grushes, in Jerusalem it was worth 3 Grushes, and in Jaffa and vicinity – 3 and 15/40 Grushes. There was a "double Bishlik" named Wazari, the value of which was double. The Matlik's value in Jerusalem was 12 and a half Prutahs (the Grushes contained 40 Prutahs) but it varied in each province of the Ottoman Empire. Other countries' currencies were legally accepted in Palestine, such as the Golden Napoleon (20 Franks), both golden and paper Sterling Pounds, American Dollars, and silver Shillings and Franks. The values in Grushes of each of these currencies varied in different towns and provinces.

## TAXES

The Turkish government's income came mainly from direct taxes, and a smaller portion from indirect taxes. The three major tax items were customs tax, the tithe tax and the property tax. One percent of all the exports was collected for customs tax, which was mainly from crops like barley and other products, such as oranges, lemons, raisin wine, etc. Eight percent was taxed from all the merchandise entering the country's ports from abroad, including used goods. The government's income from this tax was the largest, since almost everything was imported from abroad, as there was virtually no industry in Palestine. The customs tax was initially eight percent of the merchandise's value across the board, a rate set by the Ottoman government by agreement with foreign governments, under the Treaty Law. Realizing that the taxes failed to balance its budget, the government lobbied the European governments to allow it a customs tax hike, to no avail. Only around 1910, following extensive deliberations, was the government able to raise the customs tax rate to 11%.

The customs officials in Palestine did not trust the delivery invoices sent by the manufacturers in Europe and submitted to them by the importers here. They suspected that the boxes may contain more than what was stated on the invoice, or that the prices were lower than the merchandise's real value. Therefore, many of the boxes were opened and checked in the customs building, where government assessors would evaluate the merchandise's prices, and the tariff to be paid was determined according to such assessments. Indeed, if the assessor's evaluation was not acceptable to the recipient, he had the legal right to pay the tariff not in cash, but rather as an appropriate proportion of the merchandise itself. However, this arrangement was generally not very much to the liking of the customs director, who was using various means to press the recipients to accept the assessments and pay in cash. One method at his disposal was to exploit his prerogative to choose which segment of the merchandise to collect as tariff, thus selecting the best and undamaged goods, leaving the merchants with the lesser-quality merchandise. The boxes would be opened and emptied for selecting the tariff, and since they were not re-packed very carefully, the merchandise could easily be damaged on its way to storage, especially when it had to be sent further inland. This procedure also caused a delay in removing the merchandise from the customs building, and the merchants were charged storage fees. Therefore, the merchants were usually willing to accept the exaggerated evaluation of the customs assessors, to avoid unnecessary expense and loss of time. When the merchandise was received in such amounts that enabled the collection of the tariff without opening boxes, the customs director was inclined to reduce the overestimated assessments, only to assure payment in cash, which was more desirable to the customs management.

The farmers, citrus growers and vine growers, regardless of their citizenship, were taxed on the income received from their crops. This amounted at first to ten percent, but later a road tax, education tax and others were added to it, so that sometimes it reached even as much as 20%. This tax was not collected by the government itself through its collection agency, but rather was farmed out to tax collectors, for the highest bid. These private collectors, mostly wealthy effendis

with great influence in high places in the government, received assistance from the police and even the army to collect the taxes from the village peasants, per an assessment conducted by specialists representing the government and the collectors. The law forbade the farmers, citrus growers and vine growers to pick any harvest or fruits from the fields, citrus groves or vineyards, prior to paying their crop taxes. Obviously these taxpayers were hard pressed, dependent on the goodwill of the collector, who would appear at their farms escorted by policemen and soldiers – whose fees were charged to the taxpayers – and coerce them, with the backing of the law enforcers, to pay an overestimated sum. Much agitation and agony on the part of the taxpayers was involved in settling the amounts to be paid to the collectors. Especially exaggerated was the assessment of the fruits' values, so many peasants resorted to cutting their trees for a relief from the tax they entailed – although that, too, was against the law and could result in severe punishment. The large Jewish Moshavot attempted to obtain the tithe collection contracts via their committees directly from the government, and the tax was then divided among the Moshava's farmers in accordance with the committee's assessment.

The property tax, called Virqo, for houses and land, was also paid regardless of citizenship, at a rate of one percent of their value per year, or one half percent per year for a house inhabited by its owner. The appraisal of houses was done once every three years by official appraisers of the central and municipal governments. The effendis knew how to exert their influence for this purpose, too: Their houses' values were underestimated regularly, and some houses were registered in the Virqo book as valueless, which of course did not require any tax. Because the Old City of Jerusalem, within the walls, was considered sacred, the houses there were exempted from any Virqo tax.

Commercial tax was collected at a very low rate, and only from merchants with Turkish citizenship. Foreign citizen merchants were exempted from this tax, by virtue of the Treaty Law.

Wine producers from locally grown grapes were taxed 19 Grushes per each one hundred kilograms of grapes. Each household was allowed to obtain 600 kilograms of tax-free grapes for its own consumption of wine.

Only Muslims were taken to active military duty. The Ottoman Christians and Jews were exempted from active duty, but instead were charged a ransom tax of 38 Grushes annually per each male, from the age of one year for the rest of his life. After several years, this tax was raised to 50 Grushes annually. Foreign citizens, even those who resided permanently in Palestine, were exempted from this tax. In addition to the aforementioned direct taxes, there were also indirect taxes, such as a stamp tax on bills and checks, and all kinds of certificates, according to a set rate.

## CRAFTS IN JERUSALEM

At the time of my arrival in Jerusalem, there were a number of Jewish craftsmen there, most of them woodworkers and engravers, who produced tools and various objects, both large and small, from the wondrous olive tree, which once its arteries and veins are excised, its finish is beautiful, glittered and polished. Their craftwork was fine; however, they were all individuals of no monetary means, who could not afford to prepare a significant stock of these various objects for the tourist season. Tourists came to Jerusalem mainly during the winter from England, America and other countries, after touring Egypt, and they were the main customers of this merchandise, which served as a pretty souvenir for them from the Holy Land.

Conversely, Christian Arabs were important factory-owning craftsmen as well as prominent olive tree merchants. They opened large, neatly organized stores in central locations within the city, with extended inventories of olive tree craftworks as well as attractive tools and dishes from shell and mountain stones, produced in Arab shops in Bethlehem. At the time, no Jews could be found in Bethlehem, except for one medic who lived there temporarily, treating the local poor. Although these shops used primitive methods, without machines, many of their products were State-of-the-Art. Most of the Jewish olive tree craftsmen worked at home for the Christian Arab shops, and only a few of them had small stores, located on side streets and alleyways, with limited inventory.

Most of the tourists were brought by the Cook & Son travel agency, or other English and American agencies, which provided them with their own regular interpreters, all of whom were Christian Arabs. They led the tourists to the Christian Arab stores, where they were awarded high commissions, and avoided the Jewish stores. Although a good number of the tourists were Jews, they were mainly assimilated ones who did not wish to advertise their Judaism; they were interested neither in general Jewish issues nor in their specifics.

This state of affairs impoverished the Jewish olive tree craftsmen, many of whom had to emigrate overseas in pursuit of a livelihood. Only a few of them were left in Jerusalem. Several of the prominent Arab merchants had warehouses or agents for their merchandise in Europe and America, and they did excellent business, whereas Jewish merchants were not engaged in this sort of trade. Charitable Jewish societies and individuals were also not interested in promoting the Jewish craftsmen. Some of the leading national activists in Palestine, such as the author and energetic activist Mr. Yehoshua Barzilai and others, wrote articles in the newspapers and special publications, advocating assistance to our craftsmen brethren in Jerusalem, to help them establish their businesses and increase their numbers. However, their calls were not well received.

During the World War, almost all the shell crafts shops in Bethlehem were shut down, and never re-opened, even after the war was over. In Jerusalem, shell craftsmen continued their work and their shops remained open. Once the Betzalel School of Art was founded by Professor Boris Shatz in the year 5664 [1903/4], Jews also learned this craft, as well as other crafts, as will be

described herein. A number of families live off this trade to this day, their shops selling this merchandise in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and elsewhere.

In the year 5649 [1888/9], the following eight small printing houses operated in Jerusalem: One belonged to Reb Yitzhak Gashtzini, who had bought it from Reb Yisrael Beck, the first printing house owner in Safed, and moved it to Jerusalem after the riots in Safed; of Rabbi Israel Dov Frumkin, editor and publisher of the Havatzelet newspaper; of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, editor and publisher of the famous Land of Israel Board and the annual Jerusalem Almanac, and other important books studying the Holy Land and its history; of Reb Moshe Solomon, the famous activist of Eretz Israel, who taught himself the printing skills while staying in Russia on behalf of the Vilnius Kolel; of Reb Shemuel Tzukerman; of Reb Yitzhak Nachum Levi; and of Reb Moshe Lilienthal.

They printed with simple press machines, and some even brought manual machines (there was no electricity in Palestine at the time) no larger than 70X50 cm.

In addition to the newspapers, monthlies and books of these aforementioned publishers, those printing houses also published both religious and research books by various authors, as well as printing materials for the learning and charity institutes in Jerusalem.

With time, new printing houses opened, using larger, more modern machines, along with a greater variety of fonts and symbols, and produced more-or-less modern jobs. Most of the original printing houses closed. In the years following the World War and the English occupation of the country and the installation of electricity in the city, the owners of the printing houses introduced electrical motors for their machines. The leading printing houses introduced linotype machines and a large variety of the most modern symbols. Since then, the printing in Jerusalem continued to develop and has reached the level of graceful art.

## **THE PILGRIMS IN JERUSALEM**

The pilgrims in Jerusalem provided great help in lifting the city's economy up. Since early years, Christian pilgrims used to come to Jerusalem to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and various holy cities of theirs throughout the land.

When Russian Czar Alexander the Third rose to power, the number of pilgrims from Russia increased greatly. This Czar was raised Christian Orthodox. He believed that the power of the Russian government was derived from providing the Russian masses with a deeply religious education, and granted the Church great material means. In addition to the direct support from the government, funds galore were voluntarily flowing from wealthy pious Russians. At that time a great society, named The Royal Orthodox Palestinian Society, headed by the Czar's own uncle, was established in Russia. This society developed and expanded the various Russian monasteries that had already existed in Jerusalem, and bought additional land and houses in Jerusalem and elsewhere, such as Nazareth, Bethlehem, Tiberius, Hebron, and other places that had some religious or historic significance, building there new churches and monasteries.

In Jerusalem they built a glorious church at the foot of the Mount of Olives, named after Mother Mary, and a large church in what is known as the Russian Compound. They bought the cave of our prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi from its Arab owners; they built a large church with a now-famous tall tower in the village of Tur, above the Mount of Olives; and another one in the village of Ein Karem near Jerusalem; as well as others in Nazareth, Tiberius, Hebron, and elsewhere in Judea and the Galilee. The pilgrims would visit all of them, donating money for those churches and monasteries. The aforementioned society built an ornate building on a large lot it had purchased above the Russian Compound in Jerusalem, as a home for the Archimandrite and other leaders of the Russian Church, as well as a luxurious hotel for rich Russian pilgrims, and next to it one giant building and other smaller ones inside the Russian Compound as lodging for the pilgrims who used to come every year in great numbers.

They used to arrive in Jerusalem every week in large convoys, beginning in the period before Christmas, in December, and ending on Easter, in April. Some would stay here for a number of weeks or months, then return to Russia, while others stayed here for the entire period from before Christmas to after Easter.

All the Russian pilgrims, as well as many Orthodox pilgrims who came here during that period from the Balkan and other European countries, who were in town during the Eve of Easter, were present in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the lighting of the Holy Fire, which was done at midnight by a mysterious automatic machine. The devout, gullible pilgrims were convinced by their priests that the fire had come down supposedly from the Heavens. With the fire, they lighted cords in oil lanterns they had prepared in advance, and while maintaining the light by constantly adding oil, they would take them back with them to their homes in Russia to serve as a "permanent light".

The number of pilgrims present here during those 4-5 months was estimated at about 10,000 men and women. Most of them resided here in the houses of the aforementioned society, but some would rent themselves private apartments. They all paid their own ways, and bought their needs in the city. Besides, they used to buy many ritual articles and pictures made by Jerusalem artists, which they took back to their churches at home. They also bought many goods and gifts for their families in Russia, as well as photo cards showing their holy sites. The sum of money left by the pilgrims in Jerusalem during the season was estimated at about one million Rubles. This giant sum, which was distributed either directly or indirectly among most residents of Jerusalem, increased the commerce and improved the economy in the city.

Other convoys of Catholic pilgrims came throughout the year from France, Italy and other countries. Their stay here was shorter, but they also left plenty of their money in Jerusalem.

The Russian Compound in Jerusalem was walled on all four sides by buildings, and gave the impression of a special community. In it there were the Russian Consulate-General, a fancy cathedral, a monastery and a large, well organized hospital, with a specialist physician who was brought especially from Russia and took private patients in his clinic as well. Part of this Russian Compound, which was the property of the Orthodox Church, was administered by the head of the monastery – the Archimandrite. The hotel and houses built by the Royal Orthodox Society were run by a special management comprised of both lay managers and priests, who were sent here on behalf of the Royal Orthodox Society. This management was typically anti-Semitic.

All of Jerusalem's residents used to pass through the Gates of the Russian Compound on their way from Jaffa Street to Hanevi'im Street, Meah She'arim Street and other places, thus shortening their way considerably. However, during the last years prior to the [World] War, the Russian Church here became more and more anti-Semitic, and the Compound's management hired guards to watch the gates and not let the Jews pass through them.

During the World War, deliveries of funds from Russia to their religious and civilian institutes here were interrupted. The pilgrims stopped coming here altogether, the monasteries dwindled, the priests, nuns and monks, as enemy citizens, were forced to leave the country. Most of them went back to Russia or found shelter in Egypt and neighboring countries. Only a few of them managed to stay in Jerusalem, living in dire poverty.

Once the atheist Bolshevik government was established in Russia, all the financial and economic transactions of the Russian Church here were discontinued. Everything was taken over by the English government in Jerusalem, which founded a committee to deal with the matter of the Russian Church's properties. The local government also took over the hospital in the Russian Compound, converting it first into a military hospital and then into a governmental civilian hospital. The large buildings, used once as monasteries, hotels and lodging houses for pilgrims, were rented by the government for its courts and a jail. The rest of the building, properties of the Russian Royal Society and the Church, were rented out. Only the church itself was given to the



Russian priests and monks still present in Palestine. The mandatorial government granted licenses for private individuals to build on the part of the Russian Compound facing Jaffa Street. They built new commercial buildings with shops and offices that were rented for a given period of time, and the income was forwarded to the committee in charge of the Russian assets. This is still the practice to this day.

## MUSLIM ARABS AND CHRISIAN ARABS

The Muslim Arabs in Jerusalem were of two kinds: Effendis and the masses.

The effendis lived mainly off their incomes from their assets around the country. Many of them had fields and orchards, and certain families owned entire villages. They leased their lands to the local peasants, who served as land tenants. They rented out their houses and warehouses in town to Jews and Arabs from the middle and lower classes. Members of the aristocratic families, once they graduated the government high school in Jerusalem and completed their studies of the sciences, law and Turkish in institutes of higher education in Istanbul, were generally appointed to government positions by the Turkish commissioners and the Supreme Government in Istanbul.

Although the salaries paid by the Turkish government to its officials were rather meager, these officials knew how to secure decent incomes through Baksheesh (bribery), which was a common practice in all the courts and government institutes during the Turkish rule. The Baksheese could exonerate the evil and convict the just. In many cases, the judges would take bribes from both sides. Their verdicts were generally not unequivocal: they left an opening for the loser to win his appeal by offering his own bribe.

The Jews managed to hold on to their businesses and trades in Palestine, in the face of false accusations by the Arabs and abuse of the law by the local police and courts, only thanks to the fact that by and large they were all citizens of foreign countries. The consuls of those countries here, being quite familiar with the “justice” meted out by such courts and judges, always protected their Jewish subjects under the Treaty Law, and prevented any abuse of their rights. The consul would send his representative to the court to protect the rights of his citizens. A Turkish judge was not allowed to step on the threshold of the house or shop of a foreign citizen, without the presence of his consulate’s Kawas (custodian). If a policeman were rude to him, the citizen would send him away in disgrace. Any time a policeman showed disrespect to a foreign citizen, the consul would demand his dismissal from service.

Another source of income for the effendis came through leasing the Tithe Tax from the Turkish government. This tax had to be paid to the government by the farmers, grove owners and orchard owners, both Arab and Jews as well as foreign citizens, since the consuls had no power over land laws and they could not intervene in this matter. Basically, this was a tax of ten percent of the net worth of the grains and fruits. However, additional percentages were levied as education tax, road tax, etc., and the total tax amounted to a large portion, sometimes up to half the worth of the produce.

The government did not collect this tax directly through its collection agency, but rather farmed it out in a form of a lease to the effendis for the highest bid. The effendis knew how to get the lease for the right price, and then collected taxes from each farmer, grove owner or orchard owner. The law did not allow the taxpayers to harvest their grains and fruits prior to paying the tax to the lessee. The lessees came with soldiers and policemen who made sure the produce

would remain in the fields and on threshing floors, and the farmers were forced to accept the leader's conditions and pay him as much as he wished. At times, the tax on fruits even exceeded the value of the entire produce. Many times the peasants preferred to cut down their trees to avoid the taxpaying, risking severe penalties for such violations. The large Jewish Moshavot attempted to arrange for their own committees to lease the Tithe Tax from the government, to avoid the lessees.

The other type of Arabs in Jerusalem was small merchants, owners of grocery stores in each and every Arab street and neighborhood, craftsmen and laborers. Some were specialist craftsmen for stone-building, plaster works, paving and the like, as well as expert blacksmiths and carpenters. These were Christian Arabs and Armenians.

The construction field in Jerusalem was not advanced at that time. Beautiful, luxurious houses were built only by the Christian monasteries and European institutes, who brought architects and engineers from Europe for this purpose. They also brought various machines for construction works, such as machines that grind stones into gravel, mix concrete, chisel stones, and the likes. Hence their buildings were remarkable for their beauty and grace. Ordinary home owners in Jerusalem built their houses the old way. They did dig the foundations deeply all the way to the rocks, but then they filled them only with gravel stones and dirt mixed with plaster and with no concrete, since concrete was not even known in Jerusalem at that time. The walls were built 30-inches wide made of two stones, one from the outside and the other from the inside, with gravel stones and clay between them. The ceilings were built dome-shaped from light limestones called Nary Stones. Later, the ceilings were built straight and made from iron stripes, with Nary Stones filled between one stripe and the next.

House builders at that time did not need any professional architects or engineers, but rather followed the building plans of unauthorized "specialists". There were no certified Jewish architects and engineers in Jerusalem prior to the war. There were only European Christian architects, the most famous among whom was the Dutch architect Mr. Schik, who lived for many years with his family in Jerusalem and achieved his fame for his excellent model of the Holy Temple, which he prepared according to the descriptions in the scriptures. For this work, the Dutch government awarded him the title Construction Consultant. He built fancy buildings for monasteries and institutes and for large European companies. The German Christian architect Sandler was also known as a prominent specialist in his field. Shaarel Zedek Hospital, The School of Count Lemel, Bikur Holim Hospital and others were built according to his plans and under his supervision.

The number of Christian Arabs was about one third of the number of Muslim Arab in Jerusalem. Most of them were, indeed, craftsmen, laborers and shopkeepers. Being Ottoman citizens, they also were oppressed by the Muslim effendis. However, they were very familiar with the Muslims' ways and nature, and knew how to adapt and live with them under friendly, albeit submissive, terms. Most of the Christian Arabs' children attended the elementary schools run by

the Christian monasteries of the various denominations. The most gifted among them went on to high schools where they learned languages and sciences, and later became clerks and interpreters for foreign consulates, or filled administrative positions in banks, trade shops, etc. Some even made it to secretarial positions in the government. A few even went to Beirut, where they were admitted to the prestigious French or American schools. Once they graduated, they became physicians, attorneys, and members of other free professions.

## MEDICINE IN JERUSALEM

During the first few years after my arrival here, there were only five physicians in Jerusalem, all of whom were general practitioners whose services were needed for all types of internal diseases as well as nose, ear and throat disorders, eye disorders, dental disorders and other diseases. There were no specialist physicians in Palestine at all.

The first certified Jewish physician was Dr. Shraga Feibel Papeles, who had graduated the medical school of the University of Vienna and had a large practice for Jews and Arabs. He used the medical methods of his time, but was successful to a large extent. He was a pious Jew, loyal to religion and tradition and observed all the commandments, which lifted his reputation among the Jews who were, for the most part, religious. He was the first physician in the Bikur Holim ["Patients' Visit"] society, and also treated poor patients on behalf of the Frankfurt Committee for Charity in the Holy Land.

The rest of the physicians were European Christians. Among them: Dr. Sandretzki, a Pole, who had a large clientele; Dr. Mazaraky, a Greek, who was known as a great expert, and was called only in severe cases, due to his stiff charges per visit. He was the main physician in the Misgav Ladakh hospital, where he also treated poor patients on behalf of the hospital, either for free or for small fees; Dr. Hoffman, a German; and Dr. Einsler, a German, who worked in Bikur Holim hospital for many years, till the day he died. His wife, a Dutch Christian, daughter of the famous architect Dr. Schik, volunteered for many years, until a very old age, to serve as a chief supervisor for Bikur Holim. Aside from these, private Jewish homes were visited by an English physician, who worked for the English Mission Hospital. He did not charge for his visits, and their hospital admitted patients for free as well. However, people of honor avoided his medical services, and were especially adverse to staying at the mission's hospital, because there they were forced to listen to missionary sermons.

The first Jewish hospital in Jerusalem was the one belonging to the Rothschild family, named after Meir Rothschild. It was established in the year 5614 [1853/4] in the Old City, inside a courtyard bought by the Baron's envoy, Mr. Albert Cohen – a Rothschild confidant, who did a great deal for the Jews of Jerusalem, and was among the leaders of the Sepharadi community there. When that hospital was founded it had only 18 beds – 9 for men and 9 for women, a pharmacy and restrooms. Poor Jewish patients from all the communities were admitted there for free, and three times per week, the resident physician would see patients, giving his advice for free. Medications were also provided to the poor at no cost. The Rothschild Baron dedicated a fund of a quarter of a million golden Franks solely for the purpose of running the hospital.

In the year 5648 [1887/8], the Rothschild family built a more spacious building to serve as a hospital, outside the Old City, adjacent to the Russian Compound. The family increased the maintenance fund, and a number of beds were added. In the year 5657 [1896/7], a pediatric ward

opened in this hospital, and in 5660 [1899/1900], an ophthalmologist joined the medical team there.

A special English ophthalmology hospital operated there and an English specialist worked there, treating patients with eye disorders from all the religious denominations. However, because the hospital was visited by such a large number of patients, especially peasants from the surrounding villages who were particularly prone to suffering from eye problems, the visit there involved great difficulties and time wasting. Eye disorders, particularly trachoma, were quite common due to the hot climate in Palestine and the very poor sanitary conditions.

In the year 5650 [1889/90], the German Jewish Society For Zion opened an eye care clinic, where later a German specialist, Dr. Arlenger, was sent, who would receive patients for free three days every week. In the year 5688 [1927]8, the same society opened an ophthalmology hospital with a number of beds, where patients who required surgery and prolonged treatment were admitted.

Shortly after the Rothschild Hospital was established, Mr. Albert Cohen opened on behalf of the Rothschild family an affiliated institute for support of poor obstetrics patients, who received financial support, as well as linen and blankets for their newborn babies. In both the Old City and in the new neighborhoods, commissioners were appointed from among the local dignitaries, according to whose recommendations the support was given to the neediest new mothers. Special seamstresses were assigned to sew underwear for the newborns.

Mr. Albert Cohen also established a fund for teaching trades to children, a fund for interest-free loans to small merchants and craftsmen, and a fund for bread distribution to the unemployed poor who had no source of livelihood. These three funds were closed down in the year 5637 [1876/7], once Mr. Albert Cohen died. In the year 5664 [1903/4], the Jewish Colonization Association took over the management of Rothschild Hospital.

During the World War, Rothschild Hospital served as a Turkish military hospital, but once the English entered Jerusalem, it was re-organized and its previous functions were resumed. Baron James Rothschild, who was in Palestine during the war as an officer in the English army, appointed new physicians as well as a new general manager for the hospital – Mr. Shmuel Raphaeli – For the re-opening of the hospital, Baron James gave a beautiful inauguration party, inviting Jerusalem's dignitaries as well as English military officials.

The most important medical aid was provided by the General Ashkenazi hospital Bikur Holim, established by the leading activists in the Kolels of the non-Hasidic Jews in Jerusalem. This hospital has operated since the year 5630 [1869/70] in a small house purchased for it inside the Old City. In time it was expanded by building new rooms and a top floor with the help of charitable Jews, and at that point it contained more than fifty beds. In the year 5650 [1889/90], Master Reb Moshe Witenberg used his own money to build an additional hall on the roof of that building. A similar hall was built by the Hungarian charitable man Rezsdorfer. The additional

construction led to an increase in the number of beds. Beds from the old rooms were moved to these new halls, where there was sunlight and fresh air; repairs were made throughout the entire house and new features were added, so the place began to resemble a modern hospital.

Once the construction of the roof floor, donated by Reb Moshe Witenberg, was completed, the hospital financiers at the time – Reb Zalman Weisfish, Reb Avraham Frost and Reb Selig Hoisdorf – gave a party in honor of the house's inauguration. They invited all of Jerusalem's great figures (the charitable Reb Moshe Witenberg took me with him to the party). Others who attended were the German Consul, as the hospital was sponsored by the German government; the resident physician, the Christian German Dr. Einsler; and other esteemed guests from the European Christian communities. The late Hungarian Rabbi Mada gave a rabbinical lecture, whereas the Great Rabbi Yossef Hayim Sonenfeld, who was then the Chief Rabbi of the Hungarian-German community in Jerusalem, gave an impressive speech in fluent German, articulating noble ideas about charity in general and the treatment of the sick in particular. The German consul also spoke in honor of the event, praising the Jews for their charitable ways. Once the speeches were over, the invitees set down to eat fruits and deserts, congratulating Reb Moshe Witenberg for his wonderful donation for the needs of the public.

To this day, Bikur Holim Hospital has lived on donations received from charitable Jews abroad, particularly from Russia, America, Germany, Austria, Hungary and others. Jerusalem residents also supported it with their private donations, especially the Kolels of Ashkenazi non-Hassidic Jews that granted it annual sums.

In return, poor patients from these Kolels were charged only ten Turkish Grushes (about 60 Mils) per day of hospital stay. Patients from the Hassidic Kolels were paying twenty Grushes per day, since their Kolels did not contribute to the hospital's budget. Poor patients from the CHABAD Kolel were charged fifteen Grushes per day, thanks to the charity of Master Reb Moshe Witenberg, President of the CHABAD Kolel, who supported the hospital with a hefty monthly donation. The hospital had some income from selling shrouds, for which it had a monopoly, for the dead from the non-Hassidic Kolels.

The patient care and service in this hospital was excellent. Although there were no registered nurses at all in Palestine at that time, there were men and women who had been trained by the physicians and were quite knowledgeable about the necessary patient care. They administered all sorts of injections and dressings, not only for inpatients but for outpatients as well, who came to seek medical advice from the specialist Dr. Einsler. The hospital's pharmacy sold medications, offering them to the poor either at no cost or for a slight fee.

Special recognition is due to the fabulous personality of the pharmacist of Bikur Holim Hospital, Reb Avraham Rokach, who served in that position for many years. He also functioned as an assistant to Dr. Einsler, always accompanying him during his rounds in the hospital. With his great energy and talent, he became quite an expert in medicine. His suggestions always hit the

mark, so some Jerusalem residents preferred his advice to that of the certified physicians. His hands were full of work day and night, both in giving advice and in pharmacy work. He even went to visit patients at home – all for the sake of charity, as he charged no fees. When the house resident, Dr. Einsler, was out of town for several days, he would assign Reb Avraham Rokach to take care of his patients, because he trusted him and his ample knowledge.

Bikur Holim Hospital was under the protection of the German consul in Jerusalem, from the day it was established until the World War erupted. Around the year 5660 [1899/1900], the late Dr. Mazia joined the hospital staff. As Jerusalem grew and the house inside the Old City was too small for all the patients who came to the hospital from Jerusalem as well as from Jaffa and the various Moshavot, the hospital's financiers purchased a large lot on Hanevi'im Street, and built a big building there with many beds, all the modern features and competent, professional service. A number of specialist physicians serve there in the various wards, led by the famous Professor Tsundak.

Once the hospital was moved to the new building on Hanevi'im Street, the house inside the Old City was set up as a hospital for the terminally ill. One physician works there and it is very useful for those patients who are in need of such a place.

Once Rothschild Hospital moved from its old house inside the Old City to its new building adjacent to the Russian Compound, the Pikuach Holim ["patient Supervision"] society of the Sepharadi community bought the old house, opening there in the year 5649 [1888/9] a hospital named Misgav Ladach. Poor patients of the Sepharadi and Middle Eastern communities were admitted there, as well as poor Ashkenazi patients, particularly from the Old City. Outpatients also came to hear medical advice from the regular house resident, the reputable Dr. Mazaraki. This hospital also lived on donations from charitable Jews from abroad and Jerusalem residents.

Once annually, in one of the non-sabbatical days of the Passover holiday, the house's financiers organized the Misgav Ladach Hospital Day. They invited many people in Jerusalem, staged a nice ceremony with prayers and speeches, submitted a report of their yearly activities and recruited volunteers to work in the hospital. This tradition continued until the World War.

This hospital was also given income from real estate in Jerusalem, allocated by various charitable persons, among them Reb Moshe Witenberg, who allocated a portion of his income from his houses in Jerusalem. Misgav Ladach Hospital is still operating in the Old City, providing medical care to poor patients, although to a lesser extent than prior to the World War, due to reduced income. The regular house resident provides advice to visitors who come to seek his opinion, especially among the Old City residents.

In the year 5650 [1889/90], the Jewish Charity Committee in Holland and Germany sent a young physician, Dr. Moshe Wallach, to Jerusalem. He treated mainly poor patients for free in his clinic and at their homes, thus attempting to stop them from seeking care from the English Mission's physician. Poor patients, especially from among the Middle Eastern community but also



Ashkenazi, tended before to go to that mission doctor, since they were given medications from the mission's hospital for meager prices or at no cost at all.

His sponsors' main objective was to build a large hospital in Jerusalem, where poor patients from all the Jewish communities could be admitted. For this purpose, Dr. Wallach, on behalf of his sponsors, appointed an executive committee in Jerusalem, comprised of the Great Rabbi Hayim Sonenfeld; Rabbi Moshe Yitzhak Goldschmidt, the Jerusalem representative of the Amsterdam-based Charity Committee; and Master Reb Moshe Witenberg. With the joint initiative of the committee and Dr. Wallach, a large handsome lot was built on Jaffa Street, on the edge of the Jewish neighborhoods, and a few years afterwards, the large hospital Sah'arey Tzedek [Gates of Justice] was built on that lot. The funds for the building came from charitable Jews in Holland and Germany, and its operations have been supported by them as well as charitable people in America and Jerusalem.

This hospital, and its regular house resident since its first day, Dr. M. Wallach, with the help of other doctors, does a great deal for patients from Jerusalem and other part of the country. In later years, all types of modern equipment were installed there. It is surrounded by a large, marvelous garden. At one of its ends there is a special house for patients with communicable diseases. A maternity ward was also opened, as well as a surgical unit. The surgeries are performed by professional specialists who are called whenever necessary.

In the same area, and at about the same time, a much larger lot was purchased by the financiers of the Old Age Home – Reb Yisrael Dov Frumkin, Reb Avraham Zakash and Reb Issac Ben-Tovim. The Old Age Home had previously operated for several years inside the Old City.

In the year 5640 [1879/80], Dr. Samuel Sanders, a pious, good-hearted Jew from Australia, arrived in Jerusalem. He saw the suffering of the poor, lonely Jews and decided to help them to the best of his ability. With his own private means, he rented several rooms in the Old City and established a tea house, where anybody could come to drink hot tea and even take boiled water home. Later he rented the entire house and took in a few poor, lonely elderly men, to support them for the rest of their lives - while continuing his tea and boiled water service for all for a few more years. He used his own funds to maintain the house, and also received donations from his wealthy sons in Australia and other acquaintances. He also established a society in Jerusalem, and various people of means contributed monthly sums to it. To limit costs, he himself, an old man, used to wander among the contributors' houses to collect their donations. As his income increased, he added more elderly men to the house, taking care of their livelihood and welfare. His establishment made itself a name abroad as well, and monetary support came from various donors, especially from Russia.

At that time, the famous Jerusalem activist, Yisrael Dov Frumkin, editor of Hachavatzelet, joined Dr. Sanders as a financier. In the year 5649 [1888/9] they purchased a large house in the Old

City, with a donation from the famous charitable Mr. Fridlander of St. Petersburg and other donors.

In the year 5653 [1892/3], they opened a ward for elderly women, in a house they rented adjacent to the old men's house. In the year 5654 [1893/4], they began construction for the large building on the lot they had bought outside the Old City on Jaffa Road. The building was finished and inaugurated in the year 5661 [1900/1] and the elderly men and women were transferred there. Various donors built on the large lot additional large, spacious buildings as well as synagogues and a hospital, where they hired a physician. The house kept growing, and currently it contains several hundred elderly men and women.

In the year 5662 [1901/2], with a donation from the charitable Rabbi Yeshayahu Neishtadt, a mental institute was build across from the Old Age Home by the Ezrat Nashim ["women's section"] Society in Jerusalem. The society was led by its founder, Mrs. Haya Tzipa, wife of Rabbi Michel Pinus, along with some other esteemed matrons, such as the late Mrs. Reizel Feinstein and others. The institute admits Jewish mental patients from all over the country, according to the available number of beds and means. Today, Ezrat Nshim is headed by the founder's daughter, Mrs. Ita Yelin, wife of Professor David Yelin, assisted by the other matrons of Ezrat Nashim in Jerusalem.

## THE PHARMACIES IN JERUSALEM

Every hospital in Jerusalem featured a pharmacy, employing both certified pharmacies and non-certified pharmacists, who had learned their skills from the certified ones.

In Bikur Holim Hospital, the chief pharmacist was Reb Avraham Frost, who also served as one of the financiers. He had acquired his skill at a young age in Europe, and was sufficiently versed in it, although he was not certified. He himself trained his own assistant in the Bikur Holim pharmacy. Once Avaham Rokach was fully trained, Avraham Frost could finally retire, after assigning a helper to his successor. The hospital's pharmacies also sold medications per prescriptions by private physicians, at reduced prices.

At the time of my arrival here, there was only one private pharmacy, which belonged to a certified pharmacist, a German Christian man. About two or three years afterwards, another pharmacy was opened by a Greek Christian man.

There were two Jewish pharmacies, on the Street of the Jews inside of the Old City. One belonged to Reb Yekhezkel Mandleman, who had also served as pharmacist in Misgav Ladach Hospital before a certified pharmacist was hired there, and the other was owned by Reb Leib Gavrielowitz, son of the Eliezer Dan, Chief Rabbi of Etz Hayim Yeshivah. They also had branches in the Meah She'arim and Beit Yisrael neighborhoods. They trained their own students, even though they themselves were not certified. The Ashkenazi Jews signed contracts with the pharmacies' owners to sell medications to members of the poor kolels at reduced prices. The wealthy kolels contracted physicians to see patients of their kolels in their clinics as well as do home visits, for either a very small fee or for free altogether, to be paid by the kolel.

Even the private pharmacies, which were opened later, did not have any certified pharmacists. They were only on-the-job trainees, "experts" who prepared medications according to the physicians' prescriptions, based on what they had learned from their own "expert" trainers. Imported medications were not available here yet. A number of years afterwards, the local government responded to demands made by the best physicians and new physicians who had settled in Jerusalem, and began requiring that pharmacies should be run by certified pharmacists, graduates of the professional schools in Istanbul or other European cities. Such schools were also established a little closer to here in Beirut, Capital City of Lebanon, by the French and American universities there.

The government gave the pharmacy owners a certain deadline to obtain certified pharmacists after which, if they failed to comply with the new requirements, it would shut them down. In 1892, Reb Yekhezkel Mandleman and Reb Leib Gavrielowitz, owners of pharmacies and themselves products of the old school, went to Istanbul to learn the pharmacy skill. After one year, they returned to Jerusalem certified as authorized pharmacists. Obviously, the Baksheesh [bribery] was not less instrumental than their studies in obtaining the certificates. Nevertheless, a number of pharmacies remained in town without certified pharmacists. The government would

harass them from time to time, but they learned to adapt to the new situation and stayed in business. Years later, young Jerusalem men went to Europe or to Beirut, where they studied the pharmacy skill properly, and then returned to Jerusalem to open modern pharmacies here. They formed a union, demanding that the government shut down pharmacies without certified pharmacists. A few pharmacy owners hired certified pharmacists, while others were shut down. Since then, the preparation of medications has been done with proper skills.

At that time, the midwives in Jerusalem were also uncertified trained-on-the-job “experts”. Around 1900, the first certified midwife arrived in Jerusalem: Mrs. Fruma Kestelman, a native of Safed, who had studied in Vienna. The deliveries were done in special Labor and Delivery institutes, because there were no proper hospital facilities then. Only after the World War were special maternity wards set up in She’arey Tzedek, Bikur Holim and Misgav Ladach hospitals. Special maternity hospitals were also established and run by specialist physicians.

There were no registered nurses in Jerusalem at the time. The hospitals employed men and women who had learned the job from experience only. Only after the World War did the Hadasah Society, as part of its efforts to improve the health conditions in Jewish Jerusalem, found a professional school for nurses. Since then, a class of trained nurses has graduated the school once every other year. Once graduated, they are hired by hospitals as well as by private individuals who need them for treatment of patients in their home.

## LAG BA'OMER

On Lag Ba'omer<sup>1</sup>, the feast day of the Tanna<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, many Jerusalem Jews, especially among our Sepharadi brethren, members of other Eastern communities and various Hassidic groups, used to go to the village of Kfar Meron, near Safed, to attend the Tomb of Rabbi Bar Yochai and participate in the great festivities that were held that night in the adjacent synagogue and the large lot around it.

Thousand of our brethren from other Middle East countries also would come and spend the night praying, singing, dancing, and playing many types of instruments, with much joy and celebration. The Safed residents would come out on Lag Ba'omer's Eve in the afternoon, with Torah books in their hands, led by their chief rabbi and the community dignitaries who were followed by the masses – some on foot, while others were riding horses and asses. The road was unpaved with many inclines and declines. Once the procession arrived, the festivities commenced, continuing throughout the night. A large iron can was installed on top of the tomb and filled with oil, and at midnight it was lit.

The right of lighting the can was traditionally reserved for one of the Galician rabbis, and his representative in Safed would light it on his behalf in front of the large crowd visiting Meron. The fire lasted until dawn, because more oil was added periodically to the fire. Many of the Middle Eastern Jews, in accordance with their tradition, would toss expensive clothing, handkerchiefs and fabrics into the fire. Others brought their children to cut their hair for the first time, leaving them with side curls only, during the great festivities of the morning.

In Jerusalem, the Feast of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was celebrated by lighting campfires inside empty lots in various places in town, and dancing around, while singing ancient songs in honor of the divine teacher Bar Yochal. In Sepharadi synagogues, as well as in those of Ashkenazi Hassids, candles made of oil were lit inside glass bowls set in copper frames and hung on the ceiling by a metal cord. Each such fixture carried a note with the name of one of the famous teachers, both Bar Yochai's followers and others. The synagogue's financiers would honor the attendants with the lighting of the candles, in return for contributions for the feasts that followed.

Throughout the entire Lag Ba'omer Day, and particularly in the afternoon, many Jerusalem Jews – among them whole families, elderly and youth – especially Sepharadi and Hassidic Jews, came to the field in front of a cave in the northern end of the city, where according to tradition, the Righteous Shimon is buried. The entire field was filled with the celebrating masses. Many brought food, and then dined and spent the entire day there. They entered the cave, prayed and read from the Psalms. Various amusement sites were set up on the field for the children, and vendors with cold drinks, cakes and sweets set up their shops or otherwise walked among the

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<sup>1</sup> [The 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the barley count – AA]

<sup>2</sup> [Teacher with special authority – AA]

festive crowd, selling their merchandise to the attendants who needed to quench their thirst and eat heartily. Grooms and brides also came there with their families to see and be seen. Representatives of charitable organizations came to raise funds on behalf of their institutes, and even ordinary poor beggars were given fair handouts at that time of rejoicing. In the evening, the crowd headed back home, either on foot or on carts, jamming the streets leading back to the city.

I recall the terrible pogrom of our brethren, the Jews of the town Kishinev in Beserbia, in the year 5664 [1903/4]. The sickening news reached Jerusalem a few days prior to Lag Ba'omer. A wooden stage was placed, then, in the middle of the field, and an important, eloquent speaker motivated his listeners to help those who were suffering under their cruel persecutors. The audience responded handsomely, and a decent sum was collected on the spot and given to the trustees who were handling the matter.

During the war years, as well as during the years of the various upheavals that followed, the visits to the Cave of the Righteous Shimon were interrupted, and since then they have been rather scarce.

This cave is also visited, especially by our Sepharadi brethren, on the day after the festival of Shavu'ot.

## **FIVE YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT**

### **5655 [1894/5] to 5659 [1898/9]**

The year 5655 [1894/5] was inundated by activities designated for Jewish Jerusalem. In that year, the city's government paved the narrow alleyways leading to the Wailing Wall, the remnant from our Holy Temple, as well as the area in front of the wall itself, that was filled with mud and dirt, with large, smooth stones, thus maintaining this holy place clean.

That year, the large, beautiful neighborhood of Rehovot was built by the Bucharian community in Jerusalem.

Leaders of the Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem established a general soup kitchen where the poor, regardless of their denominational affiliation, would receive a hot meal for one half of a Turkish Grush.

Also during that year, the Ezrat Nashim [women's aid] society was founded by Ms. Khaya Tzipa, wife of the late Rabbi Michele Pines. Its original objective was to assist poor women in giving birth, and many of the city's women contributed to this society. In the year 5656 [1895/6], the society opened a hospital for mental and incurable patients, for which there was great need.

The same year, the Jerusalem Bureau of Bnei Brith Association purchased about two hundred dunams of land, at a location where the ancient city of Motza once existed, about seven kilometers from Jerusalem, establishing a new Moshavah named Motza. Initially, the Jerusalem bureau settled three workers there, providing each of them with 40 dunams of land a monthly support of twenty Franks, until such time as the vineyards they planted there would yield fruits. Shortly afterwards, additional land was purchased there where new workers settled. Today this is a large and important Moshavah, located very close to Jerusalem.

In the same year, the first Jewish photography shop was established in Jerusalem by a pair of young men, who had learned their craft in Europe.

In the year 5656 [1895/6], a society was established in Jerusalem, named The Society for Settling the Holy Land, with many Jerusalem residents as members. Its goal was to promote among Jerusalem residents the idea of settling the country. It helped many a young man to find work as laborers in the Moshavot and get permanent jobs there either with representatives of the Baron Rothschild, or with individual farmers.

The same year, the London-based Agudat Akhim ["brethren's association"] bought a big house with a large garden where it sponsored the Evelyn D. Rothschild School for Girls, at a cost of 120 thousand Golden Franks.

That year, the city government of Jerusalem brought for the first time a sweeping and sprinkling machine. The machine was used to sweep and sprinkle Jaffa Street, which was unpaved and very

dusty, especially during the summer, three times per day. The city also hired security guards at night to patrol the town and prevent thefts.

During that year, the Turkish Post Office opened a branch inside the Jewish Quarter. A Jewish clerk was running it, and the seal was imprinted with the word “Jerusalem” in Hebrew.

In the year 5658 [1897/8], the Sepharadi community in Jerusalem elected a board for non-religious matters via a secret ballot. Mr. Nissim Bachar was elected chairman of the board. The board devoted itself to the community’s interests.

Among the new rules issued by the board, particularly noteworthy is the regulation that any man who is about to marry a woman must notify the board accordingly fifteen days prior to the wedding. The board then has to announce weekly, through newspapers and open announcements, the names of the various couples, as is the practice in all the well-organized European communities. Also, the Ketubah<sup>1</sup> must be signed by the chief rabbis. The board also conducted an accurate census of the entire Sepharadi community, classifying its members according to their countries of origin, parties, occupations, and the like.

This prompted the Ashkenazis, too, to understand the need for election of a board for their community, and they took steps to prepare for elections.

During the same year, Mr. Yehoshua Yelin was elected as a member of the City Council

In the Abarbanel & Ganzi Yossef Study bookstore, lectures were given every Saturday, in Hebrew, on various issues, as well as classes about Jewish scholars’ books. First among the lecturers were Rabbi Pines, who taught classes about the Book of Khazars, and Reb David Yelin, who lectured about Maimonides’ life. During the last day of Passover of that year, one of our people’s scholars in London, Mr. Abrams, who was visiting the country at the time, gave a lecture there about Jewish travelers during the Middle Ages. All the city leaders, scholars and community dignitaries were invited to this lecture, and many of them did attend it.

In the year 5659 [1898/9], the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem elected a board, by secret ballot, to run the city affairs, in particular regarding matters between the community and the government. The board contracted the famous lawyer, Mr. Malkiel Manni, to serve as its representative with the local authorities and the courts, regarding community affairs in general and individual matters in particular. However, the board served only for one or two years, and then was abolished.

In the year 5659 [1898/9], the Alliance Society purchased a large lot of 10,000 square cubits, where it built a three-story house with thirty rooms for a thousand students, who would be sent there from all over the Turkish empire.

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<sup>1</sup> [Jewish marriage contract – aa]



This school renewed the teaching of stone-masonry and stone-cutting, admitting about fifty students to this class. The society also helped a number of people to learn the building and construction crafts. Only a few Jews were skilled builders at the time. The society also founded a shop for cotton wool weaving, using funds of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). It placed 51 weaving looms under the supervision of five craftsmen who were brought from Damascus. The society's vocational-shop school was placed under the directorship of Mr. A. Antabi.

## THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM BY GERMAN KAISER WILHELM THE SECOND AND HERZL

5659, 1898

The official purpose of the Kaiser's visit to Jerusalem was to inaugurate the Church of the Redeemer, built by the German government in a beautiful, spacious plaza inside the Old City. The estate was called the Johans' Estate, after their Johans' association, to whom the estate had belonged for hundreds of years. In the estate, a large guesthouse had stood for the Christian pilgrims who came to visit Jerusalem, as well as a large hospital for poor patients – both of which were eventually destroyed.

The estate was given as a gift by Turkish Sultan Abd Al Aziz to Prussian King Wilhelm the First, back in 1869. The same year, Prussian Crown Prince Friderich Wilhelm, who was visiting Jerusalem as part of his journey to Egypt to attend the opening of the Suez Canal, claimed possession of the place. The Pasha of Jerusalem handed him the plaza through a gift deed in a formal ceremony, and the German flag was raised there.

Several days afterwards, work commenced to clean the dust and trash that had accumulated there for hundreds of years, and slowly remnants of the church, which had once glorified the site, were revealed. The cleanup work lasted a long time, because it suffered from any delays. The plan was to build a spectacular German Protestant church in this large lot, in addition to various other buildings. In 1898, the construction of this church was completed, and Kaiser Wilhelm the Second decided to come to Jerusalem to inaugurate it.

Several months prior to the Kaiser's arrival date, the Turkish government already began preparations for this reception. Special engineers were sent from Istanbul to repair the roads between Jaffa and Jerusalem, Jerusalem and Hebron and Jerusalem and Jericho. A new road was paved between Haifa and Jaffa. They also began to check all the historic buildings throughout the country, to clean them and improve their appearances. A large opening was made in the city's wall, at the Jaffa Gate, to allow carriages to come and go in and out of the Old City. The streets were cleaned and the houses painted both inside and outside the Old City. In some places, the historical character of those sites was corrupted when new stones were used for repair, or when fresh paint covered various ancient writings. Even the Kaiser voiced his regret over this during his visit.

The city of Jerusalem prepared for greeting the imperial couple according to the wishes of Sultan Abd Al hamid. Two handsome honor gates were erected by the city's government on Jaffa Street: one across the street, alongside the City Garden, and the other next to the city's Pasha's house, located on Jaffa Street and adjacent from its other side to the Even Yisrael ("stone of Israel") neighborhood. The one was build in European style, whereas the other in ancient style. Both were covered with beautiful flowers, and the flags of Turkey and Germany waved from

them. The German community built a large, multileveled platform next to Jaffa Gate, to allow their entire community to stand there.

The Jerusalem Jewish community also decided to hold a splendid reception for the Kaiser. With the approval of the Kaiser's ceremony minister, relayed by the German consul to Jerusalem, they erected a simple yet handsome gate, where the community's leaders and rabbis would greet the Kaiser and his empress. Above the gate's poles, a dome was placed with a little tower in its middle, and on both its sides there were signs with the greeting "Welcome" in Hebrew and German, and the flags of Turkey and Germany. All government offices and all the houses in town were decorated with Turkish and German flags, per the government's order.

Camping for the imperial couple and their entourage was set in the spacious lot at the end of Musrara Street, adjacent to a street that after the English occupation was named Hanev'im Street ("street of the prophets"). The lot belonged to the local German community. The lot was fenced nicely and two large, marvelous tents, brought especially from Germany, were erected on it for the Kaiser and his empress, and many other nice tents for the ministers accompanying him, as well as for the Pashas sent by the Sultan to escort them.

On Tuesday, October 25, 1898, the Kaiser, his empress and their entourage disembarked at the Haifa port. They were greeted by the Pashas of Beirut and Damascus. After visiting the town of Haifa and Mount Carmel, he returned to his ship to sleep there. The next day he returned to Haifa, visiting the Templers who were settled adjacent to the town, and holding a reception for their community leaders.

Afterwards he went on his way, lodging at night in tents erected for him in the ancient town of Ceserea. The next day, they rode horses to Jaffa. On the way, he stopped at the German settlement Sharona, where he held a reception for the settlement's leaders. In Jaffa, he lodged at a hotel in the German neighborhood there. On Friday morning they continued from Jaffa on the road leading to Jerusalem. The Kaiser and his entourage rode horses, whereas the empress was taken by a wagon.

Near the Mikveh Yisrael School, a spectacular reception was held for the Kaiser. Next to a gate decorated fancily in honor of the Kaiser, stood the school's principal, Mr. Nigo, and leaders of the adjacent Moshavot.

Here the late Dr. Herzl, for whom an appointment was made with the Kaiser, was awaiting him. When the Kaiser arrived, a choir of the school's children sang the royal anthem. Herzl stood by one of the plows. The Kaiser recognized him from a distance and halted his horse, as did his entire entourage. The Kaiser approached Herzl, who stood there bareheaded, and offered him his hand in greeting, inquiring about his well being. Herzl thanked him and asked, "How has Your Majesty's trip been so far?" The Kaiser answered, "It is very hot. However, this country has a future. For the time being it is still sick, and it needs water. A great deal of water." "Yes, Your Majesty," responded Herzl, "it requires an extensive system of canals." "This is the land of the

future,” repeated the Kaiser, offered his hand for farewell, and with the sounds of voices singing the German anthem, he continued on his way to Jerusalem.

The sight made a great impression on the crowd present there, as well as on Hertzl himself. It was a good sign for the interview still scheduled to be held in Jerusalem.

The same Friday afternoon, Herzl and his fellow delegates took the train to Jerusalem. The train was late and arrived in Jerusalem when the Sabbath commenced. Therefore, they walked from the train station to Hotel Kaminiz, where they lodged.

On Saturday, October 29, at 11:00 a.m., the Kaiser arrived in the Holy City through the German settlements at the southern end of Jerusalem. The Kaiser rode a white horse, with his queen at his side, and his entire entourage following them. Turkish horsemen named “Yenichers”, from among the Sultan’s own guard, wearing green uniforms and featuring scarves around their turbans, rode in a circle around the Kaiser and his company, with bayoneted rifles. Behind them, German knights were riding.

Before the Jews’ honor gate, through which the Kaiser was supposed to pass first, stood the students of Lemel School and children of the German Jewish orphanage, all dressed uniformly. On the other side of the gate, students from the Alliance Society’s vocational school stood in one row. In a special cubical built inside the gate on the right, stood the Bashi Sage, Great Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elisar, and Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, Great Rabbi Samuel Saint. Other rabbis and Jewish community leaders stood in a cubicle on the left side of the gate. When the Kaiser approached the gate, the school students began singing a song written especially for the Kaiser. The chief rabbis, with Torah books in their hands, greeted him with the King’s Benediction, and offered him a Hebrew blessing written on a fine parchment scroll. Mr. Ephrayim Cohen, principal of Lemel School, translated the blessing into German. The German consul, who read the translated blessing for the Kaiser, also translated the chief rabbis’ verbal greetings. The Kaiser listened to the rabbis standing, expressed his gratitude to the Jewish community and its rabbis for their gracious welcome, and asked that the scroll be brought to his tent.

The Kaiser and his Empress continued on, with their entire retinue, to the honor gate prepared for them by the city council. There he received greetings from the mayor, expressed his thanks and articulated his friendly sentiments for the Sultan and the Turkish government.

From there they went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where they were greeted by leaders of the Christian churches. From there they continued to the Johans’ Estate, where they were welcomed by leaders of the German community.

From there, they returned to the German Consulate, where they held a reception for the Pasha of Jerusalem, representatives of various governments and leaders of the communities, among them the two chief rabbis. The Kaiser parted from each of them by offering his hand in greeting. From there they returned to their tents.

Dr. Herzl first intended to greet the Kaiser at the reception that the Jews of Jerusalem held for him. However, due to the opposition by the ultra-Orthodox Jews, and for fear of those in charge of the reception, he avoided doing so. He was also convinced that by doing so, he might hurt his chances to be formally seen by the Kaiser. On Saturday night, he sent a copy of a speech he planned to read to the Kaiser, via Mr. David Wolfsohn, to Graf Oilenburg, the Kaiser's Minister of Ceremonies, along with a letter asking to inform him regarding the exact date and time when his delegation would be received.

On Saturday night, Dr. Herzl moved to the house of Mr. Yonah Marx on Mamila Street. The merchant Mr. Wilhelm Gross arranged for him to have the entire first floor of the house at his disposal. Throughout the entire day, people from all the circles, Zionists and others, came to him with all kinds of suggestions.

In the evening he went with Mr. Moshe David Shuv to the Western Wall, and toured the Old City. The next day he went again to visit the Western Wall, which made a great impression on him. He expressed his dismay over the squalor and filth in the alleyways adjacent to the Wall, and the gloomy sight of the hordes of beggars who were sitting along the entrance to the Wall and bothering the visitors there. He also visited the Tower of David. The next day he again visited the Old City, climbing up the roof of Tif'eret Yisrael synagogue, where he could see Temple Mount, the Mountain of Olives and all this fabulous view that awakens sentiments of sacredness and yearning. He then envisioned how the Holy City would be newly built and beautiful.

The letter to the Kaiser's Minister of Ceremonies, Graf Oilenberg, regarding setting up an appointment for an interview with the Kaiser, was left unanswered. Herzl sent Mr. Wolfsohn and his steward to the Kaiser's tent camp, where Oilenberg told them that the interview would be held in a day or two. Dr. Herzl sent Oilenberg an album with pictures from Jewish Mosheavot in Palestine, and took the opportunity to remind him about the interview. Finally, Dr. Herzl was summoned to the German consulate, where he was advised that he should contact the consulate's conselor, Mr. Kemet, at the Kaiser's tent camp. The latter gave him back the copy of his intended speech to the Kaiser, with editorial changes, comments and corrections. Everything that referred the objectives of the Zionist movement, the plight of the suffering Jews throughout the world, and the proposal to grant German protection for the Jewish Settlement Society in Palestine and Syria, was erased. Herzl resented the elimination of all these issues, but he swallowed his pride, returned home, revised the draft and sent it back, through Mr. Bodenheimer. The consulate's conselor accepted the draft and commented that for the time being, the German government wished not to publicize the interview.

On Monday, November 2, Herzl and his colleagues were received by the Kaiser. The morning hours were used for various preparations. Herzl inspected his companion's clothes, and instructed them how to conduct themselves during the interview. At noon they arrived at the Kaiser's tent camp, passed through the guards, and were brought by Graf Von Kessel to the

waiting tent. After ten minutes, they were called to the Kaiser's tent. The Kaiser offered his hand to Herzl in a gesture of friendship. Herzl introduced his colleagues to the Kaiser – Dr. Bodenheimer, David Wolfsohn, Dr. Schneider and Mr. Zeidner. He proceeded to read his speech, describing the country's isolation and the Jewish people's distress. He explained that if Jews would come to their land to develop it, this would benefit both themselves and the country. Such a good cause deserved aid from charitable people, and therefore he was urging His Majesty the Kaiser to grant this campaign his noble assistance. The Kaiser thanked Dr. Herzl for the information he provided, which he found most interesting, and indicated that the issue still required detailed study. He reviewed the settlement activities done up to that point, and suggested that both German and Jewish settlements could set the example for what could be done with this country with some water and shade. The Arab population, too, would benefit from the work in those settlements. Promising to pursue the matter, he offered his hand to Dr. Herzl and extended their conversation, along with Minister Bilov, about ways to rehabilitate the country, the great things that could be done by using the Jordan River's water, about improving the health conditions and building the New Jerusalem.

The results of the meeting were not clear to Herzl. Not a single word was said about the idea of German protection, and Dr. Herzl had the feeling afterwards that the matter was not progressing in the desirable direction.

In the afternoon, Dr. Herzl went with Bodenheimer and Wolfsohn, along with the farmer Boroza, to Moza, where he planted a young cedar on Boroza's land. The tree grew well later, but was cut during the World War by order of Jamal Pasha at the time. They returned to Jerusalem in the darkness of the night, and in the morning they went to Jaffa.

Herzl wished to leave the country before the story of the interview was publicized. Even before he arrived in Palestine, Eliezer Ben Yehuda had warned him about the Turkish government's attitude toward him, and tried to dissuade him from coming. Now Herzl himself felt that he was not sufficiently secure on Turkish territory. The way the Turkish officials treated him made him suspicious. In Jaffa and Jerusalem he was followed by a Jewish plain-clothes policeman, who himself admitted that he had an arrest warrant for Herzl if he detected anything suspicious about him. Therefore, he hurried up and traveled from Jaffa aboard a cargo ship to Alexandria, and from there, on an Italian luxurious cruiser, to Europe.

Already in Alexandria he received a telegraph from his father, informing him that the story of the interview had been published in the press. Upon arriving at Naples, he found the official announcement by the German Bureau of Correspondence. This news story eliminated any remnant of policy left from the interview, transforming it into nothing more than trivia. The official story described how the Kaiser had visited the Mosque of Omar and the patriarchs' houses, and how he received the French consul and after him a Jewish delegation that handed him an album with pictures from the Jewish settlements. The Kaiser responded to the speech made by the head of that delegation (whose name was not mentioned) by asserting that his

favorable interest was granted to all the aspirations, the objectives of which were to promote the agriculture in Palestine, for the benefit of the Turkish Empire, while safeguarding the Sultan's sovereignty there. The members of the delegation were very subdued by this news story. However, Herzl remained firm and refused to despair. He expressed his opinion that the fact that the Kaiser had not accepted the idea of protection was ultimately advantageous. And indeed, in later years, when Germany has become more and more distant from the western superpowers and Russia, such German protection would have only been a burden for the Zionist movement.

On Sunday, November 30, the Kaiser and his Empress and their escorts visited Bethlehem and its antiquities, inaugurating a German orphanage there. Upon their return they visited the German neighborhood of the Templers in Jerusalem, and the same day they went to the Village of Tur on top of Mount of Olives, visiting the Russian church at the peak and the tower from which a large portion of the Holy Land could be seen.

On Monday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, the inauguration of the German Evangelical Church, built inside the Johans' Estate in the Old City, took place. The Kaiser and his Empress marched, followed by a row of many evangelical ministers who came from Germany and all the Holy Land's towns, about one hundred German sailors, and behind them horsemen of the Johans' Association in their ceremonial attire, and finally the Kaiser's entourage, dressed in their uniforms of honor with silver and golden hats on their heads.

On the same day in the afternoon, the Kaiser, his Empress and their entourage went to Mount Zion to take possession of a lot of land given to the Kaiser as a gift from Sultan Abed Al Hamid. The lot was small only 9800 square cubits, but it had historical significance from the Christian perspective, because already back in the first century A.D., there was a church there, build by Emperor Justinian. The Kaiser than handed this lot to the leaders of the German Catholic Church, who later build on it a Catholic monastery and church. On his way back, he visited the military fortress known as the Tower of David. From there he went to the Armenian convent, where he was greeted by the American Patriarch and his college of priests, and inspected the antiquities there. For the next three days, he visited the site of the Temple and other ancient places in the country, as well as German institutions.

The city government of Jerusalem gave him a beautiful album as a gift, bound with boards made of olive trees, featuring pictures of the holy sites.

On Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, the imperial couple and their entourage went to Jaffa, and from there on their ship to Beirut, and later to Damascus and the ruins of Baalbek. From there they returned to Beirut, and continued to Berlin.

During his stay in Jerusalem, the Kaiser granted four Jews, among others, medals of honor: the Bashi Sage Great Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Elisar, Dr. M. Wallach, Mr. Zelig Holzdorf, and Mr. Emil Frank of Beirut.

After the Kaiser had left, a large building was built on the lot where his tents stood, to serve as a high school for German children in Palestine. In time, Jewish and Arab children, whose parents wanted to give them a German education, were also admitted to that school.



## THE YEARS 5660 [1899/1900] – 5669 [1908/9]

In the year 5661 [1900/1], Tuberculosis was seen for the first time in Jerusalem, where this had never been a problem before. A number of young people died from that disease, which spread extensively both due to the thick dust that was covering the streets, and because preventative measures against contamination were not known. Another disease that broke out the same year was meningitis, a very tough and dangerous illness. This, too, had never been seen here before. The local physicians did not understand the disease at first and therefore the mortality rate from it was very high. Once the doctors learned the correct treatment for it, the situation improved considerably within a few months – but not before a certain number of victims perished. In a few cases, a complete cure was achieved.

In the summer of the year 5662 [1902], a cholera epidemic erupted in Egypt. The government in this country discontinued any type of transportation with Egypt, and a blockade was decreed on the ships coming from there to our ports, as well on internal roads from there. Nevertheless, during the winter months of its second year, the epidemic did move here through Gaza, and spread among the urban population in the south. Particularly vulnerable were the Arab peasants in the villages, who did not know how to protect themselves and isolate those who were stricken by this damned disease. Particular sufferings were experienced by the residents of the towns of Gaza, Lydia and Jaffa and the surrounding villages. The city of Tiberius also suffered greatly, and in some of its surrounding villages nobody survived.

When the tidings about the plague breaking out in Palestine reached Jerusalem, many of Jerusalem's Jewish residents were alerted and decided to do whatever possible to prevent the disease from reaching the city. At the initiative of a group of energetic people, a general assembly of Jews from all circles in town was called and took place in the General Cooking House in the Old City, where the urgent steps to be taken were discussed. The assembly elected a three member committee, to be in charge of providing immediate relief: the Great Rabbi Zerakh Braverman, as representative of the Torah institutes; Reb Yekhiel Zvi Zimirinski, as representative of the artisans and craftsmen; and myself, as representative of the merchants.

The same evening, the three of us went to Reb Yoel Moshe Solomon, who was one of the directors of the Knesset Israel General Board, to obtain from him the financial means required to begin the necessary preparations. At first, the Board allocated only a meager sum; but when news arrived about the spread of the epidemic nearby, the Board's appointees became more interested, and even sent telegrams to donors abroad, demanding financial assistance in fighting the epidemic. Their requests were granted at once, and funds were dispatched and arrived promptly.

Aid committees were established right away by young volunteers in various sites around town. Aid stations were arranged in special rooms with baths, coal, paint for the walls and medical needs, and were attended day and night by volunteers who received their instructions from the

doctors. The garbage and trash were cleaned from the streets and alleyways, and the dirty courtyards were cleaned and painted. Tea was served to the poor at no cost, and the imported flour and coal were sold at half price, or even for free to the neediest. The veteran activist Reb Shlomo Eliach was appointed director and coordinator of these efforts, and everything was done in the best organized manner. Particularly beneficial was the absolute cleanliness that was enforced in the city. Thanks to those extraordinary efforts, the disease practically skipped Jerusalem, hitting no more than two or three people here.

In other towns in the country, especially in Jaffa, Gaza and others about four thousand people perished in this epidemic, from mid-September to late December.

Because of this terrible disease, all business activities were halted for many months, since transportation was cut off among the villages and towns – and the prices of merchandise rose greatly. There was much suffering, and the losses were estimated at hundreds of thousands of Pounds. The economy in Jaffe and Gaza was dealt a devastating blow, since the farmers around there had almost no goods to offer. Exports of wheat and other foods, considerably large in normal years, were almost discontinued altogether due to the blockade of the country's shores. For the same reason, tourists did not come either. Many of them used to come each year, positively affecting the state of the economy in the country.

In the Jewish section of Jaffa and within the Jewish Moshavot, our brethren took intensive steps to head off the epidemic. And indeed, their efforts paid off, and their sufferings were limited. Only in Tiberius did three hundred of our brethren perish.

In the year 5661 [1900/1], the Great Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz Teomim arrived in Jerusalem, per the request of the Great Rabbi Shemuel Slant, to assist him in leading the chief rabbinate and run the affairs of the non-Hassidic Ashkenzai communities. All the members of the non-Hassidic Ashkenazi Koles greeted him with great honor.

The same year, the Great Rabbi Schneor Zalman Liadier, who had lived in Jerusalem for several years, became Rabbi and Chief Judge of all the Hassidic kolels in Jerusalem.

The same year, on the 18 day of the month of Iyyar, the inauguration of the Ashkenzai old age home for men and women was celebrated, on the large lot purchased on Jaffa Street.

In the year 5662 [1901/2], the bookstore Midrash Abarbanel and Ganzi Yossef moved to a new building built especially for this purpose. The same year, Dr. Khazanowitz sent there about 300 books, some of which were very valuable.

On the night of 2 Nissan 5664 [March 18, 1904], an earthquake hit the country. The tremor was felt throughout Palestine, and approximately 60 houses were cracked in Jerusalem.

In the year 5664 [1903/4], the first Hebrew kindergarten was established in Jerusalem by the Aid Society. This society, founded at the time by German Jews in their own country, set a goal for

itself to assist Jews inside the Turkish Empire, especially in educational matters. The government of Kaiser Wilhelm looked favorably at this society's activities, realizing that the French government was exerting great influence on the masses in Turkey by establishing Catholic schools run by monks, and Jewish schools of the Alliance Society, which spread the French language and culture in the ancient land.

Ever since it was established, the Aid Society promoted German language studies to schools of the Jewish communities in Istanbul and other Turkish towns, by paying the wages of German teachers. However, the society was mainly interested in the education and learning of the children in the Holy Land.

Also in the year 5664 [1903/4], the society founded a teachers' school affiliated with Lemel School, which trained teachers for Jewish schools in the towns and Moshavot. In the year 5666 [1905/6], it also founded a school for commerce with two departments. In both school Jewish studies were taught in Hebrew and the sciences – in German. This society also granted its protection to preschools founded throughout the countries by innovative individuals. These preschools grew and expanded thanks to the society's financial aid, and the little ones chatted and played there only in Hebrew. After a few years, the society founded a school for girls in Jerusalem and other schools throughout the country, and also provided financial aid to Lemel School and others, spending large sums for all this. Dr. Paul Nathan, one of the society's directors, used to visit the schools in Palestine often, and made the necessary improvements.

In the year 5665 [1904/5], the city council of Jerusalem made three improvements in town: Trees were planted on both sides of Jaffa Street, street lights were installed to illuminate the streets and neighborhoods in the city, and workers were assigned to remove the trash from all the roads and neighborhoods. However, as was common with the authorities in those days, those things were executed rather haphazardly.

The same year, the neighborhood Zikaron Moshe ("Moses' memorial") was built, with the help of loans that the Moses Montefiore Memorial Institution, offered to those who wished to build on lots they had purchased there. The neighborhood was built according to a uniform plan for all the houses, as were all the neighborhood before it; however, they were not built in long rows, but rather each pair of houses were connected with one common wall. Each house had one or two stories, including four rooms and a kitchen – but still without a bathroom or other such amenities. At that time, this neighborhood was considered the most modern in town.

In the year 5665 [1904/5], a general orphanage for girls was founded in Jerusalem, where orphan girls were admitted regardless of their ethnic denomination.

The same year, the first ice factory opened in Jerusalem, the lack of which was felt by everybody particularly in the summers, and by the sick all year long.

In the Moshava Motza, ten houses were built with a loan obtained from the Jewish Colonization Association, as well as other houses by individuals who settled there.

In the year 5666 [1905/6], the Bezal'al School for Art was founded in Jerusalem by the veteran, dedicated Zionist Professor Boris Shatz, who was an expert sculptor and carver and taught in the Governmental Art Academy in Bulgana's capitol Sofia.

This esteemed professor contemplated years earlier the idea of establishing a school for art and home crafts in Jerusalem, for the purpose of teaching the youth in the Holy Land crafts and trades, so that they could work for their livelihood with honor. He had made that proposal to Dr. Herzl, who found it most appropriate and included it in his plans. Professor Shatz also traveled to Germany to promote his idea among the Jews there, and particularly the famous activists Professor Werburg and Dr. Openheimer, and together they founded a committee named Bezal'el after our first artist, Bezal'el Ben Uri. Representatives of the large societies such as the Zionist Congress, the Aid Society, Bnei Brith and others joined the committee. Its president was Professor Werburg.

Once the committee was founded, Professor Shatz left his position at the Art Academy in Bulgaria, came to Jerusalem and began fulfilling his great national goal. He opened the art school inside a rented house in Jerusalem, establishing two main departments within it: one for art and the other for crafts. The art department included three classes. The first class was designed to prepare teachers and drawers of plans using live models. Once the students completed their three-year training program, they were given positions as teacher and drawers of plans. The second class trained young people to draw, using models, and nature painting with colors. The third class was an evening class where the students were adult craftsman who wished to learn drawing and graphics needed for improving their own work. The prime teacher for all arts, moulding and drawing, color painting and cast making was Professor Shatz himself. The second department taught the craft of carpet weaving. Once it opened, it immediately admitted about forty-five female students, both women and girls.

From the beginning, the predominant language in Bezal'el School was Hebrew.

Professor Shatz also began to assemble a museum, collecting there all the antiquities of the land, masterpieces of the great Jewish artists and ancient Jewish coins. He managed to bring in Minister Moses Montiflore's carriage, which he had used on his first visit to Palestine. The carriage was exhibited in one of the rooms.

Professor Shatz did a great deal to train teachers for the art of drawing in Palestine, and to expand the knowledge of those who had already been teaching there. In time, the crafts of masonry, woodworking, stone cutting and others were added to the school's curriculum.

In the year 5668 [1907/8], with much lobbying by Professor Werburg, a large house was purchased for the school, allowing the addition of new crafts, such as silver processing and wooden-frame making. The affiliated museum also developed considerably.

In the year 5664 [1903/4], the first Zionist Association was founded in Jerusalem. Members of the board of this association were as follows: the teacher Mordechai Ezrachi-Krishevski, chairman; the dentist Menachem Mendel Susinski, deputy; and I, treasurer. Three other young Jerusalem residents served as members of the board. The association's purpose was to spread the idea of political Zionsim among the Jews of Jerusalem. Many Jerusalem residents joined this association and helped in establishing and expanding it. The association distributed the stocks of the London-based Colonial Bank here, and corresponded with the Main Zionist Bureau in Vienna. Many letters came to us signed by Dr. Harzl himself. The main Bureau in Vienna frequently sent us propaganda material that we distributed in Jerusalem and elsewhere throughout the country, which helped in the founding of Zionist associations in various places across the land. The Jerusalem association operated for a number of years, and was dissolved once Chairman Mordechai Krishevski moved to Tel Aviv, and three other members of the board emigrated to the United States.

In the year 5668 [1907/8], Mr. Jacob Schiff from America visited Jerusalem. He spread a great deal of money among the charitable institutions in town, but his most important contribution came after he had left, when he sent Professor Lyons here. The latter became the director of the Institute of Archeology here that researched the antiquities of the land. It began with excavations in Samaria and the ruins of Sebastian, which had a Jewish national nature. This has brought the Jews much honor, because previously, only English and German Christian societies were involved in archaeological projects in our land.

The same year, the furthest neighborhood in West Jerusalem was built and named Giv'at Shaul ["Saul's hill"], after the late Rabbi Yaakov Shaul. At first only a few small houses were built there by poor Yemenites, but then the neighborhood was expanded and nice buildings were added to it.

The Sha'arey Hessed ["gates of benevolence"] neighborhood was also built that year, with no-interest loans from Sha'arey Hessed society.

An important institution, the lack of which was strongly felt in Jerusalem – that is, an ophthalmology clinic – was also founded that year, by the For the Benefit of Zion society. The society sent here a specialist ophthalmologist, Dr. Erlinger, and four times per week he would see ophthalmology patients from among our brethren at no cost. In addition, twenty beds were set there for patients requiring surgery.

On July 24 in the year 5668 [1908], Sultan Abed al-Hamid announced the enactment of a constitution for his country. Several years earlier, some of the best young Turks had founded a secret society in Istanbul, named Unity and Progress, with chapters in various cities in Turkey.

The society exerted pressure on the Sultan, threatening to depose him, and he finally was forced to enact a constitution for the Turkish people and to establish a parliament with limited powers. Delegates were selected from all the various regions of the country. Of course the Jewish residents of Palestine, most whom were foreign citizens, were not represented there.

The Sultan proclaimed liberty for all the nations living within his kingdom; equal rights for all the citizens regardless of race or religion; rule of law and freedom of commerce and movement; and abolishment of censorship on newspapers and books. The officials were no longer required to obey commands that contradicted the laws, and could resign whenever they wished. The Sultan appointed a prime minister who would choose his own ministers. – except for the chief Muslim sheik, the minister of the army and the minister of the navy, who would still be selected by the Sultan himself. After being selected, the ministers still had to be approved by the Sultan. The prime minister would also choose envoys to foreign countries – in agreement with the minister of foreign affairs as well as the governors for the various districts and counties, members of the Royal Council and the Council's president. The budget, including all incomes and expenses, was to be published annually. All military matters were still under the Sultan's jurisdiction.

The first order issued by the Turkish Parliament was the Law of General Military Service for all Ottoman citizens, regardless of race or religion. This nullified the exemption tax paid by Jews and Christians to avoid military service, and they too were now obligated to physically serve in the military. The establishment of the parliament had no effect on the economy in Palestine, because it too was viewed as continuing the injustice that had prevailed in the country beforehand, and it failed to win the people's confidence. The use of bribery only increased further, as did the practice of informing the authorities, which brought ruin to so many. The immigration into the country was not increased but rather decreased, and nobody was motivated to venture into industry or invest his money here.

In the year 5671 [1910/11], the Turkish government started to conscript Jews and Christians into the army. At first, they took the 21-year-old youths for three years of service in various cities throughout the Turkish Empire. However, the young men had the option to exempt themselves from this service by paying a ransom of 50 Turkish pounds, and then to serve only three months in the cities in which they lived. Most of the young men chose to do so.

## THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE YEARS 5671 [1910/11] – 5674 [1913/4]

In the year 5671 [1910/11], three of the best among our brethren were elected to the city council of Jerusalem: Mr. Nissim Elisar, Mr. David Yelin and Mr. Rachamim Mizrachi. Hassin Effendi al-Hussieni, a hard working and intelligent person, was elected Mayor. It was then decided to light a portion of the city with the new “Lux” lanterns.

That year, Chief Rabbi of Turkey, the Bashi Sage Rabbi Haim Nachum, came to Jerusalem along with some famous activists from Istanbul and Salonika. The purpose of his arrival was to make peace among the Sephanadi community in town, in regards to the local Sashi Sage position, after the death of the old Bashi Sage Rabbi Yaalov Shaul Bisar. The community was divided then into two parties. With great efforts, Rabbi Halm Nachum managed to reconcile the two parties. The Sage Yaakov Meir, who had been serving as the Bashi Sage for the Salonkian community, was brought here to serve as the Bashi Sage of Jerusalem.

The year 5671 [1910/11] was a fallow year. A great controversy broke out between the Ashkenazi rabbis over the issue of how to treat of the cows in such a year, and they could not find the common ground.

That year, the “Second Aliya<sup>1</sup>” began. Many of the immigrants were wealthy; dozens of ships anchored both in Haifa and Jaffa, and trade was thriving. Most of the immigrants went mainly to Tel Aviv and the various Moshavot, but a good number of them arrived in Jerusalem as well, and they settled here.

The same year, a French company named Prie was licensed by the Turkish government to light Jerusalem with electricity and supply water to the city from the Ein Tiria spring. The license included installing electrical railway tracks in New Jerusalem and its vicinity, all the way to Bethlehem, Ramalla and other towns. The residents of Jerusalem were delighted to be relieved from the chronic problem of water shortages toward the end of the summer, and to receive clear spring water instead of filthy cistern water. In addition, they would have real light at night, rather than the dim light of the old lanterns, and the electrical railway tracks would ease the traffic considerably.

The effendis, owners of the cisterns, were not pleased by these two developments, since previously they had profited from supplying water to the city residents. The coachmen, too, were concerned about losing their source of livelihood, after it had already been undermined when the railway track between Jerusalem and Jaffa was laid. True, they made their money during the tourist season, driving tourists to Jericho, Jordan, the Dead Sea, as well as Nazareth, Hebron and other places. However, the tourist season lasted no more than a few months per year – although that year, many tourists came to visit the Holy Land, including the famous charitable Baron

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<sup>1</sup> [Immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel – aa]

Rothschild, and the coachmen made money galore. Be that as it may, they were against the introduction of streetcars in Jerusalem. However, meanwhile the World War erupted, and new troubles befell all of the country's residents.



## DURING THE WORLD WAR

Beginning in the year 5660 [1899/1900], there was great progress among the Jewish community in Palestine in general and in Jerusalem in particular. Jerusalem grew and developed, with many new settlers coming from various countries, especially from Russia, where Jews were suffering from decrees, persecution and pogroms. Here, in Palestine, life was more tranquil and comfortable. Foreign citizens enjoyed the many privileges of the Treaty Law system, exempting them from paying taxes, and relieving them from the burdens and exploitation of the government. All the Jews in Palestine were exempted from military service and many Jews from Russia, wishing to avoid military service there, came to settle here. Many Ultra-orthodox families came here so that their children would not immigrate to America, where they might end up working on the Sabbath, or committing other such transgressions.

This increase in settlement had a great effect on construction in Jerusalem. Many new houses and neighborhoods were built here. Trade expanded and interest was shown in establishing various industries that could have succeeded, if it was not for the Turkish government that, fearing it might lose its income from import tariffs, set all kinds of obstacles in the way of those who began to develop industry here.

However, after a few years of prosperity and economic boom, several years prior to the world War, the Young Turks of the Party of Unity and Progress staged a revolution, which brought down the tyrannical regime of the Sultan and established what was supposedly a democratic government. The new government subjected all Ottoman citizens to military service, including Jews and Christians. On 6 Av 5674 [July 29, 1914], war broke out between Austria and Serbia, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> of that month [August 3] a State of War was proclaimed in Jerusalem and a general mobilization of Ottoman citizens was announced, which caused great concern to the Jewish community.

On 25 day Heshvan 5675 [November 14, 1914], the Turkish government joined Germany and Austria, who were against the Allied governments, thus commencing the period of terrible years in Palestine, about which much has already been written. Jews who were citizens of countries fighting Germany, Austria and Turkey, and who refused to accept Ottoman citizenship, were forced to leave the country. They were deported in haste. In Jerusalem they were treated roughly and brutally and transported by trains to Jaffa. There they were picked off the streets and neighborhoods and taken directly to the port, from where they were transported by ships to Egypt.

Most of the deportees were taken to Alexandria, where a committee of local Jews was established immediately to help arrange employment and livelihood for those who came without resources of their own, as well as to provide financial aid with money collected from both Egyptian Jews and funds raised in America.

Many of those who could not leave the country were forced to accept Ottoman citizenship, along with all the terrible suffering and atrocities inflicted upon them by the Turkish governors and Arab officials who, no longer fearful of the Allied governments and aided by their German cronies, treated their subjects very harshly.

As soon as Turkey declared war, ships stopped arriving in our ports, and the prices of essential supplies began to rise. The military command started to impose special taxes on the citizens, which increased daily, and confiscated all the horses and mules from coachmen and others who had them. As the war dragged on, the community was depleted further, and was subjected to calamities, starvation and disease.

Young men of the ages 18 through 25 were taken to active military duty, from which they could not legally redeem themselves with money. Older men, through the age of 45, could redeem themselves with hefty sums of money for given periods of time; however, that money was not available, due to starvation and lack of any help. Many residents of Jerusalem died from poverty and real starvation, after selling all they had in their houses – furniture, books and household goods – for pennies, since there was no demand for them. The Turkish government took weak, exhausted people, unfit for military service, for public works such as road repairs, street sweeping and the like, assigning to them guards and policemen who made their lives unbearable. They did not even get food except, perhaps, one piece of Pita bread. Therefore, everybody tried their best to obtain the necessary sum to redeem themselves and to avoid those works. Those who could not obtain such sums worked themselves to the bone. However, even here our miserable street-sweeping brethren could make use of the infamous Bakshiah [Bribery] system.

Members of the Sweepers' Regiment, which was named Amalia ("Working Laborers"), had to lodge in their own barracks. In Jerusalem, this was in the old government building named The Old Series – an old, rundown building, where they slept on mats on the floor. However, if they gave up their Pita breads to the officer in charge of them – usually through mediation by the Jewish chief sweeper – the officer would allow them to go to sleep at home – providing that they would all report back on the morrow at 6 a.m., for inspection conducted at times by a higher-ranked officer. Whenever the officer knew that no such inspection was scheduled, he allowed them to stay at home even during daytime, for an additional payment. For a similar sum, he would ease their burden of work. Officially, the sweepers' officer was under the jurisdiction of the local city council, to whom the officer had to report directly.

The pressure that the Turkish government exerted on the Jews in regards to military service, and the payment of various taxes for maintenance of the army and its equipment was stronger in Jerusalem than in other towns and Moshavot around the country. The reason was that elsewhere, many activists risked themselves to protect their suffering brethren and shield those who could not withstand the Turkish military service. Many Jerusalem residents escaped to Jaffa and the Moshavot, particularly to Petakh Tikvah, where the local activists furnished them with shelter and food.

Such activists were almost unseen in Jerusalem. To the contrary, the place was riddled with informers who exploited their brethren's troubles, extorting money from them by threatening to give them up to the authorities. The informers also aided the authorities in collecting money, household goods and other valuables from the Jews of Jerusalem, for the taxes that the military authorities often imposed on the Jews. The informers would lead government officials to Jewish houses in search of draft dodgers, and helped them collect whatever loot they deemed appropriate. They unabashedly persecuted their own people.

One of the leading informers in Jerusalem used to harass me each time he saw me, demanding to know what arrangements had been done for my son in regards to military service. Because my son was registered in Hebron, that man and his fellow informers could not keep track of him. I used to tell that informer that if he thought he could catch my son, then he should go ahead and do so, and give him away to the authorities. One time, my son was sent by the military headquarters in Haifa to the headquarters in Jerusalem to arrange the transfer of an oil-producing machine from the Moshava of Motza to a factory in Haifa. Once he arrived in Jerusalem, he walked from the train station directly to the Supreme Military Headquarters here to conduct his business. The aforementioned informer was there, too, and after he saw my son walking straight into the office, he left me alone and asked me no more questions about the matter.

On the second week of the month of Nissan in the year 5675 [the last week of March 1915], a multitude of locust invaded the country, covering the entire land. The locust assaulted the fields, vineyards, orange orchards and gardens in both Moshavot and towns, and soon it gnawed all the fruits, vegetables and plants everywhere, leaving behind it ruined fields and bare trees. It was painful to see the few gardens in Jerusalem transformed within minutes into ruined, desolate lands.

The government immediately issued an order requiring all Ottoman citizens – farmers, merchants and laborers – from age fifteen through sixty, to go to various regions of the country, collect the locust eggs inside cans, and bring them to government officials. Everybody was required to collect at least five kilograms of eggs or, in lieu of that, to pay one Turkish Pound. Even the sage rabbis, who otherwise were exempted from military service, were not exempted from locust extermination duties.

The chief rabbis proclaimed 10 Nissan [March 25] as a special fasting and atonement day, for beseeching God to remove this locust plague from our midst.

On 7 Sivan [May 20, 1915], the locust covered the sky of Jerusalem again. This was already a new generation, grown out of the eggs laid by the first wave. Within a few days tremendous hordes of additional locust arrived from the vicinity of Jerusalem and filled the streets. The government then ordered every man aged fifteen through sixty to quit any other job he might have been doing for five consecutive days, and to do nothing but fight the locust from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. This also provided opportunities for the informers to harass the poverty-stricken Jews and

send them to remote places to fight the locust. To drive the locust away, people used aluminum boards taken from walls and wooden shacks, which of course they did not bother to return after the usage.

Only about one and a half years after the war had erupted did some decent aid arrive from our brethren in America. The Joint Jewish Distribution sent a ship named Volcan here, with flour and sugar and other food products as well as clothing, to be distributed among the needy Jews here for minimal prices and for free for the poorest ones, which somewhat relieved the people's starvation. Toward the end of 1915, the American Jewish Relief Committee founded the Committee of Funds for Jewish War Sufferers. This committee, in agreement with the Relief Committee, in its meeting in New York on November 29, 1915, decided to send financial help to Palestine. According to agreement between the Funds Committee and the temporary Zionist Committee, the general aide was to be divided in such a manner that Jerusalem would receive 50% of the total sum, and the remaining 50% would be given to the rest of the towns and Moshavot in Palestine. The money was to be sent to the American consul in Jerusalem, Dr. Glassbrook. Only the portions for Safed and Tiberius would be sent to the American consul in Beirut, which is closer to them geographically. The Funds Committee in New York selected a committee of Jews from Palestine to receive the money from the consuls and distribute it among the needy. A committee of 27 people was selected in Jerusalem, myself included. The Funds Committee in New York sent special letters to each one of those selected with instructions how to distribute the funds, along with a personal appeal to accept the appointment and to make all feasible efforts to ease the suffering of Jews in the Land of Israel. After lobbying by American leaders, the Turkish government granted its permission to forward the money to the Jews here in American dollars. Dr. Glassbrook, who was known for his love of the Jews, assisted in the matter to the best of his ability. Soon funds began to arrive at the consulate here, and the consul forwarded them to the selected committee, headed by Mr. David Yelin and Mr. Ber Epstein.

The first meeting of the 27 selected Jerusalem Committee members took place at the consul's house. He welcomed them warmly, and in his speech he promised to be at the committee's disposal at all time, and to do his utmost to assist in achieving its noble cause. The Jerusalem Committee, named The United Committee, rented an office and began its great efforts to revive the Jews of Jerusalem, who at that time suffered from terrible poverty and degeneration.

The large committee appointed subcommittees of its members to execute the various aide operations: 1) an aide committee for the modestly poor, who previously had been either wealthy or at least able to make a living. They began to receive weekly financial aid; 2) a committee for making loans against mortgages or guaranteed notes of debts; 3) a committee for soup kitchens that were established in various locations around town, where the needy were served free cooked food; 4) a medical committee, for those who needed to see a doctor or receive free medications. In addition, there were other committees for different aid items.

The United Committee in Jerusalem, and similar committees elsewhere in the country, did a great job of providing relief for the Jewish community. Some were literally saved from sure death by starvation, disease and the like.

However, after working with dedication for about one year, the war escalated, and America joined the war alongside the allied governments. The Turkish government then toughened its policies toward the Committee and aid in general. It demanded that the U.S. dollars, on their way from America, would be exchanged in Istanbul for Turkish notes, which reduced their value down to twenty percent of their nominal value, or even less. Later, the American consuls were ousted from the country, leaving the matter in the hands of the Spanish consul. He, too, did his best to help the Jews, but due to the exchange rate of the dollars with Turkish money notes, the value of the sums received here was less than one-fifth of the amount sent. Therefore, the committee was forced to significantly limit its various relief activities. The pressure exerted by the government over the committee became very intense, until it finally closed the committee down and froze its funds, and nothing could be done any longer. The government prosecuted the committee's leaders for various false accusations, and only after unwavering lobbying were they acquitted. Many of the committee's members and other notables from Jerusalem and elsewhere were deported to Syrian and Turkish towns, and the general state of affairs was getting worse. Thus, the only pipeline for help from America to Palestine was cut off.

The leading activists among the Jews that were deported to Egypt at the onset of the war, such as Mr. Hofine and Mr. Z.D. Libontine and others, managed a few times to smuggle funds from America into Palestine, using a variety of schemes. However, the money was given mainly as aid to the Moshavot, because the Turkish military government had confiscated their harvest and cut their vineyards and orange orchards for the purpose of using the trees as fire logs. It was imperative to help them persevere for as long as possible. Only a small fraction of those funds made it to Jerusalem. Many of the residents here, who had already sold their clothes and moveable goods, could no longer find any means of livelihood, and they died of hunger and disease.

After America joined the allied governments in their war against Turkey, Germany and Austria, Jamal Pasha, Commander of the Fourth Turkish Army that operated in Syria and Palestine, decreed that all the Jewish American citizens, who had previously been allowed to stay put, had to leave the country quickly. Because the ports were closed and they could not sail back to America, he decreed that they would go into exile in Damascus and other places in Syria and Turkey. On the day designated for them by the government, all the American citizens gathered in the Jerusalem police headquarters, and they were all sent by trains and automobiles to Damascus. According to the government's lists, some of them were absent and failed to report as ordered. Jamal Pasha ordered a search for them. Indeed, some of them could not leave the country and were hiding in various places. The search for them was intensive, and the government announced that whoever was caught would be tried and sentenced to death. The police also threatened the Moshavot's Chiefs with grave punishments if they failed to hand over the fugitives.

Jamal Pasha used to visit Palestine frequently and issue tough decrees to its residents. Later he moved his headquarters to Jerusalem, settling his offices in the German Augusta Victoria building on top of the Mount of Olives, from where he ruled ruthlessly.

When he found out about the large number of draft dodgers, he was so furious that he recruited the entire military and civil police in the country to manhunt the evaders all over the country and to bring them before him. A number of such Muslim, Christian and Jewish service evaders were captured. Jamal Pasha ordered three of them hung. His command was fulfilled at once, and they were hung a day after they had been caught. The rest of the draft dodgers were given severe military punishments.

The captured Jew was not even a real draft dodger. He actually worked in a military camp in Beer Sheva as a tailor in the shop there. His commander sent him to Jerusalem to purchase some necessary products, but neglected to furnish him with the appropriate travel documents, and he was caught on his way. They would not allow him to even open his mouth and defend himself, but rather they sentenced him to death on the spot. He was hung on the next day. When the United Committee found out late at night that the man had been sentenced to death, some of them gathered for consultations about how to save his life. However, they soon discovered that there was nothing they could do. The Jew was the only son of a widow. His mother went to the Pasha's palace to plead for her only son's life, but she was not allowed in. They would not even take her letter. Only after they hung him did they give her his body to bury on the Mount of Olives.

After the English occupation, one merchant displayed in his store's window the picture of that Jew. His bereaved mother happened to pass by, and when she recognized the picture, she fainted. The government then prohibited the public displaying of his pictures and seized them.

Jamal Pasha was very cruel to the Arab residents, although they were always quiet and obeyed the military command's orders. He suspected their loyalty, and whenever his slightest suspicion arose, he punished them harshly. He deployed a network of detectives and spies throughout the country. Once he was told by informers that the Mufti of Gaza wished to escape to the desert and join the English. Jamal Pasha issued an order to arrest the Mufti and bring him before him. He first sentenced him to life in prison, then the sentence was transmuted to death by hanging, and the man was hung in the Jerusalem prison. A few days later, he also ordered the death of this Mufti's son, who was an officer in the Turkish Army, along with some of his fellow officers.

In the third year of the war, Jamal Pasha decreed that all the Jews from Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Petakh Tikvah and other Moshavot – where many Jerusalem Jews found shelter too- had to leave their homes and move to towns and Moshavot in the Galilee. Among those exiled were many of the Jewish notables and dignitaries in Palestine, such as Mr. Meir Dizengoff and others, who made great efforts to provide the exiles with basic livelihood needs in their new places.

## THE ENGLISH OCCUPATION

Immediately after Turkey entered the war and joined the Pact against the allied governments, military troops from Germany and Austria began streaming here with both light and heavy cannons, machine guns and other type of arms. They camped in various locations around the country, establishing their main headquarters in Jerusalem.

While the Pact was successful against the allied armies, the joint German-Turkish command decided to conquer the Suez Canal, close it to English vessels, attack the English Army there and occupy Egypt itself. To facilitate the passage of troops and arms across the canal, they built, a long and wide bridge in Palestine, made of wood and metal, the parts of which could be disassembled. In order to move the bridge to the canal through the desert, having no proper railways or roads, they loaded the bridge parts on camels. Heavy parts were loaded on two or even four camels together. On the scheduled day, the large convoy of camels left on its way, with the disassembled bridge, from its camp on Jaffa Street in Jerusalem, through Hebron and Beer Sheva to the desert. Behind the camels marched both infantry and cavalry troops, with cannons, machine guns and other arms, toward the Suez Canal. The procession lasted for several hours, throughout which Jamal Pasha sat mounted on his noble horse on the corner of Jaffa Street and Hebron Street. All the troops saluted him with military honor. The troops arrived at their destination, and after they installed the bridge, they began crossing it onto the Egyptian side. However, this army was thoroughly defeated there, and Jamal Pasha himself ran for his life, returning humiliated to Jerusalem.

Then the English regiments, under the command of General Allenby, crossed the canal and began their victory march to Palestine. This campaign was rather long. To cross the desert, the English Army built temporary railway tracks from Kantara, which was later extended to Lydia. By the time the tracks reached Gaza, the English Army was transported on it. Just before Gaza, the English Army still encountered resistance from the Turkish Army. Fierce battles ensued, with heavy casualties on both sides, until the English finally won, repelled the Turks and continued with great difficulties to Ramla and Lydia. There the battles resumed, and the front approached the Moshava of Petakh Tikva and its vicinity. Petakh Tikva was taken several times by both sides, until finally the English had the upper hand, and they continued slowly on their way to Jerusalem.

On Kastel Mountain, just before Jerusalem, they were delayed for about two months, because the Turkish troops emerged from the trenches they had dug in the mountains and, with the help of the Germans and Austrians, thwarted the English advance. The Turkish Army's soldiers fought heroically, hungry and half-naked as they were, since the Turkish government could not supply their needs. Finally, the well-equipped and well-fed English Army forced them to retreat and continued its progress toward Jerusalem. Around the Moshava of Motza, the English troops were delayed again, due to the intense Turkish resistance. In early December 1917, the English cannon shells were heard in Jerusalem as they were shot at the Turkish defensive positions. On

December 7 and 8, English cannon shells were seen being launched at the Turkish Army's positions in the Arab village of Beit Safafa.

On December 9, Jerusalem's Mayor Hassin al-Effendi, accompanied with the City Council's members and a number of dignitaries, went out with a white flag in his hand to where the English Army's advance troops were positioned and handed the city's key to their commander. The same day, which was the eve of Hanukah in the year 5678, the victorious English Army marched through the gates of Jerusalem.

At first, just a small force of cavalry entered, took over the Post and Telegraph offices, and some of them returned to their military camp, which was still located at some distance from the city. Around noontime of the same day, the English troops began streaming into Jerusalem from various directions.

That evening, the first candle of Hanukah lit like a torch in all corners of the city, and the joy of its residents was tremendous. Many people, who had previously hidden in basements and attics to avoid military service and for fear of informers, were seen that day rejoicing and thanking God for their redemption and deliverance. All the residents of Jerusalem went to greet the victorious troops with delight and exaltation, hoping that their salvation had arrived – since we had been indirectly informed earlier about the Balfour Declaration and England's call for our people to come and build our National Home here.

However, the economic conditions in Jerusalem were very tough at first. The Turkish and German troops, while retreating from here, seized anything left over in the towns and villages – products and flour, livestock and cattle, and any kind of food. Jerusalem was left with no supply of food. Of course, certain amount of wheat, flour, sugar, coffee and the like had been secreted away by some merchants, but now, when the English entered town, they offered them for sale for very high prices. Poor Jews baked breads and cakes and peddled among the English soldiers. The soldiers, after a long stay in the desert, where they were fed only dry crackers, were willing to pay inflated prices for them, which the residents could not afford. The government realized that and prohibited the selling of bread to the soldiers. Nevertheless, such sales persisted. On the other hand, the arriving soldiers donated many of their crackers for free distribution among the city's poor.

The English authorities began to take care of the city and its recovery. An English general, honest and good hearted, was appointed governor of the city, and he surrounded himself with talented English bureaucrats. They took the initiative to improve the conditions of the city and its residents. The number of Jews in the city then was small, since most of the foreign citizens had left it at the beginning of the war, and many of the rest perished during the war. Finally, only about twenty five thousand Jews remained in the city.



## THE CITY COUNCIL AND ITS ACTIVITIES

The governor issued an order to select a new city council with six members: two Muslims, two Christian Arabs, and two Jews. The late Mr. Yitzhak Elissar was selected to represent the Sepharadi community in the council, and I was selected to represent the Ashkenazi community.

For mayor, the governor appointed one of the Muslim councilmen – Hassin Effendi al-Husseini, of a noble Arab family. He had served in that capacity even prior to the English occupation, as had his father, Salim Effendi al-Husseini, for many years before him. On December 17, 1917, the new city government was inaugurated.

Mayor Hassin Effendi was an industrious, smart and educated man who, as a youth, had studied in America, and was respected by all the townsmen, Arabs and Jews alike. However, he served in his new position only for a few months before dying. His older brother, Musa Kazim al-Husseini, who before the war had served as governor of one of the Turkish-ruled regions of Yemen, was appointed in this place.

Once the new city council was established, it immediately took some urgent actions. The first issue on its agenda was to provide food and means of livelihood for the city residents, who suffered from shortages in everything. The English Army was still fighting its Turkish and German adversaries both in the vicinity of Jerusalem and on the way to Syria. English cannons were positioned in various locations inside Jerusalem itself, shelling adjacent villages, where the Turks were entrenched. Whenever the Turks retreated, the English would give chase. Consequently, all the roads in the area were disrupted, and nothing could be brought into town. The Arab farmers also avoided plowing, seeding or any other work in the fields. The seaports were still blockaded, and therefore there were no economic exchanges with either Europe or America. The only connection was with Egypt, through the temporary railway tracks built by the English Army on its way to our land. The new city government set out to arrange the import of preliminary goods from Egypt, but only small quantities were available. The city council turned to the military governor, demanding that the government would import larger quantities of food from the English dominions and colonies overseas. The council's demand was met, and within a reasonable time we received decent quantities of flour from Australia, sugar and coffee from the Yawa Islands, as well as rice and other needs. The city council rented warehouses to store all the merchandise. The demand was so great that the sales were conducted with vouchers from the city council, to ensure that all the city residents could obtain equal quantities of the goods.

It took a while to conquer the rest of the country. Meanwhile, Jerusalem suffered especially, since it was isolated from other parts of the country.

In 1918, Sir Ronald Storrs was appointed military governor of Jerusalem. One day after his arrival in the city, a nice welcome reception was given in his honor by the city council. He greeted the Jewish councilmen with “Shalom” in Hebrew. He visited the council frequently and made great efforts to improve the economic conditions in town.

The official liaison person between the government and the city council on economic and administrative issues was Major Hadad Bick, a Syrian Arab, who had served as a senior official in the military command in Egypt, and the city's governor ordered his transfer here. On financial issues, the liaison person was Captain Simons. Both of them participated often in the council's meetings, aiding it with advice and with the influence they had with the governor.

The English Army brought English money notes with it – white Pounds. For some unexplained reason, the value of these notes began to drop, until at some point they could be sold for no more than 14 silver Shillings. The trade in English money caused great losses to both merchants and other residents. The city council asked the government to take firm steps against this problem. However, the government's representative maintained that there was no need to take measures, because the English money was quite strong, and life itself would take care of things. And indeed, once the groceries ordered by the government arrived from various countries and sold in the city's warehouses for Pound notes, the Pound's value began rising again, quickly reaching its original worth.

Then the English government established the Egyptian Lira note as the official currency in Palestine. Its worth was about 2.5% higher than that of the English Pound. It was divided into one hundred Grushes, each of which was further divided into ten mils. The Egyptian Lira notes were of one-half Lira, one Lira, five Liras, ten Liras, fifty Liras and one hundreds Liras. There were silver coins of five and ten Grushes, nickel coins of twenty, ten and five mils, and copper coins of one and two mils. This monetary system was used until 1927, when the government replaced it with the Palestinian money, which is still used to this day.

Aside from the main groceries brought here by the government, there were still many shortages of groceries, clothing goods, shoes, general dry goods and the like, which were in great demand. The European markets were still closed, and only in Egypt were there some available merchandise, imported from the neutral countries. Traveling to Egypt required a special permit from the English headquarters in Cairo, which was very difficult to obtain. Therefore, the council appealed to the local government to allow a number of merchants, known to be honest and law-abiding people, to travel to Egypt to bring the necessary merchandise. After lengthy negotiations between the council and government in Jerusalem and the main military headquarters in Cairo, the central government agreed to grant from time to time travel permits and licenses for bringing merchandise from Egypt. At first, such licenses were given to three merchants from Jerusalem: One was given a license to bring groceries, the other textiles for clothes and shoes, and the third for general dry goods, dishes, office supplies, toilets, etc. The temporary military railway management gave these merchants free train tickets to Cairo and Alexandria. In Cairo, the merchants had to apply to the headquarters to receive train cars to transport the goods to Palestine. This was quite difficult and required some waiting time, since all the train cars were needed to transport the troops and their arms. Nevertheless, the merchants were finally able to get a number of train cars for their purposes. They brought the goods to Palestine and sold them for good prices. Later, other merchants had their trips arranged, each in his turn. All of them did

good business, because there was prosperity in Palestine, thanks to the large number of troops there. Most of the Jerusalem townsmen engaged in commerce then, doing very well for themselves.

Through the efforts made by the city council during the first year after the English occupation, economic conditions improved considerably. The effects of the war were gradually being eradicated, and life was progressing in a healthier direction. Also, the Zionist bank, Anglo-Palestine Bank, which had been closed during the last two years of the war, was reopened shortly after the English arrived, and business started to develop in a desirable manner. Simultaneously, a branch of the Anglo-Egyptian Bank opened here and became an agent for the English government in Palestine. Through the initiative of a group of Jewish merchants in Tel Aviv, the popular Kapat Am Bank opened there, and its shares were purchased by a large number of merchants. Shortly afterwards, that bank opened a branch in Jerusalem. In the beginning, these banks could trade only with Egypt, but then they expanded their business to Europe, too. Transportation to Europe was difficult at first, because the war was still dragging on there. Only in 1920 did the Government of Palestine allow a number of merchants to go to Europe for commercial matters. Prices of European merchandise were very affordable at that time, mainly due to the lack of demand there, since money was short in the defeated countries, whereas here there was great demand for all types of goods, including luxurious ones, since money was plentiful. Therefore, the importers were quite successful and did excellent business.

The meetings of the new city council were conducted in Arabic, and so were the minutes taken. In one of its first meetings, the Jewish councilmen introduced a demand to appoint a Hebrew speaking secretary, who would write down the decisions and minutes of the meetings in Hebrew as well. At that time, the government had not recognized Hebrew yet as an official language. Unfortunately, however, since there were only two Jewish councilmen as compared to four Arab ones, the majority rejected our demand.

Then we insisted that our demand for a Hebrew secretary would at least be noted in the protocols, which was done. In general, our situation in the council, as a minority of two versus four, was not easy. Only through our friendly relations with the Arab councilmen, and particularly with Mayor Musa Kazim Pasha, did we manage to secure various rights and privileges for the Jewish community in town, with respect to both general and private matters.

Much could have been learned about what the council did in those days from the minutes, particularly what the Jewish councilmen did in the interest of the Jews in the city. Unfortunately, however, the minutes have probably been lost, as the city's secretariat notified me when I requested them a few years ago from Mayor Mustafa al-Khalidi. The loss of such official documents from the city's archives will be regretful for any historian who may wish to study and write about the history of Jerusalem during the early years of English rule in Palestine, and about the important actions taken then by the city council of Jerusalem.

Mayor Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husseini, who was normally a rather moderate and modest person, nevertheless could not resist the tremendous influence of the instigators from his family, the Husseini family. He joined the circle of Arab propagandists, and in the third year of his term even positioned himself openly as the leader of the Arab movement in Palestine, ignoring the fact that as mayor he was supposed to represent all the residents of the city, Arabs and Jews alike. During the first pogrom in Jerusalem, he even stood on the city hall's balcony, speaking openly in favor of the Arab nationalist movement and against the Jews. However, the Governor of Jerusalem, Mr. Storrs, although he himself had pro-Arab inclinations, nonetheless found these activities by the mayor inappropriate and decided, of course with the consent of the supreme government, to dismiss Musa Kazim from his position. Musa Kazim Pasha, as head of the Husseini family – a most prominent family among the Arabs in Jerusalem – was elected then chairman of the Palesstinian Arab Action Committee, where he managed all their affairs.

The first city council operated for three years before resigning. A new council was elected with the same number of members. Rajib Nashashibi was elected Mayor, the Jewish councilmen were Mr. David Yelin, who was appointed Deputy Mayor, and Mr. Yitzhak Levy, director of the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Jerusalem.

On the evening when the new councilmen were scheduled to assume their positions, Governor Storrs gave a nice party at the Fest Hotel for both the incoming and outgoing councilmen. The governor gave a gracious speech in honor of the departing members, thanking them warmly for their difficult and dedicated work for three years, and offered his wishes of good luck to the new members. In his speech, he noted the harmony among all council men who worked together for the benefit of the entire city. Many repairs were made, including sewage in some parts of the city and roadworks, to the extent that the budget at that time allowed, and other things were done, the benefits of which to the city were very great. In particular, he praised the tremendous efforts made in providing food and various goods that were lacking almost entirely for a certain period after the arrival of the English army. He also wished the new members good luck in their work. The outgoing members also offered their friendly wishes to the incoming members.

## HERBERT SAMUAL AND HIS ERA

On 14 Tamuz 5680 [June 30, 1920], the first High Commissioner of Judea, our fellow kinsman Sir Herbert Samuel, arrived in Jerusalem. He was received with royal honor by both the senior officials here and the Jewish residents of Jerusalem, who considered him the redeemer and deliverer of the Jewish People – based on the declaration of the English government, known as the Balfour Declaration, which had been ratified by 42 countries. He lodged in the large German government building on the Mount of Olives. On 21 Tamuz [July 7], in the presence of the leaders and dignitaries of Palestine, he read the King's proclamation concerning the National Home for the Jewish People in the Land of Israel.

He was invited for the special festive Sabbath service at the great synagogue in Khirbat [ruins of] Rabbi Judah the Hassid, when the weekly Torah portion was about consoling the people. Leaders and notables of the Jewish communities in Jerusalem, as well as dignitaries from other denominations, were also invited to this service. A fancy chair was prepared for him with an elegant canopy. He came to the synagogue accompanied by his adjutant, Governor Storrs, and other senior officials. He was given the honor of reading the end of the Torah portion and as such he read the first verse of the Haftarah<sup>1</sup>, which calls for consoling the people, with great emotion, emphasizing the words, "And no stranger will occupy His throne", etc., in the subsequent benedictions. Afterwards, he was invited to a large post-service reception at the Amdurski Hotel, which at that time was located inside the walls near Jaffa Gate. There, he expressed his delight and appreciation for the Jews in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel for the great honor they had bestowed upon him. He walked from his residence on top of the Mount of Olives to the synagogues and back, as he always observed the holiness of the Sabbath. His noble wife was also known as a strict observer both in private and in public,

The Jews in Palestine deluded themselves with the hope that as High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel would do everything he could to extend and reinforce the Jewish National Home, in accordance with the historic declaration of the English "Cyrus"<sup>2</sup>. However, they were bitterly disappointed. Many of the senior English officials in Palestine were hostile to the process of establishing a National Home. They began to instigate and slander on the Jews in high places in England, and at the same time stirred up envy and great opposition among the Arab leaders against the national Home and the settling of Jews in Palestine. Their evil action yielded results and the Arabs, who at first accepted the matter passively, began protesting publicly, voicing their protests and grievances against it, and openly inciting the masses.

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<sup>1</sup> [The portion from the Prophets read in conjunction with the appropriate Torah portion – aa]

<sup>2</sup> [A reference to Persian King Cyrus, who allowed the Jews to return to their land from their exile in Babylonia and rebuilt their Temple – aa]

One day, the first horrible pogrom erupted in Jerusalem, where some dear Jewish souls perished. The main culprits who incited in public, were Haj Amin al-Husseini, the brother of the then Jerusalem Mufti, and another Arab, a government official named Araf al-Araf. Some English government officials were also instrumental in the eruption of this horrible pogrom. Even Governor Storrs himself has been implicated. When the pogrom was over, both Haj Amin and Araf al-Araf were sentenced to fifteen years in prison with hard labor. However, they escaped and were hiding in Trans Jordan, east of the Jordan River. Some time afterwards, the High Commissioner pardoned them, and when the Mufti position became vacant following the death of Haj Amin's brother, the commissioner appointed the criminal Haj Amin as the Great Mufti of Palestine, and later also as chief of the Supreme Muslim Council. The other criminal, Araf al-Araf, also was given a senior position in the government, and currently he serves as governor of the Beer Sheva district.

Hence, the Jewish people in Palestine were quite disappointed in their first High Commissioner, who not only failed to protect his brethren, but also elevated their persecutors and later even issued decrees limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Once Commissioner Herbert Samuel's term was over, after four years of service, he left his position and returned to England. He was replaced by the Christian Field Marshal Plumer who, as a military man, ruled the land with a firm hand. During his term, the country was tranquil and peaceful.

In the year 5680 [1920], the rioters began their havoc inside the Old City. When the word reached the new neighborhoods, many people, old and young alike, started to run in panic toward the Old City to save their brethren. In the Aliakh courtyard, about five hundred men from all the Jewish denominations gathered, under the command of Mr. Zeev Jabotinski, to move into the Old city – but the police closed the gates, allowing nobody in or out. A column of English soldiers, armed with rifles and machine guns, stood in front of the Post Office on Jaffa Street, preventing the crowd from crossing. People were willing to go there even under heavy fire, but they were ordered to stop. Jabotinski negotiated with the military authorities, and finally he was given permission to send a small force into the Old City. These people helped the wounded, and used cars to evacuate the wounded and dead to Rothschild Hospital. Late in the afternoon, the Army helped to quell the riots, fulfilling orders by the military governor.

## THE COMMUNITY'S DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE WAR

Late in the year 5680 [1920], the Zionist leadership was established in Jerusalem, which was called then the Board of Delegates. Shortly afterwards, an election was held for the first elected assembly of the Jews in Palestine, which was officially inaugurated in Jerusalem in 25 Tishrey 5681 [October 20, 1920].

At the same time the Hebrew Language was recognized as an official language, just like English and Arabic.

In the year 5678 [1917/8], a branch of the Mizrachi Federation, originally founded by the late Rabbi Raines, was established in Jerusalem. I was member of Mizrachi here, served as treasurer, and finally was elected vice chairman. The Mizrachi Board was very active. It managed to recruit for the federation many of the notables and activists among the Ultra Orthodox public in Jerusalem. Many of the great leaders in Jerusalem joined the federations, although many leaders of the Ultra-Orthodox Jews were opposed to the entire Zionist idea, as well as to the Mizrachi Federation. For years, the Chairman of the Mizrachi Board in Jerusalem was the Great Rabbi Yossef Gershon Horowitz, the Justice Teacher of Meah She'arim and vicinity and Director of the Meah She'arim Yeshivah. Other notables, great Torah scholars and influential in town, were members of the Board. The Mizrachi Federation's Board had a significant role in inviting the Great Genius Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, who was appointed in the year 5681 [1920/1] Chief Rabbi of the Holy City Jerusalem and the entire Land of Israel. As vice chairman of the Mizrachi Board, I had the honor to sign the Rabbinate certificate of the great Rabbi Kook, along with Board members Reb Yuda Aharon Weis and Board Secretary Rabbi Avraham Haim Tzovner.

That year, per royal decree, an official rabbinate was established in Palestine. From 11 Adar to 14 Adar 5681 [February 19-22 1921], a general assembly chartered with appointing a chief rabbinate opened with a speech by the High Commissioner, and the Great Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook was crowned Chief Rabbi of the entire Land of Israel. Throughout the country, rabbinate offices opened with official rights, established in accordance with a special law.

On 11 Av 5681 [August 15, 1921], the cornerstone was laid for the "Rabbi's House", built by the American donor Mr. Harry Fischel for Rabbi Kook. The ceremony attended by senior government officials, consuls, rabbis and Jewish notables in Jerusalem.

After the war and the upheavals following it, the country was open to newcomers from Europe and America, constituting the Third Immigration. Many Jews started to pour into the country, particularly from Poland. Most of them went to Tel Aviv and Haifa, but a good number arrived at Jerusalem, too, and settled there. Those of them with means began to build new neighborhoods in the vicinity of Jerusalem and to expand existing neighborhoods. New handsome neighborhoods were built intensively, such as Rechavia, Romema, Kiryat Moshe, Beit Hakerem,

Talpiyot and others. In some places in town, old houses were demolished to be replaced by beautiful, modern ones. New roads were also constructed in the city and its vicinity. The labor force in the country increased due to the ample work, and every step of the way one could feel the progress toward the national goal and the realization of the old year bring to, “the return of the sons to their boundaries”.

A settlement activity of great importance was done by the Mizrahi association in Jerusalem. This was the establishment of the Bayit Vagan society in Jerusalem, in the year 5679 [1918/9]. The society contacted Arab landowners in the western parts of Jerusalem, purchasing from them large territories on splendid hills. Many residents of Jerusalem joined as members of the society and deposited money in the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Jerusalem for the purpose of purchasing those lands. Such funds registered in the bank in the name of three of the society’s board members: Mr. Binyamin Kuklyah, the brothers Avraham and Zalman Levy, and I. The lands were divided into lots, which were assigned by lottery to buyers from among the members of the society, who began building nice houses there. Wide, pleasant-looking streets were paved, and the neighborhood became one of the prettiest in the Jerusalem area. It is run by a board elected from among the owners of the neighborhood’s houses and lots. A few years later the committee initiated the building of a handsome, large synagogue on a public lot.

The association sold a significant portion of its lands to the Bnei Brith association in Jerusalem, which founded the Bnei Brith neighborhood by selling lots to its members and others, and by helping them to build their homes there, through long-term loans with favorable repayment terms that the Bnei Brith fund provided. This neighborhood, too, is now glorifying the town next to the Bayit Vagan neighborhood.

Prior to the English occupation, there was no electricity in Palestine. Kerosene lanterns were used for lighting, and kerosene was also used to operate the engines in orange groves and factories. Only after the occupation, some residents of Jerusalem installed generators in their private houses, from which they extended electrical power to other houses, offices and shops around them, as well as to farther areas. In those years, the government gave the concession for providing electrical light and power in Palestine to the Palestine Electrical Company, under the directorship of the engineer Mr. Pinchas Rottenberg. The monopoly extended for the entire Palestine with the exception of Jerusalem, because here there was one Greek engineer who claimed that he had been licensed by the Turkish government, before the war, to install electricity in Jerusalem. He appealed to the Supreme International Court in Den Hague and won his case. After a few years, he sold his rights to an English company from London, which installed electricity in Jerusalem separately from the rest of the country, charging higher rates for it.

Once there was electricity in the country, the government also established a telephone network. Before the War, there were no telephones in Palestine at all. During the War, there were telephone lines only among the police stations in the country as well as the Turkish and German



troops. A civil telephone service was established only after the war. At first, telephones were arranged for governmental institutions consulates and banks, and later for leading merchants. Months passed from the time the order was made until a telephone was installed. The telephone equipment then worked according to the old system. Up until a few years ago, a telephone call could be made only through the switchboard operators. A few years ago, after the use of the telephone had been greatly increased, an automatic switchboard was established in Tel Aviv, and later in the other large towns in Palestine.

In April 1936, a radio station, featuring both shortwave and longwave broadcasts, was inaugurated in Jerusalem. The station was established in the town of Ramallah, and the broadcast center in Jerusalem. Soon radio equipment were spread all over the country, and listening to radio programs became an essential activity.

## NEW TRANSPORTATION

Up until the World War, neither automobiles nor planes had been seen in Palestine, and those who had never been abroad had no notion of such transportation means. In 1912, the famous American millionaire Rockefeller came to Jerusalem. He brought his own automobile for the purpose of his travels around the country. The rumor spread in town that Rockefeller brought with him some kind of strange machine that traveled at high speed on the road without horses, but rather through the power of its motor, which was fired by some fluid called benzene [gasoline] – and that on Saturday in the afternoon, Rockefeller would ride this machine from Grand New Hotel, on David Street near Jaffa Gate, where he was staying. Of course, everybody was eager to see this magical machine, and a large crowd gathered since the morning hours by the entrance to the hotel and along Jaffa Street. However, when the car left on schedule, it did not proceed through Jaffa Street but rather turned and continued toward the Bethlehem Road, so only a portion of the crowd could really see it traveling.

During the War, with the arrival of the German and Austrian armies in Palestine, they brought with them many small and large cars that carried the military leaders here from Istanbul via Aleppo and Syria, as well as trucks to transport the weapons, ammunition, food and other military needs. They also had many motorcycles. ‘

On one summer day in 1915, a Turkish military aircraft arrived here from Istanbul, landing on a temporary airfield prepared for it in the German Colony. That day in the evening, many of the residents of Jerusalem gathered near the airfield to see this amazing bird. The pilot and his assistants were Turkish. They went on to Syria and Iraq, and on the way the plane crashed and burned and its crewmen were killed. Later, from time to time, German military planes passed through our country.

Among the most important actions taken by the English government during the first years after the occupation, was to establish transportation between all the parts of the country. A governmental department of public works was established , which hired both good English engineers and local ones, and worked mainly on repairs of the existing, unpaved roads, as well as on the paving of a network of new, wider and improved roads.

During the first few years after the War, people still traveled from Jaffa Gate to the surrounding neighborhoods by carriages. People had money then, and even those who previously could not afford them, were using such carriages, either along with other travelers or by themselves. Newcomers in particular were most inclined to use wagons. The number of wagons rose, their appearance improved, and the coachmen earned handsomely. Considering their good business, the coachmen established a government-approved association to prevent competition. The association’s articles included a clause in regards to maintaining the horses’ health, which is why no more than four passengers were allowed per coach.

As better roads were paved in the city and its vicinity, as well as in most other towns around the country, residents of Jerusalem and other towns became interested in using automobiles for travelling both between towns and within the cities. However, there were no civilian automobiles yet in Palestine, nor were there any importers or agents of car makers, or even skilled drivers.

Mr. Dimitry Salameh, Director of the Kook Company in Jerusalem, was the first to bring from Beirut a twelve-seat bus. It looked nice externally, but the engine was used. Salameh brought the driver with the vehicle from Beirut.

As a member of the first City Council of Jerusalem, Salameh invited all the council members, including myself, for the first trip on the bus to the town of Ramallah. All those who saw us were quite envious of us for such a wonderful trip. The vehicle proceeded cumbersomely, but made it to Ramallah. There we drank tea and rested in an Arab Café. Late in the afternoon we boarded the bus to return to Jerusalem, but the engine would not start and it stood idle. We had to send a special messenger to Jerusalem to order us wagons to take us home.

Shortly afterward, several Jews from Jerusalem formed an association and brought a bus to take passengers from Jaffa Gate to the Jewish neighborhoods. However, this bus was also used, and after a number of rides it broke down and was taken out of service.

At that time, an English Jew obtained a license to transport passengers on a bus from Jaffa Street to the Bucharian's neighborhood. This, too, was an old Ford, but the engine was better and managed to take the passengers back and forth, much to the delight of the neighborhood's residents.

However, the coachmen were upset about this new development, fearing that it would undermine their own livelihood. They tried to interrupt this service, but the police held them off. The coachmen began reducing their fares to compete with the automobiles but to no avail: the use of carriages was now limited only to places not served by automobiles.

The idea of establishing public transportation by automobiles from Jerusalem to its suburbs and to other towns, as a business that could yield decent profits, was beginning to take root. Young energetic people – some of whom owned carriages and horses or were hired coachmen and realized that the automobile was bound to run them out of business – started to learn how to drive. Some of them, once they learned to drive, bought small, underpowered Ford cars, and began taking passengers from Jerusalem to Jaffa and Tel Aviv and back. Each one-way trip cost one Egyptian Lira. Although the price was quite high, many people who could afford it preferred riding automobiles over traveling by carriages, a trip which would last all night, and several times the passengers had to get off the carriage to ease the climb for the horses. The travel by automobile took between one hour and a half to two hours. However, the cars had their own disadvantages at first. They were not cars of the highest quality, and after some time of being in use they required repairs – causing delays in the middle of the road, which rendered the trips not all very pleasant.

Not too long afterwards, a shop in the American colony in Jerusalem was awarded the dealership for the large American car maker Studebaker. These were strong, beautiful cars. This dealership also began selling its cars through long-term installments. The interested buyers used their cars for transporting passengers to various places all over the country. Later, dealerships opened in Jerusalem and elsewhere for other car makers, particularly American, which brought here cars of various models, with four and six seats, as well as passenger busses and trucks. In the early years, virtually all car dealerships were owned by Christian Arabs, who used their contacts with the large dealerships in Egypt to obtain the dealerships in Palestine and Trans-Jordan. The trade in cars of all types spread around the country, and the dealers did very well for themselves. Wealthy Arabs brought a good number of strong, beautiful cars, and rented them out to tour companies here during the tourist season, to take the tourists for their trips all over the country.

Several Jews from Jerusalem bought busses with sufficiently strong engines and began transporting passengers from Jaffa Gate to Meah She'arim, the Bucharian's neighborhood, Machane Yehuda and other places. At first, those busses belonged to competing private individuals. The first thing that the Police Road Department did was to establish a route for each bus, along which it was allowed to transport passengers, and it was not allowed to take passengers on any other route. Later, the police compelled the bus owners to replace outdated and unattractive busses with new, modern busses equipped with the necessary conveniences. With time, more bus owners joined the business and with the assistance of the neighborhoods' committees, they obtained licenses for additional busses and new routes.

As the number of bus owners increased, so did the competition among them. Finally they deemed it necessary to found a cooperative named Hamekasher ("the connector"), which was joined by the owners of the existing busses, each of whom received shares in the company in accordance with the value of their busses. Many of the bus drivers were also admitted as members in the cooperative, where they could buy shares at affordable prices. The company grew and prospered. When the new neighborhoods were built, such as Rechavia A, B, C and D, Geula, Kerem Avraham and others, the company obtained licenses for new busses, the number of which kept increasing, and the company started to do good business.

Cars were brought also for travel between Jerusalem and other cities across the country. These were modern, comfortable and strong cars with 4-6 seats, which could travel fast. Here, too, there was rough competition at first, prompting significant fare reductions. The train, too, lowered its fares to fend off the competition. Then, people with initiative and energy joined forces to found the Egged cooperative, which used large buses with 20-30 seats and charged the lowest fares for intra-city travel. The vast majority of passengers started to use the busses of this company, which was doing excellent business. Later on, other car-service companies for travel were founded throughout the country, such as Aviv, Kesher, Tziyon and others. Also, with time, more and more small cars became available for intra-city transportation, and they stand at every corner and every street for the public's use.

## INCITEMENT, TERRORISM AND THE TEL AVIV PORT

1935 was a peak year for Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel. That year, more than sixty thousand Jews came from various Diaspora countries, particularly from Poland and Germany. That year, a great deal of land was purchased, citrus groves were planted over vast areas, factories for all kinds of manufacturing were established – including various grocery products, building materials, clothing, etc – some of which was used for domestic purposes, and some for exports to other countries, both near and far. This situation lasted until 1936. The several years prior to 1936 were correctly called the years of prosperity in our country.

In early 1936, Arab agitators, headed by the Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini, began to incite their masses against the Jews. In early April of that year, Jewish passerbys were murdered in the vicinity of Haifa by a gang of Arabs who gathered in order to ambush Jews and murder them. They were under the command of a zealot Arab Sheik named Sheik Kassim. On April 19, Jews who passed innocently through the streets of Jaffa were murdered. That day signaled the beginning of bloody riots of Arabs against Jews in Jaffa, Haifa, Safed, Tiberius and Jerusalem, and all other corners of the country. The Arabs ambushed the Jews in alleyways and along roadsides. They shot them with handguns or stabbed them with knives. The police did intervene; however, in most cases, it could not track the murderers. Meanwhile, the terriosim spread and was also directed now against the English and the government itself, and along with murdering Jews and destroying their properties, especially in the distant, isolated Moshavot, they also murdered English civilians, government officials, soldiers and policemen, and greatly damaged properties of the government and English firms, such as the railroads, oil pipelines, government buildings, etc. Although the government reinforced its military and police, adding many regiments until they totaled more than twenty thousand troops, the murders and destruction by Arab terrorists only increased. They were organized in gangs, led by commanders and armed with various weapons and ammunition. The gang leaders received support in men, weapons, explosives and a lot of money from neighboring Area countries and from certain European countries, whose interest was in harassing the English government they despised. The purpose of the Arab instigators was to bring the transportation in the country to a halt: gang members would ambush and fire at Jewish busses and passenger trucks, throw bombs at them, burn, destroy and kill. However, the Jewish drivers faced them heroically, refusing to abandon their vehicles regardless of the dangers they encountered. When one of them was killed, the next would rise and continue his work. Thus, transportation was never discontinued, even in the most remote spots in the country. The rioters acted rigorously against the railways, too, removing tracks in various places and causing many locomotives and train cars to derail, burn and be destroyed, merchandize and all, and thus inflicting tremendous damage. The spoilers also managed to organise the Jaffa Port workers and sailors, who were all Arabs, who went on general strike – preventing the disembarkation of Jewish passengers and the unloading of any goods that were designed for Jews. Their aim was to starve the Jews in Palestine. The government then closed down the Jaffa Port altogether, and all the merchandise was unloaded at the state-of-the-art Haifa

port. The terrorists and instigators sought to arrange a general strike in the Haifa port, too, spending enormous resources to incite the Arab workers there. However, they were rebuffed there, both because there were many Jewish workers in Haifa port and as a result of the government's firm stand there against their evil plots.

However, the Haifa port by itself could not suffice for the needs of all the Jews in the cities and Moshavot, in terms of good supplies and raw materials for industry. This situation could cause great difficulties. In addition, there were grave concerns that the instigators, assisted by foreign forces, might eventually succeed in shutting down the operation of the Haifa port. This could prove detrimental to the entire Jewish community in the country, since the railroad connecting Palestine to Egypt was almost totally inactive, following the many terrorist acts against it, including the removal of tracks and burning of locomotives and train cars. In effect, merchandise could no longer be brought from Egypt. Food supplies from Syria and other countries were also prevented.

Then, the Jewish activists of Tel Aviv came up with a brilliant idea how to save the community. This was reminiscent of an idea that had been formulated years earlier by the late city founder, Meir Dizengof. With the money and power of the Jewish people in Palestine, they went on energetically to build a port in Tel Aviv – and with no help whatsoever from the government. Fortunately, this time the government at least did not stand in the way of the courageous initiative of the Jewish people who were settled on their own land.

At first they built a bridge and walls made of iron concrete in the sea to create a protected zone for boats against storms. Because the water next to the shore was so shallow, ships could not anchor near the shore, and the boats were needed to reach the land. The work was hard and the responsibility enormous, but the Jewish engineers and workers put their hearts into the job, were deterred by no difficulty, and finally successful. During the winter, when the wooden bridge leading into the sea could not withstand the storms, it was replaced by a new bridge made of iron, which no wind or storm could move from its place.

The Arab boatmen and their agitators were quite upset by the success of the Jews in building their own port. Now the Jews would no longer require the services of the Arabs, who had made fortunes off the Jewish importers, tourists and immigrants, who once had to pay the Arabs exorbitant sums for transporting people and goods from sea to shore. They still deluded themselves that the Jews would not find skillful boatmen, professional deck hands and experienced laborers. However, even in this respect they were crushingly disappointed: among the Jews there were many natives of the port city of Salonika, traditionally sea-workers with years of experience in their hometown, so they together with local industrious workers took excellent care of all the work in the port.

The management of the Jewish port appealed to the entire Jewish public in the country to buy stock of the Tel Aviv Port Company, so that the work there could be executed through the efforts of the Jewish People themselves in the Land of Israel. The entire people, regardless of their classes and factions, responded willingly to the request and purchased so many shares that the sale yielded a large sum of money. Then the port grew and the work in it expanded. The necessary buildings were built, as well as many large warehouses to store the incoming and outgoing merchandise – particularly for storing citrus fruits during the export season, to allow large deliveries from the port.

Inside the port and around it, workshops were established for building regular boats as well as motor boats to load and unload merchandise on ships. Cranes were installed and a strong, large anchorage was established between the Yarkon River and the sea to serve as a secured place for boats during the winter, when boats could be pushed away by heavy storms.

The work progressed very well, and by the time building for customs, passport control and other administrative arrangements were completely built, the government granted its license to unload merchandise in the Tel Aviv port. At first it allowed only a few types of goods to be unloaded there, but gradually the number of types of allowed goods was increased, and at the end of the second year, once the port reached good standards, the government allowed the disembarkation of passengers at the Tel Aviv port. The Jews who came there were absolutely delighted to arrive at the national port of the Jewish people, to be greeted with love and transported by their brethren boatmen, and to enter their land through this new kind of Zion Gate.